

A multi-component output developed and presented through multiple platforms over 7 years (2013–20). *Men & Girls Dance* responds to dominant social and media discourses which construct men's relationships with children as overwhelmingly negative. The research centres on a semi-choreographed, semi-improvised performance, developed and presented through an innovative partnership and touring model. Contextual materials and further mechanisms for engagement bring people together to discuss and debate the project's themes.

The research proposed positive, embodied narratives of care, playfulness and trust in relationships between men and children, whilst also developing new approaches to performance touring in the UK to engage diverse publics with these narratives. This was achieved through a complex, interwoven methodology, which aligned, for the first time, focuses on choreographic research, new strategies for participation and inclusion, and a new approach to performance touring. The project arises from multiple contexts: historical lineages of dance practice that explore, interrogate and remodel ways to think about gender; contemporary performance practices in which children act as co-creators and established systems of performance touring, participation and public engagement, which the research seeks to reimagine, remodel and advance.


The research has proven that contemporary, experimental dance practice can create and disseminate effective new narratives of intergenerational relationships, thereby opening up discussion and debate, and that dance, as an embodied practice, is *the* effective artform for this. The research has also found that contextual materials and bespoke formats for dialogue and debate significantly contribute to the potential for contemporary performance to contribute to socio-political debate, and it has created effective new approaches to touring, enabling impactful social engagement.





In 2017, *Men & Girls Dance* was runner up for *The Guardian* University Award for Social and Community Impact and a shortlisted finalist for Times Higher Education's Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Research Project of the Year.

Men & Girls Dance

David Harradine



Materials which comprise or support this submission can be found inside the box or on the USB drive  embedded in the box's interior lid. Within this publication, references for components of the submission are found in the right margin using a lettering system A–H. Items marked with an \* are components of the output, all other items are contextual.

- A\* Full-length documentation recording of *Men & Girls Dance* performance 
- B *Men & Girls Dance* video trailer 
- C\* *Men & Girls Dance* newspaper, London edition
- D\* *Men & Girls Dance* newspaper, bilingual Malmö edition
- E Independent evaluation report
- F *Men & Girls Dance* pages from [feveredsleep.co.uk](http://feveredsleep.co.uk) 
- G Article: David Harradine, 2016: 'Fevered Sleep, Participation, and Men & Girls Dance', *Animated Magazine*, Autumn/Winter 2016–17: 36–38
- H Press and critical reviews of the project 

Further information on these materials can be found on the reverse of the box's interior lid.

David Harradine

## MEN & GIRLS DANCE

The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama,  
University of London

## MEN &amp; GIRLS DANCE

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research-led approach to making art  
that is simultaneously challenging,  
compassionate and inclusive.

His research proposes new ways  
of thinking about interdependence,  
care and the connectedness of the  
human and more-than-human world.

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I	Overview	4
II	Questions, aims and objectives	8
III	Context	10
IV	Methodology	13
V	Timeline	28
VI	Findings	30
VII	Bibliography	39

## Overview

*Men & Girls Dance* is a multi-component output supported by contextual materials. It was produced by Fevered Sleep, the company of which I'm co-artistic director.

As a practice research project created and presented in the context of the professional UK dance touring, *Men & Girls Dance* offers alternative narratives of care, playfulness and trust in response to dominant social and media discourses around intergenerational relationships, in which men's relationships with children are depicted as overwhelmingly negative, predatory and dangerous. Developed and presented publicly through multiple platforms — performances, a publication, public conversations, an innovative partnership network — over a 7-year period (2013–20), *Men & Girls Dance* has developed successful methodological approaches that engage diverse audiences and members of the public with the project's themes. To enable this inclusive approach to engagement, the project was created and presented through a new touring model, which was developed as part of the research.

At the heart of the project is a semi-choreographed, semi-improvised performance (for a full-length recording see [video documentation](#)), which is re-created in each place the project is presented, with a company of 9 local girls aged 8–11 joining 5 male professional dancers to remake and perform the work. Accompanying these performances, a programme of conversations, meetings, post-show discussions, online and social media activity, collectively called 'The Talking Place' along with a project newspaper create opportunities for people in the places where performances happen to come together and talk about the themes of the project.

In order to ensure that diverse audiences and members of the public (many of whom are not regular 'arts attenders') engage with the project and the challenging social issues that it explores, the research has also developed an innovative approach to touring, by advocating new kinds of collaboration between touring companies, venue partners and audiences, promoting greater integration of research, artistic development, participation and public engagement activities. As such, the project's research questions fall into two entirely interconnected strands: one concerned with the politics

and representations of the intergenerational relationship at the heart of the work, and how these might be represented in a choreographic context; one which develops methods for engaging people in reflection, thinking, conversation and debate about these issues. These intertwined threads form the basis of the research aims and combine the different aspects of the research process into a single whole with multiple outcomes and impacts.

