

**CONSTRUCTING MASCULINITY: A STUDY ON THREE
COMMUNITY COLORGUARD TROUPES
IN KUALA LUMPUR**

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**CULTURAL CENTRE
UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA
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**DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL
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CONSTRUCTING MASCULINITY: A STUDY ON THREE COMMUNITY COLORGUARD TROUPES IN KUALA LUMPUR

ABSTRACT

This research focuses on the construction of masculinity within three community colorguard troupes in Kuala Lumpur. Colorguard has existed since the early days during the Civil War, where a military band would accompany soldiers on the battlefield. The color guard, or flag-bearer, would also march in battle with soldiers, carrying the “colors” that represents a particular nation. Flags and banners have been used by armies in battle to serve this purpose. As the years passed, colorguards became more correlated with marching bands. In a marching band, the colorguard is a non-musical section where the performers carry equipment such as flags and mock rifles made out of wood. The colorguard provides additional visual aspects to the overall performance, where the colors of the flags accompany and support the music in adding a layer of visual effect. In the United States, the modern colorguard activity is performed by males and females, incorporating dance such as ballet, jazz, modern, or interpretative dance while handling equipment such as flags, rifles, and sabers. In Malaysia, there are two types of colorguards, the female-dominated colorguards in high school marching bands, and community colorguard troupes consisting of majority males that performs without the accompaniment of a marching band. The practice of colorguards in high school marching bands, consisting of flag bearers with more elegant and feminized movements, is dominated by females. Community colorguard troupes, on the other hand, consist of predominantly male performers who use their advantage in physical strength to handle the equipment, such as rifles and sabers that were non-existent in high school marching bands. This ethnographic research examines three community colorguard troupes situated in Kuala Lumpur and how they construct masculinity within their performances. The first troupe is Guards Conspiracy, an all-male colorguard group. The second troupe is Vortex Winterguard, a mix-gendered group with majority males, and the third group is the Batteryheadz Colorguard Ensemble, an equally mix-gendered group. This research examines the construction of masculinity in colorguard that challenges the stigma of dancing being associated with femininity. This dissertation interrogates how masculinity is being constructed, performed, and asserted by men. This research offers a new perspective on masculinity within the field of dance in Malaysia.

Keywords: masculinity, colorguard, femininity, dance, performance

KONSTRUKSI MASKULINITY: KAJIAN KE ATAS TIGA KUMPULAN KOMUNITI COLORGUARD DI KUALA LUMPUR

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini memfokuskan kepada konstruksi maskuliniti di dalam tiga kumpulan komuniti colorguard di Kuala Lumpur. Colorguard telah wujud sejak zaman Perang Saudara Amerika, di mana sesebuah pancaragam akan turut serta mengikuti pasukan tentera ke medan perang. Color guard, atau pembawa bendera, juga akan mengikuti perarakan bersama tentera, membawa "warna" yang mewakili negara tertentu. Bendera dan sepanduk telah digunakan oleh banyak tentera dalam pertempuran untuk memenuhi tujuan ini. Setelah sekian lama, colorguards semakin berkait rapat dengan pancaragam. Di dalam sesebuah pancaragam, colorguard adalah seksyen yang tidak bermain alat muzik, di mana pemain akan membawa peralatan seperti bendera dan senapang tiruan yang diperbuat daripada kayu. Ia memberikan aspek visual tambahan kepada persembahan keseluruhan, di mana alunan bendera akan mengiringi persembahan muzik. Di Amerika Syarikat, aktiviti colorguard moden dimainkan oleh kaum lelaki dan wanita, menggabungkan elemen tarian seperti balet, jazz dan moden kontemporari, sambil mengendalikan peralatan seperti bendera, senapang kayu dan saber. Di Malaysia, terdapat dua jenis colorguard, iaitu colorguard yang didominasi oleh kaum wanita di dalam persembahan pancaragam di peringkat sekolah menengah, dan colorguard yang terdiri daripada majoriti kaum lelaki di dalam kumpulan komuniti yang dipersembahkan tanpa diiringi pasukan pancaragam. Colorguard di peringkat sekolah menengah, yang terdiri daripada pemain bendera dengan elemen pergerakan yang lebih elegan dan feminin, didominasi oleh wanita, manakala pemain lelaki tidak diberi tumpuan. Sebaliknya, kumpulan komuniti colorguard pula terdiri daripada majoriti pemain lelaki yang menggunakan kelebihan mereka dari segi kekuatan fizikal untuk mengendalikan peralatan, yang merangkumi senapang kayu dan saber yang tidak wujud di peringkat sekolah menengah. Kajian etnografi ini memfokuskan kepada tiga kumpulan komuniti di Kuala Lumpur dan bagaimana mereka mengkonstruksikan maskuliniti di dalam persembahan mereka. Kumpulan pertama adalah Guards Conspiracy, sebuah pasukan yang terdiri daripada pemain lelaki sahaja. Kumpulan kedua adalah Vortex Winterguard, pasukan campuran jantina yang majoritinya lelaki, dan kumpulan ketiga adalah Batteryheadz Colorguard Ensemble, pasukan yang terdiri daripada jumlah campuran jantina yang seimbang. Kajian ini membutirkan konstruksi maskuliniti di dalam colorguard yang mempersoalkan isu stereotaip berkaitan jantina di Malaysia, di mana wujudnya stigma tarian dikaitkan dengan sifat kewanitaan. Kajian ini menyiasat bagaimana maskuliniti dikonstruksi, dipersembahkan dan ditekankan oleh lelaki di dalam sebuah bentuk seni yang dianggap feminin dan dipandang serong oleh pihak awam. Kajian ini menawarkan perspektif baru mengenai maskuliniti di dalam bidang tarian di Malaysia.

Kata kunci: maskuliniti, colorguard, femininiti, tarian, persembahan

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This research on constructing masculinity within community colorguard¹ troupes is critically enveloped within the field of gender and dance. There are currently two types of colorguard in Malaysia, the female-dominated colorguard troupes that accompany marching bands in high schools, and community colorguard troupes that are mostly male-dominant that performs without the presence of a marching band. The participation of males in high school colorguards in Malaysia is very rare, where many high schools comprise of only female performers. The act of spinning and dancing with flags suggests that the activity is more suitable for females.² Thus, the women either predominate this form, or men are being marginalized, as they are not interested to enroll in colorguards due to the fear of being seen as effeminate.³

On the contrary, male enrollment in community colorguard troupes are increasing by and large due to the fact that these men are transforming the activity to appear more masculine. Within community colorguard troupes, the physicality and risk-taking elements that involve using specific equipment play a very important role in the construction of masculinity. Masculinity in the context of my research is “socially constructed ways to be a man” (Connell, 1995, p. 35). Men within community colorguard troupes culturally and socially construct their understandings of masculinity through the representations of the strong, hard, aggressive male performer, compared to the weak, soft, feminine females and their labor within colorguard. Masculinity is composed of gestures, acts, and enactments (Connell, 1995; Hatty, 2000), which will be analysed more closely through this research. As such, gender performativity (Butler, 1990) also serves as a crucial aid through understanding how these men construct their masculinity.

In order to examine how masculinity is constructed within community colorguard troupes, this research first looks at how the art form is being performed in the United States of America (the USA). In the USA, both men and women perform dance routines while handling equipment, as it is culturally more acceptable for men to dance there. In Malaysian high school marching bands, women twirl the flags while dancing, thus the activity caters more to females. This research, thus, begins its examination by looking at performances of colorguards at high school marching bands in Malaysia. Compared to the USA, dancing is not seen as an activity suitable for men in Malaysia, hence emerges the stereotype that men should not dance. This research attempts to investigate the ways in which males have responded to contrasting gender bias and stereotyping that have inevitably shaped and constructed the performance of masculinity within community colorguard troupes today. As such, the case studies under analysis in this research offer insights into cultural ideals of masculinity as well as the construction of masculinity within the Malaysian colorguard scene.

During the Civil War in the 18th century, the colorguard member, or flag-bearer, would march in battle with soldiers, carrying the “colors”⁴ that represented a particular nation. The “colors” here refers to the color of the national flag, as opposed to color being associated to a property possessed by an object.⁵ As the years passed, colorguards became more correlated with marching bands, where members would spin flags and rifles to accompany the musicians. The modern colorguard that is present in the marching arts today started to form in the USA. It was performed in drum and bugle corps governed by Drum Corps International (DCI) during the 1950s and 1960s.⁶ As colorguard began to gain more popularity, the performers substituted the real rifles with wooden replicas, while utilizing colorful flags within the marching drum corps. Since the 1960s, more groups saw what a colorguard could do and how it could benefit their shows in terms of

adding a visual representation of the music being played. By the 1990s, a lot of high schools, universities, and drum corps groups in America had colorguards. The activity itself kept evolving each year. New equipment, new dances, and new music was introduced to the repertoires.

According to an interview I had with a prominent colorguard instructor from the USA, T. J. Doucette, though the activity was traditionally male (back in the day during war times), it is predominantly female in its current form. However, men are typically the strongest at the weapons (i.e. rifle and saber⁷) since they usually have the ability to toss and catch the weapons effortlessly. Towards the end of the 1990s, colorguards has thus allowed both males and females to be incorporated within a single troupe. A successful colorguard troupe is measured by how well the performers, both male and female, handle specific equipment such as flags and rifles, with the incorporation of dance such as ballet, modern dance,⁸ and theatrical dance. Today, both males and females are given equal opportunities at attempting different kinds of equipment and dance genres. Evidently, in the USA, it is acceptable for men to be involved in dance (Burt, 2007).

Likewise, according to T.J., colorguard troupes in the USA also participate in competitions that exclude musical performers. These are known as indoor colorguards, or winter guard, that take place after the marching band season ends in the summer in August. Most of these troupes are found in North America. Held indoors during the winter, typically in gymnasiums, winter guard competitions are a growing part of the pageantry activity that has taken the modern colorguard activity to the next level. Unlike DCI, colorguards involved in these indoor competitions may be part of a high school, college marching band, or a stand-alone organization in these educational institutions.

Since the year 2000, many Malaysian high school marching bands, mostly located in urban districts, gradually adopted the styles from the USA. Prior to that, Malaysian marching bands adopted the British style of performance (Syed Khairuzman, 2012), where performances are more military-like in terms of visual design and instrumentation. Following the year 2000, changes could be seen in the attire, instruments, marching styles, music, and repertoires chosen. A major development was the inclusion of the colorguard section. The Victoria Institution, a government-owned high school situated in Kuala Lumpur, nurtured one of the first few bands which began to adopt these changes, through its marching band, the Victoria Institution Cadet Corps Band, also known as VICCB (Syed Khairuzman, 2012). Eventually, the influence of the colorguard slowly grew and spread around the country, mostly in Peninsular Malaysia.

Most colorguard troupes in Malaysian high school marching bands are dominated by females. This is because the equipment being used is limited to only flags, while the movements involved spinning and twirling of the flag performed with dance routines. No rifles are being used due to the restrictions enforced by the school authorities, as rifles are deemed more dangerous to handle and possess a higher risk of injury among the members. Males are rarely seen twirling the flag, even in co-ed high schools. The scenario is different in the USA, where there is an increased enrollment of males in colorguard. Here, men focus on heavier equipment such as rifles and sabers. In Malaysian high school colorguards, female performers perform dance routines with flags, thus colorguards being commonly referred to as a dance form. The activity appears more feminine through the extensive use of flags and dance being incorporated in the routines. The dance sequences use a set of movements (like ballet movements) which are deemed more suitable for females, thus it becomes mainly a female-dominated art form in high schools.

In high schools, males shy away from colorguard and choose to enroll in other sections, like the brass⁹ or percussion.¹⁰ In high school colorguards, twirling flags and dancing are perceived as effeminate acts, thus it emasculates the men when they perform.¹¹ In fear of being ridiculed by the public, they avoid enrolling in colorguards. I recall a conversation I had with one of my fellow colleagues from the VICCB. He felt ashamed appearing in public holding the flag, while other men who marched in the percussion or brass section said that they were proud and confident with what they did. As such, men who are passionate, or who wish to try out colorguard, choose not to perform in high schools. They find other avenues in pursuit of their interest. Men who do colorguard in all-male high schools, such as the VICCB, also seek other platforms outside of school to expand their knowledge in colorguard upon graduating.

More recently, males who are passionate about colorguards have found a new platform to showcase their skill and talent. Community colorguard troupes in Malaysia serves as a space for young men to break away from the restrictions imposed in high school colorguards. Here, males are given more opportunities to handle heavier equipment like the rifles that were non-existent in high school colorguards. More importantly, handling heavy equipment is linked to the expression of masculinity. Community colorguard troupes in Malaysia follow winter guard, an activity popularized in the USA, which is performed indoors to pre-recorded music. The music used in community colorguard troupes varies from popular music sung by famous artists, to classical tunes such as Beethoven and Mozart. However, despite the fact that it is gaining more popularity among men, there are only three community colorguard troupes in existence in Malaysia to date - Batteryheadz Colorguard Ensemble, formed in 2013, Guards Conspiracy, formed in 2014, and Vortex Winterguard, formed in 2015. All three troupes are situated within the vicinity of Kuala Lumpur.

This research focuses particularly on these three troupes, which comprise more male than female performers. Community colorguard troupes are founded by colorguard instructors and enthusiasts, and consist of school leavers, university students, and full-time working pupils, mostly former marching band members from their respective high schools. These troupes embody the American version of winter guard with the exclusion of the marching band. There are no restrictions or limitations to what the members are able to perform, thus, the inclusion of rifles and sabers within its repertoires is common. It enables them to be at par with the current trend, especially when they compete in colorguard competitions abroad. Compared to the female-dominated activity in high schools, males have started to enroll in community troupes and dominate the performance space. The females are now required to follow and keep up with them.

This research examines how male colorguard performers within community colorguard troupes construct and negotiate contemporary discourses of performing masculinity. This research details activities carried out by males within community colorguard troupes from the year 2015 to 2017. I specifically observe practice sessions, rehearsals, and competitions. The findings and analysis presented in this research are based on data gathered during the three years of ethnographic fieldwork in various locations in Kuala Lumpur. The methodology involves a range of qualitative research methods of which includes engaging in embodied fieldwork through participant-observation, interviews, writing field notes, and collecting multimedia artefacts. By attending rehearsals and competitions to observe and examine how young men construct masculinity in colorguards, this research offers a new perspective on masculinity within the field of dance in Malaysia.

1.2 Background of Research

The decision to undertake this research did not begin in a conventional way where one discovers a field of interest and proceeds to conduct the relevant work in the field. This research stemmed from my own personal experience as a colorguard performer; I was introduced to colorguards in high school at the age of thirteen when I enrolled at the Victoria Institution Cadet Corps Band (VICCB), an all-male marching band situated in the heart of Kuala Lumpur. I recall my experience in VICCB performing as a colorguard member from 2001 to 2007, utilizing the flag and rifle to accompany the band's performances and in competitions both locally and abroad. In the year 2001, the colorguard section was first introduced, embodied by the bagpipe section, as the band had a limited number of members to accommodate this new section. Being a member of the bagpipe¹² section, I was first introduced to the flags. I performed basic routines such as spinning and tossing under the direction of a colorguard instructor from Indonesia, Andi Hassan. Hassan, a prominent colorguard practitioner in Indonesia, was hired by the school in 2002 to teach us basic flag techniques to be incorporated within our performances. In 2001, the colorguard section was exposed to basic rifle techniques by Hassan. We learned to spin and toss the rifle in ways that the American colorguard troupes had done it. We started to incorporate both flags and rifles in our performances.

