



Dancing around and through harm

Examining the lived experiences of women of colour with
gender-based violence in the Toronto and Kitchener-Waterloo
Latin dance communities



By: Lexi Salt
Master of Arts, Community Psychology
Founder & Director, Leading Authentically



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Trigger warning for discussions of systemic gender-based violence, racism and testimonies of survivors.

As a gender-based violence prevention educator and a researcher, I strive to use survivor-centric, trauma-informed and harm reductive approaches. I am intentional in centering survivors' voices and lived experiences and I also have a responsibility to accurately name instances of sexual violence and their connections to systems of oppression. I say this while acknowledging that many participants do not identify with certain language used in this report and may use different terms to describe the harm they have experienced. Please take care while reading this report. Support resources are available in the [Appendix](#).

Thank you to the research participants and all those who choose to share your stories with me. I am grateful for your trust, strength and vulnerability. If you relate to what is shared in this Community Report, I hope you feel seen and heard in your lived experiences and are affirmed that you are not alone. If you do not relate, I hope this is an opportunity to learn and grow to develop safer dance spaces for all.

This report is dedicated to all those who have experienced harm in the Latin dance community. For those who have left, those who have stayed. For those who have spoken up and those who have been silenced (and those who have experienced both). This is in honour of all the bathroom conversations and all the offerings to "get home safe". This report is in resistance to the status quo and people in positions of power turning a blind eye to violence. This is a liberatory call to create Latin dance communities where all folks feel supported, safe and free, in our spaces of joy and connection, especially those with lived experiences of marginalization. Safer spaces in Latin dance are not only possible, but necessary.

With gratitude to those who have made this research study and Community Report possible. Thank you to my co-supervisors Dr. Manuel Riemer (Wilfrid Laurier University) & Dr. Fen Kennedy (University of Alabama), external examiner Dr. Cindy García (University of Minnesota), and committee members Dr. Kira Omelchenko (WLU) & Dr. Maritt Kirst (WLU). Community Report reviewed by Jena Alma and Valerie Chong. Designed by Jordan Vetter. Funding provided by Social Sciences & Humanities Research Council, Laurier Student Public Interest Research Group, Viessmann Centre for Engagement and Research in Sustainability and Wilfrid Laurier University.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Given the growing popularity of Latin dance and the systemic nature of gender-based violence in Canada, it is important to understand the particular and culturally specific ways that gender-based violence manifests within the Latin dance community. This Community Report showcases the results of the [Masters research](#), ‘Dancing around and through harm; Examining the lived experiences of women of colour with gender-based violence in the Toronto and Kitchener-Waterloo Latin dance communities’. This research study examines gender-based violence, as experienced by women of colour dancers, as well as the social norms which perpetuate this harm, in the Toronto and Kitchener-Waterloo Latin dance scene. Two groups of participants took part in interviews: 14 women of colour dancers, and six “Power Players”, leaders in the Latin dance community who are in a position of power (e.g., instructors, organizers, DJs). The results demonstrate that gender-based violence in the scene is engrained, normalized and accepted. Women of colour dancers report having to consistently negotiate power dynamics and navigate gender-based violence in the Latin dance community. Study results also show that there is a discrepancy between the perceptions that Power Players have about gender-based violence in the scene and the lived experiences of women of colour dancers with gender-based violence. Women of colour dancers experience pervasive racialized sexism; for example, they are asked to dance significantly less than white women. Participants report higher levels of gender-based violence in white-washed dance forms (e.g., sensual bachata). As a result of these intersecting experiences of violence, women of colour dancers have developed diverse and extensive coping skills, to dance around and through harm. These coping skills take significant emotional labour, time, and strategic planning. Recommendations to foster safer spaces in the Latin dance community include developing practices of community care, organizational responsibility, and embodied consent education.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I live on the lands of the Haudenosaunee, Anishnawbe and Neutral peoples, in so-called Kitchener-Waterloo. I am grateful to live, work and dance on these lands. My relationship to the land and my community grounds me. I acknowledge and grieve for the systemic genocide of Indigenous peoples, as well as the erasure of Indigenous teachings, spiritualities, culture and ways of life. I also work and dance in Toronto. Tkaronto is the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnaabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. I acknowledge that Toronto is covered by Treaty 13, the Williams Treaties and the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant. I am also mindful of broken sacred agreements, systemic and ongoing genocide of Indigenous peoples and the need to strive for justice and reconciliation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

➤ Key terms	5
➤ Introduction	7
➤ Objectives & Methodology	10
➤ What was learned about gender-based violence	12
➤ What was learned about racism & racialized sexism	14
➤ Responding to harm: Coping skills	15
➤ Power dynamics & socio-cultural norms: Impacts on WOC dancers	18
➤ How do we move forward?	21
➤ Recommendations	22
➤ Conclusion	24
➤ References Cited	25
➤ Appendix: Support Resources	27
➤ Appendix: Leading Authentically	29

KEY TERMS

- ❖ **Consent:** The voluntary agreement to engage in a specified activity. Consent requires mutual understanding and active communication (verbal and/or non-verbal). Consent must be given without coercion, threats or force³. Consent is a part of everyday life, for example seeing if your friend wants to go to the movies with you or asking if someone if they would like to dance. Sexual consent is the voluntary agreement to engage in a specified sexual activity. It can be withdrawn at any time. Sexual consent cannot be presumed based on silence, prior sexual activity, or relationship status¹. Consent cannot be provided if someone is in a position of power, over another person, such as a teacher or coach.
- ❖ **Cultural appropriation:** The dynamic of folks in positions of power of extracting knowledge, traditions or arts from a marginalized group without acknowledgement, compensation or appreciation².
- ❖ **Gender-based violence:** Violence perpetrated based on someone's gender³, including sexual violence, sexual harassment, sexual assault and gender-based stigma. Gender-based violence is grounded in systems of patriarchy, misogyny and heteronormativity. Sexual harassment is any unwanted gesture, comment or action of a sexual nature that has a negative impact on the individual. Sexual harassment can include (but is not limited to) sexist jokes, pressuring someone for dates and/or sexual activity, intimidation, non-consensual photo sharing and stalking⁴. Sexual assault is any sexual contact that is nonconsensual, ranging from unwanted sexual touching to forced intercourse⁵.
- ❖ **Racialized sexism:** The intersecting discrimination towards womenⁱ, non-binary and trans folks of colour based on their ethnicity and their gender⁶. Racialized sexism can involve verbal harassment, stereotypical judgements, sexual and physical violence and otheringⁱⁱ.
- ❖ **White-washing:** The process of erasing people of colour's lived experience and taking credit for their cultural content, rooted in white supremacy (very common in the arts)⁷.

The following terms are defined by their usage in this report and within the context of the study, to ensure a common understanding as these terms can be interpreted in different ways.

- ❖ **Latine:** A genderless, more inclusive term to refer to members of the Latin American community. I intentionally do not use "Latinx" as this term was created by white academics in the early 2000s and many Latino and Latina people do not identify with this language⁸. Latine people have a diversity of opinions and preferences in how they identify.

ⁱ All references to 'women' in this report include cis and trans women.

ⁱⁱ Othering describes discrimination and/or exclusion based on identity, recognizing the complex and challenging power dynamics and socio-cultural norms folks with intersecting lived experiences of oppression face (Anzaldúa, 1987).