### Project timeline and partners

To date, the project has been re-created 10 times, in the UK and internationally. Host organisations have ranged from local venues (such as Quarterhouse in Folkestone), to flagship venues for UK contemporary dance (The Place, London), to UK 'dance development agencies' (Southeast Dance in Brighton, Dance4 in Nottingham) and internationally important cultural institutions (Tate Britain).

2013–15	Initial research and development of the project in partnerships with: The Place, London (2013); The Point, Eastleigh (2013); Dance4, Nottingham (2014); Quarterhouse, Folkestone (2015).
2015	Creation of the performance, newspaper and The Talking Place, in partnership with Greenwich Dance Agency (GDA), London.
2016	Arts Council England funded Strategic Tour, with Quarterhouse, Folkestone; Lawrence Batley Theatre, Huddersfield; The Lowry, Salford; Dance4, Nottingham; Southeast Dance and Attenborough Centre for the Creative Arts, Brighton & Hove.
2017–19	Ongoing iterations of the project, with The Place, London (2017); Tate Britain, London (2017); Skånes Dansteater, Malmö, Sweden (2018); The Place, London — new cast (2019).

Further iterations of the project were due to be created in 2020, but were postponed or cancelled due to COVID-19. These were Norwich Theatre, Norwich (September 2020) and Triennale di Milano, Milan, Italy (November 2020).

## I Overview

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FIG 1 *Men & Girls Dance* at Tate Britain, 2017

### Funding for *Men & Girls Dance* has come from:

- ⦿ Arts Council England (ACE) through Fevered Sleep's National Portfolio Organisation core funding (total funding received 2016–20, £804k);
- ⦿ ACE through the Strategic Touring Fund (£86k);
- ⦿ Wellcome, as part of a 4-year grant for Fevered Sleep, 'Experiments in Public Engagement' (total grant £490k);
- ⦿ Paul Hamlyn Foundation, as part of a 4-year grant for Fevered Sleep, 'Developing New Approaches to Participation' (total grant £230k);
- ⦿ The Jerwood Choreographic Research Project (£12k);
- ⦿ The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama (£22k).

Rigorous peer-review processes are embedded in each of these funding schemes.

## II Questions, aims and objectives

The research has two interconnected aims, which were developed in parallel at every stage of development, creation and performance/dissemination:

- 1 To propose positive, embodied narratives of care, playfulness and trust in relationships between men and children, in response to dominant media and social discourses that depict that relationship as overwhelmingly negative.
- 2 To develop new approaches to performance touring in the UK, so as to build new audiences for research-led contemporary performance, in order to engage new and diverse publics with the themes of the research.

These aims are closely connected and inseparable, inasmuch as the research explores a broad social issue (perceptions of relationships between men and children), and so seeks to conduct, develop and disseminate findings from the research, such as new or alternative ways to think about this relationship, with as broad a cross-section of society as possible. Research on audience demographics for contemporary performance — in particular contemporary dance — indicates that audiences for these artforms are not representative of wider society and that dance is an artform with particularly low attendance and participation

(Arts Council England 2008 and 2011; Audiences London 2010). Therefore, new approaches to audience development and engagement need to be developed in order for the research to have reach, significance and impact. In the case of *Men & Girls Dance*, these new approaches specifically relate to models for touring.

The following research questions were developed in response to these aims and shaped the research methodology:

*How can contemporary experimental dance practice, along with contextual materials and events, open up discussion and debate about intergenerational relationships, specifically those between men and girls?*

*How can these events and responses provide a positive counternarrative to the one prevalent in media and social discourse about men's relationships with children, which is almost wholly negative?*

*What choreographic methods and dramaturgical strategies articulate care, playfulness and trust?*

*What (new) approaches to participation best embed the research in the communities in which the project takes place, so as to open up these narratives and counternarratives to as many people as possible?*

*How can touring be reimagined as a local rather than national activity, and what are the consequences of this for professional industry practice?*

*How can a producing company (such as Fevered Sleep) act as an agent for change, by advocating for different sorts of relationships and collaborations between venues, producing companies, participants and audiences; or between artistic research, audience development and inclusive public engagement?*

The research was embedded in the creative process, in which professional male dancers and non-trained children come together to re-create the work; in the resulting performance; in accompanying materials including the project newspaper and website; through public conversations, such as in *The Talking Place* (FIGS 9–10); and in the producing and partnership models that led to the project's presentation to diverse audiences, in particular through the networked research that took place during the Strategic Tour in 2016. This tour brought together Fevered Sleep and 5 partner organisations that commissioned and presented iterations of the project, as articulated in the external evaluation report commissioned as part of the research.

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The research models and performs:

- i. new interpretations of intergenerational relationships, centred on care, playfulness and trust;
- ii. creative and participatory mechanisms for drawing people into critical reflection and conversation about the project's themes; and
- iii. practical approaches to engaging and including new and diverse audiences in this research.

