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**"Nobody puts Baby in a corner"**

**Placing attractiveness in dancing coupled with alternative masculinities and affective-sexual relationships in Dirty Dancing film.**

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The success and popularity of the film *Dirty Dancing* (1987) placed it at the center of research interest. Many articles have been published about it, including supposedly critical analyses interpreting it as classist and sexist (Giroux, 1989). However, none of these analyses present evidence about femininity and masculinity models and affective-sexual relationships developed in the film. In this paper, the main protagonist, Johnny, and his antagonist, Robbie, are analysed in the scenes in which they interact with the protagonist, Baby, and the secondary characters, Penny and Lisa. The results show that Robbie's character corresponds mainly to a toxic model of masculinity while the protagonist Johnny's character corresponds mainly to an alternative model of masculinity. The affective-sexual relationships they establish are also reported. In her relationship with Robbie, Penny has an unwanted pregnancy and is depicted by him. Conversely, Jhonny introduces Baby in dancing, they start a relationship, and she evolves in the film in improving security and self-esteem. Dancing as an attractive key issue in the film is placed in this last relationship. Finally, the article discusses the possible role of the film in promoting the attractiveness of dance coupled with more egalitarian relationships and alternative models of masculinity.

Keywords: attractiveness dancing, alternative masculinities, affective-sexual relationships, gender

## **Introduction**

*Dirty Dancing* (1987) is a famous film for its worldwide success. By 2009, it had earned more than \$214 million worldwide, making it the first film to sell more than one million

copies on home video. The success of the stage adaptation on different continents in the early 2000s indicates that the film is still relevant today (The Numbers, n.d.). The film and its specific aspects have been the subject of scientific research for several years. Research on *Dirty Dancing* film has mainly focused on analysing issues related to dance and cultural transmission (Dunagan and Fenton 2014; Tzioumakis 2013), sexism (Sue In 2016), or classism or racism (Giroux 1989). Within the diverse spectrum of research on *Dirty Dancing*, there is a lack of studies on the models of masculinity and femininity and the affective-sexual relationships developed in the film.

Tzioumakis (2013), as a researcher specialising in media, music, culture, theatre, dance, and sociology, examines the global cultural phenomenon of *Dirty Dancing*., addressing an analysis of the political and visual culture of the 1980s. Dunagan and Fenton (2014) consider dancing the central element of the *Dirty Dancing* film. Through dancing, themes are addressed concerning sexuality and romantic relationships in which the characters transcend the defined boundaries of class and race. Giroux (1989) ventures into an attempt to critically analyse the film, which he ends up interpreting as sexist and classist. He argues the importance of questioning the moral values of the film that dismantle the reproduction of sexism, racism, and classism. However, he does not rely on clear scientific evidence or provide a comprehensive analysis that leads to this conclusion. Similarly, Sue In (2016) studies the *Dirty Dancing* film and other films that have dance in common, such as *The Streets* (2008) and *Black Swan* (2010). The author concludes that dance plays the role of incorporating cultural meanings and relationships that reinforce certain sexist myths.

### ***Masculinities, dance, sexuality and attractiveness***

Dance and masculinities are present in research in non-western countries (Bhattacharya, 2023; Foley, 2012; Kamath, 2019; Swanson, 2019), but also in Western context, masculinities, sexuality, and relationships are present in different research about films related to dance. For example, Jordan (2010) conducts a cinematic analysis of romanticism in the films *Fever Saturday Night* and *Flashdance* from the sexual objectification of women in musicals. However, she limits the analysis of models of femininity and masculinity to the role of non-subordination of women and the potential for the liberation of men. On the other hand, Castaño (2019) analyses the shift towards post-romantic products within the musical genre as an anti-romantic reaction that she identifies most clearly in *La La Land* film. For Lincoln, Tzioumakis, and Brickman (2007), the *Grease* film has been dismissed for many years as a reactionary nostalgia. Identifying the anti-romantic melodrama as that which, instead of seeking the idealisation of the loved one, and identifying love with sacrifice or the glorification of emotions, takes as a reference another scheme that flees from a happy ending and sets a course towards alienation or detachment as an indispensable element (Castaño 2019). More focused on dancing, Parfitt (2005) researches *Moulin Rouge's* film, including an analysis of gender power relations in the narrative.

Although the existence of male characters associated with dance and attractiveness in films - such as the ones mentioned above - some research, as Clegg et al. (2018), states how, in the Western context, dance is more associated with femininity. Risner (2007) states that still prevails heterononnormative assumptions and stigma towards boys and male youth in dance. In the specific case of ballet, Oliveira et al. (2022) affirm that multiple analyses identify a link between ballet and homosexuality, and this situation can make those who identify as heterosexual feel that they should emphasise their masculine characteristics so as not to be mistaken for homosexuals. Also related to ballet,

Souza et al. (2023) state that ballet acts as a protective environment for young men who break out of heteronormativity. Existing analysis of the film *Billy Elliot* also remarks on the new masculinity models the film promotes, showing a ballet dancer boy (Gordon, 2022). Other research (Risner, 2014) even highlights how young male dancers suffer bullying for their participation in dance. However, the same author, Risner (2002), argues that a more inclusive and liberating dance that legitimises male participation can achieve a greater social acceptance of dance and can also contribute to breaking down heterocentric discourses and homophobic attitudes. (Risner, 2014). Recent research focuses on different kinds of dancing and how the participation of men defies normative masculinity. For example, Cuccolo & Haltom (2023) analysed the men who pole danced, and Ha (2023) explored the challenges faced by the Malaysian youth who performed K-pop dances about hegemonic masculinity. Winer's research (2021) analysed part of the #BoysDanceToo developed in 2019 that highlighted the challenges men and boys face in dance.