- ❖ **Latin dance community:** Used to refer to the specific Latin dance communities in Canada, who dance Afro-Indigenous Latine dance forms, which are made up of both folks of colour and white folks. This is to be differentiated from dance communities that are based in Latin American countries or Canadian dance communities made up predominantly of Latine folks. While there are numerous and diverse Latin dance communities in Canada, this research study specifically examines the cultural and socio-geographical contexts of the Toronto and Kitchener-Waterloo Latin dance communities.
- ❖ **Lead/leader:** A role in partner dance. The leader guides the follower through the dance and indicates/invites possible moves to do.
- ❖ **Follow/follower:** A role in partner dance. The follower interprets the indications from the leader. Both the lead and the follow equally contribute in co-creating during a partner dance.
- ❖ **Survivor:** Used to describe folks who have lived experience of gender-based violence. Some people prefer the language of “victim” or use other terms to define themselves. I intentionally use the term survivor to honour folks’ resilience and agency – I respect the language that each person chooses to use for themselves.

INTRODUCTION

Gender-based violence is a wide-spread and persistent issue that affects numerous people across many settings, including the Latin dance community. For example, one in three Canadian women will be sexually assaulted in their lifetime⁹. In the Latin dance community, gender-based violence (GBV) is prolific and manifests in particular and culturally-specific ways. Survivors receive little to no support – women are left to develop their own coping mechanisms to deal with the constant threat and reality of sexual harassment and assault in dance. It is also well-known that GBV disproportionately impacts women of colour (WOC)¹⁰. In addition, there is significant cultural appropriation in the Latin dance community^{11,12}. Salsa and bachata, for example, originate from Afro-Indigenous Latine cultures, yet their roots are often not appropriately acknowledged in the Western world¹³. This Community Report will explore the impacts of gender-based violence and racialized sexism on women of colour dancers in Canadian Latin dance communities.

As a dancer in the Latin dance scene, a follow and a woman, this work has been motivated by my own lived experiences and the lived experiences of other dancers I am in community with. As an active member of the Toronto and Kitchener-Waterloo (KW) Latin dance community since 2014, I have witnessed and experienced gender-based violence first-hand. Furthermore, I am a gender-based violence prevention and support practitioner, specializing in arts-based approaches to consent education and harm mitigation, with over a decade of experience. Based on my work and the systemic harm I have encountered in the Latin dance scene, I founded [Leading Authentically](#); an education-based organization which addresses GBV on and off the dance floor.

As a white woman in a predominately racialized dance community, I am cognizant of my positionality and privilege in this space and how GBV disproportionately impacts women of colour dancers in the Latin dance community. There is a gap in research and action in the area of gender-based violence within dance communities, particularly in the Latin dance scene. Thus, I developed this research study to examine the lived experience of women of colour (WOC) dancers with GBV in the Toronto and KW Latin dance communities and to platform their voices in a context where they are often silenced. It is my hope that this Community Report will educate readers about this systemic issue and provide a preliminary roadmap for building safer and more supportive spaces in our Latin dance communities.

This Community Report is based on my Masters research thesis, which can be accessed [here](#) for a detailed description of the methods, results, and discussion¹⁴. This report will showcase how GBV is systemically engrained, accepted and normalized in the Latin dance communities in Toronto and Kitchener-Waterloo.

| Why this study is important

My goal for this research study is to contribute to building safer spaces in Latin dance communities. I use a pleasure-centered approach, recognizing the importance of centering joy in movements of resistance and anti-violence. For many dancers, the Latin dance scene is a space of community, connection, rest, and stress-relief. I want to mitigate violence in Latin dance communities not simply to reduce harm, but so that we may have space for joy, for belonging, for community connection. We all deserve to feel safe, especially in our “safe spaces”.

Unfortunately, there is a significant lack of research (or even supportive community conversations) on the topic of gender-based violence in Latin dance communities in Canada. As Latin dance has become significantly more popular in Canada and the United States in the past ten years¹⁵, it becomes more critical to understand the social dynamics and impact of gender-based violence on participating community members. In my study, I prioritize showcasing the realities of gender-based violence in the Latin dance scene, as well as its interaction with cultural appropriation. I also highlight the coping skills and methods of resistance used by women of colour dancers.

Afro-Indigenous Latine dance forms & social dancing

In this section, I provide background information and context for my research, including a brief history and cultural context of the Latin dance styles in my study. I define the partnered Latin social dance community. Finally, I contextualize the Latin dance community in Toronto and Kitchener-Waterloo, with respect to gender-based violence.

In my research study, I focus on two of the most popular dance styles in the Toronto and KW Latin dance community: salsa and bachata. Salsa and bachata are Afro-Indigenous Latine dance forms that have rich, complex histories of colonial resistance and celebration. The cultures surrounding these dance styles also carry significant racial and class dynamics. The history and cultural context of salsa and bachata are rarely discussed nor credited in the mainstream discourse in the Toronto and KW Latin dance communities.

Salsa originated from Cuba in the early 20th century¹⁶. With roots in colonization in the Caribbean and Latin America, salsa was developed through resistance and rebellion of systemic violence of slavery and the plantation economy¹⁷. Some of the fundamental building blocks of salsa are Afro-Cuban *son* and *danzón*, which was influenced by European ballroom¹⁶. Both dance steps are engrained with racial and class dynamics. In the 1970s, many Puerto Ricans immigrated to the United States, bringing influences of *bomba* and *plena* dance styles¹⁸ and helped to popularize salsa, particularly in New York City¹⁷. Here, it became heavily influenced by ballroom dancing, creating what we now know as Linear Salsa or Los Angeles Style Salsa. The focus was originally placed on performance and competition, instead of social dancing and community¹⁷. Eddie Torres is credited with developing Mambo (also known as salsa on 2) which is danced on a different rhythm than LA Style (salsa on 1). Both these dance forms are more linear, strictly defined and stylized¹⁷. Cuban salsa is often danced in a circle (*reuda*) and has a lower center of gravity. Colombia and Cali salsa are also credited for their contributions to developing what salsa looks like today¹⁹. Now, salsa is the most common dance style at many Latin dance social events.

Bachata originated from the Dominican Republic in the 1960s and early 1970s from working class areas of the country, predominantly danced by people of African descent²⁰. At this time, bachata was considered a dance for poor people, while Dominican elites preferred the dance style merengueⁱⁱⁱ. When bachata became popular in New York City in the 1980s and 1990s, the narrative started to change¹⁸. Bachata became a strong symbol of Dominican pride, regardless of ethnicity or cultural background. The role of Black Dominicans in developing bachata was largely erased. At the same time, young New York Dominicans began developing their own style of bachata,

ⁱⁱⁱ Merengue is a Latin dance style occasionally played and danced at socials in the KW and Toronto Latin dance Community. Merengue, as well as kizomba, a partnered dance from Angola, are not within the scope of this research.

influenced by the local hip-hop and R&B scene. This became Urban Bachata (also known as Bachata Moderna), which eventually led to the creation of Sensual Bachata. Urban Bachata has many turn patterns and more upper body movements and lower body styling versus traditional Dominican bachata. Sensual Bachata is characterized by a closer connection to one's partner, body isolations and dips. Bachata is known for guitar-centered style, emotional singing and romantic lyricism. The basic bachata step is danced side to side and generally has a closer hold than salsa. It can be characterized by playing with rhythm and footwork.

Social dancing refers to when people get together to dance for fun and is characterized by a structured improvisation in terms of dance moves and communal interactions. Social dancing is distinct from performance dancing, which is choreographed and with pre-determined partners. A social dance community is composed of folks who all enjoy a particular dance style and build a sense of community and belonging in this space. For example, the Latin social dance community is made up of dancers who are passionate about partnered Latin dance styles. Leads and follows gather to dance with various partners, usually rotating between songs.