## III

## Context

*Men & Girls Dance* is part of a long lineage of dance and performance practices that interrogate social politics, specifically the politics of gender and gendered relationships, through creative methodologies and public performance. This lineage can be traced back to the 1960s and earlier, with dance and body-based performance art works interrogating and challenging gendered histories of dance itself, and the corresponding entanglement of the gendered body, feminist theories and material/social practices that highlight the body as a site of gendered oppression, resistance, politics and protest. Whilst much of this body of work has focused on the female body, a number of key projects have explored and challenged the ways in which the male body, and male sexuality, is also a site of the construction and contestation of gendered social norms. DV8 Physical Theatre's *Enter Achilles* (1995) and *John* (2014–15), Vincent Dance Theatre's *Shut Down* (2017), Rosie Kay's *5 Soldiers* (2010) and the bodies of work of Nigel Charnock and Gary Clarke provide examples.

*Men & Girls Dance* is also one of a number of recent dance/performance works that bring together adults and children as co-creators and/or co-performers. Boris Charmatz's *enfant* (2011), Ontroerend Goed's *Once And For All We're Gonna Tell You Who We Are So Shut Up And Listen* (2008), Gob Squad's *Before Your Very Eyes* (2011), Victoria and Tim Etchells' *That Night Follows Day* (2007), Campo Theatre's *Five Easy Pieces* (2016) and earlier projects by Fevered Sleep including *On Ageing* (2010) all place children at the centre of politically engaged, formally experimental, research-led work.

Whilst *Men & Girls Dance* sits alongside, and emerges from, these cultural and historical contexts, its research is innovative and distinctive in that it draws together, for the first time, professional artist/researchers and dance

practitioners with non-professional children, as well as the wider community, along with industry partners, in order to conduct this research in collaborative, multi-valent and participatory ways.

On one level, this focus on participation and the involvement of non-professionals in the creation and presentation of the work, and its thematic focus on a social issue, along with a stated intention to engage people in reflection and debate on this issue, might lead to its description as 'Applied Dance'. However, 'Applied Dance' as a field of research and practice is only just beginning to emerge, and as yet there is no dance equivalent to Applied Theatre. When 'Applied Dance' is currently used as a term, for example to describe training courses or areas of professional practice, its focus is on the delivery of dance teaching in educational settings rather than on the application of dance practices as mechanisms for social action. In this regard, should 'Applied Dance' emerge as a field of academic and professional inquiry, *Men & Girls Dance* could be seen as a foundational work.

That said, one of the key intentions of the project is to challenge perceived and historical hierarchies between 'professional' and 'participatory' or 'community' dance (the latter of which comes closest in equivalence to Applied Theatre). *Men & Girls Dance* challenges these conceptual and practical divides by simultaneously placing emphasis on the participation and agency of non-professional performers/creators (the girls who take part in the piece), whose participation is facilitated and guided by adult choreographers, but not entirely directed by them, at the same time as resolutely framing the work first and foremost as research-led art project created by professional artist/researchers, hence its presentation in cultural institutions such as Tate Britain, The Place and regional theatres on their main stages (rather than in non-venue-based community spaces) and indeed its presentation here as academic practice research.

The research was conducted within and as a critical response to the framework and existing practices of UK performance touring, which are largely based on historically entrenched and economically driven approaches to presenting touring performance. It sought to challenge and reimagine these practices in new and innovative ways. Relationships between producing companies and presenting venues tend to be transactional, focusing on financial bottom lines which demand maximum efficiency of presentation for as little cost as possible, whilst maximising potential ticket income yield. This commonly leads to one of two approaches:

- i. longer runs of commercial work, usually with a recognisable title or high-profile performers, and
- ii. very short runs of more experimental work, which offer little if any opportunity to develop meaningful encounters with members of the local community (potential audience members and participants), so that these people might engage deeply with the themes of such projects.

By developing new approaches to touring that move beyond these norms, *Men & Girls Dance* has also helped deliver initiatives intended to develop touring established by publicly funded agencies such as Arts Council England (for example, through the Strategic Touring Programme) and has built on Fevered Sleep's past research on models for touring, in particular *Future Play* (Fevered Sleep 2014), a 4-year investigation of models for touring performance for children, which was supported by Paul Hamlyn Foundation and Arts Council England and began to develop some of the touring strategies — networked partnerships, local engagement; combining artistic and audience development — that were further developed through *Men & Girls Dance*. Furthermore, *Men & Girls Dance* proposes an alternative to conventional understandings of touring as a *national* series of presentations of a performance or event, often with a focus on scale and extent of reach (literally, the amount of ground the tour covers). Counter to this, *Men & Girls Dance* proposes touring as a networked series of hyper-local activities, which are linked together across multiple locations, but in which the focus is resolutely on the individual specificity of each place where the project appears, rather than on the overall identity (scale and reach) of the tour. By establishing these new approaches to touring through a 2-week residency model and bespoke contextual/wraparound activities, thereby taking more time to build relationships with diverse participants and audiences, the new touring model developed enables more people to engage with the themes and politics of the project, leading to potential for new, positive narratives concerning men's relationships with children to emerge.