Other research, such as Hugill et al. (2009) and Fink et al. (2016), find a relationship between **dance, attractiveness, and male role models**, identifying certain masculinities that, characterised by being more dynamic or by a particular gait, are perceived as more attractive by women. This research analyze women's perception of the attractiveness and assertiveness of men's dancing and concludes that women could thus use men's dances to evaluate male quality. Research developed by Weege, Lanke, and Fink (2012) highlights that the 'good' male dancers receive higher visual attention from women than 'bad' dancers and are judged more attractive. Some authors (LaBoskey, 2001) identify particular types of dance, such as hip hop, as an arena for expressing and affirming masculinity. The

research by Miletic et al. (2017) analyses how successful or unsuccessful performance influences the self-image of male dancers.

***Masculinities and affective-sexual relationships.***

Raewyn Connell (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Connell 2012) conceptualises hegemonic masculinity as the historically identified model as traditional, which reproduces negative behaviors using strategies of domination. Its behavior involves risky sexual practices, is linked to crime, and has heteronormative traits that make it oppressive masculinity in the face of homosexuality (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Connell 2012; Thepsourinthone et al. 2020). Added that not all men who fit this model exercise violence, although it is a category that is present in this masculinity (Malonda et al., 2021). According to Flecha, Puigvert, and Rios (2013), there is a Dominant Traditional Masculinity that represents non-egalitarian, dominant men with violent attitudes that promote gender-based violence; at the same time, they are socially seen as attractive. This attractiveness is due to a socially dominant coercive discourse (Gómez 2015; Puigvert et al. 2019; Valls-Carol et al. 2021). This dominant model instrumentalises affective-sexual relationships by reproducing double standards (Flecha, Puigvert, and Rios 2013; Puigvert et al. 2019). The use of violence and domination generates toxic relationships considered to be those that include some violence and deteriorate the mental and physical health on multiple levels of the people who suffer from them (Sabri and Granger, 2018; Kiekolt-Glaser et al., 2010; Puigvert et al., 2023)

As an opposite to these models of masculinity more linked to domination and violence, we find different studies that have identified models of masculinity that position themselves against violence (Kaufman, 2001) and work to reduce gender inequalities (Jewkes et al., 2015), banishing the traditional idea that all men follow a male model of domination (Ríos et al., 2024). In this line, the New Alternative Masculinities (Flecha, Puigvert, and Rios 2013; Gómez 2015; Joanpere et al. 2021; Ruiz-Eugenio et al. 2021;

Torras-Gómez et al. 2020) as the ones who embody men who combine attraction and equality and generate sexual desire. Non-toxic masculinities promote quality close human relationships that improve emotional well-being by awakening feelings of security, trust, and love, creating a type of relationship that makes it possible to cultivate feelings such as friendship, solidarity, or freedom (Racionero 2018).

Furthermore, there are different ways of understanding and living masculinity. Various studies promote further analysis of recent shifts toward more inclusive masculinities (Chvatík, Hardwicke & Anderson, 2022). We also find studies that bring to men's studies the concept of hybrid masculinity, understood by Bridges and Pascoe (2014) as a model of masculinity that selectively incorporates performances and identity elements associated with marginalised and subordinated masculinities and femininities. It is characterised by its success in distancing itself from hegemonic masculinities, opening the way for new models of masculinity and questioning the social and symbolic power relations between different models of masculinity. However, studies such as Vidmar (2024) highlight that while hybrid masculinities open up new possibilities for equality, some analyses question their usefulness in enhancing gender equality. Also noteworthy is the concept of fragile masculinity, a concept used to describe the anxiety experienced by certain men who feel a certain pressure that prevents them from achieving their social ideal of masculinity (Sen, n. d.). We also note the recent analysis of heterosexual men and their affective relationships (OliFFE et al. 2023), which concludes that identifies three masculine typologies: the *neo-traditionalist* characterized by reliance on traditional masculine norms of gender roles; the *egalitarian* composed by men that idealize the equality of contributions in the relationship, and the *progressive* defined by participants who focused on fairness and social justice.

## **Paper Approach**

In general, the media and films present different models of masculinity, promoting some of them as more attractive and sometimes placing dancing in the film as a characteristic of masculinity/femininity models and lacking or plenty of attractiveness. From the preventive socialization of gender violence line of research developed by the Community of Research CREA (<https://crea.ub.edu/index/>) since the early 90's (Gómez, 2015; Valls, Puigvert & Duque, 2008), the analysis of masculinity models has been carried on identifying if the hegemonic or egalitarian masculinities are associated to attractiveness in social media and films and how it promotes violent or non-violent relationships (Duque et al., 2022; Rodrigues de Mello et al., 2021; Villarejo, López & Cortés, 2020). Some existing research evidence the attractiveness presented in some masculine characters (Adams 2017; Kivel and Johnson 2009; McDonald 2015) or even their link to violence (Guarinos and Sánchez-Labella 2021), but not analysing the socialisation in attraction to violence the film can promote and not analysing how dancing can lend more or less attractiveness to the egalitarian or violent masculinity models. Concerning Dirty Dancing research, there is a lack of analysis of the masculinity models presented in the film and the toxic/hegemonic or alternative/egalitarian relationships developed in the movie. How these masculinity models interact with the critical issue of dancing, promoting attraction to egalitarian or violent relationships, also needs to be explored. In this paper, developed in the abovementioned line of research, the male characters' behaviors linked to the masculinity models' characteristics are identified. The egalitarian or toxic relationships they establish are also analysed, identifying which models and relationships the attractiveness - linked to dancing in the film- placed.