The size and organization of a social dance night can differ depending on the geographical location. A Latin dance night refers to an evening of social dancing, often beginning with a lesson. This lesson is often taught by 1-2 professional dancers or volunteers. They can take place at a dance studio, a restaurant/bar or a dedicated venue.

While GBV is common in many partnered social dance communities, there are also context-specific patterns of harm. I chose to focus the scope of my research on the Toronto and KW Latin dance scene as I have directly witnessed and experienced the severity and frequency of harm that exists. In my position as a GBV advocate and an active member of these dance communities, dancers share their experiences of sexual harassment and sexual assault with me on a regular basis. Further, I wanted to build upon the work done by other social dance scenes who have developed more mainstream consent practices in their communities (e.g., fusion and contact improvisation).²¹

Strict historical and cultural gender roles in Latin dance perpetuate GBV²². Latin dance forms are partnered dances where traditionally men lead and women follow. There is little room made for queer and trans lived experiences in the Latin dance community. As a result, queer folks often organize their own safer spaces to dance, as there is no to little space made for them within heteronormative dance events. In the Toronto and Kitchener-Waterloo Latin dance community, social norms dictate that leads (most often men) ask follows (most often women) to dance. While follows do have agency within the dance partnership, there is evidence of how binary gender roles within partner dance perpetuate gender-based violence²².

Furthermore, there is the social pressure for follows to say “yes” to every person who asks them to dance. This cultural norm is often rooted in positive intentions to foster inclusivity. However, there is a distinct power imbalance between leads and follows, and men and women. McMains explains that the “pressure to accept all invitations to dance, especially when gender roles translate to men doing the asking and women feeling pressured to ignore their own needs in service to others, reinforces troubling cultural messaging that we [women] do not have the right to control our own bodies”²¹. While in some communities these social norms are starting to shift, usually in the form of women learning to lead other women, the power dynamics of ‘traditional’ partnered gender roles contribute to the perpetuation of gender-based violence in Latin dance communities.

OBJECTIVES & METHODOLOGY

Research questions

The aim of this study was to understand:



What are (WOC) dancers' understandings of GBV in the Latin dance scene?



How do WOC experience gender-based violence and racialized sexism in the Toronto and KW Latin dance community?



How does cultural appropriation (and white-washed forms of Latin dance styles) relate to the experience of gender-based violence among WOC dancers?

How this research was conducted

The study included 20 semi-structured interviews, with two main groups of stakeholders:

- 1) The first group of participants included **14 women of colour**, who are active dancers in the KW or Toronto Latin dance community. They had a minimum of 6 months of dance experience. I wanted to understand their experiences of gender-based violence in the Latin dance community and how that may intersect with other forms of harm, including, but not limited to, racism and cultural appropriation.
- 2) The second group of participants included **6 Power Players** in the Latin dance scene. Power Players include instructors, organizers, DJs, and even popular dancers who have been in a position of power in the KW or Toronto Latin dance community for a minimum of two years. For the Power Players, the focus of the interviews was on their observations of the larger Latin dance community (e.g., how they see dancers interact with each other). They were asked about examples and prevalence of GBV in the Latin dance scene from their perspective. The goal of interviewing Power Players was to discern the power dynamics of the Latin dance community which contribute to the harm experienced by WOC dancers.

The data was analyzed using a thematic analysis, which involves a rigorous multi-step process of identifying common themes across qualitative interviews. I was interested in identifying and highlighting the common lived experiences of women of colour dancers in the Latin dance community. I was particularly interested in unpacking the social norms perpetuating gender-based violence and investigating how WOC navigate experiences of GBV on and off the dance floor. I also wanted to showcase how women of colour's experiences are different from those of other dancers in the Latin dance community.

Please note that pseudonyms are used to preserve the anonymity of participants.

VICTORIA

“I realized pretty early on that guys wouldn't like to take no for an answer if I didn't want to dance with them. I had a guy actually pick me up off the couch and force me to dance with him at [Toronto dance social]. And then he left creepy messages on my Facebook and I blocked him.”

MAI

“I was very new on the scene. And he was very known. And he seemed very sweet at first, but he was really pushy towards meeting and going out. And, you know, when I said no, the next party, he didn't even speak with me or acknowledge me, forget actually dancing.”

RITA

“And unfortunately, there are so many women in the dance community [who have experienced gender-based violence]. I think I've met only one [woman] who has not reported [their experience of GBV], at least not to me.”

NANCY

“The feeling of, just having to look out for things...like it's a good night, if I'm wary, if I'm looking out for people who might have bad intentions or who might be, you know, unintentionally harming people...It's a good night, if nothing happens, right? But I do go into spaces with that kind of sensor on.”

WHAT WAS LEARNED ABOUT GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

❖ Latin dance is more than just a hobby

Participants shared various reasons why they participate in Latin dancing; however, it is clear that it is more than simply a hobby. Women of colour described the benefits of being part of a community, the positive impacts on their mental health, and the opportunities for self-expression and human connection. Others shared that when dancing, they felt that they were their most free and confident selves. Many spoke about their ability to access joy and feelings of empowerment.

“I always say that I came for the dancing, and then I stayed for the community.”
– Aubrey

“I also dance because I feel at home with my body. I feel like it's my home that I can use to have joy with. It's my home that I can exercise with to take care of my body. Dancing for me is autonomy in my body. And in that autonomy, I can interact with other people socially in a space that is culturally familiar to me.” – Alexandra

❖ Gender-based violence in Latin dance is systemic

Based on the definitions provided above, every woman of colour dancer interviewed shared experiences with gender-based violence in the Latin dance community. All have experienced sexual harassment, and most have experienced sexual assault.

Participants disclosed over 50 experiences of sexual harassment and 25 experiences of sexual assault. Sexual harassment is extremely common, including but not limited to cat-calling, pressure to say yes to a dance, objectification/sexualization and unwanted sexual advances. Sexual assault is also very common with the most common form being nonconsensual touching or groping on the dance floor.

It is important to acknowledge that most, if not all, the participants did not identify these instances of harm as sexual assault. Some don't identify with “gender-based violence” at all. This is a very common lived experience for many survivors and speaks to the normalization of harm in the Latin dance community. *If you don't use this language yourself to describe your experience of harm inside or outside the Latin dance scene, that's okay, your experience is still valid!*

❖ Harm is worse for beginners

The risk of gender-based violence in the Toronto and KW Latin dance communities is higher with beginners. Participants described that they experienced much more frequent and severe harm as a beginner dancer. Despite pervasive gender-based violence in the Latin dance scene being common knowledge, there is a lack of collective effort or action to mitigate harm for beginners in the scene. Consequently, each new beginner who enters the community experiences the same patterns of violence, predatory behaviour and then chooses to leave or develop their own coping mechanisms over time. There is little to no support between experienced dancers and newcomers. Therefore, the vicious cycle of harm continues.

❖ Systemic minimization and normalization of harm

The overall sentiment expressed from participants was “it is what it is”. It is well-known and accepted that gender-based violence is insidious and entrenched in the Latin dance community – efforts are spent on coping within the existing system, not on changing the system. As gender-based violence is so normalized in the scene (and power dynamics of victim-blaming and slut-shaming), it is common for survivors to minimize the harm they have experienced to survive, in order to be accepted and to enjoy their dance experience.

❖ Universal yet isolating experience

While gender-based violence in the Latin dance community is a universal experience for women of colour in the scene, most folks deal with the impacts individually. Rita expressed, *“It’s like the pandemic experience all over again, you feel isolated and yet this is happening to every woman you know. And it’s sad, really.”* It takes years for dancers to develop skills and strategies to feel comfortable navigating harm and feeling safe in their community.