The VICCB became the first band in Malaysia to introduce the colorguard section at the National Level competition in 2003. During that year, we received mixed reactions and feedback from the audience members and judges. The majority of the crowd were not too impressed with this new style of performance. I recall the colorguard members, including myself, being called *sissy*¹³ or *pondan*¹⁴ by one of the judges. Since then, colorguards were banned to be included within performances in Malaysian marching band competitions. It was only in 2009 that the rules went through changes to allow

colorguards to be incorporated at the National level competition, to keep up with the trend of how marching bands were being performed all around the world. The closest examples at the time were marching bands in neighbouring countries such as Thailand and Indonesia. These bands had already adopted the American version of marching bands since the late 1990s.¹⁵ This change was influenced by an incident during which Malaysia organized the Kuala Lumpur World Marching Band Competition (KLWMBC) in 2007, the first ever international level marching band competition held in Malaysia. Marching bands from both Thailand and Indonesia also participated. Bodindecha Marching Band from Thailand won first place, followed by Marching Band Bontang Pupuk Kaltim from Indonesia, which took second place. Since the year 2007, a few high schools situated in urban areas started to implement colorguards to adhere to this change, though it consisted of mostly females.

Upon graduating from high school in 2007, my passion for the marching arts grew, thus, I became a marching band instructor myself. I started my teaching endeavours along with Hezrul Hizham (also an ex-member of the VICCB) where I played the role of assistant colorguard instructor at the VICCB in 2008, under the guidance of Andi Hassan and Sehat Kurniawan from Indonesia. From 2008 to 2013, colorguards slowly started to be implemented in major high school marching bands, such as the Keat Hwa Marching Band and Sultanah Asma Marching Band from Kedah, Nan Hwa Marching Band from Perak, and the Sultan Ibrahim Marching Band from Johor, to name a few. However, during that time, the art form appeared more feminine with the use of flags and dance being incorporated in its routines. The bands used a set of movements which were more suitable for females, thus, it became mainly a female-dominated art form. There was no use of heavy (and the more dangerous) equipment like the rifles.

My journey within the performing arts industry continued as I enrolled at the Dance Department in the University of Malaya in 2012. I took up a Bachelor's degree in Performing Arts (Dance). I was exposed to all kinds of dance styles, from traditional to ballet, to modern and ballroom dance during my study as an undergraduate dance student. My interest in dance grew, and as a result, it led me to form the very first community colorguard troupe in Malaysia, the Batteryheadz Colorguard Ensemble, in 2013. Along with a few friends who were also colorguard enthusiasts, we started to incorporate dance sequences into flag and rifle routines. We opened up recruitment to enable young performers with a passion in the marching arts from all over Malaysia to become part of the ensemble. At the beginning, I noticed that more males were interested to join rather than females. They came from all parts of West Malaysia such as Kedah, Penang, Perak, and Johor. They were all studying at various universities in Kuala Lumpur.

Upon completion of my Degree, I paid more attention to the Batteryheadz Colorguard Ensemble. I transformed it from a troupe that focused on performing for corporate events and dinners to a troupe that took part in its first ever colorguard competition in Jember, Indonesia in 2014. At the time, the troupe consisted of eight males and eight females. I played the role of a visual designer. Under my supervision, most of the choreographies were done by my fellow colleague, Hairul Zamzuri, an ex-member of the VICCB colorguard section. It was a success as the troupe barged first place during the competition. The performance received positive feedback from the Indonesians. According to them, this was the first time they had witnessed a colorguard ensemble from Malaysia had successfully embodied the American version of colorguards. Our success story soon spread throughout Malaysia, which resulted in the formation of two other community colorguard troupes.

In early 2015, Guards Conspiracy was formed by the ex-members of the VICCB, followed by the formation of Vortex Winterguard by colorguard enthusiasts in Kuala Lumpur in late 2015. Unlike high school colorguard troupes, these community colorguard troupes were formed by colorguard enthusiasts, mostly school leavers, university graduates and independent colorguard instructors, who are not bound to any restrictions or regulations evident within high school marching bands. The participation is usually open to the public, preferably those who have some basic knowledge in marching bands. Both males and females take part in these community troupes to challenge themselves by trying out new things, or simply to fill up their weekends with activities that they are passionate about. These troupes perform without the presence of a marching band, performed to different kinds of musical genres. Performances either take place indoors or outdoors and depend on the situation and needs of the performance.

To date, there are only three community colorguard troupes in existence in Malaysia. There are more male than female performers in these groups. This in large has influenced me to conduct this research; to address the changes that are taking place within the art form, where it is now becoming more popular among young males. By observing this transformation, it offers me a platform in which I am able to discuss the construction of masculinities within colorguards, an art form which was once considered to be feminine in Malaysia. Apart from observing the males and how they construct masculinity, I intend to address the motivation for this transformation, as the males within community colorguard troupes position themselves as being masculine. As such, I argue that this form of masculinity is similar to the forms of masculinity present in other physical activities more suitable for males, such as sports. The males in colorguard utilizes their strength and capabilities to perform more complex routines to assert the male dominance within the colorguard activity in Malaysia.

1.3 Statement of Problem

The primary problem in the Malaysian colorguard scene is the lack of participation by males in high school colorguards. Conversely, until more recently, male colorguard enthusiasts are only able to fulfil their passion by enrolling in community colorguard troupes, as participation is more open and not restricted to females. The construction of masculinity displayed by males within a form which was dominated by females will be examined. The basis of this research will focus on this form of masculinity as being constructed within the three community colorguard troupes, to transcend the perception that colorguard is a feminine art form in Malaysia. The association of sports within the construction of masculinity plays a very important role in this transformation. As a result, colorguards becomes more of an athletic art form.

In Malaysia, if it was an all-male high school marching band, like the Victoria Institution Cadet Corps Band (VICCB), then the males get to do colorguard. However, in order to successfully replicate the American colorguards, males are required to dance while twirling the flags. In 2003, during the National Marching Band Competition held at Bukit Jalil Stadium, the VICCB had attempted to do that, which resulted in heavy criticism by the public. In fact, I recall some of my peers were reluctant to warm-up their routines outside the stadium, in fear of being ridiculed by the public. Likewise, the marching band community were still very new to the idea of the American influence.

On the other hand, if it was a co-ed high school, only females were positioned in the colorguard section. From 2008 to 2013, colorguards started to be implemented in major high school marching bands, such as the co-ed Keat Hwa Marching Band and the all-female Sultanah Asma Marching Band from Kedah, and the co-ed Nan Hwa Marching Band from Perak. However, during that time, the art form appeared more feminine with

the extensive use of flags and dance incorporated in the routines. Only females were chosen to spin the flags, while males were given the responsibility to play heavier equipment such as the brass or percussion. Thus, male participation in colorguards were uncommon, as they were mostly marching and manoeuvring heavier equipment such as the trumpet, tuba, snare drum or bass drum.

In Malaysian high schools, the colorguard section is typically dominated by females. The females twirl and wave the flags while adding movements such as a leg extension, hand gestures, or body turns. These set of movements, done together with flag choreography, positions colorguard as a dance form in Malaysia. While there are mix-gendered troupes comprising of male performers, their roles and responsibilities are very much different.¹⁶ In co-ed high schools, if males enrolled in colorguard, they have to dance with the flags and follow the females, hence take the risk of being referred to as *pondan*. This is the present state within high school marching bands in Malaysia. As such, there are fewer males in colorguards. The drop in male participation reinforces the impression that colorguards are exclusive to females. Males are required to be physically strong in high schools.

In the case of the VICCB, St. Johns Institution, and another all-male high school from Kedah, Sultan Abdul Hamid College, males had to bear the flags and accompany the band. Their movements with the flags had to be choreographed with less twirling and dancing. They marched in time together with the band while carrying the flags in a way that the military had done it back in the day, displaying the flags at different angles with no dance motives. Their movements with the flags were more rigid, thus the entire performance was more restrained with limited use of creativity. With no elements of dance or theatricality involved, there was no entertainment value within their

performances, as it had a more military feel and presence to it which tend to bore the audience over a long period of time.

In Malaysia, colorguard was, and still is, commonly referred to as a dance form, being performed alongside marching bands to support the music from a visual standpoint. The main purpose is to dance and wave the flags while providing added visual elements to enhance a marching band performance. Males who enroll in high school colorguards fear of being emasculated, where body movements while twirling the flags are regarded as feminine. Community colorguard troupes, on the other hand, is performed without the presence of marching bands. When males enroll in these troupes, they do not see themselves as dancers, rather, as physical athletes. Males treat it as a physical activity associated with sports because they do not want society to assume that they are doing dance. Sports is perceived to be more masculine than dance.

This research, therefore, seeks to explore the interrelations between men and the performance of masculinity within community colorguard troupes in Kuala Lumpur. By treating colorguard as a form of masculated physical activity like sports through rigorous training in accomplishing complex choreography while handling heavy equipment, males are asserting their dominance in colorguards within the three community colorguard troupes. Male performers are able to utilize their strength to, for example, toss the flag higher, which enables them to perform more difficult movements than females. The construction of masculinity by males, where colorguard is framed as a physical activity similar to sports rather than dance will be highlighted in this research. Since sport is equated to being more masculine (Griffin, 1995; Gard, 2006), and the usage of equipment such as rifles and sabers, play a very important role in adopting masculine traits. Thus, males within community colorguard troupes identify colorguard as a masculine activity.

Based on my observations and interviews with my informants, I bring to surface how these men perceive colorguards within community troupes as masculine as they pay more attention to equipment handling rather than dance.

Throughout this research, the arguments pertain to the overarching scenario of gender bias and stereotyping within high school colorguard troupes. The male performers within these troupes perceive that gender bias exists in the opportunities afforded to males within high school colorguards, especially in co-ed high schools. These biases appear to lead to a greater valorisation of colorguards being perceived as a feminine activity, therefore is exclusive only to females. I argue that community colorguard troupes in Malaysia serve as a platform for young men to break through the boundaries of gender norms and stereotypes, where males are given more opportunities to perform colorguard routines in a manner that is perceived to be more masculine to them.

These troupes provide an opportunity for emerging male performers to showcase their strength, hand and body coordination, and more importantly their ability to execute difficult and more challenging choreography. Therefore, the members are able to break away from limitations of how colorguard was performed in high school marching bands, in direct comparison to how the activity should be performed in the USA. Colorguard troupes from America serve as an inspiration for males who perform in community troupes in Malaysia, where in the USA, the choreography is more intricate and challenging. At the same time, colorguard choreographers and instructors play an important role in the assertion of masculinity within these community troupes. They are the key figures in addressing the issues on gender and performance.

1.4 Significance of Research

This research is carried out to offer new perspectives on the construction and performance of masculinity within the field of dance. Such studies are scarce in Malaysia. With the inclusion of more males in community colorguard troupes, this research offers a fresh perspective to the construction of masculinity within dance in Malaysia. I argue that males perceive colorguard as a physical activity rather than a dance performance, hence, colorguard becomes very popular among youths in Malaysia. This research focuses on men rather than women because the number of men who enroll in community colorguard troupes are increasing year after year, thus, contesting the phenomenon that colorguard is exclusively a female activity. By interviewing these men and examining how they perceive colorguard, this research highlights the use of a narrative exploration and analysis as a useful methodological tool in the study of masculinity within the field of dance.

This research presents data collected from small groups of men who are involved in colorguard within the vicinity of Kuala Lumpur. They are the everyday, average middle-class men who have no professional training in dance, or have never been involved in dance. This research provides further verification of the broader social justification of what it means to be a man in Malaysia, that is most visible with, but clearly not limited to, middle-class boys and men. Ultimately, this research aims to provide academic reference for future research related to the study of masculinity in dance within the Malaysian context.

1.5 Research Questions and Objectives

As opposed to gender equality in colorguards in the United States, in Malaysia, colorguards in high school is dominated by females. With that in mind, some key questions that this research aims to address are:

- 1) What are the differences between high school colorguards and community colorguard troupes?
- 2) Why is there a need for young men to construct masculinity in colorguard?
- 3) How is masculinity being performed in community colorguard troupes in Malaysia?
- 4) How is the perception of the public towards men in community colorguard troupes?

In relation to the research questions stated above, the aim of this research is to first examine the history of colorguards in high school marching bands in Malaysia, providing an insight into the current gender politics within the colorguard activity as a point of departure. It is important to understand the historical development of colorguards in Malaysia before focusing on the current issues pertaining to gender politics within the Malaysian colorguard scene. This research focuses on the male performers in constructing masculinity within community colorguard troupes, since there are currently more males enrolling in these organizations. Therefore, it is vital to first look at how and why this transformation happened in the first place.

Next, this research examines how masculinity is asserted in a dance form which is dominated by females in high schools, by focusing on the males within three community colorguard troupes in Kuala Lumpur, Guards Conspiracy, Vortex Winterguard, and Batteryheadz Colorguard Ensemble. The specific roles and responsibilities carried out by the males via the division of labor are examined. The

division of labor is discussed in this research, highlighting the theory of “masculinity” as the focal point.

Next, this research aims to highlight how the form of masculinity being constructed and negotiated within community colorguard troupes is similar to the form of masculinity generally present in other physical activities that is perceived to be masculine, such as sports. This research aims to demonstrate how males in colorguard performs challenging choreography using heavy equipment in a similar way in which a sportsman is challenged in other physical activities. This masculine performance by community colorguard troupes is distinctive and vastly different from the traditional practices followed in high school colorguards in Malaysia. The emphasis has now shifted from dance to equipment handling.

This research contests the stigma that has restricted males to participate in colorguard troupes in high school; to breakthrough gender confinement in order to emulate the activity in the USA. By observing the perception of the public towards males who perform colorguard in community troupes, this research is aimed at providing a foundation in promoting more male participation within the Malaysian colorguard scene. Ultimately, this research aims to transcend the overarching scenario of gender stereotyping and biases that exists within the Malaysian colorguard scene as a whole.

1.6 Methodology of Research

The research is done based on a qualitative approach which involves methods of observations and participant observation, interviews, archival research, and based on a reflective ethnography through self-reflection and writing. Extensive reading is done as pre-fieldwork in preparation to equip myself with sufficient knowledge about gender and performance theories, marching bands and colorguards. First, the research is carried out using primary and secondary materials as aid. I first gathered data from books, journals, online materials and dissertations. I also examined archival transcripts from the Victoria Institution library to gain a better understanding on the history of marching bands in Malaysia. Next, once all the secondary materials were gathered, I entered the field to gather data using qualitative methods of interviews, observations, informal discussions and participant observation.

