Dionysus Meets neoliberalism: Zumba fitness and the call to zorbitality

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Abstract

In the twenty-first century, asexuality has become synonymous with sexual orientation, being described as a 'lack' of sexual attraction. This definition is problematic, as it assumes that everybody is sexual and that sexuality is immutable. With the rise of a postfeminist culture, the lived experiences of asexual-identified women are in danger of being lost within static narratives of frigidity and singedom. In response, this article proposes an emergent concept for reconfiguring female (a)sexualities through collective ecstatic motion – Zorbitality – drawing on the global Latin dance fitness phenomenon, Zumba® Fitness, as a central example. I firstly conceptualise Zorbitality, via Csikszentmihalyi’s theory of ‘flow’ and Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘rhizome.’ Secondly, I examine the emergence of Zumba® Fitness as a contemporary Dionysian rite, mediated by digital culture, capitalism and globalisation, through my insights from the ZIN™ Academy and Believe party (London, July 2015) and work as a Zumba® Fitness instructor. Finally, I conceptualise Zumba® as (i) an asexual space, (ii) a celebration of the autoerotic body and (iii) an invocation of West African collective movement rites. Zorbitality emerges as a resistant imaginary, where differences in sexuality cease to matter and where personal movement styles are celebrated within a set of shared rhythms.

Keywords: Zumba® Fitness; Asexuality; Neoliberalism; Zorbitality; Autoeroticism; Polyamory
Introduction

In the early twenty-first century, ‘asexuality’ has become synonymous with sexual orientation, being described by psychologists and the asexual community as a ‘lack’ of sexual attraction (Bogaert, 2004; AVEN, 2016). This definition is problematic as it erodes individual idiosyncrasies, assumes that everybody is sexual and that sexuality is immutable. At this juncture, a study of female (a)sexualities is long overdue. Firstly, very little has been written on the subject. Johnson’s (1977) chapter on asexual and autoerotic women was perhaps the only offering. She highlighted the dangers of reducing asexual-identified women to static symbols of spiritual devotion or political consciousness at the absence of examining their lived realities, a concern that still resonates today. Secondly, as Gill and Scharff (2011) assert, with the rise of a postfeminist sensibility, women are often represented as desiring their sexual objectification, whilst the possibility of new female subjectivities is being limited for all women. Therefore, a study of female (a)sexualities is particularly relevant to the twenty-first century.

In this article, I draw on Zumba® Fitness, the global Latin dance fitness programme that celebrates the historical transformation of Afro-diasporic rhythms, as a central example of an emergent concept that I have coined: Zorbitality. Zorbitality is a resistant imaginary, which seeks to reconfigure female (a)sexualities through collective ecstatic motion. It embodies an ethical openness to otherness and enables a celebration of one’s body for oneself, whilst experiencing a collectivity with others on local and global scales. Zorbitality features re-aligned erotic poles, from autoeroticism to polyamory. Havelock Ellis ([1897] 1913: 161) described autoeroticism as sexual emotion ‘generated in the absence of an external stimulus, proceeding directly or indirectly, from
another person.’ Meanwhile, polyamory refers to a non-monogamous relational style involving the love of many people (Scherrer, 2010). Zorbitality proposes that the relationship between autoeroticism and polyamory may shift throughout women’s lives, and in specific transformational moments.

Zumba®’s celebration of asexual embodiment and the autoerotic body will be the central focus of this article. In particular, I will focus on how Zumba reconfigures the static notion of asexuality as an individual ‘lack’ of sexual attraction, by highlighting the role of collective enjoyment. Zumba® was created by the Colombian choreographer, Beto Pérez, in the 1990s, and marketed in the US in the early 2000s. It became an official brand in 2006, when the global Zumba® Instructor Network (ZIN) was established (Kabir, 2015). Zumba® provides a sense of shared joy for people all over the world, via local and global networks, in the space of the transnational gym.

Undoubtedly, Zumba® fails to acknowledge the origins of the Latin dances it employs in Europe’s colonisation of the ‘New’ World, or the capitalist principles that underpinned the emergence of ‘Latin America’ as a concept (Mignolo, 2005). However, I argue that Zumba® challenges capitalism’s commodification of human sexualities and desires, whereby empowerment is supposedly achieved by reaching a partnered sexual goal. It does so by tapping into ‘collective ecstasy,’ or ‘self-loss in the rhythms and emotions of the group’ (Ehrenreich, 2007: 9). Zumba® is worthy of scholarly attention, as it has an ability to unite diverse groups of people, and to enable groups otherwise marginalised within society to gain empowerment.
I will proceed by firstly conceptualising Zorbitality, via Csikszentmihalyi’s (1992) theory of ‘flow’ and Deleuze and Guattari’s ([1980] 2004) ‘rhizome.’ Secondly, I will examine Zumba® as a contemporary Dionysian rite. In Ancient Greek mythology, Dionysus was the God of collective ecstasy. He is often described as an androgynous and asexual figure, whose followers would dance themselves into trances (Jameson, 1993). Representations of him have evolved over time. Thus, he is a manifestation of a ‘collective identity’ (Storm, 1998: 11), characterised by birth and rebirth, fragmentation and reassemblage. I argue that Zumba® is a twenty-first century Dionysian rite, mediated by capitalism, an economic and political system that favours private ownership and profit, and neoliberalism, which ‘places an emphasis on the potential expansion of the viewpoint of commercial exchanges to nearly every other sphere of society from motherhood and reproduction to international relations’ (Guardiola-Rivera, 2010: 6). Zumba® channels collective joy through a shared concept and brand, which was built into its marketing strategy. I will explore the tension between Zumba® as a capitalist enterprise and the lived collective Zumba® experience, by drawing on insights from the ZIN™ (Zumba Instructor Network) Academy and Believe after party, held in London on 10-11 July 2015, and my work as a Zumba® Fitness instructor. Thirdly, I will describe Zumba® as (i) an asexual space, (ii) a celebration of the autoerotic body and (ii) an invocation of West African collective movement rites.

Structurally speaking, this article will test the boundaries of academic writing, as it will combine interdisciplinary scholarship on dance and sexuality, and my self-narrative. Richardson’s (1988, 1997) work on collective stories and creative analytic practices (1999), as well as research that explores the intricate connection between self-narrative
and autoeroticism (Sedgwick, 1995; Blinne, 2012; Sadlier, 2018b) is useful for theorising my approach.

Collective stories refer to stories that enable those who are marginalised to gain voice in the process of writing, by altering and resisting accepted norms, connecting with a broader community and nurturing various ‘emergent selves’ (Richardson, 1997: 295). The collective story narrativises the experiences of the social category to which the writer belongs, rather than simply retelling a cultural narrative (Richardson, 1988). Richardson’s (1999) idea of Creative Analytic Practices (CAP) further encourages writers to consider how they present their work to engage an audience, using genres such as poetry, drama, fiction and – in the case of this article - dance.