In terms of research within the academy, *Men & Girls Dance* has contributed to the development of new knowledges in the fields of Aesthetics and Applied Theatre (see Shaughnessy 2015); Ethics (see Bannon 2018: 1–13, 168–73) and Dance Studies (see Domm 2019). It has also made a significant contribution to the field of Care Ethics as a way to think about performance, by modelling new ways to think about performance as a site of care (see Stuart Fisher 2020). Indeed, I would suggest that the practice research

conducted through *Men & Girls Dance* thinks *alongside* the theoretical/conceptual field of Care Ethics, rather than simply enacting in practice the new knowledges that have already been developed through forms of research and dissemination such as writing and publication. Through this practice of embodied 'thinking alongside', *Men & Girls Dance* contributes to the field of Care Ethics by modelling performance and practice research as modes of thought in themselves, that offer new ways to think about care. This relationship between practice research, writing and publication equalises different research methodologies and strategies for dissemination, in keeping with Cull Ó Maoilearca's call "for performance to be treated as an equal participant in an ongoing mutation and multiplication of thought's possibilities" (Cull Ó Maoilearca undated). Indeed, the research conducted through *Men & Girls Dance* makes a significant contribution to the development of the whole field of practice research, by proposing new ways for practice-based and written/publication-based research to inform one another, in which the performance actively participates in — and challenges orthodox ways of thinking about — the production of new knowledge itself.

## IV Methodology

The research methodology for *Men & Girls Dance* is rooted in three overlapping areas of practice:

- i. the creation of a contemporary dance performance;
- ii. the development of contextual materials (newspaper and The Talking Place);
- iii. close work with a network of partner organisations to conceive and deliver new approaches to collaboration, participation, touring and audience development.

This multi-valent approach ensures that the research takes place on several levels simultaneously, ensuring that the two overarching research aims are addressed throughout all aspects of the process: in the rehearsal studio with professional artists and participants; in the encounter with audiences, through conversation and exchange in multiple media (live and digital); and in collaboration with a range of industry partners.

Internal and external evaluation processes, both formative and summative, ensure that data from participants,





FIG 2 Research and development workshop at The Place, London, June 2013

FIG 3 Research and development workshop at The Point, Eastleigh, August 2013

audiences and partner organisations are carefully gathered and analysed at all stages of the research. The repetitive and iterative format of the project offers an effective method for embedding formative research and evaluation at every stage. Because the touring of the project is always linked to school holiday periods (so that the girls taking part are available for rehearsals), inherent periods of reflection and learning open up. Furthermore, because an explicit aim of the project is to engage diverse audience and participants in debates about a complex social issue, discourse, discussion, reflection and evaluation are deeply embedded in the process itself. These evaluation processes gathered data through various means: audience and participant feedback, roundtable discussions with representatives from the network of partner organisations, reflection diaries kept by key members of the Fevered Sleep and external teams, and internal reflection and planning meetings with staff from Fevered Sleep. Further detail on these methods can be found in the sections that follow and in the external project evaluation report.

E

### The Performance

Initial research for the performance element of *Men & Girls Dance* began at The Place theatre, London, in 2013 (FIG 2). These workshops tested the concept of the project, with a focus on the potential for bringing together adult male professional dancers with children to co-create a performance.

The next stage of research, taking place at The Point, Eastleigh, in August 2013 (FIG 3), took the form of a week-long workshop focused on developing a choreographic language for the performance, and explored questions related to sound and music for the performance, specifically an idea to do with sound collage — creating sonic unity through disparate elements — which ran in parallel to the research on bringing together different kinds of people to perform together.

Further development took place in partnership with Dance4 in Nottingham, in October 2014 (FIG 4). These workshops continued to develop a choreographic language for the piece, specifically the development of a performance structure that incorporated learned choreography with improvisation. The workshops also introduced for the first time the material presence of newspaper as a key design element in the performance, exploring its use as costume, prop and scenography — and making explicit the project's dialogue with print- and other popular-media representations of men's encounters with children.



FIG 4 Research and development workshop at Dance4, Nottingham, October 2014

As part of the evaluation of this stage of the project, an invited panel of 'critical friends' attended an open session at the end of the week. Before attending, the panel was sent a questionnaire with provocations that invited them to reflect on their thoughts and feelings about men's relationships with children. Their responses were shared and discussed in a group conversation after the open session, after which each panel member was asked to annotate their original answers, indicating if and how their original responses had changed as a result of attending the open session.

The final research and development stage took place at Quarterhouse, Folkestone, in February 2015 (FIG 5). This series of workshops enabled deeper exploration of the use of newspaper as scenography, object and costume; further development of a choreographic language of touch, imitation, observation and trust; the introduction of voice, in particular the use of spoken descriptions of each other's bodies and movements; and experiments with developing dramaturgical structures for the disparate material that had emerged through the various research and development phases.