Given the need for more research on the models of masculinity and femininity and affective-sexual relationships in the Dirty Dancing film, this paper is structured as follows. First, researchers identify the main features of the two antagonistic masculinity

models presented in the characters of Dirty Dancing film Johnny and Robbie. For doing so, researchers centered their masculinity models analysis on general characteristics related to hegemonic/violent or egalitarian/non-toxic interactions towards women. Second, researchers report the affective-sexual relationships they have with the protagonist, Baby, and the secondary women characters, Baby and Penny, identifying the egalitarian or toxic dynamics in them and observing the role of dancing in those different dynamics and finally, discussing the limitations and further research and the great potential for education promoting alternative masculinities and egalitarian affective-sexual relationships related to dance.

### **Materials and Methods**

Film analysis is a standard method in research for identifying gender issues (Guarinos and Sánchez-Labela 2021; Sierra and Martín-Alonso 2019), but the specific methodology developed in this research is not only a film analysis but has followed a communicative approach (Gómez et al. 2011). Communicative methodology implies a communicative organisation of the research and communicative analysis of the data that seeks social transformation (Gómez et al. 2019). In this case, the research orientation has been discussed with various researchers from the research team with whom the authors work. Then, the analysis was revised by two experts, as explained later. The communicative methodology focuses on achieving social impact (Roca et al., 2022). The objective is to describe and contribute to the results to improve social challenges. In this paper, conclusions discuss the educational potential of the film to promote alternative masculinities and non-toxic affective-sexual relationships.

### ***Data Collection and Analysis***

To analyse the models of masculinity and their influences on health, we have done **first 1) a Literature review on masculinities**. Some characteristics of different models of

masculinity were identified based on the existing scientific literature. In front of the several and increasing masculinity models studies, researchers have focused on general characteristics more related to hegemonic/toxic attitudes and actions or related to egalitarian/non-toxic attitudes and actions. On the one hand, we have identified toxic/hegemonic masculinities by using the contributions that have addressed the conceptualisation of Hegemonic Masculinity. To this end, we have considered mainly the work of Raewyn Connell (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Connell 2012), the author who has contributed most to identifying the traits of this model of masculinity. We have also included the contributions made by Flecha, Puigvert, and Rios (2013) under the denomination of Traditional Dominant Masculinity, as it has been identified as one of the models that reproduce gender violence and their link with attractiveness (Gómez 2015; Valls, Puigvert, and Duque 2008). On the other hand, we have used the contributions from different authors to define the egalitarian/alternative masculinity models by revising the concept of egalitarian men (Kaufman 2001) but mainly the New Alternative Masculinities (Flecha, Puigvert, and Rios 2013) among others.

Based on the literature review, the following table was drawn up, identifying some toxic/hegemonic masculinity traits and the aspects of alternative/egalitarian masculinity that can have a positive impact.

Table 1. Masculinity models

| Toxic/Hegemonic Masculinities                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Alternative/Egalitarian Masculinities                                                                                                                                     |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| It uses strategies of domination, demands that all other men position themselves concerning it, and ideologically legitimises the overall subordination of women to men (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005).                                                    | Self-confidence, strength, and courage are coping strategies to deal with negative attitudes toward DTM and explicit rejection of double standards (Flecha et al., 2013). |
| Instrumentalise affective-sexual relations, separating love from sexual desire and reproducing double standards (Flecha, Puigvert, and Rios, 2013). Separation of love and kindness, not considering friendship as part of the affective-sexual relationship. | Intervene by supporting the girl in situations where a boy sexually coerces a girl (Kaufman, 2001).                                                                       |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| A lying person conceals information or uses deception (Valls, Puigvert, and Duque, 2008).                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | It seeks egalitarian relationships based on desire and love (Flecha, Puigvert, and Rios, 2013). It does not use strategy to be liked, and it is the treatment of equality and kindness that arouses sexual desire.                                                                                                            |
| Difficulty in responding to disability and injury (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005).                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Self-confidence, as a generator of attractiveness in men, especially when connected to egalitarian values (Flecha, Puigvert, and Rios, 2013).                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Sexual risk behavior (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Behavioral health problems in girls.                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Mutual help and support are dynamic elements that create an environment based on the link between attractiveness and equality (Flecha, Puigvert, and Rios, 2013).<br>Solidarity and friendship.                                                                                                                               |
| Connection with delinquency and crime: murder, rape, sexual harassment, football hooliganism... (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Not all DTM are violent, but all violent people are DTM (Connell 2012). DTM is a necessary but not sufficient condition for violence (Flecha, Puigvert, and Rios, 2013). | Strength and courage are crucial strategies to combat and even ridicule negative attitudes from DTM men, such as sexism and racism (Flecha, Puigvert, and Rios, 2013; Kaufman, 2001). NAM implies a model of affective sexual relationships that are both attractive and free of violence (Flecha, Puigvert, and Rios, 2013). |
| Heteronormative, oppressive traits towards homosexuality, i.e., homophobic (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005).                                                                                                                                                                                               | They promote affective-sexual relationships free of violence and full of passion that positively affect the health of the women with whom they relate (Joanpere et al., 2021).                                                                                                                                                |
| A defiant, contemptuous, abusive, or abusive attitude arouses attraction, promoting a desire for (Flecha, Puigvert, and Rios, 2013).                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |

After identifying some of the characteristics of the opposing models of masculinity, researchers continued with the **second** phase: **2) Character selection**. Researchers have selected the characters to analyse: two male characters from the film *Dirty Dancing*: the main character Johnny and his antagonist Robbie. In addition, we have also chosen three female characters with whom they interact: the protagonist, Baby, and the secondary female characters, Penny and Lisa. Although these were the characters previously selected to analyse their interactions in-depth, interactions with other male and female characters in the film were also considered.