The relationship between autoeroticism and self-narrative is also central to my work. In *Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl*, Sedgwick (1995: 150) argues that sexual orientation categories *obscure* autoeroticism as a ‘self-contained’ central sexual identity. Yet, there is power in autoeroticism’s ‘traceless’ nature, since it acts as ‘a reservoir of potentially utopian metaphors and energies for independence, self-possession, and a rapture that may owe relatively little to political or interpersonal abjection’ (Sedgwick, 1995: 135).

connection between writing and autoeroticism, by stating that they both 'construct, embody, and perform in relational arenas.' Sadlier's (2018b) work further develops this approach, by articulating her journey from asexuality to autoeroticism, through poetry and prose that engage with dance and movement. In the process, she challenges the linear focus of traditional life writing, with particular reference to the articulation of queer identities, by highlighting the power of transformational moments, where the individual and collective become enmeshed.6

Dialoguing with Richardson's theorisations and a consideration of the intricate connection between autoeroticism and self-narrative, my article's structure could be described as Zorbital, as it moves from Zorbitality as a reoriented female subjectivity, to Zumba® as marketed collective joy, my self-narrative, and a deeper articulation of Zumba® as a central example of Zorbitality. Drawing on my self-narrative is vital, since I wish to highlight Zorbitality as an embodied process. This endeavour further speaks to Nguyen's (2015) 'me-search,' which acknowledges how 'personal experiences and histories can become frames of analysis that are valuable to intellectual and academic work' (Nguyen, 2015: 4). I recognise that me-search is closely linked to autoethnography, 'an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural' (Ellis and Bochner, 2000: 739). Yet, 'me-search' captures the concept of Zorbitality more clearly, for it demonstrates how the research process itself can transform the researcher. As I take you now on this Zorbital journey, I ask you to dance with me. By the end, we may have come full circle.
I - Reaching Zorbitality

In *Flow: The Psychology of Happiness*, Csikszentmihalyi (1992) articulates a theory of flow, which could be seen as a contemporary interpretation of Dionysian thought. He describes flow as 'the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1992: 4). Csikszentmihalyi's words resonate with Zumba®, which expresses a sense of collective joy that transcends divides of gender, sexuality, class, race and culture. As I argue, it achieves this through a shared set of rhythms, which kinaesthetically connect people through local and global networks, and expose the contradictions between the market and collective ecstasy.

Flow is a concept that can be transferred across generations and cultures, as a method of characterising the human channelling of psychic energy towards a goal. Yet, this goal is not deterministic; flow moments are moments of ecstasy, which create a continual sense of happiness and integration in everyday life, and connect us with others through a shared community of interest. As Csikszentmihalyi describes, deriving enjoyment *in the present* is a marker of happiness across cultures, and this is what Zumba® taps into, through its development of local and global communities. Yet, Csikszentmihalyi fails to fully examine how a flow experience can act as a resistant practice that enables one to transcend vulnerabilities in everyday life. A flow experience can achieve this by encouraging the internalisation of a collective ecstatic spirit, thus making ‘the subject’s vulnerability to discursive power starkly visible while also making visible the constitutive powers of the subject-in-process (Davies and Gannon, 2006: x). Thus, Zorbitality's role as a resistant imaginary addresses the limitations of Csikszentmihalyi's work.
Csikszentmihalyi views consciousness as a circular rather than linear process, involving a structure of attention and goals, mediated by the self: ‘consciousness is not a strictly linear system, but one in which circular causality obtains’ (Csikszentmihalyi, 1992: 34). When acquired information threatens goals, a sense of ‘psychic entropy’ ensues (Csikszentmihalyi, 1992: 37). However, when a flow experience occurs, ‘the self is more complex than it had been before’ (Csikszentmihalyi, 1992: 41). Key to this process is the relationship between differentiation, which ‘implies a movement toward uniqueness, toward separating oneself from others,’ and integration as ‘a union with other people, with ideas and entities beyond the self’ (Csikszentmihalyi, 1992: 41). This relationship enables a thread of enjoyment to emerge, which weaves through individual and collective lives, and is largely achieved through a ‘freedom from the tyranny of time’ (Csikszentmihalyi, 1992: 67), where the linearity of clock time is transcended and lived time is enacted. Indeed, as I have experienced, this freedom allows us to navigate the relationship between inner ecstasy and collective ecstatic motion, which is central to Zumba® as an embodied practice. In essence, when you Zumba®, you throw your body into space, in communion with multiple others. It is as if you are in the throws of passion, but this is your way of expressing it.

The contrast between pleasure and enjoyment, and the surpassing of linear time are also features of Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of the rhizome in A Thousand Plateaus ([1980] 2004). The rhizome interrogates the dominant images of the tree and root in the Western imaginary, which represent a search for origins and neat categories. It rejects any centralising force and binary logic. Instead, it proposes that there are no orientating points, just lines of intensity, called ‘lines of flight’ (Deleuze and Guattari, [1980] 2004: 4). Furthermore, the rhizome may be ruptured but can start again on an
old line or a new one. It is not a structural model. Rather, via the concept of Schizoanalysis, it disavows origins and appropriate life ‘stages,’ and thus ‘rejects any idea of a pretraced destiny, whatever name is given to it’ (Deleuze and Guattari, [1980] 2004: 14). Desire is the driving force of the rhizome, which may manifest itself in multiple ways. ‘Sexless, genderless, just pure movement, pure joy, pure ecstasy.’ These would be the words the rhizome would utter if it could speak. Yet, it does not desire to, as music is its drug of choice, movement its articulatory gesture.

Deleuze and Guattari engage in a radical rethinking of Western libidinal economy, as demonstrated in the concept of the plateau, which they derive from Bateson's (1972) work on Balinese sexual cultures. They describe the plateau as ‘a continuous, self-vibrating region of intensities whose development avoids any orientation toward a culmination point or external end’ (Deleuze and Guattari, [1980] 2004: 24). They highlight how Western sexuality has been subjugated to the reproductive model and without having to label it ‘asexuality,’ put forward a convincing rhizomatic theory, which eschews the Western world’s focus on genitality in sexuality studies:

... the rhizome, on the other hand, is a liberation of sexuality not only from reproduction but also from genitality. Here in the West, the tree has implanted itself in our bodies, rigidifying and stratifying even the sexes. We have lost the rhizome, or the grass (Deleuze and Guattari, [1980] 2004: 20).