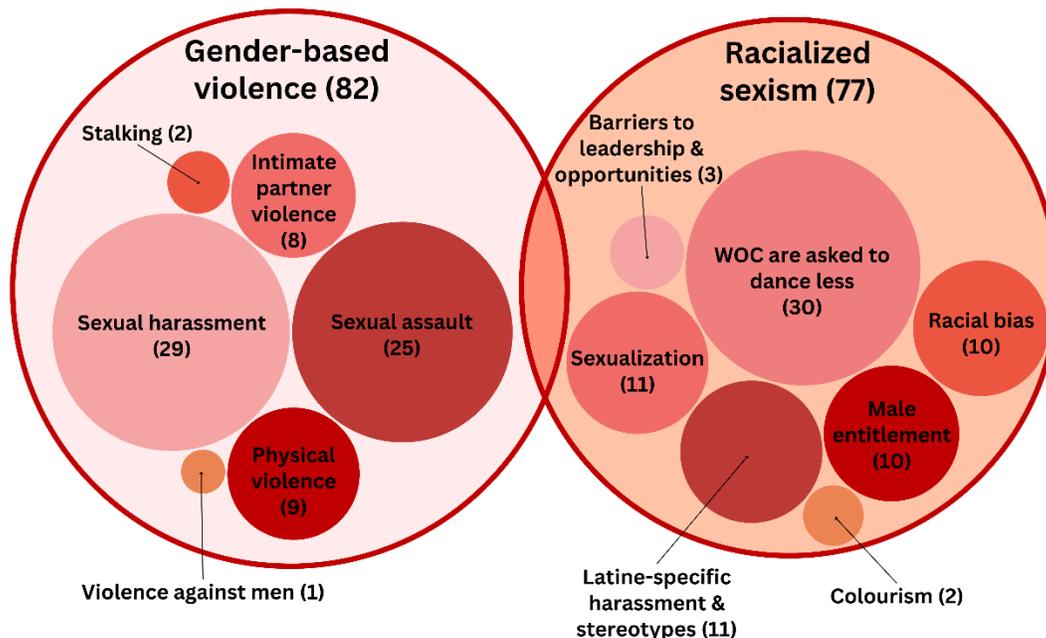
❖ Significant negative impacts on WOC

There are significantly negative impacts to gender-based violence experienced by WOC dancers. Two participants have left the Latin dance community due to the harm they have experienced, and others have changed the way in which they dance or the way they relate to the scene. Participants consistently described the feeling of always having to be on alert and keep their guard up. This heightened awareness and sensitivity to your surroundings is burdensome and exhausting. Women of colour use an enormous amount of emotional labour to promote feelings and experiences of safety in Latin dance.

“It only takes one scenario [of experiencing gender-based violence] or less, to instill that fear that exists throughout.”
– Sarah

Intersecting Systems of Violence in the Toronto & KW Latin dance scene

Instances of violence experienced by women of colour, as reported by research participants



WHAT WAS LEARNED ABOUT RACISM & RACIALIZED SEXISM

❖ WOC dancers experience significant racialized sexism

Women of colour participants described experiencing systemic racialized sexism. Women of colour participants shared experiencing racist verbal harassment and encountering regular racial stereotypes, assumptions and judgements (including about their dance skills, their abilities and their country of origin). Participants also shared experiences of their male partners feeling entitled to their bodies during dances. This was demonstrated in two primary ways: asking intrusive questions and not respecting their physical boundaries.

“I hate feeling the energy shift the moment I tell someone that I'm Latina, because sometimes it even comes off as they dance suddenly the moves become more sexually charged, somehow they become closer to me and I'm not into that.” – Rita

WOC participants also spoke about feelings of objectification and sexualization when dancing with men in the Latin dance community. The impacts of these actions are profoundly negative, including dehumanization, poor self-esteem and lack of enjoyment. Participants described feelings of being used, exploited and unseen. They also shared feelings of questioning their worth and their value as a dancer and as a person.

“Sometimes, they don't even treat you as a person. Like, they're not even looking at you. They could be dancing with their broom, for all I know.” – Kelsie

WOC participants shared that they experience being asked to dance less than white women. This contributes to negative impacts including social isolation, poor self-esteem and self-doubt. WOC participants shared that they are asked to dance more if they comply with ‘white beauty’ standards, describing changing the way they styled their hair, make-up and clothing. Folks also found they were asked to dance more when their skill level increased, when they had more dance experience and if they knew more people in the scene.

“That experience has not changed for me over the years, no matter how much I learned. It's just the more people I knew, they asked me to dance, because they knew me. But, if I would go to a random place where no one knows me, I would not get asked. Simple as that.”

– Asha

“My experience has been that a lot of leads will approach these women and want to dance with them because they're perceived as beautiful [...] I feel like I have proven myself in some circles to be just as good of a dancer as they are, or maybe sometimes even better. So, it kind of feels shitty to know that just because I'm not fitting into whatever beauty standard that they are falling under that I'm not perceived as “attractive enough” to be asked for a dance.” – Audrey

❖ Impact of cultural appropriation and white-washing

The findings from this study indicate that white-washed dance forms have a higher rate of GBV than more traditional forms of dance, including physical violence and sexual violence. Many participants highlighted that they have experienced the worst forms of harm when dancing sensual bachata. Some women of colour shared that they no longer feel safe dancing sensual bachata due to their lived experience of violence, despite enjoying the dance form.

“I think with bachata sensual, in a white female body is very different than done in a person of colour’s body because I think of general understandings of what bodies are available bodies vs what bodies are deserving of boundaries vs what bodies are deserving of like care and don’t have like access.” – Alexandra

Latine dancers reported experiencing cultural exclusion from their own dance styles. They shared discomfort and frustration of being excluded from their own cultural space which brings them joy and where they hold expertise, generational knowledge and embodied wisdom. Folks also shared feelings of dissonance when encountering the devaluation of traditional Latin dance forms, a lack of knowledge of its historical context and the white-washing of their culture.

“Sometimes it feels like you are an outsider looking in. ...Imagine you’re a fish in a fishbowl and suddenly you’re released into the ocean. And yes, it’s water... but it’s different water, and you know how to swim, and other fish know how to swim. But they’re all looking at you like, ‘why are you swimming funny?’, and I’m like, ‘I’m used to swimming...I know how to do these movements’.” – Rita

RESPONDING TO HARM: COPING SKILLS

None of the WOC dancers were aware of any systems of support for GBV that are available in the Latin dance community. Women of colour dancers utilize diverse coping skills and strategies to survive, to mitigate harm and to continue experiencing joy in their space. Participants shared that it has taken them years to develop their boundaries and feel comfortable advocating for their basic safety. Leila expressed, *“so I’ve learned in over the seven years of experience, I’m more comfortable saying no, or walking [away] mid dance if I need to.”*

The coping skills described by WOC dancers fall into two categories: individual-based and community-based. The potential third category of systems-level coping skills was notable absent in research participant interviews. The individual-level coping skills were more prominent than the community-level coping skills. This dynamic reflects the self-reliance expected of WOC dancers and a lack of systemic accountability and community care.