**Third, Scene selection.** The researchers have visualised the film and selected the scenes in which Robbie a) interacts with or talks about Penny, b) interacts with or talks about Baby, c) interacts with or talks about Lisa, d) interacts with or talks about other women, and, finally, e) interacts with or talks about other men. And the scenes in which

Johnny a) interacts with or talks about Penny, b) interacts with or talks about Baby, c) interacts with or talks about Lisa, d) interacts with or talks about other women, and e) interacts with or talks about other men

**Fourth, the male characters' behaviours observed** in the selected scenes have been analysed according to the characteristics identified in the literature review and summarised in Table 1.

Therefore, the communicative analysis of information (Redondo et al. 2020) identifies the exclusionary and transformative dimensions by offering a transformative orientation, contributing to social impact. In this study, the exclusionary dimension is identified with the toxic/hegemonic masculinity model and its promotion of toxic relationships. The transformative dimension is identified with alternative/egalitarian masculinity models ; promoting non-violent relationships and women's well-being. Subsequently, the review of the analysis was validated by two other experts in masculinities and gender-based violence prevention to corroborate the studies. One female junior researcher in Sociology area of knowledge from the Harvard Kennedy School (USA) and one senior researcher in Education area of knowledge at the University of Zaragoza (Spain). The gender experts revised the analysis of the sequences of the films in a joint discussion with the authors. After the discussion, some scenes were eliminated from the results for not having enough representatives, and some interpretations of the scenes were revised.

## **Results**

Before the analysis, we summarise the interwoven links between the main characters analysed. Baby is a young girl who travels with her parents and sister to a holiday resort during the summer. She meets Johnny, an employee who works mainly as a dance teacher. An affective-sexual relationship is established between them. Robbie is a waiter at the same holiday center. Robby flirts with Baby's sister, Lisa. Robbie has previously

had an affective sexual relationship with Penny, an employee at the holiday center and a dance teacher. Penny is a close friend of Johnny's. As a result of this relationship with Robbie, Penny has become pregnant, and Robbie takes no responsibility and despises her.

The transformative and exclusionary dimension of the analysis of the male characters in the film *Dirty Dancing* has been considered to categorise the findings obtained. As exclusionary elements, we present the masculinity model represented by Robbie, which has behaviors and attitudes related to toxic/hegemonic masculinity characteristics. Then, we present Johnny's behavior and attitudes about alternative/egalitarian masculinity models. The egalitarian or toxic sexual-affective relationships they establish with Baby, Penny, and Lisa are also reported.

### ***Toxic affective-sexual relationship between Lisa and Robbie***

The analysis of Robbie's interactions with different women and with other men in the film shows that he fulfills several of the attributes of toxic/hegemonic masculinity models. Concerning *Lisa's* character in different scenes, it is identified how Robbie flirts with her with instrumental conquest strategies, making use of empty but captivating phrases that serve as a hook to "hunt the prey," as in the scene in which Robbie tries to capture the interest of Baby's sister Lisa to get a date with her:

Robbie: So I say, ask not what your waiter can do for you, but what can do for your waiter. If tips keep up, I will have enough for my Alfa Romeo.

Lisa: That's my favorite car.

According to the existing previous research, behaviors such as sexual harassment are some of the features defining a toxic masculinity model. This characteristic can be observed when Robbie engages in abuse. He and Lisa have just come from being together, and the scene suggests that abuse has taken place while they were on a date on the golf course. Lisa tries to demand an apology from Robbie. Robbie responds by trying to ridicule Lisa and with a gesture of contempt to achieve an effect of impunity with Lisa's

silence. This situation could lead to a normalisation of this behavior and, therefore, her not standing up for herself when the abuse happens again.

Lisa: I don't hear an apology.

Robby: Go back to mommy and daddy, Lisa. Maybe you'll hear one in your dreams.

Robbie's behavior does not imply that Lisa is distancing herself from him. In fact, after this scene, the next time they meet, he acts as if nothing has happened, and he asks her for a dance later. Lisa is far away from rejecting him; she awakens her interest in him, subordinating her to his abusive behavior.

Robbie: Hey, how about a dance later?

Lisa: Could be.

Subsequently, Lisa decides to have sex with Robbie. She tells her sister, Baby. When Baby expresses her disagreement, Lisa replies by telling her that she is envious.

Lisa: I've decided to go all the way with Robbie.

Baby: Oh, Lisa, no. Not with someone like him.

Lisa: Do you think, if we came back here for our 10th anniversary, it would be free?

Baby: It's just wrong this way. It should be with someone...someone that... that you sort of love.

Lisa: Ahh come on. You don't care about me. (...) What you care about is that you're not Dady's girl anymore. He listens when I talk now. And you hate that.