This conception is encapsulated in their vision of ‘the body without organs,’ (Deleuze and Guattari, [1980] 2004: 165-184) where movement and energy are transformed, via a flow of intensities.\(^8\) Equally, in their discussion of the inadequacy of orgasm as a centralising goal of human sexuality, the rhizome as a theory of eternal flow offers a convincing alternative. Yet, what their theories lack is a connection with the lived experiences of people, who have to survive within constraining societal structures.
Zorbitality as a conceptual and analytical mode seeks to address this by theorising from experience outwards and showing how collective ecstatic motion can enable subjective transformation.

Climax is neither part of Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of the plateau, nor Csikszentmihalyi’s flow. Rather, these theories seek to bring forth ‘a plane of consistency of desire’ (Deleuze and Guattari, [1980] 2004: 172), inscribed with continual flows of intensity, which go beyond constants, embody a sense of becoming, and ‘have neither culmination nor subject’ (Deleuze and Guattari, [1980] 2004: 558). In the process, joy itself is continuously replicated, as in the Zumba® experience:

> a joy that is immanent to desire as though desire were filled by itself and its contemplations, a joy that implies no lack or impossibility and is not measured by pleasure since it is what distributes intensities of pleasure and prevents them from being suffused by anxiety, shame, and guilt’ (Deleuze and Guattari, [1980] 2004: 558).

The preceding elaborations are key to an understanding of Zorbitality. Whilst Zorbitality can be accessed in diverse collective movement practices, Zumba® is a central example, since it highlights Latin American history as a collectively embodied global site of postcolonial trauma, and openly exposes the contradictions between the spontaneity of ecstasy and market demands. Zorbitality extends the work of Csikszentmihalyi (1992) and Deleuze and Guattari ([1980] 2004), by putting forward a specifically female libidinal economy, which is grounded in the lived experience of collective ecstasy, and thus transcends theoretical musings. I will now give a detailed account of the various layers of Zorbitality.
Zorbitality is coined through a number of words, each of which expresses movement: Zumba®, Zorb, Orbit and Vitality. Firstly, Zorbitality draws on the collective joy of Zumba®, as a central example. However, it can be accessed through other collective movement rites, such as hip-hop dancing, another commercialised glocal collective movement form, which creates a sense of collective identity and political practice (see Dowdy, 2007). Zumba®’s vital life parodies the capitalist system from which it emerged, since its sense of collective joy may be integrated into everyday life.

Furthermore, Zumba® highlights the eternal transformation of Afro-diasporic rhythms and opens up new relational possibilities through the specific configuration of solo within a collective. The second word, ‘zorb,’ is an object that enables a new way of moving. It is a plastic circle, in which one stands, walks and directs movement. One is cocooned and safe, within one’s own kinetic sphere. On a micro level, the word ‘zorb’ contains the word ‘orb,’ a circular ball of light that is often seen in digital photography, sometimes with trails that suggest motion and a transferral of energy, much like Deleuze and Guattari’s ([1980] 2004) concept of the rhizome.

The third word, ‘orbit,’ embodies the power of ‘circular nomadism’ (Glissant, 1997: 18), where ‘uprooting can work towards identity, and exile can be seen as beneficial, when these are experienced as a search for the Other... rather than as an expansion of territory...’ In this conception, a search for the Other is an ethical act. Contained within the final word, ‘vitality,’ is the vital energy of embodied experience, as well as the last letters of the word ‘digital.’ Zorbitality disrupts the linearity of neoliberal regimes and the capitalist commodification of human desires, instead emphasising collective joy.

Thus, Zorbitality extends Braidotti’s (2006: 4) theory of nomadic subjectivity as ‘a non-essentialist brand of vitalism,’ by showing how joy can be accessed in a collective
movement experience, which can be integrated into everyday life. Zorbitality engages with biopolitics: the interaction between the biological and the discursive as manifested in processes of health, pleasure and sexuality, thus 'exposing the opening of the body and of life itself, to its own historicity and indeterminacy' (Giorgi, 2002: 35). Vitality in this context embodies movement and transformation.

Zorbitality embodies an ethical openness to otherness, and enables a celebration of one's body for oneself, whilst experiencing a collectivity with others on local and global scales. Whilst Gilroy (2004: 4) argues that such an endeavour often 'appears old-fashioned, new-agey, and quaintly ethnocentric,' I justify it by abandoning 'notions of identity and belonging that are overly fixed...' (Gilroy, 2004: 5). Thus, I respond to Gilroy's (2004: xv) call to replace the term identity with 'conviviality' to suggest a sense of ecstatic motion, and to draw on the word 'planetarity' to specify 'a smaller scale than the global,' which also emphasises the collective. Furthermore, I draw on Glissant's (1997) conception of creolisation, which refers to the interpenetration of various cultural elements, and the symbolic value of this exchange. Glissant (1997: 11) asserts that an ethical openness to otherness exists in a 'poetics of relation.' He describes this as 'a poetics that is latent, open, multilingual in intention, directly in contact with everything possible' (Glissant, 1997: 32). In fact, opening ourselves to otherness in a non-essentialising way challenges the myth of one truth and acts as an 'ethical principle' (Glissant, 1997: 154). As Sadlier (2018a) argues, collective movement in the configuration of solo within a collective taps into the possibilities of the 'uncreolised' African body, which refers to 'a body free of classification, with no specific origins' (Sadlier, 2018a: 7). This process in turn can enable us to ethically connect with others: human and non-human.
Zorbitality features realigned erotic poles, from autoeroticism to polyamory, expanding from an ever-moving centre, where sexual pleasure is not seen as having its natural base in heterosexual dyadic formations (Van Anders, 2015). Neither is it necessarily genital, as Western theories would have us believe. In essence, as Ehrenreich (2007: 39) argues, collective ecstasy can be viewed as ‘asexual.’ Speaking of Dionysus, the mythical Greek god of collective ecstasy, Ehrenreich (2007: 39) remarks: ‘The fact that he is asexual may embody the Greeks’ understanding that collective ecstasy is not fundamentally sexual in nature, in contrast to the imaginings of later Europeans.’ Zorbitality is collective joy, spread diffusely through the world via various transmigrations. It is the transformation of a negative energy held in the ‘lack’ of asexuality, into a positive and life-affirming concept, which turns life into a unified experience.

Most significantly, Zorbitality answers and extends Braidotti’s (2006: 33) call for a ‘sustainable nomadic ethics,’ which ‘implies a new way of combining self-interests with the well-being of an enlarged sense of community, which includes one’s territorial or environmental interconnections’ (Braidotti, 2006: 35). Zorbitality thus offers a resistant imaginary, which enables one to live ecstatically in the present. I will now examine Zumba® as a central example of Zorbitality, arguing that it both harnesses and subverts the logic of capitalism, and thus offers a resistant ethics for the twenty-first century.