This research requires a thorough understanding on form of masculinity carried out by the members from each troupe. To understand, analyse and interpret their behaviors and characteristics, a qualitative method is crucial. According to Trumbull as quoted by Taylor, a qualitative method is “inductive, with the purpose of describing multiple realities, developing deep understanding, and capturing everyday life and human perspectives” (Taylor, 2005, p.101). In this research, observations are crucial to record the event thoroughly to gain a deep understanding of the event and its participants without “disturbing the normal order of the event” (Buckland, 1999, p.47). I prepared for fieldwork beforehand by reading information collected from secondary materials. The fieldwork preparation allowed me to be fully prepared when observing the target groups and when formulating questions.

Numerous observations were conducted during practice sessions, rehearsal, and competitions involving the three respective troupes. Through this method, I was able to observe the characteristics and the division of labor between males and females. This allowed me to gain a better understanding on how each practice session was being carried out through equipment handling and dance routines by male members. Participant-observation is performed to acquire a better comprehension of the style of movements used in their routines. Methods of performance theories were also applied during participation in the routines in order to deliver the research and to derive the dance vocabulary normally used in the movements. Direct involvement in the routines performed by the members can effectively help me in acquiring competency of the form of masculinity being asserted by male performers.

Informal interviews and observations were conducted at practice and rehearsal venues throughout the Klang Valley, as well as during competitions for a period of three years. Participant observations were included in this research to create a trustworthy relationship between myself and the participants. All notes gathered from the field were written and documented using a field journal. Observations during colorguard workshops, classes and rehearsals were carried out using cameras, video recorders and audio recorders. The data gathered was then transferred into a laptop and saved in labelled folders. Extra copies were made and saved onto the laptop and external hard disc. Informal interviews were conducted on the choreographers and members to have a better understanding on how the enrollment within these community troupes has affected the overall understanding of the activity and how it has affected the way the members perceived being a male in colorguard. A total of eight key informants were selected for an informal, semi-structured interview.

Conducting interviews is assumed as the most appropriate and efficient way to deliver the arguments for this research. As pointed out by Silverman (2006), “interviews are the most commonly used method for qualitative studies, and they are also relatively economical in terms of time and resources” (p. 12). Moreover, while allowing relative flexibility, interviews above all enable a more “in-depth examination of the topic than any other method does” (Burgess, 1980, p 24). Among various possible forms, semi-structured interviews were considered as the most adequate to serve the purpose of this research. Likewise, semi-structured interviews propose a set of specific questions interviewees are expected to answer, but they also leave a certain “freedom to drift away from the original questions” (Rowley, 2012, p. 19).

In the scope of this research, interviews were conducted on a face-to-face basis. Given the personal aspect of this research, individual interviews were assumed to be the most appropriate way to put the interviewees at ease and to reach a relaxed and a trustful atmosphere needed to talk about one’s opinions and personal experiences (Mertens, 1998). The questionnaire was first developed in English before I (a native Malay) translated the questions into *Bahasa Melayu* (Malay language). Once translated, the Malay version was read by two other native Malay speakers and the version was compared with the original transcript to ensure that the questionnaire adhered to its intended meaning. Once ready, the questionnaire was tested on two other native Malay speakers to ensure questions were correctly understood, and thus was expected to bring intended results.

The questionnaire was composed of ten questions that are attached as Appendix E. Interviews took place during practice sessions and rehearsals over a period of three years from 2015 to 2017. A total of ten interview sessions were conducted with eight

male colorguard practitioners. After all interviews were conducted, four males were examined and highlighted briefly in Chapter 4.2. The remaining four males were further examined critically in Chapter 4.3. Due to the length of each interview session that took place, only the English transcription will be attached in the Appendix section. To foreground the negotiation and identity construction associated with doing masculinities, my research employed ‘narrative analysis’ (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995), where I will bring in excerpts from interviews and observations, along with my interpretations, intervening them within the analysis.

Besides using a qualitative method, a reflective ethnographical approach is also carried out through means of self-reflection on my own personal account, exploring and reflecting passed experiences. Reflective ethnography is also known as autoethnography, where Carolyn Ellis (2004) defines autoethnography as “research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political” (p. 24). Autoethnography “as a form of ethnography,” (p. 24) is “part *auto* or self and part *ethno* or culture” and “something different from both of them, greater than its parts” (Ellis, 2004, p. 25).

Being the founder and artistic director of the Batteryheadz Colorguard Ensemble, I had to distance myself from my own troupe in order for me to obtain a better understanding on the current gender politics within the Malaysian colorguard scene. Therefore, I have selected two other troupes to be examined along with my own, which is Guards Conspiracy and Vortex Winterguard. It is crucial to observe how male members within these troupes perform and construct masculinity in reflection to my own personal experience as a colorguard performer, choreographer, and educator in Malaysia.

1.7 Literature Review

This research examines the interrelations between men and the performance of masculinity in colorguard. There is a clear link between the discourses of gender and dance in colorguards. This link will be pursued using specific theoretical frameworks such as gender performativity and masculinity which will be discussed shortly.

This research is foremost a gender study that traces the development and construction of masculinity within community colorguard troupes, and focuses on the current gender politics within the Malaysian colorguard scene as a point of departure. Over the years, there has been substantial research and theorizing on gender related topics. Gender has been identified as a presentation (Butler, 1999), a social organization (Fuss, 1991; Weeks, 1991), and an ideology (Lorber, 1994; Smith, 1996). Gender is referred to as a socially-defined set of differences between males and females, which have transformed into varying social institutions and subsequently reinforced in all social interactions (Messner, 2000; Zinn, Hondagneu-Sotelo, & Messner, 1997). In this research, gender is seen as embodied realities, which define and challenge the notions of masculinity.

Several literary sources in gender studies, in particular, the works of Judith Butler, have proven significant in the shaping of the theoretical framework of this dissertation. Butler (1990) presents her fundamental theories of gender as performative in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, with arguments that "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; ... identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results." (Butler, 1990 p. 24). Butler observes that no matter how you construe it, gender, as opposed to sex, is a pieced-

together, culturally constructed and consensually validated form of identity. We are born, that is, chromosomally, male or female, but we become definably and recognizably - and, perhaps most of all, contractedly - masculine or feminine through the intricate process of socialization. Here, the body is conceived from a process of historical contexts and understanding, resulting in which the body comes to bear cultural meanings.

Butler argues that “gender identity” is “a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction” (1990, p. 22). In this case, gender is constituted in the mundane acts of the body; the performative acts constitute gender. In other words, gender is not the starting place; it is an identity repeatedly constructed through time, and it is always constructed through the body. You do not have gender first and then choose to perform it; rather, gender is “created by the act of your performance” (1990, p. 22). This performance is informed by what is already historically constituted as gender and is performed by the individual through acts of the body. Therefore, Butler’s seminal work on gender performativity serves as a vital entry point to this research.

This research then theorizes the construction of masculinity by exploring and examining works of various theorists in an attempt to explore the various understandings and constructions of performing masculinity amongst the young men in colorguards. Within a colorguard performance, males are exposed to prominent masculinities within this setting, particularly hegemonic norms of masculine practice. This dominant norm of masculine practice becomes a marked influence in the assertion of the male dominance. Research studies reviewed in the following passages suggest that masculinities are actively produced, multiple, fluid, dynamic and created in specific historical context.

Since not all social scientists agree on what it means to be “masculine”, there are a number of ways to study masculinity. One of the first ways of looking at masculinity was based on an essentialist understanding of gender, which is one that it is inextricably linked to sex (Holmes, 2007). A seminal publication is the book, *Gender and Power* (1987), written by Connell where he claims that gender is demonstrated as being a concept associated with power. This power is demonstrated by how individual men each enjoy the ‘patriarchal dividend’, which is the advantage gained by men in general from the overall subordination of women. With these in mind, a focus on the more dominant form of masculinity, namely hegemonic masculinity, allows for the conceptualization of the power aspect of masculinity. In this research, I will argue that the men in community colorguard troupes enforces images of hegemonic masculinity, the “publicly avowed, preferred model of manliness” (Connell, 1987, p. 117).

A crucial source to the shaping of this dissertation is in *Masculinities*, in which Connell (1995) argues that physical fitness is essential to the construction of hegemonic masculinity; it is not, therefore natural, or fixed. Indeed, masculinities can vary between cultures, in one culture over time, in a man’s individual life and between and among different male identities (Kimmel, 1992). In a similar way, Butler (1990) draws on Foucauldian concepts to argue that rather than masculinity being constructed, the gendered body materializes through the dynamics and processes of discourse and performance. These discourses produce that which they name and power is said to work within them (Osborne and Segal, 1994). Discourse has been defined as the ways in which we talk and think about the world which shapes how we behave (Johnson, 2000).

Modern theorists no longer speak of masculinity in the singular, but of masculinities in the plural sense. Connell suggests that a single notion of masculinity and

a 'male role' miss the complexities within masculinity and the multiple forms of masculinity (Connell 1995, p. 72). Brittan (1989) further reiterates this view when he suggests that masculinities need to be conceptualized in relation to class, sexual and ethnic locations. Further according to Kahn (2009) masculinity, being a gender identity, can be defined as "the complex, cognitive, behavioral, emotional, expressive, psychosocial, and socio cultural experience of identifying with being male" (p. 2). Given that masculinity is psychosocial, it can be said to be constructed differently not only by different individuals but also in different sociohistorical contexts. Consequently, there are many alternative ways that the men in color guard perceive their notions of appearing as masculine, thus it is not surprising to find that not all of them have the same opinion about what it means to be masculine (Kahn, 2009).

To understand masculinities at a deeper level, it is important for me to look at the roles in which these masculine bodies convey, as seen by Robert Brannon (1976), a sex role theorist, in his work *The Male Sex Role*. The masculine role consists of four basic clusters which he argues are oppressive to women and harmful to men:

- "no sissy stuff" - the avoidance of all feminine behavior and traits
 - "the big wheel" - the acquisition of success, status and bread-winning competence
 - "the sturdy oak" - strength, confidence and independence
 - "give him hell" - aggression, violence and daring behavior
- (Quoted in Mac An Ghail, 1996, p. 101)

In the written contexts, the previous traits were encouraged in boys as signs of masculinity and manliness. Such behavior was rewarded whereas deviation from this often produced ostracism and marginalization. Thus, masculinity and femininity were quite easily interpreted as internalized sex roles, the product of social learning or socialization. Sociologists use the term 'socialization' to refer to the process by which gender expectations in society are learned (Brannon, 1976). There are many ways in

society from which males and females are socialized into particular roles. Fagot's (1981) research indicated that boys receive negative feedback from peers when they exhibit feminine behavior (in Franklin 1984, p. 38). Boys were more likely than female children to be encouraged among others in independence, adventure, risk taking.

In the dance field, research on masculinity and dance has been scarce, while the existing studies are mostly focused on professional male dancers. Desmond (1993) describes: "dance remains a greatly undervalued and under theorized arena of bodily discourse" (p. 35). Dance, unlike music and visual art, has been difficult to reconstruct and analyse due to the lack of documentation. She further suspects that it might be because it has been represented by mostly females and expressed by bodily work (Desmond, 1991). Most researchers, with less emphasis on dance, have not done enough to signify the importance and value of research on men, masculinities and dance.

Masculinities revealed through 'dancing bodies' is therefore a crucial subject to address the research which, as Burt (2007) observes in his book, *The Male Dancer: Bodies, Spectacle, Sexualities*, 'dancing bodies' is framed by but invariably diverges from the dominant white, heterosexual male position which patterns western thought. At ground or rather stage level, Burt aligns the discussion from the ever-changing vantage points of spectators. To his credit, he is also sensitive to the limitations of visual reception in a medium, dance, which arguably operates simultaneously on visceral levels of reception. His premise focuses on the excess of meanings, although in limited western parameters, that a human being who dances can provoke. "Masculinity as a socially constructed identity is not a stable entity, but one made up of conflictual and contradictory aspects" (2007, p.7). That exemplary aim sometimes misses its potential, which may be more of a reflection of the subject's complexity than Burt's contribution to its description.

The result of the book's analysis of the conceptual groundworks and central identities of masculinity in motion, and a very refreshing one, is that this vague dancing identity is just as mysterious as his feminine partners.

Another vital source on the subject matter is in Michael Gard's (2006) *Men Who Dance: Aesthetics, Athletics & The Art of Masculinity*. Gard asserts that public displays of men participating in dance are seen as "unambiguously (homo)sexual and therefore immoral" (p. 215). Adler (2002) reiterates that boys who are not considered to be successful athletes are, unfortunately, labeled as "gay" in high school (p. 202). He further ranks school subjects - sports and academic courses. Music is one of the subjects that is "least valued by school administrators" (p. 200). This finding is somehow not surprising. Why do males always value sports more than other art subjects? Part of the answer may be found in Griffin's study (1995) that shows "sports prowess" as a means for males to show others and themselves that they are heterosexual.

Yet another notable work on the interrelations between dance and sport is in *One Thousand and One Night Stands* by Ted Shawn (1960); he states that in the early 1900s, sports were constructed as a completely (hetero)sexualized practice. As masculinity researchers try to comprehend the past, Shawn reminds us that sport and dance remain both discursive as well as material. Sport and dance construct and occupy significant if evolving places within the project of gender identity construction, particularly for boys and men, and the perpetuation of heterosexual male power. Many males choose sports as one of the means through which they can justify their identity for being heterosexual and claim their masculinity (Connell, 1995; Kidd, 1987; Parker, 1996; Martino, 1999; Messner, 1999). This certainly promotes the idea such that "man + sports = muscular/heterosexual" attitude (Shawn, 1960, p. 35).

As a significant portion of this dissertation deals with the developmental points of colorguards in Malaysia, literature that focuses on the colorguards and its historical development is unfortunately limited. Early accounts of the colorguards in the United States were detailed in *Techniques of Color Guard (Let's Go Team - Cheer, Dance, March Series)* by Karyn Sloan (2002) and *Band Front: Color Guard, Drum Majors and Majorettes* by Jason Porterfield (2007). These two books describe the history and techniques of colorguards, including music, choreography, flag twirling, rifle twirling, teamwork and pageantry. While the account provided is fairly descriptive, it is not without its gaps. Questions pertaining to the current social and gender order have been left largely unaddressed and unanswered, which I intend to develop further within my research.

Besides Sloan and Porterfield's accounts about the historical aspects of colorguard, there were no other known sources that detailed the colorguards in Malaysia. Crucial, however is the work *Implementing Dance in Marching Music: A Case Study on the Colorguards at the Victoria Institution Cadet Corps Band*, a thesis I wrote during my undergraduate studies in 2012. This thesis focused on the invention of a post-colonial colorguard performance, where a transition within marching bands in Malaysia took place from military to a more modern style. This thesis focused on the initial stages of implementing colorguards at the Victoria Institution Cadet Corps Band. This thesis serves as a platform to further expand the study on colorguards, where the activity is now transitioning and evolving into a more contemporary art form. However, this thesis lacks sufficient information on the gender division and labor within colorguard troupes in Malaysia. Therefore, the direction of the current research is to focus on gender division in high school colorguards and the construction of masculinity within community colorguard troupes.