These initial stages of research provided the foundations on which the performance score and structure were based (this was subsequently used as the basis for re-creating future iterations of the project). The devising and rehearsal period which led to this score and structure took place through a 4-week residency at Greenwich Dance, London, in August 2015 (FIG 6). This process consolidated the choreographic and scenographic approaches that had been developed through the previous research workshops. The performance score that was created during the residency was based on a dramaturgical structure in which the company (the 5 men and 9 girls) transition through a series of tasks, choreographies and improvisations, as illustrated in the film recording of the performance. These started with the company separated on age and gender lines (the girls separated from the men: 09:00 to 19:15); enter into a phase of exploration and mutual recognition (which involved strategies of copying, teaching, learning, watching and describing each other: 25:50 to 41:00); through to a final phase of unity and togetherness (articulated first through an extended improvisation: 45:30 to 52:10) and then finally through a choreographed sequence which acted as an embodied metaphor for the key research aims of reimagining relationships between men and girls as acts of care, playfulness and trust (52:10 to 57:30).



FIG 5 Research and development workshop at Quarterhouse, Folkestone, February 2015

FIG 6 Preview performance at Greenwich Dance, London, August 2015

FIG 7 Public performance at ACCA, Brighton, October 2016 →



### The newspaper and The Talking Place

The newspaper that is an inherent part of the project, like the performance, has a fixed structure, into which new content is dropped for each iteration of the project (FIG 8). In each place the project is presented, new content is invited from members of the local community, and an introduction, which places the themes and politics of the project in a local context, is written by the host organisation (usually by the Artistic Director). This process of making an invitation to co-author the newspaper is one of the strategies for audience development and public engagement that the research has developed. Like the performance, the newspaper has some content which is the same in each place and some which is specific to that place. Visual content for the newspaper was created during the residency at Greenwich Dance, through a photoshoot with the original devisor/performers in a range of public spaces in Greenwich and Lewisham, London. 1500 copies of the newspaper are distributed for free during each residency, via public spaces such as bookshops, libraries, cafes, arts centres, launderettes and pubs, ensuring that people who do not see the performance can still engage with the themes of the research, thereby broadening audiences for the research and increasing its potential impact. The newspaper also functions as the programme for the performance and a copy is given for free to each audience member.

The Talking Place (FIGS 9–10) is an itinerant drop-in space that opens during the performance/creation residency. Its purpose is to open up conversation and debate about the themes of the project, with people who may not see the performance, to again further increase the reach of the research. It is a hosted space, staffed by an associate artist, who also functions as a research assistant inasmuch as matters that arise in The Talking Place are fed back into the ongoing development of and discourse around the project. Although there have been variations, The Talking Place usually appears in public/community spaces in the weeks leading up to performances (visitors to these spaces will not necessarily also engage with the performance) and then migrates to the theatre foyer for post-show discussions (where it is attended by people who have seen the performance). The concept of The Talking Place was developed through a series of email exchanges and meetings with a group of people whose combined expertise covered socially engaged practice, audience engagement and discursive practices (e.g. developing innovative approaches to post-show discussions and 'creative debates').

C, D

The group consisted of:

Professor Paul Heritage	<i>Professor of Drama and Performance, Queen Mary University of London</i>
Natasha Friedman	<i>Director of ENO Baylis</i>
Georgina Bednar	<i>Creative Learning Producer at Barbican</i>
Professor Lois Weaver	<i>Professor of Contemporary Performance, Queen Mary University of London</i>
Maddy Costa	<i>Theatre critic, writer and founder of Theatre Club</i>

### Partnership and networked research on touring and audience development

Following the periods of research, development and creation described above, the project was further developed and presented through a series of 5 residencies in 2016 as part of a Strategic Tour funded by ACE. The Strategic Touring Fund was designated to support projects that developed new models for audience development and public engagement, with the express intention of engaging people who are not regular arts attenders with contemporary arts and culture. By definition, the fund supported projects that developed new approaches to touring, by supporting research into innovative touring models and encouraging experimentation and the development of new methods for audience engagement. This strategic approach necessitated the development of a network of partners who worked closely with Fevered Sleep and with each other to develop new approaches to touring, public engagement, participation and audience development, leading to shared learning across the network. The network comprised of Quarterhouse, Folkestone; Lawrence Batley Theatre (LBT), Huddersfield; The Lowry, Salford; Dance4, Nottingham; Southeast Dance and Attenborough Centre for the Creative Arts (ACCA), Brighton & Hove.