II - Zumba® as a lifestyle choice: Marketing collective joy

Zumba® Fitness is a huge multinational company, with its headquarters in Hallandale Beach, Florida. In 2012, it was worth $500 million and in the same year was voted American Company of the Year (Rusli, 2012). The Zumba® website
(https://www.zumba.com/en-US) states that 15 million people attend Zumba® classes at 200,000 locations worldwide, in 180 different countries. Whilst Zumba® Fitness is a global phenomenon and a largely collaborative process between Latin American and Western artists/markets, its origins lie in the narrative of its creator, Alberto ‘Beto’ Pérez. Beto was born in 1970 in Cali, a city on the Pacific coast of Colombia, which has been central to the passage of Latin music to the mainland US via Miami. Having immersed himself in many styles of dance, Beto also began teaching step aerobics classes in his teens. One day, Beto forgot his regular aerobics music CD. Arriving late for class, he resorted to using a salsa and merengue CD that he listened to usually for his own entertainment (Kabir, 2015). Never before had he considered using this music for a group fitness class. Yet, in that moment, as he improvised the steps and saw smiles rippling across the faces of his class participants, he realised that this feeling needed to be replicated.

Undoubtedly, Zumba® would not exist if Beto had not embarked on his own journey of discovery. In 1999, Beto decided to pursue the American dream and arrived in Miami, Florida, a city that had become synonymous with the transnationalisation of salsa but also with Colombian drug trafficking. Blissfully unaware, Beto ‘was bringing a very different “drug” to the Estados Unidos’ (Kabir, 2015: 3). Poor and with nowhere to stay, Beto resorted to sleeping on a park bench for two nights. Luckily, he managed to find work teaching group fitness classes at gyms with wealthy clients. One of his clients was the mother of a young jobless entrepreneur, Alberto Perlman. She enjoyed Beto’s classes so much that she encouraged her son to do business with him. In 2001, Perlman approached another entrepreneur, Alberto Aghion, and together the three Albertos of Colombian origin developed the concept of ‘Zumba® Fitness,’ which combines the four
core Afro-diasporic dance styles of merengue, salsa, cumbia and reggaeton, and has gradually grown to encompass a broader range of world music.9

As Kabir (2015) notes, whilst recent studies have shown the health benefits of the Zumba® Fitness programme as compared to other fitness regimes (see Luettgen, Foster and Doberstein et al., 2012), virtually no research has examined Zumba® ‘as a social and cultural phenomenon’ (Kabir, 2015: 1). This is surprising, for from its very beginnings, Zumba® has been marketed as not only a product but also a lifestyle choice. This is reflected in the comment of a Zumba® representative, Mr. Rowitch, quoted in Rusli (2012): ‘Zumba is more than a fitness program; it’s representative of a whole lifestyle and attitude.’ Thus, Zumba® works with a neoliberal economy, which capitalises on people’s desires to be part of a shared brand and concept. Similarly, Zumba® Fitness’s chief marketing officer, Jeffrey Perlman (quoted in Bruell, 2012) stated the following: ‘I wanted to turn Zumba into a brand where people felt that kind of free and electrifying joy.’ In a 2016 interview (Pérez and Perlman, 2016), Perlman specifically defined ‘FEJ’ (Free Electrifying Joy’) as a distinctive component of the Zumba® process. According to Perlman, this occurs 20 minutes into a Zumba® class, where ‘the person suddenly feels very liberated… everything that’s in their life disappears and it’s just them and the music.’ I argue that this is an updated version of a Dionysian rite. Zumba® is about bottling people’s collective enjoyment but this time working within the capitalist system.

By 2006, Perlman realised that Zumba® had to capitalise on people’s emotions. This change was influenced by his chance viewing of a poster for the David LaChapelle
movie, *Rize*, which featured a man and woman experiencing the collective ecstasy of dance (Kabir, 2015). This was a eureka moment, as the three Albertos realised that Zumba® was about collective joy, not weight loss, which was reflected in the emerging slogan: ‘Ditch the workout; join the party.’ This became Zumba®’s tagline, as it invested $10,000 in a new website homepage with a Zumba® lifestyle blog (Z-Life), branded clothing and the Zumba Instructor Network (ZIN™) [Kabir, 2015: 1]. Indeed, it was decided that Zumba® would be inclusive of all body types in its marketing campaigns. The most important element was that the model looked like they were experiencing joy. As Perlman (quoted in Bruell, 2012) remarked: ‘Instead of the typical full-body shot of a woman with a six pack, [we decided] you’re going to see a close-up of a person feeling free and electrifying joy.’ Buchanan’s (2012) analysis of Zumba® Fitness as a global business marked by postmodern pastiche is therefore not far off the mark:

> Like some great Zeitgeist cocktail, it is a frothy blend of Latin culture, social networking, globalization, weight consciousness, a feminizing society, solo entrepreneurship, and the maker’s movement. It is tempting to call Zumba the quintessential 21st-century business. Given that it traffics in health, joy, and community, that is a hopeful sign for the species.

As Buchanan’s comment suggests, Beto works with the tenets of neoliberalism and capitalism, directing Zumba towards human emotions, whilst harnessing a joyful product, disseminated through digital and media culture.

Zumba® Fitness has continued to capitalise on this sense of collective joy. In September 2014, Zumba® Fitness launched its first multimedia campaign: ‘Let it move you.’ As a Zumba PR (2014) stated, this phrase: ‘draws out the passion that lives deep within everyone. It’s a feeling that moves you not only in a physical sense, but also emotionally, telling you to break free and bust a move.’ Furthermore, 180LA, an A-List
advertisement agency, commissioned an ad to accompany the campaign, which featured various people in their workplaces, who began to have small uncontrollable movements and then broke into life through dance, to the soundtrack of Diplo’s *Express Yourself* (Zumba PR, 2014). Meanwhile, in May 2015, Zumba partnered with Royal Caribbean cruises to introduce the Zumba® Cruise, which set sail between 25 and 30 January 2016 and again in April 2017 and 2018. This shows how far Zumba®’s marketing strategy has gone: it is no longer about doing Zumba® classes alone; one can soak up the high life at the same time. Zumba® is becoming a global force and is expanding its own alternative empires, celebrating Latin and Afro-Caribbean cultures and taking all people, European, African, black or white, old or young, on board. At the helm is Beto himself, an updated vision of Dionysus, encouraging all to shimmy and enjoy their bodies, a global father that reproduces products and multitudes of followers. I will advance these thoughts now, through my experiences at the ZIN™ Academy, held in London on 10 July 2015, and my work as a Zumba® Fitness instructor. I will argue that a tension exists between Zumba as a capitalist enterprise and the collective joy it creates.