CHAPTER 2: THEORIZING MASCULINITY IN COLORGUARDS

2.1 Theorizing Masculinity and Hegemonic Masculinity

“Masculinity to the extent, can be briefly defined, is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture.” (Connell, 1995, p. 3)

In the last two decades, the concept of masculinity and attempts at its definition has come under much scrutiny and re-evaluation (Connell, 1995; Kimmel, 1987; Morgan, 1992). Challenges to masculinity have come from a number of different social and economic forces including rationalization of the work force, the women’s movement and men’s entry to the arts sphere. Arising from these challenges came a certain crisis of masculinity where traditional and previously unproblematic notions of masculinity were now being seen as problematic. The concrete structure of traditional masculine identity was being shaken. Modern theorists no longer speak of masculinity in the singular, but of masculinities in the plural sense. Connell suggests that “a single notion of masculinity and a ‘male role’ miss the complexities within masculinity and the multiple forms of masculinity” (Connell 1995, p. 72). Brittan (1989) further reiterates this view when he suggests that masculinities needs to be conceptualised in relation to their class, sexual and ethnic locations. Therefore, in order to theorise the form of masculinity embodied by men in colorguard, I need to first examine the subject matter in terms of the multiple facets of masculinities and the multiple dimensions they embody.

When analyzing the construction of masculinity in colorguard troupes, one necessarily has to take a closer look at the behavior of these men. These behaviors are socially constructed, repeated and re-enacted through actions of everyday life. According to Lindegger and Maxwell (2007), masculinity is a socially constructed phenomenon

rather than a property of an individual man. It is both socially and historically constructed in a process involving “contestation between rival understandings of what being a man should involve” (Morrell, 2001, p. 7). Likewise, Connell (1994) emphasises that there is no one pattern of masculinity that is found everywhere. Due to the fluidity of masculinities, culture, gender, language, historical context, socioeconomic status and race all become factors that play an important role in defining masculinities. Lindegger and Maxwell (2007) further explain that masculinity is an everyday system of beliefs and performances which regulate behavior between men and women and between men and other men. Therefore, individual attitudes and behaviors of men in colorguard also emerge as a product of the construction of masculinity in the context and culture that they are surrounded in.

Although masculinities are multiple, they can only be understood in relation to femininity. Davies (1997) explains that gender is constructed through language as two binary categories which are hierarchically arranged in relation to each other. A large part of what it means to be a boy is not to be a girl. Young men learn how to behave appropriately from an early age. This appropriate behavior is learned by replicating behaviors that are performed by older boys and men around them, and by participating in discourses of masculinity with their fathers, brothers and the likes of their peers. This learned behavior is then continuously enforced and reinforced throughout the boy’s life in both public and private spheres (family, peer groups, school, etc.). Therefore, young men who fail to successfully replicate these gendered performances are subjected to ridicule from their peers, such as the men who twirls flags in high school colorguard troupes. The act of twirling and dancing, being seen as effeminate, contradicts the learned behavior and performances of how a man should act and be seen in public.

The question of gender performance is related to ideas of gender identity in society, whereby certain codes of behavior are assigned according to gender. There is an initial essentialist view of social identity whereby gender is determined biologically and gender is an immutable and recognizable physical essence. However, the concept of gender performance questions the essence of gender roles and identity as being determined by purely physical and biological factors. Instead, gender identity is a performance or construction made up of behaviors and roles which are then assigned to a specific gender. Aspects of identity are traditionally characterized in terms of gender and interpersonal characteristics, which may include self-definition or personal traits, roles and relationships, personal values or moral beliefs (Calvert, 2002).

Constructing masculinity can be closely related to the constructions of gender identity. Gender identities refer to how individuals and groups perceive and present themselves, and how they are perceived by others (Schiebinger, 1999). In other words, gender identities are context-specific. Any individual may engage in multiple femininities and masculinities, consciously or unconsciously, depending on the particular context. For example, a man directing a meeting may use masculine-identified leadership skills, but he may employ more feminine-identified qualities when helping his child with math. These cultural notions of 'feminine' and 'masculine' behavior are shaped in part by observations about what women and men do. This kind of 'gender marking' tends to discourage women or men from entering 'gender-inauthentic' occupations (Faulkner, 2009).

Femininities and masculinities are learned. They are present in a range of environments, from the home to the workplace to public spaces. In other words, 'femininities' and 'masculinities' describe gender identities (Faulkner, 2009). They

describe socio-cultural categories in everyday language; because femininities and masculinities are gender identities, they are shaped by socio-cultural processes, not biology, and should not be essentialized. Femininities and masculinities are plural and dynamic; they change with culture and with individuals. In any one culture, certain behaviors or practices may be widely recognized as 'feminine' or 'masculine', irrespective of whether they are adopted by women or by men. Any one person, woman or man, engages in many forms of femininity and masculinity, which she or he adopts consciously or unconsciously depending on context.

Gender identity can also act as a coercive ideal that exists principally to protect the norm of heterosexuality. It is in this sense then, that gender, rather than being static and reactive, is inevitably performative, continually unfolding as a complex enactment of self-representation and self-definition. As Butler (1990) observes:

"Gender is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free-floating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practice of gender coherence ... In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed ... In an application that Nietzsche himself would not have anticipated or condoned, we might state as a corollary: There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results." (p. 25 - 26)

The results of this "performance" may work to defy original or primary gender identities, as in the cultural practices of cross-dressing; or it may stylize identities in order to exaggerate, play with, or in a more reactionary sense, conform to socially defined notions of the masculine or the feminine. Because such options of self-presentation are the product of dramatic and contingent constructions of meaning, they offer an essentially

optimistic understanding of masculinity, since what is performed - in a sense, fluid and temporal rather than socially fixed and static - can be re-evaluated and even changed.

Masculinity, just like femininity, is an artificial justification defined by society (Schoenberg, 1993) and based on several factors. The word 'masculine' describes "attitudinal and behavioral characteristics that, in a socially accepted sense, are considered appropriate to the biological inheritance of the male" (Ibid., p. 29) But with a growing liberation concept of gender it has become more difficult to define what the attitudinal and behavioral characteristics are. As many factors play an important role in defining and structuring maleness and its masculinity, a lot of gender research has been conducted, especially in the 1990s, to explore the "multifacetedness of masculinity" (Strattman, 1996), such as the term "hegemonic masculinity".

In this research, I argue that the men in community colorguard troupes purposely construct their notions of being a man and create an ideal that aligns with hegemonic notions of masculinity. In his work, Connell (1987) established the concept of hegemonic masculinity:

There is an ordering of versions of [...] masculinity at the level of the whole society [...]. This structural fact provides the main basis for relationships among men that define a hegemonic form of masculinity in the society as a whole. "Hegemonic masculinity" is always constructed in relation to various subordinated masculinities as well as in relation to women (p. 183).

Connell goes on to describe that hegemonic masculinity as "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy" (Connell, 1987, p. 77). Implicit in this definition is that it is the configuration of gender practices of men that is being considered. While some scholars

contend that because Connell discusses gender regimes and highlights that gender is relational, hegemonic masculinity is thus about men and women, and it is notable that hegemonic masculinity is used overwhelmingly to understand the practices of men. Thus, a model for understanding the stratification of masculinities among men who performs colorguard has resulted from Connell's theory, as well as an understanding of their individual gendered behaviors and their relation to women.

Masculinity is now conceptualized as hierarchical (Dean, 2013, p. 534), with hegemonic masculinity being at the top of the societal hierarchy. As such, hegemonic masculinity is the "publicly avowed, preferred model of manliness" (Hatty, 2000, p. 117). In addition, Yue Tan et al. found that "while it [hegemonic masculinity] may not be the most common type of masculinity, it sets the standard against which the achievements of all other men (the majority) are judged" (p. 239). This is crucial for my approach in analyzing the construction of masculinity in community colorguard troupes, for all three troupes under analysis significantly promote the most desired form of masculinity; they can herewith be classified as promoting the hegemonic form of masculinity.

Many scholars have attributed certain characteristics to hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is often based on normative heterosexual masculinity (Dean, 2013, p. 535). It is associated with Western, white, and middle-class privilege (Doull et al., p. 330). Hatty (2000) points out further character traits of hegemonic masculinity:

Hegemonic or dominant masculinity embraces heterosexuality, homosociality [...], aggression, hierarchy, and competition. The opportunity and capacity to dominate Others is integral to hegemonic masculinity. The use of force and violence is viewed as one of the modes of behavior by which hierarchy is perpetuated in society. Consequently, violence [...] is implicated within hegemonic masculinity. (p. 181)

Carrigan, Connell and Lee (1985) go on to say that the term “hegemony” has been used widely in recent years in debates on men, mainly as hegemonic masculinity. There are two approaches to the issue of hegemony. One approach is based on cultural studies and post-structuralism and posits a constantly changing hegemonic masculinity (Cornwall & Lindisfarne, 1994). The second approach is based on a multi-layered model of gender power and asserts that hegemonic masculinity is a structured relationship where power is distributed between men and women in unequal ways (Cornwall & Lindisfarne, 1994).

Margaret Wetherell and Nigel Edley (1999), state that Connell’s formulation of hegemonic masculinity and men’s complicity or resistance has been a very popular conceptual framework for understanding masculinity. Wetherell and Edley (1999) provide three ways in which Connell’s work has been popular in understanding masculinity; Connell’s approach allows for diversity where masculine identities can be studied in the plural instead of in the singular; the approach allows for careful analysis for problems specific to gender power; and this approach highlights the importance of noting the relations that exist between men, as well as the relations that exist between men and women in the formation of gendered identities. Thus, Connell’s seminal work on hegemonic masculinity has proven to be particularly useful for understanding the broad social context of gender relations between the men and women in community colorguard troupes, which will be highlighted in Chapter 4.

Malaysia is a patriarchal society in which the dominant ideal of masculinity is heterosexual (Peletz, 2009; Jewkes & Morrell, 2010). Thus, since the current hegemonic masculinity in Malaysia has been constructed as heterosexual (Connell, 2002), alternative forms of masculinity, such as homosexuality, have been subverted. Consequently,

Malaysia presents a context of patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity where men (as defined by sex) have historically had an advantage in society, especially in professional arenas. On the other hand, dance is a unique context where women are at an advantage. Since dance requires a feminine body and feminine attributes, which might explain the stereotype of the homosexual dancer (Bailey & Obershneider, 1997). Therefore, males who enroll in colorguards in Malaysia occupy two worlds with seemingly contradictory requirements. Perhaps this contradiction is only present if one considers masculinity as a unitary concept, as it might be better understood as embodying many alternative forms, so male colorguards are in a unique position to assert dominant notions of masculinity (Fisher, 2007). Therefore, how male colorguards construct their identities in terms of their gender, sexuality and body in a context where general social constructions take place are explored in the following sections.

2.2 Masculinities, Men, and Dance

Dance is, in itself, an “operative concept” whose meanings are inextricably bound up with the type of problems I am about to discuss, namely, issues related to dance and masculinity (Bala, 2012). It is also attached to a need for developing a sense of selfhood, community restoration and revival of performance practices among men through dance. Thus dance, as a concept, is not addressed here as merely descriptive, but as “programmatically” in the sense that the choice and justification for using the term leads and implies specific effects, such as the undoing of prejudice against male dancers and their self-defining masculinity. Dance expression could be a decisive element in rebuilding masculinity to its original place of relevance in male social structures by contesting the predominant perception that dance is feminine (Bala, 2012).

Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli (2003) discuss how boys gain and refuse membership of groups and how these boundaries are negotiated and related to constructs of gender normativity and heteronormativity as well as hegemonic masculinity. These types of negotiations lead Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli to the word '*Mestizaje*' meaning borderland people which defines identity as a process that is shifting (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003). This concept of *Mestizaje* has proven particularly useful in understanding how some of my research participants perceive themselves as a male performing colorguard. Their conceptions of what is defined as 'being a man' changes based on their social setting. For example, these men may do masculinity and understand themselves differently with friends, family and/or the arts world. These boundaries are constantly subjected to policing and contestation contributing to versions of masculinities and identities. It is this imposition and constant policing on the body that makes dance a problematic endeavour for men.

"I started dancing [when I was 21] because I had friends who were dancing hip-hop. Probably, if I had friends dancing modern, or contemporary, or tango, I would have done other things. So it has been casual in sum, it's not that hip-hop was my dream, absolutely not. When I was younger, I was completely disinterested in dance. Now indeed I'm moving closer to dance, my friends show me movies, videos; earlier I completely refused this idea, of dance, of dancing anyway." (Personal Conversation A: Male, 25; 9 March 2016, translated in Italics)

Homosexuality and femininity tend to be associated with dancing men (Burt, 2007; Risner, 2009). As the above excerpt shows, an interest in dance, just as such, might be read as a sign of deviation from mainstream masculinity, which leads one to be regarded as 'effeminate'. Yet, according to the above excerpt, starting to dance in one's twenties, practicing with a group of male peers, and choosing the most masculine among dance styles, as well as growing older, may downsize the problem.

That is why engaging in dance may be problematic for men. Most of the male dancers I met, started dancing relatively late in life, and in most of their biographical narratives chance plays an important role. For some, like the below excerpt who reached dancing through acting, this happens even to the detriment of one of the discursive hinges of dancers' biographies; chance and destiny:

“I started when I was 20 [...] Earlier nothing, I had a passion for dance but I didn't do anything. When I was 19 I attended a theatre course, and it included dance lessons and I was attracted to dance. The teacher told me [...] go to this university, do a try-out [...]. So, that's how it started.” (Personal Conversation B: Male, 23; 19 May 2016, translated in Italics)

Both Male A's late involvement with dance, and Male B's chance-grounded identity performance of self-narration enacted during interviews, point to a certain discomfort among men, especially heterosexual ones, with regards to their interest in dance. Those who started dancing relatively early, more or less explicitly allude to discrimination:

“I was one of those few who did start dancing when they were young, and I was definitely picked on as a child for dancing up through all of high school. Someone joked like ‘dance is for sissies! You could be a soccer player to attract more girls!’” (Personal Conversation C, Male, 25; 14 February 2016, translated in Italics).

What lies behind the statement above is the soccer player being better not only as a sportsman, but also able to attract more girls, so to speak. In fact, heterosexual regulations are at play in the dance world too, and they produce a complicated side-effect. Physical contact being very frequent, and the body being exposed to the gaze of others

“at various stages of undress” (Wulff, 1998, p. 114), dancers (are taught to) enact what Federico (1974, p. 252) calls “occupational minimisation of sexual attraction”.

