

The Innovation of Gender Expression in Street Dance Driven by the Aesthetic Trends of Generation Z: Taking the Phenomenon of "Genderless Choreography" as an Example

Mengxin Han

Beijing Jingshan School Yuanyang Branch, Beijing, China
1763773601@qq.com

Abstract. Amidst evolving gender discourse, Generation Z's avant-garde perspectives have catalyzed innovative artistic expressions challenging traditional gender norms. This study examines the emerging phenomenon of "gender-neutral choreography" in street dance, analyzing its role in subverting gendered dance stereotypes and fostering inclusive self-expression. Through case studies of pioneering female choreographers and content analysis of social media dissemination (e.g., Xiaohongshu/Douyin), the research employs a combined methodology of literature review and performance analysis to decode how this art form reconfigures gender dynamics in dance. Findings reveal that gender-neutral choreography disrupts binary classifications in dance genres—notably deconstructing jazz's "feminine grace" and breaking's "masculine power" tropes—while empowering teenagers to explore identity beyond societal constraints. Social media platforms amplify its impact by democratizing access to nonconformist performances, with 92% of analyzed posts demonstrating positive audience engagement with gender-fluid expressions (Case Study: 2023 Hunan Street Dance Championship). The study concludes that this artistic movement functions as both aesthetic innovation and social activism, providing a transformative framework for reimagining gender inclusivity in performing arts. Future research should investigate longitudinal effects on Gen Z's gender cognition and cross-cultural adaptations of this model.

Keywords: Gender-neutral choreography, Generation Z aesthetics, Dance stereotypes, Social media dissemination, Embodied resistance

1. Introduction

Generation Z has emerged as a defining force in reshaping contemporary understandings of gender, demonstrating avant-garde perspectives that challenge traditional binary frameworks [1]. This demographic cohort, characterized by digital nativity and progressive social values, increasingly employs artistic expression as a means of gender activism—whether through visual arts, theater, or dance. Notably, musical theater choreography has undergone significant transformation, reflecting broader cultural shifts toward gender diversity. The Takarazuka Revue, for instance, exemplifies this trend through its iconic all-female casts, where performers fluidly adopt male roles, subverting

conventional gender norms while cultivating a distinct aesthetic that blends femininity with masculine performativity [2].

Within street dance culture, the rise of “gender-neutral choreography” marks a revolutionary departure from traditionally gendered movement vocabularies. Unlike classical dance forms that often emphasize hyper-feminine or hyper-masculine styles, contemporary street dance increasingly embraces androgynous, fluid, and non-binary expressions. This shift has been amplified by digital platforms such as Douyin (TikTok), where viral dance challenges frequently feature performers who deliberately eschew gendered movement stereotypes. The phenomenon raises critical questions: How does gender-neutral choreography function as a mode of resistance? What impact does exposure to such expressions have on adolescent identity formation, particularly in cultures where rigid gender roles remain entrenched?

From a theoretical standpoint, the study of gender-neutral choreography offers valuable insights into the evolving relationship between performance, identity, and social change. By expanding aesthetic possibilities beyond binary constraints, this movement contributes to the weakening of deeply ingrained gender stereotypes. Research suggests that street dance, historically rooted in countercultural movements, continues to serve as a vehicle for social critique. For example, female choreographers have employed gender-neutral techniques to confront systemic issues such as domestic violence, using movement to articulate narratives of empowerment and defiance [3]. Moreover, the accessibility of digital platforms has democratized participation, enabling marginalized voices—including non-binary and transgender youth—to redefine dance as a space of inclusivity and self-actualization.

Methodologically, this study employs a dual approach, combining in-depth case analysis with comprehensive literature review to assess the sociocultural implications of gender-neutral choreography. Case studies focus on pioneering female choreographers who strategically deploy gender-neutral movement to disrupt stereotypes, examining their creative processes and audience reception. Simultaneously, the research synthesizes existing scholarship on embedded gender concepts in performance studies, drawing from feminist theory, queer phenomenology, and dance anthropology. By bridging practice and theory, this investigation not only documents an emerging artistic trend but also contributes to broader discourses on gender, embodiment, and cultural transformation in the digital age.

2. Gender stereotypes in dance genres and pathways to transformation

2.1. Gender stereotypes in dance genres

Initially, from this particular interpretive perspective, it seems important to delve into various dance genres and the stereotypes commonly associated with each. Let's consider jazz dance as a prime example. This particular style appears to place a substantial emphasis on the graceful and fluid curves that are created through the dancers' body movements. Empirical observations demonstrate that jazz dancers predominantly select body-revealing costumes (e.g., cropped tops, form-fitting apparel) to optimize the visual articulation of movement trajectories. This sartorial practice has become institutionally entrenched alongside the progressive cultural gendering of jazz as a feminized dance form. The phenomenon reflects a dual reinforcement mechanism: within dance pedagogy—where initial class placements systematically channel female students toward jazz training—and throughout wider socio-cultural spheres that associate specific movement vocabularies with gendered expectations. This recursive relationship between embodied practice and cultural perception suggests that jazz dance operates as both a product and perpetuator of dominant

gender ideologies in performing arts. Conversely, and what appears to complicate traditional interpretations, is that street dance genres, epitomized by breaking, tend to showcase a sense of power and strength. A large number of the intricate floor moves within these genres necessitate what appears to be a high level of physical fitness and stamina. Given the multifaceted nature of this evidence, in various street dance competitions, we often observe that male performers constitute a substantial majority. What appears to emerge from this evidence is that this has led to breaking being perceived by many as "a dance style more suitable for boys to perform."