Robbie's behavior towards Lisa is abusive. Lisa maintains her interest in him and even gets angry with her sister when she warns her that she is making a mistake. This situation continues until Lisa finds Robbie having sex with another woman.

### ***Relationship between Penny and Robbie. Unhealthy consequences.***

There are several scenes in the film in which we can see the negative consequences for Penny's well-being and health of having sex with Robbie. The most severe unhealthy consequence is that Penny has resulted in an unwanted pregnancy. This fact articulates

the central axis of the film, as all the events and relationships pivot around it. This unwanted pregnancy leads Penny to a clandestine abortion that could end her life. In contrast, Robbie's attitude is one of disinterest and contempt towards Penny, and he blames her despite being a victim of her abusive behavior. Not only does Robbie not take responsibility for the pregnancy, but he does not care about Penny at any point, even with the severe consequences of her abortion. In general, Robbie has a continuous attitude of contempt toward Penny during the film, even though there is no direct interaction between Penny and Robbie in the entire movie. The few times they do coincide in a scene, he does not even look at the woman he knows he has impregnated, which will probably lead to her losing her job or perhaps her life in a clandestine abortion. While Robbie and Penny do not interact directly in any scene, Robbie makes derogatory remarks towards her. For example, one scene is when Robby tries to lecture Baby by making a disparaging comment that puts Penny on an inferior footing and, therefore, has the legitimacy to mistreat her:

Robbie (about Penny): Some People count, some people don't.

During Robbie's conversation with Baby about Penny, he identifies her as an "easy girl," making disparaging comments towards her.

Robbie: I didn't blow a summer hauling toasted bagels, just to bail out some chick who probably balled every guy here.

In another scene, Robbie's attitude of contempt towards Penny is repeated, blaming her, as can be seen in this comment made by Robbie to Baby's father about Penny when he discovers that it is Robbie, and not Johnny, who is responsible for Penny's unwanted pregnancy:

Robbie: Penny said so, but with girls like that, they are liable to pin it on any guy around.

The lack of support for Penny affects not only her physical health but also her emotional and psychological well-being. This situation can be seen in several scenes in

which Penny breaks down and is seen crying or frustrated by Robbie's attitude and the problem she faces. In one scene, Baby finds Penny crying alone in despair, hiding, and sitting on the kitchen floor. In another scene, Penny feels the need to clarify and tells Baby she does not "sleep with anyone"; she is also worried about what people think about her.

Penny: I want you to know I don't sleep around, whatever Robbie might have told you, and I thought that he loved me. I thought it was something special. Anyway, I just wanted you to know that.

The crux of the film and the harmful physical health consequence of a woman having sex with a toxic /hegemonic masculinity model in the film is Penny's pregnancy as a result of her relationship with Robbie and the dangerous abortion she undergoes. Penny is also in constant pain, sadness, tears, and despair at the prospect of being fired and left with no means of survival.

### ***Penny and Johnny: Friendship and Dance***

Analysing Johnny's interactions with different women throughout the film has allowed us to identify several characteristics attributed to an alternative/egalitarian masculinity model. These defining traits can be observed in the scenes where Johnny interacts with Penny, Baby, and other girls and boys.

Concerning his relationship with Penny, they are presented in the movie as maintaining a close friendship. Dancing is an essential element between Johnny and Penny; both are dance teachers, and in different moments of the film, they protagonise attractive dance scenes. Dancing is the way of life for both of them; it is an activity they share, develop with passion, and enjoy together.

Alternative / Egalitarian masculinity model attributions as the commitment to intervene in front of a situation in which there has been coercion or sexual violence, supporting the victim, is reflected in Johnny's behavior. In several scenes, Johnny shows

his solidarity with Penny as a victim of an abusive relationship. Johnny acts courageously and confidently, promoting alliances with the victim, one of the keys to successfully tackling gender-based violence.

Johnny (to Penny): It's ok, it's ok. Johnny is here, It's ok, it's ok. I'm never going to let anything happen to you. We got to go. Just hold on, just hold on.

This type of interaction shown by Johnny and the others shown below is positioned in favor of the victim, who suffers the consequences of the violent relationships generated by violent masculinities.

Johnny: You're in trouble, you talk to me. I'll take care of it. You should have come to me in the first place.

Penny: Forget it Johnny, I'm not taking what's left in your salary.

Johnny: That's my business.

From that moment in the film, Johnny does not leave Penny alone at any time and always supports her, especially in the most challenging moments, such as when Penny is on the verge of losing her life. Johnny is the character who most actively cares and acts to preserve Penny's physical and emotional health. The solidarity Johnny shows to Penny when she is devastated offers unconditional support. As observed through this interaction:

Johnny: I'm never going to let anything happen to you.

Johnny's friendship and solidarity with Penny are passed on to Baby, who deeply sympathises with Penny. While a toxic masculinity model creates competitive relationships between the women around him, oppositely, Johnny creates bonds between them. Dancing is again a key element in the relationship between Penny and Baby. Baby offers herself to cover Penny in a spectacle on the day of the abortion. Moreover, the film developed around this fact, the solidarity of Baby towards Penny. Baby needs to learn dancing with the help of Penny and Johnny to cover Penny in a yearly dancing event. This event will take place on a unique day when the supposed doctor will be available to make the abortion. While the song "Hungry Eyes" is playing, an attractive scene is starred

by Johnny, Baby, and Penny dancing the first three together, then Penny and Baby while Johnny is looking at them, and finally, Baby and Johnny.