“*Dance is for sissies!*”, as Male C had experienced first-hand, is a sentence we’ve all heard at least once. The process of practical and symbolic feminization that Western theatrical dance has undergone since the 19th century (Burt, 1995; Thomas, 1996) has led to the so-called problem of the male dancer (Adams, 2005). On one hand, the majority of (aspiring) dancers are women; in Italy (Bassetti, 2010), France and UK (Rannou/Roharik, 2006), United States (Risner, 2008, 2009a, 2009b; Van Dyke, 1996), and many other countries. Moreover, the same goes for dance audiences (e.g. for Italy, see Istat, 2008). On the other hand, the male dancer suffers from a stigma (Goffman, 1963) which appears indelible, throwing his primary identity into crisis (i.e., gendered, and thus sexual identity).

The fact that in the field of dance men dancers are noticeably outnumbered by women dancers may perpetuate the assumption that dance is not a man’s career. When judged under the rubric of hegemonic power, dance is disempowering for men. This however goes as far back as the 19th century when middle class men simply “did not look right on the ballet stage” (Burt, 2003, p. 47). Concerning men, the relation effeminacy-homosexuality and dance came to be established in Western common sense discourse through specific historical processes, in the midst of what has been almost unanimously defined as the “crisis of masculinity” of the late 19th and early 20th century (Carnes/Griffen, 1990; Fout, 1992; Mauge, 2001; McLaren, 1997; Mosse, 1996). Similarly, the male dancer stigma arose at a particular time and went through diverse phases, having its foundations in cultural plots and conceptual dichotomies that were becoming progressively dominant.

Since one of the main dance forms used in colorguards in the United States is ballet, which has then influenced the colorguard activity here in Malaysia, it is therefore significant to also examine a concise historical literature in the concerns of ballet and the male dancer in relation to this research. There has been comparatively less work conducted on the experiences of male ballet dancers than ballerinas, and this may be due to the fact that ballet is generally viewed as a women's activity (Gard, 2006; Helena, 2001). This view of ballet as a female profession places men who choose to dance in a position that conflicts with ideas about men's work and normative ideas about masculinity. Therefore, "for males, to dance is not simply to choose one form of physical activity over another, it is also to position oneself in relation to a set of social meanings in which bodies never simply 'are'" (Gard, 2006, p. 3). Due to the perceived femininity of ballet, there exists an assumption that most male ballet dancers are gay (Bailey & Obershneider, 1997). Thus, by choosing a 'homosexual profession' many male ballet dancers are often placed into this category even if they are in fact heterosexual.

The view that male ballet dancers are homosexual is rooted in the history of ballet, including how ballet has come to be viewed as a feminine occupation even though it began as a masculine past-time. Ballet as we know it today is essentially a creative form of dance that is choreographed "using set steps and gestures" (Soanes, 2002, p. 59) that "(tells) a story" against a backdrop of music (Hawkins, 1990, p. 30). It first took shape in the Italian and French courts where (predominantly) male nobles danced as a means of entertainment (Gard, 2006). These aristocrats were not considered to have been very skilful dancers, but they did have an elegance and refinement which was the focus of their presentations. Following these 'noble' beginnings, ballet continued to grow as a form of entertainment and became a dance spectacle.

In the 19th century, the male ballet dancer seemed to disappear from the stage as ballet became romanticised (Gard, 2006). The ballerina became the focus on stage with the male ballet dancer only offering her support. Ballet, therefore, became viewed as a female activity during this time, with the ballerina on stage producing an embodiment of the ideal femininity of the time. It is arguable that the ballerina's presence was so overpowering that male ballet dancers became enmeshed with the ballerina's femininity. Middle class audiences came to view male ballet dancers as homosexuals because their presence on stage and their embodied emotional displays seemed contradictory to the bourgeois conception of a masculine body as emotionally disciplined and concealed (Gard, 2006). Furthermore, the male ballet dancer was viewed as supplementary on stage, merely there to hold up the ballerina. Helena (2001, p. 111) argues that "the male dancers themselves often view their position on stage as being secondary to that of the ballerina". Therefore, the popularity of the male ballet dancer declined during the 19th century, only to be somewhat rescued in the early 20th century by the Russian ballets where dancers, such as Nijinsky, Nureyev and Baryshnikov, performed leading roles and solos (Fisher, 2007; Helena, 2001).

Yet the re-emergence of the male ballet dancer occurred after a time when the male ballet dancer had been constructed as a particular kind of dancer: someone who was out of the ordinary, who was able to embody emotion through his art and who was, ultimately viewed as homosexual and effeminate (Fisher, 2007; Gard, 2006). This view of the male ballet dancer has arguably persisted well into the present day in most Westernized countries. Male ballet dancers are nonetheless attempting to resist such assumptions of homosexuality by constructing ballet as a medium for heterosexual men to get close to women in short skirts (Fisher, 2007) or as an athletic endeavour that can be associated with events that are largely deemed masculine activities such as contact

sports (Fisher, 2007; Gard, 2006). Moreover, through particular styles of dance that have been choreographed to include militaristic displays as well as through the very shape, tone, strength and musculature of their bodies, male ballet dancers challenge feminine constructions of themselves (Gard, 2006).

Prestige is conferred on males with heterosexual tendencies through these behaviors of exploration and conquest, which occur within the dance world (Appelrouth & Edles, 2011). Bodies being seen as objects of a process of social construction is considered to be inadequate as bodies are actively involved in a more intricately connected social process. I have turned to Bourdieu for a specific type of lens that allows me to operationalize my research participants' 'personal experiences' which encompasses hegemonic masculinities (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). As a researcher, it is the simultaneous occupation and balance between my research participants' personal experience and my own personal experience which has provided particularly nuanced understandings of men and masculinity in colorguards.

On the basis of my empirical research, where colorguards is seen to be a more feminized art form, I have identified two main antidotes. Both of them have been observed mainly at the collective level and consist of emphasising the masculinising aspects of dancing-as-sport, such as athleticism and self-control, and dancing-as-leisure/body-activity, like skill, risk, excellence, and creativity. They are "normalizing" strategies, and aim to represent the male colorguard as endowed with all the mainstream masculine characteristics. Within community colorguard troupes, the status quo has been reinvented through the performances of the males via the construction of a masculine identity. This form of construction, as I will argue in the next section, is intended to normalize dance by the males in colorguard to be seen and affirmed as athletic.

2.3 Normalizing Colorguards as Sport/Athletic

As colorguard was, and still is, generally referred to as a dance form in Malaysia, men who do colorguard seek alternative ways to re-invent themselves. This section is designed to chart the emergence of dance to be viewed as athletic over time. As I will demonstrate later, it is clear that the various histories of these discourses are important elements of the discursive present. That is, whatever the truth about the various periods of development in Western theatrical dance may be, the present is invariably explained via references to the past. For this reason, I propose to interweave the literature presented here with some key stories found in selected dance histories and a number of other scholarly works. In this way, I am endeavouring to give a sense of the ways in which men have been positioned within the selected excerpts. Although none of the literature I cite here explicitly addresses the same question as the one I am asking in this research, my argument is that I can draw from it a sense of who the male dancer has been witnessed as at various historical moments.

Ballet historians tend to begin their accounts with the dances of the Italian and French courts of the middle ages and early Renaissance (Anderson, 1992; Au, 1988; Clarke & Crisp, 1981; 1984; 1992; Steeh, 1982). It is generally argued that, in its 'original form', ballet was predominantly, although not entirely, a male preserve. For the most part, the dancers from this period appear to have drawn from the nobility and royal families, with the casts sometimes supplemented by professionals in order to fulfil the more challenging roles (Au, 1988). There also seems to be a feeling amongst some writers that these early ballet men were not overly 'skilful'. Although this is not made clear, the deployment of the notion of 'technical skill' here appears to suggest feats of acrobatic and athletic prowess.

Within the period of modern dance, my main focus is on how notions of 'athleticism' in male dancing are constructed. For this reason, the dance work of Ted Shawn is all the more notable. Shawn is remembered as the first male of American modern dance and with the already well known Ruth St. Denis, formed the dance school and performing company *Denishawn* in 1915 (Au, 1988). He had studied for the Methodist ministry, became ill and, according to his own writings, taken up dance as a form of therapy (Shawn, 1960).

Shawn gave his first public performance in 1911 (Burt, 1995) and travelled across the United States for the next three years devising and giving solo performances. Shawn joined St. Denis as a pupil in 1914 (Anderson, 1992) but soon became her partner in *Denishawn* and her husband. From this point on, Shawn's choreography navigated the mythical and the exotic but always with his cause of change in mind: "I was impelled to wage my personal battle for the cause of the male dancer" (Shawn, 1960, p. 74). He drew on images of ancient warriors, peasant workers and, as Burt (1995) points out, almost every other culture he could think of but his own in order to prove that dancing was not for 'sissies'.

In the early 1930s he separated from St. Denis and formed *Ted Shawn and His Men Dancers*, a company whose work "was dedicated to proving that dancing was a highly masculine activity" (Au, 1988, p. 96). Shawn made much of the fact known that many of his dancers were ex-athletes and physical education college students. Once again his choreography "emphasized strength and athleticism; work movements, warlike drills and the rituals of primitive cultures" (Au, 1988, p. 96), while also borrowing liberally from competitive sport. In this excerpt, he recalls:

“My experiences with the all-male dance demonstration made me more certain than ever that I wanted to try to sell the public, the press, and the educators of America on the legitimacy of dancing as a serious career for men. Though I, the first American man to make the art of dancing his life-works, had made good, there still was a prevailing prejudice against dancing for men. It was considered to be an effeminate, trivial, and unworthy occupation for the strapping and well-muscled male [...] I hoped, by touring with a company of men, to make people think about the subject. I was sure that when people saw young American athletes going through masculine dances, prejudice would be overcome and dancing as a career would take its place with other legitimate professions.” (Shawn, 1960, p. 240-241)

Shawn produced a certain kind of male dancer, both through the things he said and wrote on the subject, but also by selecting particular kinds of male bodies to be in his company and on stage, by creating particular kinds of dances for these bodies to do. By choosing to base his performances around a variety of contemporary foreign cultures, he refused to depict on stage what his audiences probably most feared: a dancing American male. Although some scholars may argue that most, if not all, of his dancers were gay men, by far the dominant element of Shawn’s discursive strategy was the athleticism of his dancers and his choreography. Shawn was also constantly associating them with sport. Recalling a performance of his all male company, he writes: “The audience was intelligent and enthusiastic, and our program review written by O. B. Keeler, known as the Boswell of Bobby Jones, appeared smack in the middle of the sports page, a location we heartily approved” (Shawn, 1960, p. 254).

Shawn’s all male company gave their last performance in 1939 (Anderson, 1992) but, as I show in the next section, his unrelenting depiction of the male dancer as athlete has been enthusiastically taken up by others. Burt (1995) concludes that:

“By arguing that dance was not ‘pansy’ or ‘sissy’, Shawn seems to have attempted to fit in with dominant heterosexual male norms, rather than challenging them. Shawn’s work thus tried, within the social restrictions of the period, to occupy common ground, albeit of a problematic kind, between a gay and straight point of view. But such value-free common ground never exists. The restrictions may allow a limited expression but at the same time they block and deform it.” (p. 110).

Burt’s analysis points to the way Shawn articulated a new way of discursively constructing the male dancer. Shawn sort to close the gap between the sportsman and the dancer by equating them and borrowing from sport’s by now well established cultural legitimacy as a ‘maker of men’. Rather than challenging the homosexual stereotype, he avoided it altogether. Shawn tried to show that the male dancer is like other male athletes and at the same time, was just as legitimate a presence on stage as the female dancer. It seems necessary to reassure people about male dancers and that this is best done via reference to the ‘athlete’. For Clarke and Crisp (1984):

“In the matter of stamina, physical energy and muscular control a male dancer is as powerful and far more rigorously-trained than most of the athletes we may see in the Olympics or in a hard-fought football game.” (p. 60).

The evidence from the previous passages suggests the emergence of a knowledge of justificatory discursive strategies with which to talk about the male theatrical dancer. Rather than the male dancer being a self-evident thing, he can be seen as a discursive ‘project’ of social construction. Beginning with Shawn, the 20th century produced the male dancer as ‘athlete’, a term which derived much of its meaning from the male-dominated world of competitive sport. I would argue that the construction of the ‘supreme athlete’ is a reactive discursive strategy which exists only because sport, and not dance, has usually been seen as the right place for men to display and discipline their bodies.

Pertaining to the issue of what makes a ‘good’ male colorguard performer, the male-as-athlete in contrast to the male-as-dancer is an important construction. It marks the emergence of a new kind of colorguard, against which the ‘standard’ of subsequent colorguard form would be measured.

For men, whilst sport is often constructed as a masculinising experience, exposing them to an environment emphasising purportedly masculine ideals such as “mental toughness” (Cook et al., 2014), and developing a masculine body, dancing is viewed as an “effeminate and suspect activity for a male body” (Migdalek, 2015, p. 76). This is despite demanding physical characteristics involved in developing a highly trained male dancer. The “feminisation” of dance genres, such as ballet, often leads to stigmatisation and bullying of those males who do engage with certain dance styles (Polasek & Roper, 2011; Risner, 2014).

To counteract this tendency, males who work within the world of dance, and in this case, colorguards, have engaged in what Fisher (2007) has termed the “making it macho” strategy. This attempt to hyper-masculinise dance for male dancers includes referring to dancers as athletes and sportsmen (rather than dancers), focusing on more physical, athletic moves for men, and highlighting the opportunities for a wide range of heterosexual ideals for male dancers. Risner (2009), however, found that boys can experience frustration at these attempts. Furthermore, whilst masculinisation of certain dance genres, such as ballet, emerges from a constrained understanding of what it is to be masculine, other genres are already seen as highly masculinised. For example, street dance (Holdsworth, 2013), often attract more males. Thus, male dancers may perpetuate the dichotomisation of dance genres into “feminine” and “masculine” forms.

As scholars of sport and sociology studies have long recognized, sport is a powerful arena for negotiating and contesting the cultural meaning of gender. For boys and men, sport has served as a primary site (perhaps even the primary site) to construct a culturally valued masculinity, and oftentimes a hegemonic masculinity. Sport is particularly well positioned to serve this role for numerous reasons. For boys who play competitive sport, especially as they advance in age and skill level, it is typically an all-male space. This separation from girls and women reinforces the masculinizing processes of sport (McGinley, 2010). In reality, gender is a continuum, but all-male sports portray gender as binary, associating powerful athletic performance with the status of being male (Ibid., p. 84). The masculinity achieved through sport is entirely constructed, but the absence of women makes it appear seamless and natural.

While many different kinds of male dancers have and continue to emerge within the dance field, my central argument within this research is that the male colorguard performer as athlete has come to occupy a dominant discursive position in constructions of who the male colorguard is, and what kinds of skills they need in order to become a 'masculine' colorguard performer. An interest in the 'technical' side of colorguards, rather than the dance aspect, is what some males claim as their reason for doing colorguard. They are interested in the 'technical stuff' which, I would argue, makes it very easy to equate colorguard skill with sporting skill. As a result, men in colorguards contests the predominant notion and perceive colorguard as a masculine activity.