**Meeting Dionysus: ZIN Academy and Believe**

**ZIN Academy, 10-11 July 2015**

Early on Friday 10 July 2015, I made my way to the Excel Centre in the docklands of East London. Waiting for the next DLR at Canning Town, I spied other Zumba® enthusiasts on the platform. Their presence was unmistakable, with their bright patterned leggings, neon tops, and Zumba® wear sneakers. I chuckled to myself as I thought of how we must have appeared to businessmen on their way to the office. We arrived at Excel and were greeted with a queue of Zumba® enthusiasts, each Zumba®
outfit brighter than the last. Some fanatics practiced dance moves; others enthused
about Beto. These were hardcore devotees. Even though I had lived and loved Zumba®
for over three years, I had not realised what a cult following Beto had. In fact, I realised
I knew very little about him.

We were each given an armband, which allowed us entry into the auditorium, a large
space, with a Zumba® wear stall on the left-hand side and a huge raised stage in the
centre. Die-hard Beto fans immediately rushed to the front to claim their space. I
stayed a little back and waited. From the very moment Beto came on stage,
accompanied by his ZESs (Zumba® Education Specialists), he captivated the huge
audience of mainly female Zumba® instructors. As we went through the 1.5 hour
masterclass, I had the distinctive feeling that this was joy being bottled and passed on to
the masses. I was reminded of Nietzsche’s ([1872] 1923: 70) description of Dionysus in
*The Birth of Tragedy*: ‘a visionary figure, born as it were of their own ecstasy.’ The
women around me squealed with delight, as Beto rolled up his sweat-stained vest to
reveal a rippling six-pack. I could not quite muster the same enthusiasm. After all, I
don’t like worshipping one God! Something struck me about Beto. He is all muscles, all
brawn. This created conflicting feelings within me. I was left wondering was Beto just a
patriarchal figure, encouraging women to be sexy and men to be hyper-muscular, whilst
creaming off millions of dollars every year in this enterprise. I was reminded of this in
one of his pep talks, when he described how he mainly hired ‘normal’ girls for modelling
Zumba® wear, and only sometimes ‘beautiful’ girls featured. I can remember my heart
sinking when he said this. Yet, I cannot help but feel that the joy Zumba® gives to many
people through its global empire transcends its limitations. After all, Beto’s overall
motto is that ‘Zumba® is for all.’ In the pep talk, Beto encouraged us to ‘leave your egos
behind... Spread the love, not the poison.’ This resurfaced again in his discussion of ZES groups in different countries: the ZESs in Mexico are all in competition for ‘who is closer to Beto,’ while ZESs in the Philippines work together in harmony. Beto was clearly aware of his God-like status. Yet, he was also rather humble.

Following the masterclass and pep talk, a Zumba® business representative took to the stage, showing us graphs of Zumba®’s continuing popularity and the range of various other courses available to extend our Zumba® training. This had clearly been choreographed. The UK ZESs then took over, dividing us instructors into two lines. We would walk between one side of the room and the other in response to various questions. These included: ‘Have you ever talked about another instructor behind their back?’ The aim was to keep us humble, as they encouraged us not to be dismissive of other teacher's skills. I felt a little nauseous at this cheesy sentimentality. In the afternoon, we had a solo merengue and salsa mash-up session with Wally Diaz, one of Beto's old friends. Beto ducked backstage, awaiting his adoring fans, who queued for photos at every nearest opportunity. I did not have such a desire and did not even stay until the end of the day: the neon glare of the Zumba® wear and the cult following of Beto were becoming too much.

After the second day of the academy, I prepared myself for the ‘Believe’ after-party, held at the East London nightclub, Troxy. Believe is run by Maloca, a dance school, café and wellbeing centre that celebrates Latin culture, based in Putney, Southwest London. Kabir (2015b: 2) appropriately describes Maloca as ‘a pan-Caribbean space’ in the heart of London, demonstrating roots and migrations of Caribbean cultures. Maloca is a microcosm of the Zumba® enterprise, marketing Latin culture proudly whilst
celebrating a lifestyle brand. Interestingly, one of the Colombian owners, Catalina Vitolo, has a personal connection with Beto, having gone to dance lessons with him as a child (Kabir, 2015b: 2). Having provided some context, I will now describe my experiences of Believe.

**Believe, 11 July 2015**

Neon lights were flashing. And then it all kicked off. Groups of Zumba performers, UK and other European ZESs, as well as international artists such as Francesca Maria performed, leading routines amongst adoring fans. A few hours in, Beto made his appearance. He strode out on stage wearing white jeans and a white t-shirt, very similar to Kabir’s (2015b: 2-3) description of Believe in the previous year, except he wore black then. There were screams of joy, especially from adoring fans who had not been at the academy. Yet, something about Beto seemed lacklustre. Of course, he must have been tired after two long days and probably would be jetting off somewhere else the next day. Many dismayed faces were hoping for more.

Afterwards, he took the microphone, as the glowing performers stood behind him, sweat dripping from their brows. What he said next was not entirely expected: ‘This was great fun. It was a performance. But please remember that Zumba® is about education. We can have fun, but please remember the people in the class that you teach.’ The changing faces of the ‘performers’ behind him said it all: perspiration does not always mean that you will get praise. Afterwards, Beto went to the side of the stage, where he knew his adoring fans would be waiting for a photo opportunity. I reluctantly decided to go with the masses this time. Beto was cordial and smiled, a towel around his neck. Yet, I could sense what he was thinking: ‘Next customer.’ Indeed, Beto is the
Dionysus of the twenty-first century, his vision born of the same system and ideology that has forged asexuality as its nemesis: capitalism. I respect what Beto has done. He has liberated bodies worldwide and shared his culture in a positive light. Beto believes in education and that we become better teachers to inspire our students. But there is also a time and a place to say this.