Continuing with the solidarity towards Penny, Baby also decides to ask her father for money for the abortion. She does all this in secret from her family. However, when Penny's life is in danger, Baby wakes up her father (a doctor) in the middle of the night to go and treat Penny. She saves her life thanks to the medical intervention of Baby's father.

Baby's father's intervention, which makes her recover from the clandestine abortion and gives her the chance to remain a birth mother, restores Penny's joy. It also means she will not lose her job. In the following scenes, Penny appears smiling as she recovers. Furthermore, in the final scene, dancing takes center stage. Penny dances happily with the doctor who saved her life.

### ***Relationship between Baby and Johnny. Dance, love, desire, and well-being***

Alternative / Egalitarian masculinity models foster attraction to egalitarian affective-sexual relationships by not using any instrumental strategy. This model is mainly represented by Johnny in the film, combined with dancing as the critical element of the film that arouses attraction and sexual desire.

Johnny teaches Baby the dance steps for substituting Penny in the dance event. Johnny behaves professionally and caring, encouraging Baby to feel comfortable with him and promoting their dance progress. This dancing learning, in turn, encourages Baby to motivate herself and try harder and harder, putting passion and feeling into what they are doing.

Johnny: Just listen to me. The steps aren't enough. Feel the music.

One significant example in the dancing scenes is the dance that Johnny and Baby have alone while the "Loverboy" song is playing. The film unites an attractive dance scene with an egalitarian relationship between Johnny and Baby. Nevertheless, related to

the critical role of dance, one of the most famous scenes in the film, as it is one of the most replayed, that brings together solidarity, equality, attraction, and desire is the famous lake scene in which Johnny and Baby are rehearsing one of the most challenging steps of the dance "The Jump." They share a scene uniting kindness and passion, in which Johnny helps Baby to achieve the dance step. Baby's self-confidence increases throughout the film as her relationship with Johnny develops. One of the representative scenes is when Baby goes to Johnny's room, and she tells him the following:

Baby: Most of all, I'm scared of walking out of this room and never feeling the rest of my whole life the way I feel when I'm with you.

Once again, dance has a vital role in the love story. After this sentence, there's a silence, and a "Cry to me" song sounds. She says: *Dance with me*, they dance and spend their first night together.

The self-confidence and security acquired by Baby throughout the film can also be observed in the scene where Baby is with her family in the dining room when the hotel owner comes to accuse Johnny of a robbery in the hotel the night before. Baby knows it is false and wants to help him not lose his job. Saying the truth to defend Johnny will mean revealing their relationship to her family and explaining that she spent the whole night with him. And that is how she does it, although it does not stop Johnny from being fired, either.

Baby: I know Johnny didn't take the wallet because he was in his room all night. And the reason I know is because I was with him.

In the film's beginning, Baby is a girl who is insecure and doesn't feel very attractive. Throughout the film, the relationship with Johnny united to their progressive immersion in dancing seems to be related to the increase of Baby's self-esteem, well-being, security, and positive body image. She struggles to overcome her difficulties and shows that she can also assert herself. An example that can be seen is the scene when she

is dancing down the stairs and putting on lipstick. It conveys how Baby feels good about herself, more self-confident, and more attractive.

This emotional well-being provides intelligent security, which means that when they have to part, they do so with humor and without regret for anything they have shared. It can be observed in the scene where Johnny and Baby say goodbye:

Johnny: I guess we surprise everybody, HAHAAH.

Baby: I guess we did.

Johnny: I'll never be sorry.

Baby: Neither will I.

Another impact on Baby's well-being is the evolution of her relationship with her sister throughout the film. At the beginning of the film, there is a lack of trust and support between the two sisters. In the end, when the abusive behavior of Robbie and the egalitarian behavior of Johnny is evident, the relationship changes. The sisters feel closer, as reflected in the scene where they are in the room together, and Lisa approaches Baby and says:

Lisa: Baby, I'll do your hair. It could look pretty. No. You're prettier your way. Looser.

Throughout the film, Johnny explicitly values Baby's way of being. A crucial scene is by the end of the film when Johnny approaches the table where Baby sits with his father and mother, takes her by the hand, and says to her one of the most recognised sentences of the film:

Johnny: Nobody puts Baby in a corner. Come on.

Then, Johnny made a brave speech to Baby in public.

Johnny: But I always do the last dance of the season. This year, someone told me not to. I'm going to do my kind of dancing with a great partner, who's not only a terrific dancer but somebody who's taught me to stand for other people... no matter what it costs them. Somebody who's taught me about the kind of person I want to be. Miss Frances Housman.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

This study presents an **innovative analysis** of the film Dirty Dancing that fills a gap in the scientific literature. First, the paper analyses the main features of masculinity models represented by two male characters in the movie, the protagonist and his antagonist. Then, the relationships they establish with the female protagonist, Baby, and two secondary female characters, Penny and Lisa, are reported. The paper highlights the egalitarian or toxic dynamics in those relationships and shows the crucial role of dance in the relationship between the protagonists, Johnny and Baby. The research has **different limitations that could be overcome in further research**. Given the worldwide success of the film, the film has been released in 975 theatres around the world, in which the film has come to be an average of 20.8 weeks per screening (The Numbers, n. d.); it would be interesting to research the impact of the film in the non-western countries. It would be interesting also to identify similar films, if there are, in other cultural contexts concerning the role of dancing linked to masculinity models and toxic or egalitarian relationships. Previous research has collected experiences of people discussing films (Padrós-Cuxart, Rodrigues de Mello, et al. 2021) that can be a method to analyse Dirty Dancing with diverse people in age, culture, and academic background. The relationship between masculinity and femininity models presented in the film, their relationship with gender violence, and their impact on the viewers can be researched in the future. In the following, we discuss the article's main contributions while pointing to possibilities for future research.