Networked partnership working with these presenting venues and partners (theatres, festivals, dance development agencies) took place through a series of round table meetings before, during and after each iteration of the project, ensuring that all stakeholders contributed to the formulation, investigation and evaluation of the research questions, process and outcomes. This is a highly innovative approach in touring in the UK, inasmuch as it led to each stakeholder remaining connected to and in dialogue about



FIG 8 Copies of the *Men & Girls Dance* newspaper



FIG 9 The Talking Place during the residency in Nottingham with Dance4, 2016  
 FIG 10 The Talking Place during the residency at Skånes Dansteater, 2018

the project after they had presented it. It is more common for touring companies to ‘parachute’ into a place/venue, with little if any opportunity for meaningful engagement with local people and potential audiences. One of the ways the research reimagined touring as a networked series of local activities, rather than as a national activity per se, was through the development of new roles called ‘Community Catalysts’. These were people local to each place the project was presented, who worked closely with partner organisations and Fevered Sleep to engage members of the local community with the project, through word of mouth, social media and other events/workshops. The participation of girls from the local community in the performance, and local contributions to the project newspaper, further enable the project to achieve a meaningful and specific connection to each place it visits. The timeline for the ACE-funded Strategic Tour in 2016 also demonstrates this new approach. Whereas a tour to 5 venues in a conventional touring model might take as little as 5 days for small-scale work, or perhaps 5 weeks for medium- and large-scale work, a single tour of *Men & Girls Dance* took place over 8 months.

This more embedded, longer-term and locally rooted approach developed through the research, allowed for:

- i. deep engagement between the project, its research themes and its local context and communities of interest;
- ii. extensive peer-to-peer learning between partner organisations; and
- iii. a timeframe in which significant audience development activities could take place (for example, by inviting local people to contribute to the newspaper or by working with Community Catalysts).

This new approach to touring ultimately advocated new kinds of collaboration between touring companies, venue partners and audiences, promoting greater integration of artistic, participation and audience development activities; for example, the participation of local girls in the project led to attendance at performances by parents, family and friends who were not already engaged with contemporary performance/contemporary dance. As outlined above, this new approach also specifically sought to engage diverse audiences (many of whom were not regular ‘arts attenders’) with performance practices that explore challenging social issues.

A key opportunity for rigorous evaluation and learning arose as part of the Strategic Tour in 2016 and led to the production of a major [evaluation report](#), undertaken by

independent evaluators Morris Hargreaves Mackintyre. The aims of the project evaluated through this process were:

- 1 To develop audiences for contemporary dance;
- 2 To develop and test new approaches to touring;
- 3 To provoke and facilitate discussion and thinking around relationships between men and girls;
- 4 To have a positive impact on participants.

These evaluated aims (which were focused on in order to address the expectations of ACE Strategic Touring funding) map closely onto the two overarching aims of the research: reimagining and reclaiming relationships between adult men and children in response to the dominant, negative, media and social discourse around that relationship; and developing new approaches to performance touring in the UK, so as to build new and diverse audiences for research-led contemporary performance.

The evaluation report offers a full assessment of the extent to which these aims were met, with further detail on associated outputs and outcomes. Detail from the report is not included here, as its focus aligns more to the assessed aims and objectives of the ACE-funded tour, rather than to the aims and questions of the practice research.

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## Timeline

2013	June	<i>Research and development workshops (3 days) at The Place, London; Funded by Arts Council England (ACE) and The Place.</i>
	August	<i>Research and development workshops (1 week) at The Point, Eastleigh; Funded by ACE and The Point.</i>
2014	October	<i>Research and development workshops (1 week) at Dance4, Nottingham; Funded by ACE, Dance4 and The Jerwood Choreographic Research Project (JCRP). JCRP was a 3-year research funding project, led by Dance Xchange (a dance development agency in Birmingham) with funds from Jerwood Arts. Its aim was to support dance-based research. Funding for Men &amp; Girls Dance was secured from JCRP, through a competitive pitching process</i>

to an assessment panel of approximately 40 leaders from the UK dance sector.

2015	February	<i>Research and development workshops (1 week) at Quarterhouse, Nottingham; Funded by ACE and Quarterhouse.</i>
	August	<i>Creation of the performance score and structure (subsequently used as the basis for future iterations), through a 4-week residency at GDA (Greenwich Dance), London; Funded by ACE through a Strategic Touring Grant.</i>
2015 2016	September– January	<i>Creation of the Men &amp; Girls Dance newspaper; development of the concept and format for The Talking Place.</i>
2016	February– October	<i>Strategic Tour. The 5 partnerships/residencies that took place during this tour were:</i>
	February	<i>Quarterhouse, Folkestone. 4 performances, 1500 copies of the Folkestone edition of the newspaper, The Talking Place in an independent café and then at Quarterhouse.</i>
	May	<i>Lawrence Batley Theatre (LBT), Huddersfield. 4 performances, 1500 copies of the Huddersfield edition of the newspaper, The Talking Place in a unit in a shopping centre and then at LBT.</i>
	August	<i>The Lowry, Salford. 4 performances, 1500 copies of the Salford edition of the newspaper, The Talking Place in a community kitchen in Salford and then at The Lowry.</i>
		<i>Dance4, Nottingham. 4 performances, 1500 copies of the Nottingham edition of the newspaper, The Talking Place in a unit in local market and then at Dance4.</i>
	October	<i>Southeast Dance and Attenborough Centre for the Creative Arts (ACCA), Brighton &amp; Hove. 4 performances, 1500 copies of the Brighton &amp; Hove edition of the newspaper, The Talking Place in an independent bookshop and then at ACCA.</i>