I would suggest that Ted Shawn and his male dancers had embodied the 'supreme athlete' (Au, 1988) that I have highlighted, and has become such an important part of the stories of theatrical dance now tells about its men today. Therefore, perhaps beginning with Shawn, a process of consolidating the male dancer as athlete began. As with

colorguard, a general set of discursive resources have emerged from within the arena of gendered social relations which have constructed the male colorguard as a 'normal' male with high athletic abilities. Similar to sports, colorguard hints at athleticism, which includes technical skill, strength, stamina, endurance, challenge, and risks. To my knowledge, there presently exists no scholarly attempt to account for the growth of colorguards as a highly athletic art form. As such, along with Burt, my purpose here is to show how particular social conditions has produced a certain kind of male colorguard as an athlete.

As with the males who do colorguard, I intend to highlight that sport and heterosexuality were tightly linked (although not synonymous) within the art form in constructing the 'masculine colorguard performer'. The male's control of gesture and technical abilities is seen as not so very different from a highly trained sportsman. These men utilize their strength to manoeuvre heavy equipment, and sometimes get injured in the process, just like how a sportsman would suffer from injuries. Therefore, the link between sport and heterosexuality in creating a masculine colorguard will be thoroughly examined to verify my arguments. Through sports and the physicality involved in colorguard, the male performers are pushing the boundaries of how masculinity is defined in the Malaysian context. Through colorguard performances, performers merge athletic ability with aesthetics of choreography (music and dance). Thus, what they present is more than the usual show of sports athleticism. I investigate this complex interplay between bodily spectacle and social meaning in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 3: COLORGUARDS - A HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

3.1 Colorguards in the United States

3.1.1 History and Background

Modern colorguard is “a combination of military drill, also called marching, and the use of flags, sabers, mock rifles and other equipment, as well as dance and other interpretive movement” (Sloan, 2002, p. 3). There are currently two types of colorguards in Malaysia, the female-dominated colorguards that accompany marching bands in high schools, and the male-dominated community colorguard troupes that performs without the presence of a marching band. The participation of males in high school colorguards in Malaysia is very rare, where many high school troupes consist of only female performers. Thus, one of the primary issues that will be investigated in the Malaysian colorguard scene is the participation of the males in what is being perceived as a female-dominated form. I argue that the males in community colorguard are performing masculine by treating colorguard as a form of physical activity rather than a dance form which caters more towards females.

The modern colorguard that the Malaysian colorguard community practices today started to form in the USA, therefore it is crucial for me to first begin my investigations by exploring the history of how colorguards in the USA came to be, and how it is performed today in marching bands and drum corps units. In the USA, colorguard is performed mostly in high school marching bands and drum and bugle corps units, using flags, rifles, sabers and other stage props to enhance their show. The art form was traditionally a male-dominated activity, resembling the military back in the day during the Civil War. Originally part of the American and British national guards during the Civil War, a colour guard (spelled with two words) used the nation flags in royal, patriotic

and military ceremonies. The colour guard (spelled as “colour” according to the British spelling), or also known as honour guard back then, would also march in battle with soldiers (often with a drummer or a marching band) to keep soldiers in line as they marched, to represent a particular nation, and to provide moral encouragement.¹⁷ The men would hold the flag in an upright position while also presenting it at different angles aligned with the left and right shoulder. The men would also spin and toss rifles to accompany the band. Back then, the weapons used within military band performances were real, excluding the ammunition.

As the years passed, colour guard became synonymous with marching bands. Over time, the new division began to split and focus less on military technique and focus more on artistic expression – colorguard (spelled with one word) was born. The colorguard (spelled as “color” using the American spelling) usually preceded the marching band in local parades and in high school half-time shows. It evolved into the art form that we know today because of a woman named Peggy Twiggs. Peggy is the inventor of the "Peggy spin" which took flag spinning to a whole new level.¹⁸ Before the "Peggy spin" guard members would usually just show the flag at different angles or “planes”, just like the military.

Towards the 1980s, dance was slowly incorporated into the activity, and colorguards gradually turned into a female-dominant art form, performed within drum and bugle corps units in the USA (T.J. Doucette, Personal Conversation, 18th December, 2011). The colorguards would dance while twirling and tossing brightly colored flags in the air to create a more entertaining performance. T.J. herself has been a member of the colorguard section of the Blue Devils Drum & Bugle Corps back in the 80s, as she vividly recalls dancing to the tune of *Hawaii 5-0* as being one of her most memorable experiences

as a colorguard performer. During the period of the 1980s, most drum corps units presented an all-flag routine.

Towards the early 1990s, the real rifles were replaced with wooden replicas that were deemed more suitable to be maneuvered within a marching band performance. Some drum corps units even introduced the saber to be incorporated into its performances. The saber is a form of blade made out of plastic without the sharpened point. Since then, men participation within colorguard units started to increase tremendously, as they are typically the strongest at the weapons (rifle and saber). They usually have the ability to toss them higher and catch them further. Towards the end of the 1990s, the activity has allowed both males and females to be incorporated within a single troupe. It was a common practice for both male and female to perform dance routines alongside equipment handling.

The modern colorguard in the USA today is known as “the sport of the arts” (Sloan, 2002, p. 2) that combines ballet, modern and interpretive dance with flag and rifle twirling, which is often used as a sideline spectacle at high school games. As the role of a marching bands and colorguards became increasingly ceremonial, they were adopted by high school marching bands, and colorguards began adopting more elements of dance and athleticism. Today, colorguards can be found in some, if not most, colleges, universities, high schools, middle schools, and independent drum corps. The guard uses choreography and equipment for added visual appeal during a marching band show. During competitions, the colorguard score is typically based on movement, visual effect, fluidity of choreography with the music, coordination of all members, drill, and the use of equipment (e.g. flags, rifles, and sabers). Colorguard has thus been considered to be both an athletic activity and an art form.

3.1.2 Colorguards in Drum & Bugle Corps

My observation of the colorguard activity in the USA is limited to watching videos, reading online articles, and interviewing colorguard instructors. However, there are reliable accounts that can be used to support my arguments on the issues I intend to discuss later on throughout the research pertaining to men in colorguards. Many of the interviews I had were with instructors and ex-members of renowned drum corps units, mainly with Andy Toth from the Cavaliers Drum & Bugle Corps. Toth has given me a clearer insight on how colorguards is performed in drum corps activity in the USA, and how men perform alongside women within these units.

My journey as a colorguard practitioner in Malaysia has enabled me to cross paths with Toth several times. We met several times when he judged the Winter Guard International Malaysia Regional Competition held in Kuala Lumpur from 2015 to 2017. As a prominent colorguard practitioner and educator in the USA, Toth's vast experience has provided me with great insight in conducting this research, as I am constantly making side by side comparisons of the Malaysian colorguard scene to the scene in the USA. Conversely, his constructive feedback regarding queries on gender division and the role of the males in colorguards are discussed and highlighted in this chapter.

To begin with, the colorguard performance tradition has turned into an American art form that developed in the military and morphed into halftime shows at high school and college football games. According to Toth, this was due to the needs and demand of the audience, as military performances was less entertaining to watch. The presence of color being added by the colorguards gave a new life to marching band performances. The modern colorguard in marching bands involved intricate displays of synchronized

rifle-spinning, saber-tossing and flag-twirling, integrated with modern dance techniques, performed by both men and women. It soon became increasingly popular within drum and bugle corps units.

Drum and bugle corps stemmed from a rich American and Canadian military history, separate from other marching musical activities (Toth, Personal Conversation, December 2016). Owing to many of these groups' roots, corps were traditionally militaristic. By the late 1960s, many corps wanted more creative freedom and better financial compensation than was offered by their sponsoring organizations. A modern drum and bugle corps is a musical marching band consisting of brass and percussion instruments, synthesizers, colorguards and dancing. Typically operating as independent non-profit organizations, drum corps perform in competitions, parades, festivals and other civic functions. Participants of all ages are represented within the band activity, but the majority are between the ages of 13 and 22 and are members of corps within Drum Corps International.

Drum Corps International (DCI) is a governing body for drum and bugle corps based in Indianapolis, Indiana. DCI is responsible for developing and enforcing rules of competition, and providing standardized adjudication at sanctioned competitions throughout the United States and Canada. Unlike marching bands, where it is usually affiliated with a school, corps who participate in DCI are independent organizations that recruit members through auditions. Most corps are operated as or by dedicated non-profit organizations; very few are associated with schools or for-profit entities. Some corps are even parts of larger non-profit performance arts organizations, which might also include theatre groups, winter guards, winter drumlines, and other various musical or visual activities.

In modern drum corps, the colorguard has become a crucial part of each group's visual and thematic program. Standard equipment includes flags, mock rifles and sabers, but other objects like bare poles, hoops, balls, windsocks, and custom-made props are sometimes used to create visual effects that enhance the show. While the rest of the corps generally wear the same uniform for several consecutive seasons, the guard members more often wore spandex uniforms that are custom-made for each corps' theme for a particular season. The primary role of the colorguard is to complement the corps' musical program by creating visual interpretations of the music through dancing, prancing and rolling on the ground. The colorguard can also enhance the overall drill design by marching in formations that integrate with the rest of the corps. However, the colorguard most often performs as an ensemble that frames the rest of the corps or performs within the drill formations of the corps proper. Like all other sections of the corps, the guard often features a mix of both men and women within a single unit.

Though the activity was traditionally dominated by male, it is predominated by female in its new form, due to the added elements of complex dance routines. However, men who do colorguard are very common in the USA, as there are many colorguard troupes operating as a mix-gendered ensemble. These men are given the role of handling the heavier weapons like the mock rifles and sabers, as they are physically stronger and have the ability to toss the equipment higher. Towards the end of the 1990s, it became common practice for modern drum corps in the USA to incorporate both males and females within a drum corps unit who performs dance alongside equipment handling. The females would mostly be spinning the flags, while the males would focus more on the heavier equipment like the rifles. However, this division of labor is currently being contested as of late, as more females are now being trained to carry the rifles, while the males also perform dance while handling the flags on field.

According to Toth, the colorguard instructor for the Cavaliers Drum & Bugle Corps, the fact that “colorguards is only for girls is a myth,”¹⁹ where in fact there are a lot of males involved in the art form. Toth has been the instructor for the Cavaliers Drum & Bugle Corps, a renowned all-male drum corps unit situated in Rosemont, Illinois, for more than fifteen years. He has vast experience performing and teaching in the USA, and has personally lived through the evolution process that colorguard took place in America. In the USA, regardless of gender, it is common for any child who is interested in theatre, dance, or sports to enroll themselves in colorguards. Toth shared that he never struggled to fit in when he first started out in a mix-gendered troupe.

“We create dramatic visual impact that gives the audience a different way to appreciate and understand the show. It’s a great feeling. The fact that I was the only male in my troupe did not stop me from pursuing what I wanted to do. It did not become an issue for me nor the people around me.” (Toth, Personal Conversation, 23rd December, 2016).

However, there are certain issues that arises in a mix-gendered troupe in the USA. Both male and female members could not wear the same uniform because it did not fit their personality or body type. Most guard troupes in the USA made different outfits for both the men and women, though there are some troupes, according to T.J.²⁰, that places sequins and tight outfits on the men as well. For T.J., this is not a serious issue in the USA, as it is more tolerable for men to wear tight clothing and dance alongside women. From the 1970s to the 1990s, much of the impetus for the evolution of the modern colorguard, with the inclusion of both men and women, came from the arena of competitive drum and bugle corps. More recently, a new form of colorguard performance has emerged. Winterguard, or also knowns as indoor colorguard, have claimed the cutting edge in recent years within independent, universities and school-related programs.

3.1.3 Winter Guard - Indoor Colorguards

Some colorguard troupes also participate in competitions that exclude the musical performers. These are known as indoor colorguards or winter guard that takes place after the marching band's season ends in the summer. Most of these guards are found in North America. Held indoors during the winter, typically in gymnasiums, winter guard competitions are a growing part of the pageantry activity that has taken the modern colorguard activity to the next level. Colorguards involved in these indoor competitions may be part of a high school or college marching band or may be a stand-alone organization in these educational institutions, just like in DCI.

At its core, winter guard camps begin in September or October and take place over the weekend, usually in a school gym, or in a designated training hall. Many members are local, but others must travel from their respective homes. At camps, the members work on technique and work closely with their choreographers as they carefully craft each year's show. In these ways, winter guard is essentially the same with outdoor colorguard. During the 1970s, most colorguards were influenced by military marching styles. They performed to live drum cadences or were silent, relying on the footfalls of the members or vocalizations provided by the guard captain. The military style evolved into the modern colorguard, and Winter Guard International (WGI), a major governing body for the activity, was formed in the late 1970s. WGI set the stage for more standardized national competitive rules and judging.

Every year, WGI welcomes colorguards from all over the world to grace the floor of the Dayton Arena, located in Dayton, Ohio. Units are judged on the design of the show and the aptitude of the members regarding movement and equipment work. Expectations

are different for the varying classes, with longer shows and more stringent requirements as the units ascend to the highest class, "World Class." Competitions are generally held from mid-November through early April (winter season) with local circuits accounting for most of the competitions nationwide. WGI sponsors widely attended Regional Championships leading to the national championship typically held in early April. Thousands of performers compete each year to perform for WGI, and as such, the movements and routines are very difficult in this group; there is much more tossing, dancing, and spinning compared to colorguards in marching bands. Thus, it is not something that can be easily done. Both men and women who join WGI train very often to master each equipment technique and dance routine.

Competitive colorguard grew tremendously within WGI in its early years. Eventually, dance came into colorguard through the Seattle Imperials, a renowned WGI colorguard troupe in the early 1980s, and revolutionized the activity's concept of "movement."²¹ From that point on, a meteoric rise occurred in the growth of this activity in artistic and competitive development. Shows began to take on a different look, and creativity and originality became a focus for the growing WGI. Thus, creativity lead teams to milestone discoveries, such as implementing stage sets and props usually only found in a large scale theatrical production. From roots based in the military, colorguard grew to align its performance with theatre, dance and entertainment of a different nature, where the inclusion of coordinated equipment handling and athletic prowess made it more entertaining to watch.

According to Toth, through the years, some of the most beloved shows in WGI history have come from all-male ensembles. In an activity dominated by all-female and co-ed ensembles, there is an undeniable and unique thrill that a strong male group exudes,

one that audiences look forward to every year. Since its inception, WGI has seen memorable performances from all-male casts such as The Cavaliers and Pride of Cincinnati. These groups carry with them a legacy of excellence, strength, and brotherhood.

Toth continues by saying that WGI's history of all-male excellence begins with The Cavaliers Drum & Bugle Corps. The Cavaliers became a charter member of WGI and sustained finalist status in the years that followed. Hailing from the Cavaliers Drum and Bugle Corps, the Cavaliers Winter Guard was strongly rooted in an all-male tradition, making it one of the only, if not the only, winter guard to have been all-male from day one and to have sustained an all-male membership throughout its existence. The winter guard existed out of love and commitment for the activity, brought about by summer members convincing the staff to field a competitive winter guard.