**Masculinity roles analysis** of the protagonist and his antagonist in Dirty Dancing is the first contribution of this paper. To do that analysis, first, previous scientific research about masculinity models has been revised to identify the main features of toxic and

egalitarian masculinity models. Some models of masculinity as hybrid masculinities generate controversy about whether there is a more egalitarian masculinity model (Vidmun, 2023). For this reason, it has been essential to identify the predominance of masculinity model characteristics and not all of them. Researchers identify central attitudes and actions related to toxic or non-toxic elements in this case. The masculinity model analysis developed according to scientific evidence is critical in this framework. Sometimes, masculinity models can be superficially identified as toxic or alternative according to a particular aesthetic style, musical style, or social class following social prejudices. However, the masculinity model characteristics identified in the scientific literature review are detached from aesthetic characteristics and social prejudices but are associated with characteristics such as egalitarian, derogatory, violent, and supportive behaviors, among others. These behaviors are not associated with any social, cultural, or aesthetic class. Although some research examines social class in contexts of violence (Ptacek 2021), no study indicates that social class is a risk factor for gender-based violence, but having relationships with toxic masculinities is it (Flecha, Puigvert, and Rios 2013). Some studies, like the one developed by Giroux (1989), have identified this film as sexist. Still, the author doesn't provide scientific references on which this conclusion is based.

According to the characteristics identified in previous scientific research about egalitarian and attractive masculinity models (Flecha, Puigvert, and Rios 2013; Kaufman 2001), researchers found evidence that Johnny mainly represents a model of alternative/egalitarian masculinity that corresponds with the characteristics analysed by the authors Flecha, Puigvert, and Rios (2013) defining the New Alternative Masculinity model. Johnny's character corresponds because he unites attractiveness with egalitarian behavior and positioning against violence. In this masculinity model, the egalitarian/non-toxic

characteristics are represented in the treatment he has towards Baby in the affective-sexual relationship they establish, in his friendship towards Penny, and his position against Robbie's behaviour towards Penny. Contrarily, Robbie's behaviour mainly corresponds with hegemonic masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Connell 2012) and with a Dominant Traditional Masculinity (Flecha, Puigvert, and Rios 2013; Ríos-González, et al. 2021; Rodrigues de Mello et al. 2021; ). This model is shown in Robbie's contempt for Penny, despising her after getting her pregnant, as well as in his utilitarian treatment of Lisa. It is also evident in his condescending treatment of Baby at first, considering her very innocent in a derogatory sense. This treatment of Baby then shifts to contemptuous remarks when - after becoming aware of her relationship with Johnny - he places her in the opposite place, promoting double standards. **Further research** on the masculinity models analysis of Dirty Dancing film can be developed by going in-depth into how the masculinity characters correspond with the main characteristics of other masculinity models as hybrid, fragile, egalitarian, and progressive masculinities, among others (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014; Oliffe et al., 2024, Sen, sf.).

The **egalitarian or toxic relationships** of the abovementioned male characters with Baby, Penny, and Lisa are reported in the paper. According to previous research (Dunkel-Schetter 2017; López de Aguilera et al. 2021; Racionero-Plaza et al. 2021; Sabri et al. 2018), toxic relationships have negative consequences on health, while healthy/egalitarian relationships (Racionero 2018; Puigvert-Mallart et al. 2022) has positive consequences. Throughout the film, the situation and evolution of female characters during and after their relationships with Johnny and Robbie can be observed.

Regarding Robbie, a toxic relationship is reflected in Penny's unwanted pregnancy that leads to a clandestine abortion that almost leads to her death. In addition to this life-threatening physical health consequence, Penny is constantly scorned by Robby. He

abandons her, does not help her, and doubts that the pregnancy is the result of her relationship with him, stating that she is the kind of girl that nobody can trust. Even knowing the severity of the consequences of clandestine abortion, he shows no empathy for her. According to existing previous research (Mechanic, Weaver, and Resick 2008; Padrós-Cuxart, Molina-Roldan, et al. 2021), it is possible to identify that Penny is also suffering mental health consequences derived from her relationship with toxic masculinity. Robbie also establishes a toxic relationship with Lisa. He tries to abuse Lisa, and after that, she feels insecure and far away to reject him and continue being interested in a relationship with Robbie. As the film shows, Lisa not only accepts a dance after being abused by Robbie on the golf course but decides to have sex with him. According to existing research on gender violence, Lisa subordinates herself to his abusive behavior; she has a submissive dynamic towards Robbie that increases as he despises her. This situation is analysed in gender violence research as an effect of the dominant coercive discourse that presents hegemonic masculinities as attractive, pushing people towards toxic relationships (López de Aguilera et al. 2021; Puigvert et al. 2019; Ruiz-Eugenio et al. 2021, Torras et al., 2020) Along the film Lisa is presented as a girl with insecurity, low self-esteem, rivalry with her sister Baby and always looking for external approbation. But when she finally rejects Robbie, improves her relationship with her sister, and sees Baby happy at the film's end, she also shows herself happy.