Categories of Coping Skills Exhibited by WOC Dancers

Individual-based	Community-based	Systemic
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Boundary-setting ❖ Survive until the end of the dance ❖ Fleeing ❖ Hyper-vigilance ❖ Masking ❖ Strategic lying ❖ Overcompensation or making concessions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Solidarity ❖ Relationship building ❖ Bystander intervention 	

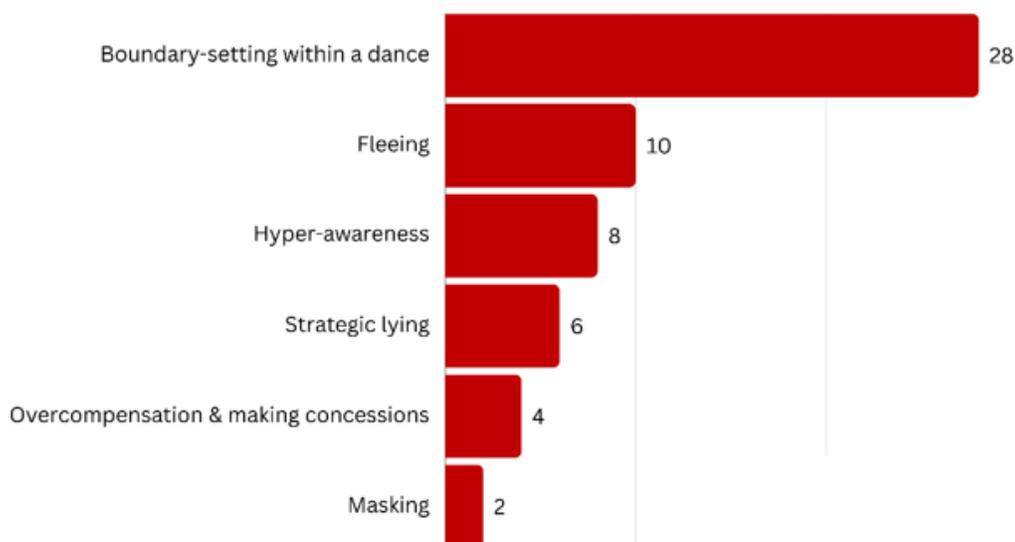
Individual-based coping strategies

- ❖ **Boundary-setting:** Women of colour dancers set a variety of physical and verbal boundaries with dance partners with whom they experience discomfort and/or harm. Physical boundary-setting refers to the use of physical holds in the dance partnership, physically resisting a particular move to inform your partner non-verbally of your comfort level. Some interviewees referred to this practice as “defensive dancing”. Mariam explained *“I try to fix it by just like, my body movements, you know, like, stepping back or just if the hand is lower than where it should be just like raising it myself.”* Verbal boundary-setting can look like communicating to a lead if one feels uncomfortable or a move physically hurts. Participants emphasized that, when possible, they preferred physical boundary setting to verbal boundary setting to reduce the risk of backlash.
- ❖ **Survive until the end of the dance:** Due to the strong social norms and pressures in the Latin dance community to never interrupt or leave in the middle of a dance, many WOC dancers reported finding it easier and safer to wait until the end of the dance. These harm reductive approaches are informed by “consequences to resistance” that participants have experienced from providing feedback or going against social norms, including aggression, gaslighting, defensiveness and mansplaining.
- ❖ **Fleeing:** Participants described tactics of escape, avoidance and evasion (e.g., dancing with another person or hiding out with one’s friends). Alternatively, WOC dancers spoke about fleeing outside the dance venue itself (e.g., a temporary break in someone’s car or permanently leaving the dance venue). I also noted a distinction between intentional, strategic fleeing vs. fleeing as a gut reaction, which could be considered as “flight” or a trauma response.
- ❖ **Hyper-awareness:** Participants continually expressed the need to keep their guard up and constant surveillance of the dance floor, both when they are actively dancing and to keep tabs on potential “gross guys”.

- ❖ **Masking:** Participants spoke about putting up a front to foster a sense of safety and mitigate harm, including putting on a fake smile and changing their tone of voice (code-switching). Another way that WOC mask is by strategically altering their appearance. Aubrey shared, *“I feel like I tend to dress pretty modestly when I dance, which shouldn't even be like a consideration that I need to have. But it is something that I do to protect myself...I like to try to mitigate any negative experiences that I might have. Because I feel unsafe sometimes.”*
- ❖ **Strategic lying:** Women of colour dancers described that it is safer to provide an excuse to refuse a dance instead of saying no. Rita explained that *“over the years, I've learned, unless I feel really comfortable with this person, I don't tell them the truth.”* Participants also shared their experience managing letting down men easy. Victoria said, *“We do run the risk of bruising their ego, and then they won't ask you to dance.”*
- ❖ **Overcompensation or making concessions:** Several participants describe feeling the need to change themselves in order to secure social belonging. Some overcompensate and go out of their way to form bonds with dancers who have social status. Others have chosen to make concessions, an adjusting or minimizing of self to fit in more. Asha shared her experience, *“I would also overcompensate or overdo things sometimes...So that they see me and they see me as that ‘Oh, yeah. You can just ask her, she'll actually help you’. Just so people know that I exist and I'm there. And then next time, I'm not waiting or being scared that ‘oh, this person will ask me to dance and touch me like last time’. Like I'm just trying to build my like allies within the community.”*

WOC Dancers' "Toolbox": Individual Coping Skills

Instances of these coping skills demonstrated through the lived experiences of women of colour dancers, as reported by research participants



*Please note that the coping strategy “surviving until the end of the dance” is not reflected in this graph, as it was demonstrated as an engrained social norm. Research participants discussed it rarely, due to the degree of normalization of both GBV and this coping strategy in the Toronto & KW Latin dance communities.

Community-based coping strategies

- ❖ **Solidarity:** This refers to finding support when harm occurs on the dance floor. This is a reactive approach. Participants discussed the importance of experiences of solidarity in friends or other follows and sharing the experience they had. These conversations can be a space for affirmation and safer expression of emotions for women of colour.
- ❖ **Relationship-building:** This is a proactive tactic, where women of colour have strategically implemented plans or methods to mitigate harm for themselves and/or others. Many folks shared that they will only attend Latin dance socials with friends, a male partner or know at least one person who will have their back. Additionally, another frequent relationship-building strategy that was discussed was to only dance with people you know. Finally, participants described that warning each other of “gross guys” on the dance floor is a common practice. The importance of making a plan, needing to have a safety net and feeling like someone has your back is repeated over and over again by participants. For example, Aubrey shared: *“Whenever I went to socials, I knew that I had at least one friend that I could count on, I felt comfortable and safe. I think having that person’s face that you know that if something goes wrong at the social or if you feel uncomfortable, you can approach that person and no questions asked, they will support you or they will make sure that something gets handled and taken care of — I think that’s really important.”*
- ❖ **Bystander intervention:** This refers to the interception of harm by a third-party. Participants describe that they have developed signals with their friends and other follows, as a means to alert each other if they need to be “rescued” from a dance. Rita explained how signaling often works on the dance floor, *“Whether that looks like a female friend, I can signal for assistance...And you know, if you ever feel uncomfortable, again, know that I can be the person that you signal on the dance floor. You know, give me the doe eyes like...like widen your eyes a little.”* Others described how they keep an eye out for other follows in the community, including ensuring folks get home safely and intervening in instances of stalking.

POWER DYNAMICS & SOCIO-CULTURAL NORMS: IMPACTS ON WOC DANCERS

While I have demonstrated thus far that experiences of GBV among women of colour dancers are both widespread and harmful, power dynamics enable the condonation, minimalization and normalization of GBV in this scene and, thus, perpetuate the harm.

As demonstrated by the vast coping strategies employed by participants, **agency is gendered**²³ for WOC dancers. WOC dancers demonstrated tremendous agency and decision-making ability, while contending with systemic structures of gender-based violence in the Latin dance community. This systemic harm is exacerbated by power dynamics.