Subsequent iterations of the project, leading to ongoing public engagement and impact activity were:

2017	April	<i>The Place, London. 10 performances, 1500 copies of the London edition of the newspaper, The Talking Place in various locations, including Somers Town Community Centre and Wellcome Collection and then at The Place; Funded by ACE, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Wellcome and a commission from The Place.</i>
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	August	<i>Tate Britain, London</i> . 16 performances; Funded by ACE, Paul Hamlyn Foundation and Tate.
2018	October	<i>Skånes Dansteater, Malmö, Sweden</i> . 4 performances, 1500 copies of a bilingual Malmö edition of the newspaper, The Talking Place at the theatre; Commissioned by Skånes Dansteater.
2019	April	<i>The Place, London (new cast)</i> . 10 performances, 1500 copies of the 2nd London edition of the newspaper, The Talking Place at The Place; Funded by ACE, Paul Hamlyn Foundation and a commission from The Place.

Further iterations of the project were due to be created in 2020, but were postponed due to COVID-19. These were:

2020	September	Norwich Theatre, Norwich
	November	Triennale di Milano, Milan, Italy

## VI

## Findings

*Men & Girls Dance* is the first project to link together research into intergenerational choreographic practices, socio-political issues and their embodiment in performance, strategies for public engagement and models for touring. The combination of these lines of inquiry represents a significant and unique advancement in the field of contemporary research-led performance and industry practice, which has had considerable reach and led to evidenced impacts.

The research has engaged over 25,000 people directly in the project's themes, challenging pre-existing assumptions about men's relationships with children, by modelling, unfolding and performing new and different ways for people of different generations and genders to be together. This demonstrates strong potential to influence thinking and bring about change in societal attitudes. Furthermore, the project has successfully investigated, developed and trialled new approaches to collaboration and partnership between multiple arts organisations, leading to new models for touring, audience development, participation and inclusion.

The research was part-funded through the Jerwood Choreographic Research Project, a funding scheme that brought together a network of over 40 UK dance/research organisations that pooled resources to support innovative dance-based/choreographic research projects. Findings from *Men & Girls Dance* were shared with this network through meetings, end-of-project reports and verbally, enmeshing the research and its findings in a network of organisations that provides the framework for the development of innovative dance and performance practices in the UK. This adds significant scope to the potential for the project to bring about change within the arts industry.

The following outputs have arisen from the research:

- ⦿ An original performance, which has been re-created 10 times, leading to 60 public performances; A
- ⦿ 10 editions of the *Men & Girls Dance* newspaper; C,D
- ⦿ 8 iterations of The Talking Place;
- ⦿ A detailed evaluation report which has been shared with external stakeholders and partner organisations. E

From August 2015 to October 2020:

- ⦿ 7122 people have seen the performance (public audience);
- ⦿ 15,000 copies of the newspaper have been distributed for free (in settings ranging from theatres and arts centres to cafes, libraries, pubs and launderettes);
- ⦿ 710 people (public) have participated live in conversation and debate in The Talking Place;
- ⦿ Over 46,000 people have viewed the project trailer online; B
- ⦿ Over 420,000 people have engaged with it via social media.

I have also presented publicly on the project, as follows:

2017	28 January	'Love-Touch-Risk-Love-Play-Dance' presented at <i>With Children: The Child as Collaborator and Performer</i> symposium, Leeds Beckett University;
	14 December	'What Happens When Men and Girls Dance?' presented at <i>Researching (with) Difficult Feelings</i> symposium, Birkbeck, University of London for CHASE (Consortium of the Humanities and the Arts South-east England).



## MEN & GIRLS DANCE

2018 3 November 'A conversation on *Men & Girls Dance*', co-presented at the *Dance and People Talk* industry conference at Skånes Dansteater, Malmö, Sweden.

2017 April; 2019 April Post show discussions at The Place, London.

Writing:

2016 Autumn/Winter 2017 'Fevered Sleep, Participation, and *Men & Girls Dance*', *Animated: Current Issues and Practices in Participatory Dance*.

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The following key findings were arrived at in response to the original aims and research questions:

**Aim 1** To propose positive, embodied narratives of care, playfulness and trust in relationships between men and children, in response to dominant media and social discourses that depict that relationship as overwhelmingly negative.

The research has proven that contemporary, experimental dance practice can create and disseminate effective new approaches to exploring and interrogating social discourse around the politics of intergenerational relationships, thereby opening up discussion and debate. The embodied form of dance itself, and the focus of the choreographic and dramaturgical concepts of the performance on trust, mutual support, play, attention, balance and care, have together, in the project, created new narratives of potential relationships between men and children, at the same time as developing new performance-making practices, in which professional adult dancers and non-professional, child dancers collaborate and co-create the work.