Conversely, Johnny establishes more egalitarian relationships. Johnny's friendship with Penny is based on supporting her in the more difficult moments (pregnancy and abortion), defending her in front of Robbie, and enjoying their passion for dancing together. Johnny also passes his friendship to Baby, who unconditionally helps Penny and supports her. Thanks to Baby's intervention and her father's call for help, Penny saves her life. Nevertheless, the film's central relationship is the relationship

between Johnny and Baby. With the motivation to help Penny, Johnny teaches how to dance to Baby to be prepared for a dance event. Throughout the film, Johnny teaches, accompanies, and falls in love with Baby. Throughout the film, at the same time, she learns to dance and falls in love with Johnny; Baby improves her self-esteem and body image. She dares to defend her ideas to her father, even if he initially rejects her, with the conviction that she is doing the right thing. Different scenes show her security, how she feels more attractive, and how she decides to have a relationship with Johnny despite difficulties.

**Dancing** is a crucial element in the film, mainly in the relationship between Johnny and Baby. Dancing is the passion Johnny and Penny share as friends. Learning to dance is the challenge Baby faces to achieve his goal of helping Penny in a dire situation. As Baby learns to dance with Johnny in the film, their love story unfolds. As she learns to dance, she falls in love and feels more attractive and self-confident. Dancing is one of the most appealing elements for the audience of this film. As we stated in the introduction to the article, several films have dancing as a central element (Jordan, 2010; Sue In, 2016).

However, through the analysis of the models of masculinity and affective-sexual relations, another essential element is identified. The attractiveness of the dance itself in this film is coupled with a relationship to egalitarian dynamics with an alternative model of masculinity. In other words, the film's appeal is in egalitarian relationships, and it is in these egalitarian relationships (Johnny, Baby, Penny) that the film deploys its attractive dance spectacle. According to existing research on gender violence prevention, the film uses a language of desire (López de Aguilera et al., 2020) by placing attractiveness and desire in egalitarian relationships (friendship, solidarity, and love). Some analysis of masculinity model male attractiveness related to violence in films (Duque et al. 2022) have been studied previously (Rodrigues de Mello et al. 2021) and identified how can

contribute with educational elements to prevent gender-based violence (Villarejo et al. 2022). However, the element of dance as an essential attractive element and their placement in the film associated with egalitarian or toxic relationships in the film could be a field of future research. It is evident that dance is a central element of the film that makes it attractive in itself, and that makes the two main characters, Baby and Johnny, attractive. It is meaningful to emphasise that the "good dancers" are the protagonists who behave in solidarity with their environment (they help Penny) and, simultaneously, have a loving, passionate, and good relationship with each other. In this way, the film uses dance to appeal to characters who are rebels against injustice and who stand up to who has more power (Baby's father, the businessman) to help those in need (Penny) and to defend an injustice (false accusation of theft against Johnny).

Consequently, they promote an attractive model of masculinity and femininity - characterised by being a good dancer - and "good behaviour". The analysis would have been different if the dance appeal had been placed on Robbie (who gets pregnant and abandons Penny), yet this character lacks absolutely no dance scenes at all, nor is he even dancing or participating in the opening scenes where all the workers are dancing in the employees' quarters. Not only is he not a "good dancer", but in a film with dance as a central element, this character does not dance at any point. Therefore, dance and attractiveness are not associated at any time with the character who establishes toxic relationships with women; instead, dance is associated with characters who establish more egalitarian and supportive relationships, making them attractive.

Finally, it is necessary to highlight the **educational implications** of this paper about dancing and the promotion of egalitarian relationships. This film was not created, nor has it been analysed in existing research from an educational perspective. However, it has great educational potential in the field of models of masculinity and femininity

associated with dance and in the promotion of non-violent relationships. Education in affective-sexual relationships and models of masculinity and femininity are the result of a continuous process of socialisation through interactions. (Racionero et al. 2020) From this perspective, we are faced with a film that "educates" in attractive affective-sexual relationships - linked to dance - far from violence. This statement opens two leading research focuses.

On one side, taking into account the studies that state the marginality, exclusion and bullying that some boys and men suffer for their participation in dance (Clegg et al. 2018; Risner, 2007; Risner 2014), it would be interesting to investigate in further research how boys can be influenced by the existence of films where the dancing character has the characteristics of being the most attractive and the boy/man with the "best behaviour". It might be interesting to investigate whether showing attractive and egalitarian models of masculinity associated with dancing might influence more boys to engage in dancing and whether it might impact reducing the discrimination faced by male dancers.

On the other side, as mentioned before, the gender-based violence prevention line of research (Gomez, 2015) analyse if attractiveness is placed in toxic relationships (as in Robbie's and Penny's relationship) or egalitarian relationships (as in Johnny and Baby's Relationship) and it is successfully applied in educational interventions promoting interactions and solidarity networks to overcome gender violence (Íñiguez et al., 2021; Roca-Campos et al., 2021). In *Dirty Dancing*, we have found that attractiveness represented through dancing throughout the film is mainly placed in egalitarian relationships. The dance in the film is related to joy and passion, and the happy ending is associated with a final dance spectacle. At this final dance, different people dance together. For example, Penny, recovered from physical health, dances happily with the doctor who saved her life. The educational implications could be studied more in depth

in the future as a promotion of non-toxic relationships. Finally, the famous last dance with the song "The Time of My Life," where Baby finally manages to do the dance jump successfully, represents a final triumph of love in a passionate and egalitarian relationship.

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