I found a **discrepancy** between the perception of Power Players and the lived experiences of WOC dancers with gender-based violence. Women of colour dancers spoke about their lived experiences with systemic gender-based violence, while Power Players spoke about GBV being a rare occurrence in the scene, referring to “one-off episodes” or a “few bad men” causing harm. Power

Players also showcased a lack of understanding of how to meaningfully address instances of harm and support survivors in the scene.

Power Players	Women of Colour
<ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ “Harassment is not the norm.” – Cole❖ “Sometimes, you know, just mistakes can happen. I hope that that was just a mistake and miscalculation on his side. That accident caused by him will pretty much always be in ‘the grey zone’ from my perspective...” – Victor	<ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ “I realized pretty early on that guys wouldn't like to take no for an answer if I didn't want to dance with them.” – Victoria❖ “Sometimes I look back, and I'm surprised that I even stuck with it, honestly!” – Kelsie

Gender-based violence in the Latin dance community is **simultaneously blatantly occurring in public and buried**. Sexual harassment and sexual assault are perpetrated out in the open; however, this harm is either ignored, accepted or actively celebrated. This ‘seeing’ and ‘unseeing’ of harm is particularly violent, as it condones the violence of those perpetrating it AND simultaneously erases the lived experience of those experiencing said violence.

These ‘**choreographies**’²⁴ of **rape culture** normalize and perpetuate gender-based violence on and off the dance floor. For example, it is common to see a follow being physically pulled onto the dance floor against their will or someone’s ass being grabbed while dancing. However, it is rare to see any form of intervention or community support, never mind accountability. Dancers who experience harm are regularly silenced about their lived experiences, both actively by those in positions of power and passively by the cultural norms of the scene. This collective complicity²⁵ enables gender-based violence to be acceptable and even encouraged in the Latin dance community. Based on the testimonies of women of colour participants in this research, instances of gender-based violence in the Latin dance scene are as commonplace as a cross-body-lead in salsa or a Romeo Santos song in bachata.

“Because I feel like we all kind of learned the hard way, in like alright there's this problem in the dance community, and we all kind of dance around it, you know? Because it's an issue. People think that because you dance sensual bachata, you want to get sexual with them. It's like, no- those are two very different things. And it's not right that...women make up 50%...how is it that so many of us feel uncomfortable?” – Rita

The **normalization and minimization** of gender-based violence in the Latin dance community makes it more difficult for dancers who experience harm to access support. For example, “bachata boner” is a common term in the scene referring to a lead nonconsensually pressing/rubbing their erection on the follow while dancing. While this is sexual assault, conversations around “the bachata boner” in the Latin dance scene are most often laughed about instead of called out. These narratives continue the perpetuation of this harmful behaviour. Rita shares *“you don't want to be on the receiving end of ‘The Bachata Boner’, which is unfortunately too wide of a common experience.”*

In the Toronto and KW Latin dance communities, there are the rigid social norms of white-washed beauty standards – these **desirability politics** influence how WOC dancers are valued or devalued by other community members, creating significant negative impacts on their feelings and experiences of self-worth, safety, and belonging. This prioritization of appearances dismisses WOC dancers’ hard work, never mind their humanity. Aubrey states, *“it kind of feels shitty to know that just because I’m not fitting into whatever beauty standard that they are falling under that I’m not perceived as like ‘attractive enough’ to be asked for a dance.”* Moreover, men use women and women’s bodies to elevate their own status and visibility in the Toronto Latin dance community. Asha explains that *“I remember even some of the guys that I know, they would only dance with me if let’s say I’m dressed nicely, or like showing some cleavage...just showing more skin, I would get more dances. [...] Just because I look a certain way and they know that the camera will capture them. Because you know, everyone wants to be captured.”*

It is important to note that in the Latin dance community, **male approval**, specifically men asking folks to dance, given the heteronormative gendered constructs in our dance scene, is critical to women’s sense of belonging and experience of safety within the Latin dance community. Through the approval and acceptance of experienced leads in the scene, participants describe feeling more “looked after” and “protected” from leads that make them feel unsafe. Essentially, this study suggests that folks with more community connections, access to support networks and social power in the scene are less likely to experience harm.^{iv} Everyone deserves safety and care in the Latin dance community, regardless of positionality or status.

Another learning from this research study is that **harm is worse when it happens in your safe space**. Participants spoke of the particular type of pain with experiencing violence in Latin dance vs in other spaces of their life given that Latin dance is a place of community, belonging, connection, etc. Thus, we have an important responsibility to foster safer spaces and mitigate harm in the Latin dance community. When discussing the inequitable power dynamics and harm that caused her to leave the scene, Asha shared *“I just felt like everything I built, whatever I built...I gave so much of me to everyone, I thought I built a relationship, I thought I built some goodwill...I felt like just everything went down the drain for something that people don't even know.”*

In the Toronto and KW Latin dance community, **safety is conditional** for WOC dancers. They develop and co-create their own systems of safety in the Latin dance community. Safety is not the standard, or even the expectation. The women of colour in my study consistently shared that they only feel safe because they have built systems of safety for themselves. They have developed a variety of coping mechanisms and strategies over time to navigate the pervasive gender-based violence in the Latin dance community.

“We have had to condition ourselves to keep ourselves safe when we are dancing.”
– Nancy

“It gets very exhausting and kind of takes away from the home I am trying to enjoy. It takes away from me enjoying it vs now I feel like I have to be a host.”
– Alexandra

^{iv} Please note that gender-based violence happens at every “level” in the Latin dance community and can be perpetrated by beginner dancers (those with less power in the scene) to the most popular instructors and organizers (those with significant power in the scene). Regardless of the context or circumstances of GBV, it is never the victim’s fault.

HOW DO WE MOVE FORWARD?

In this research study, I asked participants what they would need to feel safe in the Latin dance community. They shared a vision of a community that includes security, lack of violence, trust, shared values, freedom, community support, organizational responsibility and consent education. Ultimately, the sentiment that was expressed to me by WOC dancers was that they want to feel cared for, that they belong and that there is a sense of accountability if harm transpires.

“I just want to be physically comfortable. When I’m there, I want to be able to dance with whoever I want to dance with, and also be okay setting boundaries and not having a negative response.” – Carly

I often come back to what Victoria shared with me, in terms of what safety looks like for her: *“I feel like to feel safe is to feel like these **people have my back**. And be that, just on the dance floor preventing me from crashing into other people. But that’s also if you see me in an uncomfortable situation, you come to my help, or I feel comfortable running up to you and being like, **“this guy’s gonna ask me to dance, I don’t wanna dance with him, dance with me!”** It just kind of that like **“taking care”**, even if these are...these people don’t have to be like your best friends, like people you see, like you’d go out with. It’s just there’s some onus of like, **I see you every single week here and I’m gonna keep you safe, help you out, make sure you get a ride home.**”* That sense of community care, the feeling that you have people you can count on, regardless of whether they are your close friends or not, I believe is at the root of building safer spaces within our Latin dance communities.

I invite you to reflect on the following questions:



What does safety look like for you?



How may we foster safer spaces in our Latin dance community?



How may we create the scene that we wish to be a part of?

I would like to position the Latin dance community as a site for potential transformation. It has historically and culturally been a place of resistance for Latine people¹⁷. We collectively have the ability to develop the safer, supportive community we want to have. In recognizing and naming the structural nature of the GBV and identifying the significant power dynamics, we are taking the first step in moving towards the kind of community we want and taking systemic actions to make that happen.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Practice

First and foremost, women of colour dancers need to be central in decision-making processes around fostering safer spaces. Also, we must be diligent in breaking down binary gender norms and unlearning entrenched heteronormativity. By fostering safer spaces for queer and trans folks in our Latin dance communities, we will build safer spaces for all. We must take a pleasure-based, joy-based approach to ensure the sustainability of this work²⁶. Therefore, conversations with dancers around harm mitigation should be framed with the goal of folks having positive, enjoyable experiences dancing and rooted in mutual love of dance.