The party petered out very soon after Beto’s exit. The collective joy went limp. I made my way for the Venezuelan corn wrap stand outside. Beto passed on the way out. He clearly did not want to mingle with the masses. People were leaving thick and fast, the neon glare burning itself out. And I was left asking myself a burning question: is Zumba® really collective joy or is it just another source of well-marketed capitalist kitsch? Inevitably this question still plagues me, especially having read Braidotti's (2006: 3) words, which describe the ‘double pull in contemporary cultures as a conflict between, on the one hand, the rising demands for subjective singularities, or autonomy and, on the other hand, the conservative re-territorialization of desires for the purpose of commercial profit.’ Undoubtedly, Zumba® is a business. Yet, I firmly believe that the sense of collective joy it bottles is something special, and dare I say it, worth paying for. I will now examine how Zumba® achieves this, by analysing Zumba® as: (i) an asexual space, (ii) a celebration of the autoerotic body and (iii) an invocation of West African collective danced rites, as contextualised through my own teaching experiences and some more specific examples from the ZIN™ Academy. I wish to highlight both the good and bad aspects of Zumba®: its harnessing of collective joy but also accusations that could be levelled against it, especially the cultural appropriation of the African body.
III - Zumba as a central example of Zorbitality

(i) Zumba® as an asexual space

An interesting connection exists between the emergence of asexuality as a sexual orientation category implying a ‘lack’ of sexual attraction (Bogaert, 2004: 279) and Zumba® as a form of individual bodily pleasure in the early twenty-first century: both asexuality and Zumba® subverted neoliberal ties. Firstly, the emergence of asexuality as a sexual orientation category decoupled sex and romance, and included the possibility of autoeroticism within its formulation. With particular reference to women who identified as asexual, a challenge to postfeminism was levelled and an alternative subjectivity offered beyond stereotypes of frigidity and radical feminism. Similarly, Zumba® packaged an empowered enjoyment of one’s own body, offering women in particular a safe space to play with various articulations of sexuality under a liberating label. Zumba® cultivated a community on local and global scales, similar to the growth of the worldwide asexual community and local asexual networks via AVEN.

I came to asexuality in September 2012, after six months of attending Zumba® classes and I wonder now if there is a connection between these two discoveries. Like Beto’s accidental discovery of Zumba, asexuality came to me in a moment of serendipity. I first heard the word ‘asexual’ in my head the day after my 24th birthday. The night before, I had danced in the heteronormative space of a Brazilian bar in London, simultaneously feeling stifled by the numerous dancing dyads around me, but held within a collective of friends. As I googled the word the next day, I felt a sense of relief. Through this label I felt empowered, as I now had a descriptor that encapsulated my suspicion of the dyad and my love of many people. However, I was also acutely aware that it failed to fully capture my lived reality, notably my immense energy and self-containment.
Through my discovery of Zumba®, six months later, I began to transcend the multiple bodily traumas I had experienced, during several journeys into extreme weight loss during my youth, including a 14kg purge when I was 11 years old. My body was completely in stasis throughout my adolescence, as I felt inhibited and completely trapped under a patriarchal gaze. Through my new experiences in Zumba®, I rejoiced, as, I grew to love the unexpected feeling of exhilaration I gained through moving to this infectious music, in synchrony with others, whilst discovering my incredible energy and rapidly improving coordination.

In March 2014, I experienced a shift in my subjectivity, from asexuality to autoeroticism, as the result of an intimate encounter with a man, having presented a paper on ‘Female (a)sexualities and the limits of political subversion’ at a conference in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Moreover, training as a Zumba® instructor in March 2015 and beginning to teach classes in July 2015, has led me to realise that Zumba® cannot be separated from my conception of my (a)sexuality. I now feel powerful, as I share my energy with others, which I acquired through a complex journey from vulnerability to collective ecstasy, and help others to transcend the limitations of their own bodies in a safe and carefree space.

In October 2015, I decided to abandon the label of ‘asexuality’ entirely, since I began to see that collective ecstasy was the basis of my libidinal life, and equally that sexual orientation categories are themselves products of patriarchy and capitalism. During a trip to Cuba in April 2016, I experienced a deep sadness, as I was surrounded by couple dance. I could not move in this space. Yet, by finding a space to do Zumba® on my own one day, facing the very mountains in Baracoa that gave birth to son, the founding rhythm of salsa, vulnerability was turned to the internalisation of collective ecstatic
motion. As I imagined multiple Zumba® communities worldwide, new relational and movement configurations were offered up in the process of moving my own body in orbit with others and the world.

This led me to develop my concept of Zorbitality, which completely changed the direction of my PhD work. Up to this point, I had been exploring ‘asexuality’ as a categorical orientation. I viscerally experienced the need to develop a new theory that totally deconstructed the concepts of sex and sexuality, beyond the abstract theorisations of Butler (1990) and Deleuze and Guattari ([1980] 2004). I realised that collective movement should be a central tool in this process, as it challenges the commodifications of capitalism. Furthermore, it connects my relational moves, characterised by an enjoyment of my body within a collective, with the resistant moves of the Zumba community: the deconstructed steps of Latin social dance, celebrated individually within a movement collective. In June 2016, I began some partnered sexual exploration with men, albeit non-penetrative practices, which further spoke to my deconstruction of the expectations of heterosexual sexual practices. Yet, in the process I became increasingly aware of the provocative nature of some Zumba® songs and their corresponding movements, by: (i) learning Spanish and (ii) studying the component dances of Zumba® in relation to Western colonisation of the ‘New’ World.

In El Serrucho (The Handsaw), a cumbia song that I teach, Mr. Black (El Presidente) asserts that he is a ‘carpenter,’ who can mould and manipulate a woman and that ultimately he will ‘nail’ (i.e. – fuck) her. The main section of this song features an arm movement that resembles a sawing motion, with an added twisting of the hips. On the words pertaining to ‘nail her,’ I get the class to do pelvic thrusts. These movements
haunt me when I consider the misogynist nature of the sawing reference. Admittedly, the choreography I use comes from a Zumba® DVD, so it is a replicated misogyny. I often notice students laughing, as they understand the meaning and how the movements relate. A simplistic reading could pass this choreography off as an example of postfeminist pastiche,¹² and thus an expression of a neoliberal bodily economy. Yet, I view it rather as parody. I argue that Zumba®’s ‘parodic repetition’ (Butler, 1990: 192) of sexualised motifs exposes ‘the phantasmatic effect of abiding identity as a politically tenuous construction’ (Butler, 1990: 192). Zumba® marks our death to any notions of identity, whilst harnessing a powerful collective spirit. Furthermore, as I will now argue, it is a celebration of the autoerotic body.

(ii) Zumba as a celebration of the autoerotic body

At the ZIN™ academy, one type of body was not idealised. The message was ‘enjoy your body for yourself.’ Indeed, I felt like this experience was a ritual Zumba® orgy, with no object of desire but rather the joy of desiring bodies. I think about my own autoerotic practices, which interestingly I came to around the same time as I trained as a Zumba® teacher in March 2015, and now can see why Zumba® appeals to me. Within a neoliberal economy, my body is not for my own consumption; it is to be consumed by another. This begs the question: What about my body’s pleasure for itself? Zumba® is a safe space to engage with my body’s enjoyment, not under the watchful gaze of white heterosexual male privilege. Undoubtedly, Zumba® empowers some women to feel ‘sexy’ and some would see this as playing into a postfeminist pastiche. Yet, in my view, Zumba® reverses both the implications of classificatory language and the patriarchal gaze by offering a post-verbal alternative. Thus, my response to the question: ‘How can
you be asexual and enjoy Zumba®?” becomes a resonant: ‘This is the truth of my body’s autoerotic pleasure,’ and still further a post-verbal break into a Beto shuffle or a merengue march. This resonates with Kabir’s (2013: 147) comment that new configurations of Afro-Caribbean dance forms can develop ‘new modes of conceptualising the relationship between desire, pleasure, and empowerment.’ Zumba® is arguably a safe container for women to explore their (a)sexualities away from the dance floor, for it is often said that Latin couple dances are dances of seduction (Aparicio, 1998). Because of my relational style I do not find it comfortable, safe or pleasurable to dance with one person alone, especially not one other person of the opposite sex. Indeed, in Zumba®, the couple dancing aspect of many of the dancing styles has been removed and in a postmodern turn one dances for oneself. I will explore this more in the next section, which will examine the fusion of European and African dance forms in the colonial encounter.