The research has found that for an inquiry into a social issue that ultimately is concerned with how men's and children's bodies interact, dance is *the* effective artform, by virtue of its focus on embodied practice

FIG 11 *Men & Girls Dance* at Skånes Dansteater, Malmö, Sweden, October 2018



(more effective, for example, than drama-based practices, in which the intergenerational encounter would have been *represented* on stage, rather than *presented* directly and in an unmediated way through the 14 bodies of the dancers — unconcealed by character — who performed the piece). Audience and critical feedback, and the recognition of the research through major funding awards and award nominations, demonstrate that these approaches have effectively impacted on audiences, partner organisations and participants.

The research has also found that in order for contemporary performance practices to meaningfully contribute to socio-political debate, contextual materials and bespoke formats for dialogue and debate (for example, the *Men & Girls Dance* newspaper or The Talking Place) are a highly effective tool for extending the inquiry of the performance into forms that are widely and more readily accessible to diverse audiences and members of the public. It is insufficient to presume, with a subject as charged as men's relationships with children, that performance alone can articulate the complexity of alternative narratives to those who encounter it: contextual and wraparound materials acknowledge this complexity and offer multiple entry points to the area of reflection and debate that the project opens up.

**Aim 2** To develop new approaches to performance touring in the UK, so as to build new audiences for research-led contemporary performance, in order to engage diverse publics with the themes of the research.

The research has furthered the first aim — to enable reflection and debate — by demonstrating that new approaches to participation effectively embed the research in the communities in which the project takes place. A key finding was that participation should be layered and multi-focal: that multiple ways to take part in a project combine to create impact that is greater than the sum of its parts. *Men & Girls Dance* is highly unusual in the complexity of its approach to local engagement within the context of touring performance, and it is precisely by embracing complexity — and framing it as an act of curiosity and care — that the project has successfully embedded itself in the network of local settings which together have combined to make a 'national tour'. The multiple ways to take part consist of co-creating/performing the piece (for local girls), contributing to the local edition of the *Men & Girls Dance* newspaper, participating in the discussions that happen in

The Talking Place or supporting the project as a Community Catalyst. *Men & Girls Dance* has found that a conventional model of performance touring and the 'parachute model' previously described (that demonstrates a disinterest and carelessness with regard to each place a production appears) are inadequate if performance practices are to successfully function as catalysts for social change, especially if desired outcomes include impacts on diverse audiences and members of the public rather than only on existing arts attenders.

During the 2016 tour, by taking an atypical amount of time (over an 8-month period) to embed the project in each location it visited, the touring model developed through the research has effectively ensured that this discussion and debate has taken place in a diverse and inclusive range of settings, with all sorts of people taking part. The research finds that new models for partnership and touring, that decentralise the focus on quick turnarounds and 'touring efficiency' and instead advocate for taking more time in order to take more care, need to be embraced, so that performances with ambition to catalyse socio-political change can deliver impact.

Finally, the research has found that new approaches to partnership and touring presentation need to be developed, in order for the creative, choreographic, participatory and dissemination practices described above to be effective. As described in the earlier section on the research context (in particular, the touring context), transactional relationships between producing companies and presenting venues do little, if anything, to create meaningful opportunities for contemporary research-led performance and the social impacts it might achieve (especially if the intention of the work is to achieve these impacts in an inclusive way, with a range of people), not least because they focus on financial bottom lines which demand maximum efficiency of presentation for as little cost as possible, whilst maximising potential ticket income yield. *Men & Girls Dance* has demonstrated that by approaching partnerships not as one-to-one transactional relationships, but as networked clusters of partners and interested parties, more effective and impactful contexts for performance can be created. This networked approach, in which all aspects of a project from creation through to presentation and evaluation are conducted collaboratively with participation from partner venues, performers, potential audiences and the wider community, offers a new model for touring.

To summarise, *Men & Girls Dance* has effectively developed a creative, choreographic and contextual

framework that encourages discussion and debate about an important social issue, found successful means to embed this work in local settings through new partnership and touring models, and thereby has engaged diverse people in direct encounters with the research.

Demand for the project (which includes future UK and international iterations in planning) demonstrates its effectiveness both as an artwork and as a research project engaging with a difficult social issue. The independent *evaluation report* (see in particular pp. 31–2) indicates that partner organisations' objectives were met through their collaboration on the project, with the potential for learning that influences future touring practice. The audience response, *critical response*, feedback from participants and industry stakeholders, all attest to the project's success in bringing about change in attitudes and in industry practices and having ongoing influence on approaches to UK touring. The close interweaving of the two strands of research has meant that a significant proportion of the audience are new attenders of contemporary dance and often from areas of low cultural engagement. Both of these deepen the project's impact outside academia and beyond existing arts-engaged communities.

*Men & Girls Dance* was listed as one of the *Evening Standard's* best dance shows in 2017 and *The Guardian's* top ten theatre shows of 2016. It was runner up for *The Guardian* University Award for Social and Community Impact (2017) and was a shortlisted finalist for Times Higher Education's Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Research Project of the Year (2017).

## VII

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