Furthermore, harm lives in our bodies; thus, I believe that we need harm-reduction approaches that are embodied. Women of colour in the Latin dance community encounter socio-cultural narratives that their body does not belong to them, and the associated violence that comes with said norms. Therefore, it is especially important to support processes and practices of “re-inhabiting” and reclaiming one’s body²⁷.

Embodiment (aka being present in your body) is also an important practice in harm prevention. The ability to be present in a partner dance is fundamental in our capacity to give and receive consent²⁸. If folks are able to be present in a dance, they are more capable of understanding if something does not feel good in their body and also advocating for changes with their partner. Furthermore, it allows them to pay attention to their partner and their non-verbal cues and adjust as needed.

Education

Due to the systemic objectification, sexualization and fetishization in the Toronto and KW Latin dance scenes, I recommend the prioritization of humanity education. I don’t believe that we will be able to move forward addressing rape culture or any other systemic violence in the scene without first addressing dehumanization of women of colour. There must be education in dance classes that in partner dance, you are holding an actual, real-life human in your arms and thus you have a responsibility to take care of them. Additionally, there must be discussions about the power dynamics between leads and follows. For example, leads should be cognizant of their physical surroundings to mitigate bumping their follow into other people on the dance floor.

Additionally, education on consent, bystander intervention and disclosure response are severely needed. Given the prevalence and severity of gender-based violence in the Toronto and KW scene at this time, one-off workshops and trainings would be most appropriate. To my knowledge, unfortunately, there has been very little support and educational work offered in this region. This was my original motivation to found [Leading Authentically](#), which offers dance-based educational workshops to mitigate gender-based violence, to fill this gap. Unfortunately, my research has confirmed this gap and the continued need for Leading Authentically and work like it. I would recommend prioritizing arts-based and embodied methodologies.

The long-term goal is that these educational workshops will not be necessary, and the culture of consent is embedded into the social fabric of the Latin dance community. To this end, I envision instructors integrating conversations around consent into their dance classes and students feeling comfortable asking questions. I envision organizers working proactively to foster safer, more

inclusive spaces at their events, prioritizing the needs of dancers. I envision DJs more comfortable receiving and responding to disclosures and supporting survivors with care and empathy. I envision the values and goals of the Toronto and KW Latin dance communities shift dramatically.

Policy

We need to start building safer spaces policy infrastructure in the Toronto and KW Latin dance communities. This research study demonstrates the tremendous need, in terms of severity of harm, as well as lack of trust in Power Players. Recommended policy work includes Codes of Conduct (for Latin dance socials, dance schools, and Power Players) and guidelines on intervention (e.g., when to remove a dancer from an event).

There needs to be a means to hold Power Players accountable. Furthermore, there are many Power Players who want to develop safer spaces for their dancers but do not know how. That is why this policy infrastructure in the Latin dance scene is so important and that it must go hand-in-hand with education. Policy documents that have no means of implementation or along with broader cultural change can cause more harm.

Systemic Social Change

Through the avenues of practice, education and policy, the goal is systemic social change in the Toronto and Kitchener-Waterloo Latin dance communities. We want a dance scene that is safer for women of colour dancers and all participants. We want folks to enjoy their experience in dance, without worrying about being harmed.

In order to mitigate rape culture in the Latin dance community, the social norms which permit and enable gender-based violence must be unpacked and addressed. Moreover, a culture of consent must be actively built. Currently, conversations around consent in social dance communities are often reactionary due specific incidents of rape and sexual assault in their community. After several months, these conversations die out until the next “scandal”. We must intentionally be proactive in building a culture of consent in the Latin dance community.

Another consideration in building a safer, more supportive dance community is the right to refusal. Saying no to a dance or leaving a dance when one wants must become a socially acceptable response. Reducing the social pressure is essential for consent in our Latin dance community.

Finally, it is vital to recognize that we dance on stolen land of Indigenous peoples^v. What does it mean to repatriate the physical space we are in, particularly as we reckon with the ongoing colonial harm to women of colour dancers? We must center Indigenous, Black and Latine women and gender diverse folks on the dance floor. Afro-Indigenous Latine dance styles should be celebrated and taught critically in our Latin dance community.

^v See Land Acknowledgement on Page 3. It is recognized that more work is needed to meaningfully decolonize our Latin dance communities.

CONCLUSION

This Community Report will be presented at the Kitchener-Waterloo and Toronto Community Roundtables in Spring 2025. The goals for the Community Roundtables are to provide a platform for the voices and the lived experiences of women of colour dancers, curate constructive community discussion and ideate next steps in foster safer spaces in our Latin dance communities.

Gender-based violence in the Toronto & KW Latin dance communities is engrained, systemic and normalized. This harm disproportionately impacts WOC dancers. The socio-culturally-specific power dynamics and community norms exacerbate much of the gender-based violence and place barriers to folks feeling comfortable disclosing harm, accessing support and reporting. Additionally, WOC dancers face significant racialized sexism. White-washed dance styles have higher rates of gender-based violence.

Women of colour in the Latin dance community dance around and through harm. They employ a variety of diverse and strategic coping mechanisms to navigate gender-based violence in their Latin dance scene. This utilizes significant time, resources and emotional labour. The agency of women of colour dancers should be celebrated AND they deserve so much better. The responsibility must be placed on those causing harm to not perpetuate it in the first place.

A more systemic approach to addressing gender-based violence in the Toronto and KW Latin dance communities is essential for the wellbeing of women of colour dancers, as well as the survival of the scene in the long-term. WOC dancers are uniquely positioned in the Latin dance community as they develop that majority of the social and cultural capital in the scene. The Toronto and KW Latin dance community cannot afford to lose most of their WOC dancers due to burnout, harm, etc. We must work together to take better care of each other and strive for a culture of consent. This involves community care, organizational accountability and embodied consent education.

In the Toronto and Kitchener-Waterloo Latin dance communities, women of colour are used to dancing around and through harm. They consistently navigate and negotiate how to take up space and minimize experiences of gender-based violence. My goal is for the scene to get to a place where WOC dancers can simply exist, dance for pleasure and connect with community, without the constant threat of harm. A different reality is possible — all members of the Latin dance community have a part to play in creating this change. I am committed to working alongside women of colour dancers to transform harmful systems and build a culture of consent, community care and accountability. Everyone deserves to feel safe in their safe space.