The involvement of males in DCI and WGI are indications that men in colorguard are widely accepted in the United States. This goes to show that although modern colorguards is dominated by female, as opposed to the male-dominated military guards, more males are also entering the performance space, executing intricate dance routines while handling equipment in both DCI and WGI. Some have even turned it into a profession, like in the case of Toth. In the USA, it is culturally more acceptable for men to enroll themselves in the dance scene. Since colorguards can also be equated to being a dance form, I also argue that it is more tolerable for men to be involved in colorguards in the USA. The scenario is much different here in Malaysia, thus, I now turn my attention to the evolution process that took place within the Malaysian colorguard activity. In doing so, I intend to highlight how social justifications and acceptance of men within the art form are vastly different here in Malaysia compared to the USA.

3.2 Malaysian High School Colorguards

In Malaysia, a marching band performance may be seen as a performance carried out to entertain the audience. Most marching bands in the world today carry this same goal, to perform and to win the hearts of the audience through visual display and sonic display. Some marching bands intend to deliver a message through their performances by creating theme shows that portrays the current situation of the world ranging from social awareness, humanitarian issues, and sometimes paying tribute to a popular figure. For example, the Victoria Institution Cadet Corps Band's 2012 production entitled "Tribute to Sudirman" comprised of musical selections sung by the late Sudirman Haji Arshad, a renowned Malaysian singer and songwriter. In 2015, the Keat Hwa Marching Band's program entitled "Heal The World" captivated the audience with their musical selections and a show concept that was inspiring and memorable.

For the main purpose of pleasing the crowd, a marching band often defaults to entertaining through popular music, music that touches the heart, or music that fosters a community. However, performers of a typical marching band are not able to fully deliver the emotion and mood required by the music, as they are too busy handling their musical equipment while marching to the beats of the music. Needless to say, marching music with military precision and style has grown old and tend to bore the audience if performed for a long period of time. As mentioned earlier, the style of military marching cannot be applied in a marching band performance due to the complexity of a marching band show.

To deliver the emotion, mood, and the visual aspects of the music, color has been incorporated into its performances by the colorguards. Color here is represented by the colors of the flags that enhance the performance from a visual aspect. This brought a new life into the Malaysian marching music activity. Through the use of flags, dance, drama

and the entire visual representation of the music, marching bands has evolved into a more enjoyable performance because of these variety of elements. The members of the colorguard section incorporate dance into their equipment handling, something that could never be done to a full extent by the musical performers themselves. Although some musicians are able to move and sway their body from left to right following the rhythms of the music, their movements are often limited, compared to the colorguards. The musicians are preoccupied with holding and blowing their instruments, it therefore limits their movement in the arms and conceals their facial expressions.

In this research, I have focused my observations on three prominent high school marching bands that have included colorguards in their repertoire. The bands are, the Victoria Institution Cadet Corps Band (VICCB), an all-male marching band located in Kuala Lumpur, and two marching bands from the state of Kedah, the all-female Sultanah Asma High School Marching Band, and the co-ed Keat Hwa High School Marching Band, both situated in Alor Setar. All three of these high schools are located in urban areas and are chosen because they are the first high schools in Malaysia to embody the American version of modern colorguards. The three schools provide a good example of how colorguards are practiced and viewed in Malaysia, while warranting an investigation on gender division and critical spectatorship.

VICCB had the opportunity to know about colorguards through instructors from both Indonesia and Thailand. The band director, Jimmy Wong, hired Andi Hassan and Sehat Kurniawan to help form the colorguard section in 2003. In 2009, Jimmy hired an instructor from Thailand, Sastra Tor, to further develop the section through means of teaching more advance techniques. Although Kedah is a more conservative state as compared to the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur, bands like Keat Hwa and Sultanah

Asma are taught by instructors from Thailand. Tang Chia Hoe, the band director for both Keat Hwa and Sultanah Asma, has maintained a working relationship with marching band instructors from Thailand. Although he is the band's main director, he hires instructors from Thailand to assist him. Through this approach, bands from Kedah had the opportunity and privilege to know about colorguards.

The Victoria Institution Cadet Corps Band (VICCB), known for its huge military history and tradition, was the first marching band in Malaysia to officially form a colorguard section in the year 2000. The VICCB were greatly influenced by marching bands and drum corps units from the United States, where the first active contemporary performing colorguard section was established. The members of the VICCB, an all-male group, tried to imitate the idea of the colorguard and install it in their performing ensemble, although at first not in its entire form. The idea was initiated by the band director, Jimmy Wong Yew Mun, with the encouragement of the members of the band and a few other instructors. The newly formed colorguard section started off by using the basic flag and rifle as the main equipment. However, during this stage, no dance was incorporated into the performance. The members consisted of twelve male performers, and were at the same time playing another musical instrument. The players would interchangeably switch their equipment to carry the flag and rifle during the performance.

The first performance of the VICCB showcasing the colorguard section was in Calgary, Canada, where the band took part in the World Championship of Marching Show Bands in the year 2000. During the performance, the pre-selected performing musicians put down their instruments halfway through the show outside the performance space, and marched back in carrying the flag and rifle.²² The players showcased some spinning and twirling of the equipment in a static position, and moved to a new position, either

marching or running, while holding it up straight and at different angles like the military. It was not until the year 2003 that dance slowly started to be embedded in the choreography carried out by the colorguards of the VICCB during the National Level Marching Band Competition in Kuala Lumpur. The idea of applying dancing in their marching program would soon play a dramatic role in eliminating the British elements within the organization entirely, turning the band into a contemporary marching show band with the inclusion of the colorguards, highly influenced by the American marching bands.

Through the four years of performing the colorguard, the VICCB has enhanced their show from military style to a more modern style marching performance. By adding color through means of flag twirling and dancing, it has turned its performance to be visually entertaining. The influence of the colorguards slowly grew and spread around the country. In 2009, Sultanah Asma High School Marching Band became the second band in Malaysia to include the colorguard section within their performances. Sultanah Asma High School (SMK Sultanah Asma) is an all-female government-owned high school consisting of mostly Malay students situated in Alor Setar, Kedah. During that year, the sixteen female colorguard performers used only flags to enhance the marching band performance. Their routines consisted of spinning and twirling of the flags while also incorporating simple dance movements. They received positive feedback from the audience as they gracefully moved around the field with brightly colored flags to the beats of the music in their program entitled "Mulan". Indeed, with the addition of color, the entire performance became more entertaining to watch from an audience stand point. By adding color to the show through the use of flags by the colorguard section, the overall mood of the performance generated a great impact.

In comparison to the reaction that the VICCB members had received in 2003, the use of flags and dance by the Sultanah Asma colorguards received a positive reaction from the audience during the Kuala Lumpur World Marching Band Competition held in Kuala Lumpur in 2009. This was a good example to highlight how women are more acceptable as colorguard performers and are allowed to perform or behave in a certain way than men. In Malaysia, gender roles such as how a man and woman should behave are socially constructed. The males in VICCB contests these gender roles by circumventing the predominant gender norms expected by a Malaysian audience, therefore risk the idea of being ridiculed. This clearly shows that the gender climate in Malaysia limits the male to participate in dance, which is seen as a more effeminate art form, but provides more freedom for females, such as in the case with Sultanah Asma. Therefore, it can be argued that it is socially acceptable for females to “dance with flags”.

Keat Hwa Marching Band was another government-owned high school marching band that had implemented the use of colorguards in 2009. Keat Hwa High School (SMK Keat Hwa) is a co-ed high school consisting of mostly Chinese students from Alor Setar, Kedah. Although Keat Hwa is a co-ed high school, the colorguard section was made up exclusively of women. Their team, which comprised sixteen colorguard members, were positioned to dance around the band while waving colorful flags to make the entire performance more entertaining to watch. The fact that there were only women performing with flags suggests that perhaps only women can participate in the activity by dancing around the band without being ridiculed by the audience. According to a conversation I had with one of the members, the men were not allowed to enroll in the colorguard section.²³ Another example was in 2012, when Keat Hwa Marching Band incorporated a single male in the colorguard section, together with fifteen female members. However, the male performer was only used to support the theme and story line of the performance

by moving backdrops in and out of the performance space. He did not perform the same choreography using flags as the female performers.

Both Sultanah Asma and Keat Hwa Marching Band were under the direction of the same instructor, Tang Chia Hoe, a male instructor. The colorguards that Tang implemented in both bands were female-dominated, thus, only females were given the role to dance while waving flags. Many of the gendered issues illustrated within these two bands not only reflected how Tang perceived gender roles and stereotypes, but larger society values and gender norms were also being contested. Perhaps Tang realized that placing males in colorguards would result in heavy criticism in relation to the negative social stigma associated with men and dance. Tang also teaches other marching bands in the state of Terengganu and Kelantan, and all of its colorguard sections are dominated by females.

The ethos of high school marching bands in Malaysia values uniformity, aiming to downplay the gendered differences of its members. Yet, “gender-appropriate” roles have existed within high school marching bands. Recently, I heard the terms “*piccabros*” (referring to men in the piccolo²⁴ section) and “*tuba chicks*” (referring to women who plays the tuba²⁵) were being used. The fact that there are terms being used for those who differed from the gender norm emphasizes that there is a norm to differ from. I will use the two extremes as stated above, women in the tuba section and men in the piccolo section. While a woman deviating from social norms is seen as ordinary, men who deviate their norms are viewed as weak and effeminate. I have heard feedback from other band members from high schools across Malaysia that they are proud of the girls who play the tuba in their ensemble. Part of this is a physical achievement; since the tuba is a very heavy brass instrument which weighs almost 35-pounds, it is usually harder for a female

to carry it around. On the other hand, the one guy in the piccolo section is ridiculed of being weak or a *sissy*, since the piccolo is much smaller and lighter compared to the other instruments. Here, it can also be highlighted that the size and weight of the instrument is directly correlated to how a man is portraying his masculinity. The measure of masculinity is associated with strength and endurance that one possesses to be able to carry heavy instruments.

There is an idea within the marching band community in Malaysia that brass and percussion are more masculine and woodwinds are more feminine. This is based on countless experiences, conversations, and observations since 2003. This is interesting because in the marching band, the only sections where women outnumber the men are the woodwind sections. The brass and percussion sections are predominantly occupied by men. This may come from the fact that marching bands today often descended from historic military bands. In my opinion, this plays into the idea that marching bands are a more masculine form of activity. If women are interested to enroll in marching bands, it is only natural that they are given lighter instruments. Therefore, this idea that women cannot physically do the same thing as men plays out in the band. These issues pertaining to “gender-appropriate” performance roles have also become increasingly contested in recent years with the inclusion of the colorguard section. As colorguard appears more feminine with the use of dancing and graceful movements, it can be argued that colorguard is a more feminine form of activity. Therefore, to avoid being ridiculed as feminine, men avoid enrolling in colorguards. This by and large is supported by the fact that Malaysia is a highly homophobic country (Peletz, 1999), where men’s involvement in colorguard, a feminine art form, may contribute to homosexuality. More recently, males who have a passion in colorguards have found a new platform to showcase their skill and talent.

3.3 Community Colorguard Troupes in Kuala Lumpur

Colorguards in Malaysia is usually performed at football fields or outdoor arenas with live marching band music, replicating the colorguards performed in drum and bugle corps from the USA. On the other hand, community colorguard troupes in Malaysia are based on winter guard, an activity also popularized in the USA, which is performed indoors to recorded music. The style of music in community colorguard troupes is varied and unlike anything the colorguards performed to in high school marching bands. To date, there are only three community colorguard troupes in existence in Malaysia, Guards Conspiracy, Vortex Winterguard and Batteryheadz Colorguard Ensemble, all situated within in Kuala Lumpur, a more cosmopolitan city.

Guards Conspiracy is an all-male colorguard troupe exclusive to ex-members of the Victoria Institution Cadet Corps Band, an all-male marching band situated in Kuala Lumpur. The troupe consists of sixteen members who perform their routines using mostly wooden rifles with minimal flag and dance routine. Vortex Winterguard is a troupe comprising a majority of males. Many members reside within the vicinity of Kuala Lumpur. The troupe consists of thirteen male and three female performers. They utilize flags and rifles within their routines. Batteryheadz Colorguard Ensemble is more open in their membership, where members are recruited from many parts of West Malaysia like Kedah, Penang, Johor, and Kuala Lumpur. The troupe consists of eight males and eight females who performs using a wide range of equipment such as flags, rifles and sabers while incorporating dance in their routines.

These troupes provide an opportunity for the emerging male performers to showcase their strength, hand and body coordination through equipment handling, and more importantly their skills at executing complex choreographies. Thus, they are able to

breakout from the confinement of how colorguard is usually performed within high school marching bands in Malaysia, in direct comparison to how it is being performed in the USA. Colorguard troupes from WGI in the USA serve as an inspiration for the young males who perform colorguard in these troupes because, in America, the choreography is more intricate and physically more demanding. In WGI, the combination of equipment handling and complex dance routines, set to a backdrop of a theatrical-based performance which includes a lot of acting and character development, makes colorguard a very physical and challenging art form.

The number of members in a community colorguard troupe is similar to the size of colorguard teams that accompany marching bands; that is, there are usually no more than twenty members in one troupe. In the USA, winter guard teams usually perform in school gymnasiums or similar areas with a large, rectangular floor. In Malaysia, special pieces of flooring (called floor mats, although they are different from the floor mats used in gymnastics) are usually placed on the floor of any indoor arena available for the members to practice. The floor mats are suitable for barefoot dancing, and some troupes perform barefoot, although some wear jazz shoes or other types of dance shoes.

Because they do not perform with a live marching band and because they perform indoors, community colorguard troupes have more flexibility in terms of musical styles and forms of dance. Often, community troupes choose popular music similar to the choices of music danced to by outdoor colorguards. It warrants mention, though, that school bands can play any song as long as it has been arranged for the instruments in the band, from military marches, to songs from Broadway musicals, to current pop songs. Since community troupes are not beholden to live instruments, they can perform to any type of music, whether it is played by a marching band, an orchestra, synthesizers, or any

other combination of musical instruments. Some even perform to spoken words, abstract music, or popular music sung by local or international artists.

Growing up as a colorguard performer in high school, and based on my observations, most Malaysians are likely to view colorguard as a dance form, simply because of how the flag can be graceful as well as the performer. This makes some people view it as an artistic dance solely for females where the dance can portray a story or to support the musical elements. In the USA, the style of dance used within colorguard performances varies depending on the choreographer. More often than not, ballet, modern dance, and contemporary dance are the major dance styles used throughout the repertoires of colorguard troupes in the USA. Depending on the theme of the programme, many choreographers choose to interpret the theme show through the use of dance vocabulary associated to contemporary dance. This includes a lot of running, jumps, rolls on the floor, and partnering work. The same applies with the dance styles being used within community colorguard troupes in Malaysia.