(iii) **Zumba® as an invocation of West African collective danced rites**

An invocation of the African body has been inherent within Zumba since its inception, with Beto mentioning his ‘ugly white skin’ (quoted in Kabir, 2015: 1) and declaring that ‘I want to be like them [Africans/Afro-Latinos/Afro-Colombians] – they have the flavour in their bodies’ (Kabir, 2015: 6). Undoubtedly, Beto’s words fetishise the African body, thus highlighting Zumba®’s role in cultural appropriation. Yet, as Gilroy (1995: 29) asserts, there is no such thing as a univocal African body, since the Black Atlantic exists ‘in a webbed network, between the local and global,’ internally divided by other factors such as sexuality, age, economics and ethnicity.
As Bartky (1990: 22-32) notes, colonialist regimes forge three types of oppression: stereotyping, cultural domination and sexual objectification. These processes overlap, resulting in a fragmentation where the objectified person becomes identified with their body. As hooks (1992: 21) asserts, it is vital to take stock of the Other's history, in order to create a more ethical relation, for the biggest danger is 'the commodification of Otherness,' where we seek to enable transformation through racialised sexual encounters. Indeed, Beto's words have sexual connotations, which emphasise the presumed sexual pleasure of the African body. Thus, he plays into hooks's (1992: 22) fear that 'sexuality is the metaphoric Other that threatens to take over, consume, transform via the experience of pleasure.' Yet, as hooks (1992: 22) quips, desire for the other and a longing for pleasure 'is an unrealized political possibility,' which Zumba® arguably taps into through its harnessing of a capitalist enterprise to create collective joy.

What Zumba® does achieve is a deconstruction of the seeming naturalness of coupledom in Latin social dance. Zumba® invokes two collective ecstatic traditions that were devalued by Western domination: West African solo dance within collectives, and Dionysian rites in the Western tradition. Many West African dances were danced in a circle and it was only when they became influenced by European courtly couple dance that Latin couple dance emerged (Ehrenreich, 2007). Whilst these dances today function 'as a means for the interracial appreciation and enjoyment of the black body, both male and female, where kinetic motion to syncopated percussive rhythms, and the concomitant generation of pleasure, becomes the channel for collective subversion' (Kabir, 2013: 143), I question the naturalisation of the dyad. In a postmodern turn, Zumba® removes the couple hold and allows increasing freedom throughout the whole
body. Although Zumba® is danced mainly in lines, circling movements are often incorporated. In some of my routines, I choreograph movements to the front and then get the participants to spin around in a circle, or to replicate the movements on each side. I argue that this is an adapted version of the circularity of African dance, thus subverting the linear tenets of capitalism. In essence, Zumba® does not celebrate the African body, but rather evokes its sense of collective ecstasy, as well as the memory of an uncreolised African body: ‘a body free of classification, with no specific origins’ (Sadlier, 2018a: 7). The wounds of Western colonial history may be turned to inner ecstasy through imagining the alternative configuration of solo within a collective.

Conclusion

The article has taken a Zorbital journey from Zorbitality as an emergent concept, to Zumba® as a marketed Dionysian rite, to my self-narrative and a deeper articulation of Zumba® as a central example of Zorbitality. I firstly defined Zorbitality as a resistant imaginary, which can be accessed through the internalisation of a collective ecstatic spirit, via Csikszentmihalyi’s (1992) theory of flow and Deleuze and Guattari’s ([1980] 2004) theory of the rhizome. Secondly, I examined Zumba® as a twenty-first century Dionysian rite of collective ecstasy, which simultaneously harnesses and subverts the logic of capitalism, drawing on my experiences from the ZIN™ Academy in July 2015 and work as a Zumba® Fitness instructor. In this section, I highlighted how the collective joy inherent within Zumba® as a twenty-first century Dionysian rite exists in tension with its role as a capitalist global corporation. Finally, I focused on the positive aspects of Zumba®, and examined it as a central example of Zorbitality. I argued that it offers an asexual space, celebrates the autoerotic body and invokes West African collective
movement rites. Ultimately, Zumba® destabilises the dominance of the dyad and evokes the collective traditions that were overhauled by Western colonisers of the ‘New’ World. Through my focus on Zumba®’s celebration of asexual embodiment and the autoerotic body, I have reconfigured the definition of asexuality as an individual ‘lack’ of sexual attraction, by highlighting its relationship with collective enjoyment, in the process of theorising, moving and writing. It is hoped that these musings will influence future research on human subjectivities, so that a more inclusive world can be built for all people, and that it will encourage methodological and stylistic creativity in scholarly writing.

My vision for the future is not utopian, since we need to ground resistance in everyday practices. Ideally, a ‘coordinated collective action’ (Guardiola-Rivera, 2010: 371) would wipe capitalism out, but perhaps the best we can do in this time and place is to utilise capitalist resources and to slowly subvert them. I experience this every month when I receive my latest Zumba choreography in the post. I have bought into the Zumba brand, yet have not been consumed by it. Instead, I draw on the resources that capitalism offers me and try and make the world a better place. In all our collective movement rites, we need to be aware of the importance of connecting local groups to global networks, through a product that spreads happiness.

In conclusion, Zorbitality addresses Butler’s (2004: 26) question of where queer people may find ‘enduring ties,’ in a world where they do not fit. As I have argued, to displace female (a)sexualities from their Western starting point - to queer them beyond existing queering paradigms - means that endless possibilities of repetition and transformation are opened up. One may orbit higher and higher; one may go beyond. Movement, life
spirit and digital culture merge seamlessly. Through Zorbitality, I do not dance myself to death. I dance myself to life, doing my own dance in collective motion with others, and finding infinite connections on local and global scales. The boundaries forged through language are erased. I am post-verbal. I am all motion. I am neither this nor that. I can be whoever I want to be. And this is what Zorbitality can offer all human beings, as we continue moving ecstatically together.