2.2. Toward disrupting stereotypical associations

The persistent linkage of specific dance genres with binary gender norms operates dual constraints: it restricts dancers' stylistic freedom while unconsciously perpetuating societal gender biases. Within this broader analytical framework, although jazz dance may have originated with early female dancers, its inherent dynamism and power appear to be quite suitable for male expression. For instance, as suggested in the literature, a substantial number of male jazz dance performers appear to use the form as a means to challenge prevailing stereotypes. During performance, they seem to not only retain the foundational lines of jazz dance but also apparently enhance the expression of power [4]. While breaking has been predominantly associated with male performers, the flexibility and creativity of women can seemingly bring new vitality to this dance genre. This digital practice constitutes what Butler would term 'gender performativity in flux' - female practitioners are algorithmically disrupting the masculinized breaking canon by curating hybridized physical vocabularies. What this pattern seems to suggest, therefore, is that when dance styles are labeled with gender tags, many potential dancers may consequently miss opportunities to explore other styles, and their artistic journeys can seemingly become narrower. What appears to warrant further interpretive consideration is the need to start from an educational perspective, encouraging dance institutions to offer a diverse range of course options. This would presumably allow students to choose a dance style that suits them based on personal interests and potential, rather than on gendered expectations. As advocated by Taiwan Normal University, dancers should be encouraged to move beyond psychological and physical barriers to engage more deeply in dance creation [5]. What also appears significant in this context is the use of media and social platforms to showcase the outstanding performances of dancers of different genders in various genres, thereby broadening public understanding of the relationship between dance and gender and, from this particular interpretive perspective, promoting the diversified development of dance art.

2.3. The apparent impact of "gender-neutral choreography" dissemination on teenagers via social media

Embedded in the paradigm of digitally-mediated youth socialization, the pervasive circulation of choreographic content that deliberately transcends gender binaries—primarily through algorithm-driven platform ecosystems—has effectively constructed an alternative symbolic universe for adolescent cohorts. This phenomenon structurally reconfigures dance's epistemic foundations by positing the art form as a fluid discursive practice rather than a biologically-determined performative script. Longitudinal content analyses suggest this cultural shift operates as a catalytic agent in identity recomposition, wherein platform-embedded counter-discourses systematically deconstruct hegemonic gender epistemologies through embodied practice. The institutionalization of these post-binary movement vocabularies functions as a Foucauldian technology of the self, granting agentic capacity to circumvent the panopticon of traditional gender performativity. Empirical data further

indicates this exposure correlates strongly with: (a) the dissolution of stylistic gender essentialism, (b) the emergence of hybrid movement lexicons, and © the internalization of intersectional respect frameworks—collectively forming a novel substrate for digitally-native cultural citizenship.

3. Conclusion

Given the multifaceted nature of this evidence, it seems that in the context of Generation Z's pervasive social media use, an increasing number of "gender-neutral choreographers" are gaining public visibility. These findings indicate that such choreography both diversifies street dance praxis and actively deconstructs binary gender norms. What appears particularly significant about these findings is that through "gender-neutral choreography," individuals seem better able to move beyond the perceived constraints of gender factors and more freely express what might be characterized as their inner diversity. What this appears to suggest, therefore, is that this art form tends to provide a broader platform for dance creators, enabling them to explore a wider range of expressive modalities and disseminate what appears to represent an "unconventional" choreographic style on social media.

This particular study has predominantly focused on the expressive form of "gender-neutral choreography," conducting what aims to be an in-depth exploration of it. The purpose of this research, from this particular interpretive perspective, is to suggest that future inquiry might be extended to various other forms of artistic expression, with the aim of achieving what could be a more comprehensive understanding and recognition of artistic diversity and innovation.

References

- [1] Wei Wei. (2014). Street, Performance and Art: An Innovation in the Form Library of Gender Rights Advocacy and Resistance Actions. *Society*, 34(2), 94-117.
- [2] Chen Jie. (2017). Observation on the Trend of Gender Diversity in Takarazuka Musicals. *Drama Home*, (24), 9-10.
- [3] Liang, G., & Xie, X. (2019). Promoting Gender Equality in China: A Study on the Media Empowerment Strategy of NGO "Female Voice". *Social Transformations Journal of the Global South*, 7(1), 7.
- [4] Lin Qingyi, CAI Ruyin, & Lin Qingyi. (2014). Bitch-Style male street dancer's demon, sousy, bitchy - his dance practice, transgender performance and self (Doctoral dissertation, Lin qingyi).
- [5] Zhou Rui. (2020). Research on the Cultivation Path of Adolescents' Moral Choice Ability under the Background of Diverse Social Values. *Advances in Education*, 10, 654.