REFERENCES CITED

- ¹ Women’s Legal Education and Action Fund. (n.d.). The Law of Consent in Sexual Assault. <https://www.leaf.ca/news/the-law-of-consent-in-sexual-assault/>
- ² Chen, Y. (2020). From “Lamb Kebabs” to “Shared Joy”: Cultural Appropriation, Ignorance and the Constrained Connectivity within the “One Belt, One Road” Initiative. *The Journal of Contemporary China*, 29(121), 1–16.
- ³ UNWomen. (2023). *Frequently asked questions: Types of violence against women and girls*. Retrieved from <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/faqs/types-of-violence>
- ⁴ Khan, F., Elmi, A., Snow, A., Giannitsopoulou, S., Naushan, A., Murray, L., & Bridgeman, C., (2023). Use the Right Words Checklist for Reporting on Sexual Violence. *Courage to Act: Addressing and Preventing Gender-Based Violence at Post-Secondary Institutions in Canada*.
- ⁵ Privacy, J., & Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General. (2020). Sexual assault. Province of British Columbia. <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/justice/criminal-justice/bcs-criminal-justice-system/reporting-a-crime/what-is-a-crime/crime-examples/sexual-assault>
- ⁶ Gianettoni, L., Roux, P. (2010). Interconnecting Race and Gender Relations: Racism, Sexism and the Attribution of Sexism to the Racialized Other. *Sex Roles*, 62, 374–386.
- ⁷ Creative Equity Toolkit (2022). Cultural Appropriation. Retrieved from <https://creativeequitytoolkit.org/topic/organisational-culture/cultural-appropriation>
- ⁸ Slemp, K. (2020). Latino, Latina, Latin@, Latine, and Latinx: Gender Inclusive Oral Expression in Spanish. *Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository*. 7297.
- ⁹ Statistics Canada. (2019). Gender-based violence and unwanted sexual behaviour in Canada, 2018: Initial findings from the Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2019001/article/00017-eng.htm>
- ¹⁰ Bent-Goodley, T. (2009). A Black Experience-Based Approach to Gender-Based Violence. *Social Work, Special Issue on Practice Perspectives with Racial and Ethnic Minorities*, 54(3), 262-269.
- ¹¹ Gonzalez, L. S. (1999). Reclaiming salsa. *Cultural studies*, 13(2), 237-250.
- ¹² García, C. (2013). The great migration: Los Angeles salsa speculations and the performance of latinidad. *Dance Research Journal*, 45(3), 125-136.
- ¹³ Chasteen, J. (2004). *National Rhythms, African Roots: The Deep History of Latin American Popular Dance*. UNM Press.
- ¹⁴ Salt, L. (2024). Dancing around and through harm: Examining the lived experiences of women of colour with gender-based violence in the Toronto & Kitchener-Waterloo Latin dance communities. *Theses and Dissertations (Comprehensive)*. 2632. <https://scholars.wlu.ca/etd/2632>

- ¹⁵ Leib, A., & Bulman, R. (2007). The choreography of gender: Masculinity, femininity, and the complex dance of identity in the Ballroom. *Men and Masculinities*, 11(5), 602–621.
- ¹⁶ Dare, Valerie., & Ferreras, S. (1997). *Music of Cuba: from son to salsa*. British Columbia Teachers' Federation.
- ¹⁷ Renta, P. (2004). Salsa dance: Latino/a History in Motion. *Centro Journal*, 16(2), 138-157.
- ¹⁸ Clifford, P. (2000). *Origins of Salsa with Puerto Rico Influences*. Retrieved at https://www.oocities.org/sd_au/articles/sdhsalsapr.htm
- ¹⁹ Waxer, L. (2000). " En Conga, Bonga y Campana:" The Rise of Colombian Salsa. *Latin American Music Review/Revista De Música Latinoamericana*, 21(2), 118-168.
- ²⁰ Hernandez, D. P. (2014). Urban Bachata and Dominican Racial Identity in New York. *Cahiers d'études africaines*, (216), 1027-1054.
- ²¹ Kennedy, F. (2020, January). *Switch: Consent and Gender Non-conformity in Social Partner Dancing*. The Activist History Review. Retrieved from <https://activisthistory.com/2020/01/17/switch-consent-and-gender-non-conformity-in-social-partner-dancing/>
- ²² Meneau, V. (2020) Coding sexual violence as love – choreographed heteronormative gender performances in Latin American competitive dancing. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 29(8), 962-980.
- ²³ Gatrell, C. (2010). Who rules the game? An investigation of sex-work, gender, agency and the body. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 25(3), 208-226.
- ²⁴ García, C. (2008). “Don’t leave me, Celia!”: Salsera homosociality and pan-Latina corporealities. *Women & Performance*, 18(3), 199–213.
- ²⁵ Prilleltensky, I. (2008). The role of power in wellness, oppression, and liberation: The promise of psychopolitical validity. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 36, 116-136.
- ²⁶ bitty, s. (2022, November 21). *Pleasure is Consent* [Presentation]. Action Now Atlantic.
- ²⁷ Piran, N. (2001). Re-inhabiting the body from the inside out: Girls transform their school environment. In D. L. Tolman & M. Brydon-Miller (Eds.), *Qualitative studies in psychology. From subjects to subjectivities: A handbook of interpretive and participatory methods* (p. 218–238). New York University Press.
- ²⁸ Lloyd, R. J. (2017). The feeling of seeing: Factual life in salsa dance. *Phenomenology & Practice*, 11(1), 55-71.

APPENDIX

Support Resources: TORONTO

Crisis Lines

Hotlines are free, confidential and open 24/7 to offer help and support to folks.

Toronto Distress Centres

416 408-4357 or 408-HELP

24 hour crisis line for all

Assaulted Women's Helpline

416 863-0511

24 hour crisis line for women who have experienced harm

24hr Support Line for Male Survivors

1-866-887-0015

Provides support for men who have lived experience with gender-based violence

Community-based Care

Toronto Rape Crisis Center/Multicultural Women Against Rape

416-596-8808 (24hr Crisis line)

Supports survivors of sexual violence through individual counselling, court support/accompaniment, advocacy and support groups (*there is a Latin American women's program)

The 519

<https://www.the519.org>

Committed to the health, happiness and full participation of the 2SLGBTQ+ community

YWCA Toronto

<https://www.ywcatoronto.org/ourprograms>

Dedicated to improving the lives of women and girls, has a variety of support services

Healing in Colour

<https://www.healingincolour.com>

Resource for people of colour to find a counselor to suit their specific mental health needs and reflect their lived experiences

**This is a non-exhaustive list. If you would like help navigating support services or for assistance with referrals, please contact lexi@leadingauthentically.ca.*

Support Resources: KITCHENER-WATERLOO

Crisis Lines

Hotlines are free, confidential and open 24/7 to offer help and support to folks.

Sexual Assault Support Centre of Waterloo Region (SASC)

519-741-8633

24/7 support line, staffed by trained volunteers, uses an empowerment-based approach

Women's Crisis Services of Waterloo Region

519-741-9184

24/7 support via phone and online chat

Here 24/7

1-844-437-3247

Crisis/support line and will help connect you to the most helpful service for you

Community-based Care

Sexual Assault Support Centre of Waterloo Region (SASC)

519-571-0121

Supports survivors of sexual violence, through a variety of services including counselling & advocacy

Women's Crisis Services of Waterloo Region

<https://www.wcswr.org>

Emergency shelters for women and children who have experienced domestic violence

SHORE (Sexual Health Options, Resources and Education)

519-743-9360

Sexual health education, sexual health resources and pregnancy options

Spectrum

<https://www.ourspectrum.com/>

Serves, affirms and supports the wellbeing of 2SLGBTQ+ people in Waterloo Region

KW Counselling Services

519-884-0000

Individual and group therapy options are offered, as well as quick-access counselling

Sexual Assault Domestic Violence Treatment Centre

519-749-6994

Located at St. Mary's and Cambridge Memorial hospitals

**This is a non-exhaustive list. If you would like help navigating support services or for assistance with referrals, please contact lexi@leadingauthentically.ca.*

Leading Authentically

[Leading Authentically](#) is dedicated to building supportive, safer and connected communities. We facilitate consent and healthy masculinity workshops, grounded in embodied practice. We are passionate about mitigating gender-based violence in Afro-Latin dance communities, through our one-of-a-kind consent-based dance workshops, which equip participants with enhanced skills in practicing consent, healthy communication, effective feedback, and meaningful connection. Leading Authentically also provides social justice consultation services for organizations' equity-based needs and anti-oppression goals.

We believe that everyone has the right to feel safe doing what brings them joy. We are passionate about providing folks with the tools to prevent and reduce gender-based violence in their communities.