Notes

1 Postfeminism emerged in 1980s media culture. It simultaneously incorporated and repudiated feminism, promoting a sexualised image of women as an ironic ‘critique’ of feminism past (McRobbie, 2009). Braidotti (2006: 46) asserts that a rhetoric of sameness pervades postfeminism, and indeed a sense of white supremacy, where ‘diversity’ is only superficially endorsed: ‘Post-feminist liberal individualism is simultaneously multicultural and profoundly ethnocentric. It celebrates differences, even in the racialized sense of the term, so long as they conform to and uphold the logic of Sameness.’

2 As Laqueur (2003) notes in his insightful genealogy of solitary sex, Havelock Ellis was the first to use the term ‘autoeroticism’ with reference to the practice of masturbation, in Studies in the Psychology of Sex (1897, Volume 1: 161-283). The term autoeroticism is used in the present article, to avoid the cultural taboo surrounding the term ‘masturbation’ and to highlight the role of the ‘erotic’ in the process of solitary sex.

3 In the past, polyamory has largely been seen as having multiple sexual and relationships with different partners, but now it is being increasingly recognised that polyamory does not have to have a sexual or indeed romantic component (see Scherrer’s [2010] chapter on the relationship between asexuality and polyamory).

4 As the queer Marxist theorist, Rosemary Hennessy (2000) highlights, late capitalism bolsters the dyad and this has real implications for how people may or may not move within the world.
Writing as a lesbian who got married, she realised how she had: ‘lived within the privileges of heterosexuality, how they [heteronormative structures] had bolstered not just my economic security but my shameless sense of entitlement and ease of movement through the world’ (Hennessy, 2000: 2, emphasis added). The focus on movement here is central, since it serves to highlight how sexual identities play into the logic of capitalism. Whilst movement and fluidity are seen as liberatory forces within queer identities, Hennessy also makes us think about their limited political potential: ‘To the extent that they de-link sexuality from its historical connection to the human relationships of exploitation capitalism relies on, and to the extent that they reify desire, postmodern sexualities participate in the logic of the commodity and help support neoliberalism’s mystifications (Hennessy, 2000: 109).

5 Neoliberalism refers to a set of ideas that supported free-market capitalism, which emerged in Germany and the US from the 1970s. Neoliberalism is a self-determining concept that devalues the collective.

6 For more on autoeroticism as a form of self-othering for the poststructural subject, see Anderson (2017). For more on the power of the erotic and its connection with collective joy in everyday pursuits, see Lorde ([1978] 2007).


8 Markula (2006a, 2006b) explores Deleuze and Guattari’s ([1980] 2004) concept of the body without organs in the field of dance, arguing that it can enable possibilities for a resistant female bodily identity.

9 Without diminishing the ingenuity of this endeavour, it must be noted that other musicians had previously engaged in a similar process. For example, in December 1969, the Cuban musician, Juan Formell formed his own orchestra, which had a similar synthesis to Zumba®.
Roy (2002: 159-160) brings me to this connection: 'His goal was simple: He wanted to make people dance by sheer strength of a captivating rhythm and incantation, with a line-up that featured neither virtuosos nor brilliant soloists. He incorporated into the basics of the *son* rhythmic elements he borrowed from the music of other countries. He looked for new sounds and called the style he created *songo*. Today, according to Juan Formell, no one invents new rhythms; people only combine already existing ones: *son, merengue, reggae, ranchera, shake, pop, funk.* It seems like Beto's vision had been formulated a year before his birth. However, there were two crucial components that prevented the spread of *songo*: the absence of both the process of globalisation and due to the US embargo on Cuba, the US capitalist regime.

Every two months Zumba® instructors who are signed up to ZIN™ receive a volume with a music CD featuring approximately twelve tracks. An accompanying DVD offers two choreographies for each song, one that was demonstrated at a live class led by two star Zumba® instructors, and the other privately demonstrated by an instructor, with voiceover. Choreography notes accompany the CD and DVD. For the months in between, instructors are sent a Mega Mix CD, which contains selected Zumba® hits, with no accompanying choreography. Previously, the CDs and DVDs were posted worldwide but since early Autumn 2015 a digital option has been made available. For an additional fee, one can get the material both ways.

Previously, asexuality and autoeroticism were viewed as separate categories, as in Johnson’s (1977) chapter on asexual and autoerotic women. To be clear, in Johnson’s synthesis, asexual women were those who did not want to engage in partnered sexual relationships with others or masturbation. Autoerotic women did not want to engage in partnered sex but masturbated.

As Jameson ([1982] 1983): 114) explains: ‘pastiche is blank parody, parody that has lost its humor.’ Postfeminist pastiche can be related to Gill’s (2007) conception of a postfeminist sensibility. This sensibility focuses on self-determination and seeming independence, sexual visibility and the apparent enjoyment of this, without acknowledging that self-surveillance and
consumer culture collude to make women see themselves as autonomously sexualised rather than playing into a misogynist gaze.

Indeed, this trend of dancing for oneself is not new, in either Western or Latin dance. For instance, Ehrenreich (2007) reminds us that during the rock and roll era, people began to dance together in groups rather than in couples. Equally, in genres such as the Cuban timba, which developed in the late twentieth century, couples dance close and do not touch, yet make sexually explicit gestures that connect symbolically with some of Zumba®’s motifs.

Furthermore, in 1982, the Cuban group, Los Van Van, launched an innovative rhythm called conga-son, a slow and measured style where people danced separately, as evidenced in the song, El Baile del suey cansado (The dance of the tired ox). In this vein, it could be argued that any sexualised movements in Zumba® songs, such as pelvis thrusts and shimmies become removed from the context of sexual engagement with one other person. Perhaps Zumba® is the ultimate non-sexual polyamory, as could be said of asexuality as a sexual 'orientation.'

Significantly, these were not explicitly couple dances, but were rather set dances. Couples danced in lines and moved to different partners. Partner hold was not used (see Manuel, 2009 for more on how these were creolised). The watershed moment occurred with the emergence of the waltz in nineteenth-century Europe, which was the first strictly defined couple dance (see Scott, 2008). Significantly, it emerged at the very same moment as bourgeois capitalism. This marked a democratisation of the dance floor, which had the dyad at its core. The polka and mazurka added to this base. In Argentina, the most European-dominated Latin American country, the tango also emerged as a dance strictly for couples. The black influence in tango is often denied, but it is in fact a fusion of European couple dance and African rhythm (see Dom Pedro’s 2013 film, Tango Negro: The African Roots of Tango). For a comprehensive history of tango, see Savigliano (1995).

Indeed, as Kabir (2014) succinctly argues, the role of African rhythms, as manifested in Zumba®, has largely been under-theorised as a way of subverting the linearity of capitalism.
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