In BCE, for example, the instructors require members to learn and practice basic ballet movements in order to gain a better comprehension of the contemporary dance work later applied in the show. Members are taught to do basic ballet movements such as *plie*²⁶ and *releve*²⁷ to be incorporated in the choreography. This is done by myself and another female performer, who wishes to be known as Zummy. As ballet was widely used within the repertoires of many colorguard troupes in winter guard from the USA, I wanted to apply the same choreographic experience in BCE. Ballet and contemporary dance movements were widely used within BCE's performances from 2014 to 2017.

On the other hand, there are others who see the hard work and dedication behind colorguard and consider it as a sport because it enhances the performers' strength and agility. A colorguard performer needs to be physically fit, strong, and have a considerable amount of stamina in order to execute the equipment tosses. Therefore, those who are more inclined towards sports, such as football, are more than likely to view colorguard as a sport and not a dance form. With these factors in mind, in the following chapter, I examine the narratives of chosen male performers within the three community colorguard troupes chosen, located within the vicinity of Kuala Lumpur at the time of their interviews from 2015 to 2017. Each of these men participated in colorguard troupes that were (and, my observation suggest, generally are) heavily weighted towards showcasing the strength and physicality of the males. The reasons for the gender biases are largely cultural and historical, but are also related to perceptions of physicality and temperament.

Because of the gender biases in the activity, I suggest that male participants are “constructing masculinity” within what is perceived as a feminine art form. In referring to the lines between standard gendered roles as perceived by the Malaysian marching band community, I hope to suggest that, while they may seem fixed, masculinity is in fact “socially constructed and therefore have a history, are not universal, and are permeable” (Connell, 1995, p. 72). The theoretical justification for this course of action is derived from the fact that this form of masculinity displayed within these troupes is similar to the form of masculinity portrayed by males in sports. I argue that the males are performing masculine by treating colorguard as a form of physical activity, like sports, through rigorous training in accomplishing complex choreography while handling heavy equipment. Drawing on the work of Connell in understanding gender constructions, particularly her notion of hegemonic masculinity, the following chapter highlights how young men position themselves in colorguard in establishing a masculine identity.

CHAPTER 4: CONSTRUCTING MASCULINITY IN COLORGUARDS

4.1 Outline of Chapter

This chapter presents my findings from observations and interviews with my informants. I divide my findings into two sections, observations and narrative analysis. The first section highlights observations and participant observations that I have undergone within the span of 24 months, and even prior to the beginning of conducting this research. I had participated in all three of the chosen case studies practice sessions, rehearsals, competitions and other events and performances. It is important to note that the time I have spent with the Batteryheadz Colorguard Ensemble (BCE) is longer than the other two troupes, as I am the resident program coordinator for BCE. However, it did not affect the outcome of the analysis presented in this chapter, as all the questions presented to my informants (eight in total, but only four were used in the analysis) were unbiased in respects to all three troupes.

In the second section, I highlight key comments based on interviews I had with my informants, together with a discussion of my interpretations. Since the process of narrative analysis relies so heavily on the participants' testimonials (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998), it would have been irrational to separate my interpretations from the presentation of the participants' constructs. While analyzing the participants' interviews, I needed to reflect on the influence that I was exerting over the data and ensure that all of my interpretations were firmly grounded in the participants' statements, and this was done through constant reflexivity and reflections on my own experience within the field of colorguard.

Within most troupes under analysis, males are shown to be dominant, heterosexual, and competitive. As such, they promote the image of the masculine man that has been strongly lacking in the colorguard activity in Malaysia, mirroring and perpetuating the hegemonic male ideal. Malaysia is a patriarchal society in which the dominant ideal of masculinity is heterosexual (Peletz, 2009; Jewkes & Morrell, 2010). Since the hegemonic masculinity in Malaysia is associated with heterosexual/heteronormativity (Connell, 2002), alternative forms of gender/sexuality, such as various forms of non-masculine gender and sexualities have been subverted. Consequently, since Malaysia values patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity, where men have historically had an advantage in the society, Malaysians are rather homophobic (Jewkes & Morrell, 2010). Since the official religion of Malaysia is Islam, this adds to the fear of being regarded as effeminate or homosexual.

In his article, "*Malaysian Youth Sexuality: Issues and Challenges*", Low (2009) provides a thorough account of the changes that have affected daily life and values of people, especially younger ones, by influencing their perception of gender roles, "male-female interactions" (p. 14) and "risk-taking behaviors" (p. 15). An Asian study that he conducted, which explored the important masculinity traits among more than 10,000 men from Malaysia, showed that the perception of masculine traits was, for instance, having a good job, having lots of money, being a man of honour, being athletic, and being in control were the most important masculine traits. In her essay, psychology scholar Katherine Krauss further identifies the hegemonic male identity:

"The traditional image of masculinity was, and still is, defined by characteristics such as heterosexual, competitive, individualistic, aggressive, strong, successful, capable, and authoritative (Feasey, 2009; Gentry & Harrison, 2010). The ideal man is financially responsible, outdoorsy, athletic, and completely undomesticated." (Krauss, 2011, p. 7).

Krauss' take on the "ideal man" (Ibid., p. 7) echoes what Peletz (2009) and Low (2009) deem as the ideal masculine trait portrayed by Malaysian men. Likewise, as my analysis in this chapter will show, most of these character traits from the above passage holds true for males although they perform in community colorguard troupes. I foreground their behavior, self-presentation, and the labor they perform in colorguard within the analysis. The findings support my arguments on the construction of masculinity within community colorguard troupes. This construction can be linked directly to the image of hegemonic masculinity. Although this form of masculinity often times may not be the most common kind of masculinity, it sets the standard to which all other men are compared (Connell, 1987).

This chapter sets out to explore how young men in colorguard construct their masculinity. The analysis in the following sections explore these constructions using the conceptual framework of hegemonic masculinity. The findings highlight how young men applies various "normalizing" strategies in an attempt to construct an acceptable form of masculinity. The young men within this research commonly draw on the characteristics of the dominant or hegemonic ideal, including success, respect, compulsory heterosexuality, physical strength, and competitiveness in an attempt to achieve the desired masculinity. According to these men, masculinity is visible through physical strength and capabilities, having a girlfriend, engaging in heterosexual activities such as sports, distancing one from homosexual relationships, and the willingness to take risks. Therefore, by means of observations and conversations, I will reveal instances of the construction of masculinity by these young men performing colorguards within the selected community troupes.

4.2 Analyzing Masculinity in Colorguards Through Observations

Community colorguard troupes in Malaysia allow more choreographic freedom and are more open in its gender recruitment. These troupes offer a platform for males to safely pursue their interest in colorguard. Within the three community troupes, the colorguard instructors are the primary people responsible for teaching and doing demonstration at practice and rehearsal sessions. Most of them hold either full time jobs or are pursuing a Diploma or Bachelor's Degree at local universities. In Guards Conspiracy (GC), there are two main instructors; the overall caption head, Mohd Hezrul Hizham (henceforth, prefers to be referred to as Audi), is in charge of overseeing the entire ensemble's program throughout the season. He sometimes acts as a visual designer and a movement choreographer. His assistant, Ahmad Huzaimi Che Ismi (Huzaimi), is in charge of movement choreography that includes both flag and rifle work.

Audi brings over ten years of experience to the colorguard activity. Originally from Kuala Lumpur, he is a graduate from the Victoria Institution High School and marched in the Victoria Institution Cadet Corps Band (VICCB) for seven years from 1997 to 2003. Audi is currently living in Gombak and is the instructor for the VICCB colorguard section, as well as the director and visual designer for GC. Huzaimi also started his colorguard training at the VICCB. He marched with the band through the years 2005 to 2009. Upon graduating from high school, Huzaimi furthered his studies at a local institute, but never gave up his love and passion for colorguard. He is currently Audi's assistant at both VICCB and GC.

In Vortex Winterguard (VW), Rafaeil Morgan (Rafaeil), an ex-member of the St. John's Institution high school marching band situated in Kuala Lumpur, is in charge of overseeing the entire program while at the same time choreographing the rifle

movements. He is assisted by Mohd Hafiz Khairuddin (Hafiz), an ex-member of the Kolej Sultan Abdul Hamid high school marching band located in Kedah, who focuses more on the flag routines. Both Rafael and Hafiz are “straight” men who have a strong muscular physique. Rafael used to be a part of the football team in high school, while Hafiz also played a lot of sport. They were still studying in local universities at the time the observations and interviews took place.

At Batteryheadz Colorguard Ensemble (BCE), I am the overall program director. I am assisted by two movement choreographers, Mohd Hairul Zamzuri (Hairul) and Fendy Razaein (Fendy). Hairul, an ex-member of the VICCB, focuses on the weapons like the rifles and sabers, while Fendy, a graduate from the Penang Free School high school in Penang, choreographs the flag movements and routines. Both Hairul and Fendy have a muscular physique and are athletically fit to be able to constantly come up with movement choreography for the group. They were studying in local universities at the time observations took place.

As highlighted previously, the construct of an “ideal man” is seen to be someone with financial stability, someone having a paid job, and someone who is strong, outdoorsy, and athletic (Krauss, 2011). Evidently, most of the people who are in charge of the mentioned troupes either have a full time job, or are actively pursuing a career. They also pursue an active lifestyle by attending colorguard practices on weekends. They are strong, have a muscular physique, and are highly involved in other sporty activities, like football. This directly acts as a signifier for masculinity. These characteristics are equated to masculinity, which translates as being a man refers to having a stable income while also having an active lifestyle, being athletically fit and strong.

At the beginning of a competitive season (which solely depends on the dates of selected competitions), usually at the end of December, instructors first explain what they will be teaching by giving a verbal explanation of the goals for the entire season. This includes program directions, theme choices, setting the goals or timeline, and selection of competitions that they plan to take part in. All three troupes begin their practice sessions in a stretching block, to stretch their muscles and gain more flexibility, before they proceed to rehearse equipment fundamentals. As the season progresses, the time allocated for stretching and basic equipment exercises may get shorter, as the teams focus on the performance routine, but daily fundamentals are still essential for their growth. All three troupes choose a set of basic routines they will execute every day as a warm up, such as drop spins, flourishes, pull-hits, and hand spins on flag, flourishes and tosses on rifle. Generally, these fundamentals help build strength, as such, they need repetition. Many instructors also include high-risk routines such as tosses or difficult combinations, such as a toss with a body turn underneath the equipment, during the daily block. In order to execute these combinations, members have to be physically capable of tossing the equipment in the air at a specific height. Through repetition of daily warm ups and routines, the goal is to build up the muscles in the arms in order to be able to execute equipment tosses. The ideal man is herewith shown as being muscular and physically strong, which will be highlighted in the next few pages.

GC practices twice a week, usually on weekends, and comes up with a routine that consists of flag, rifles and minimal dance routines for their 2015 program entitled “Prince of Egypt”. In December 2014, the members of GC gather at a public park located in Bandar Tasik Permaisuri and begins their training. Since all of the sixteen members graduated from the same high school, Victoria Institution, they were immediately familiarized with each other. Huzaimi begins his rifle warm-up session as follows:

“Today we are working on building our hand strength. This is a short warm-up routine that we will perform every day at the beginning of each practice session. We may also perform it to music because it is relatively easy and it fits to any song with four beats in a measure. We need to learn the entire routine and clean it today in the next hour and a half. But first, let’s do some push-ups!” (Personal Observation, translated in Italics, December 2014).

One of the most common challenges Huzaimi faces is how to avoid members getting bored while performing their routines and warm ups. He constantly switches between flags and rifles during practice sessions, and give the members a new skill to learn to constantly keep them engaged and interested during practices. He always demonstrates the move that he intends to teach for the day before having the other members try it out for themselves. Huzaimi’s teaching philosophy is to teach with a positive and encouraging environment so that members learn a sense of discipline to achieve excellence. Huzaimi emphasizes the importance of being physically fit, being capable of performing difficult movements and routines, thus training is highly male-centric.

Similarly, VW begins practices in December of 2015, in preparation for its upcoming program the following year. The troupe’s instructor, Rafaeil, has an interesting view for the 14 males present in the troupe:

“Winter Guard is a great tool for any organization. Whether you are competitive or not, members are always looking for outlets to keep busy and be involved, doing something they love doing, regardless of male or female. We have 13 men and three women for our next production planned out for 2016. As for the men in VW, the key is to keep them interested by planning out a set of choreography suitable for men, showcasing their skills and strength.” (Personal Conversation, translated in Italics, December 2015).

Similar to the importance of physical strength that Huzaimi emphasizes earlier within GC, Rafael goes on to say:

“The men are very concern about their physical well-being. Get mentally healthy, exercise, change the way they eat, listen to music that makes them feel good, these are among the habits that the males have practiced throughout the year.” (Personal Conversation, translated in Italics, Deember2015).

When analyzing the construction of masculinity in colorguard troupes, one necessarily has to take a closer look at the behavior of these men. In VW, their behavior can be classified as a masculine behavior. A common stereotype of masculine men is that they are aggressive, assertive, adventurous, and competitive (Berger, 1995; Hatty, 2000; Mansfield, 2006), and thus powerful. This can best be seen from the example in the above quote. For the men in VW, exercise is considered one of the best ways to acquire a muscular physique. Upon further observation, the men’s athletic bodies with its musculature implies a very active lifestyle. This appearance also underlines the men’s high level of independence, as “the myth of masculine independence is embodied in confident and confident-inspiring appearance” (MacKinnon, 2003, p. 89).

In BCE, its members, both male and female, are constantly pushed to their limits. As such, the strength of the body is a major contributor to the member’s success with their flag, rifle, or saber. In the year 2016, BCE consisted of eight males and eight females in its production. This gave me a perfect opportunity to observe the division of labor between males and females, as they were required to execute the same set of choreography comprising dance movement and equipment handling. The characteristics and dynamics of the group in completing certain tasks or goals differs between male and female. This takes place during practice sessions and even during break times.

For a long time, since the year 2013, Fendy Razain, one of the initial founders of the troupe (also a former athlete in school), has always talked about the core, and the importance of training the core muscles, and the benefits provided therein. This is absolutely true in the remark *“and there is no excuse to skip your push-ups, sit-ups, boys and girls”*. Fendy repeats this in almost every practice session throughout the year, 2016. Fendy begins the first session in the morning of January 2016:

“For those of you who are not going to join me, you may carry on with your dance block over there...”

Push-ups, here we go. The standard push-up format is your starting point. If you are just beginning, do the bent knee “girly” version.” (Personal Observation, translated in Italics, January 2016).

I noticed none of the males intended to be referred to as “girly” as they immediately repositioned their body alignment to perform the push-up as how they felt a “man” would. Fendy continues:

“Next, pull those fingers close together. Make a diamond with your index fingers and thumbs. This is putting more emphasis on the triceps. I know, stop calling me names guys. And finally, open those hands wide apart, past the shoulders by at least six inches. We’ve switched the torture emphasis to the bicep now.

Start with five to ten of each kind, with a goal of working up to fifty; twenty-five for the girls, okay, fine.” (Personal Observation, translated in Italics, January 2016).

As a result of Fendy taunting the group, the males immediately proceed to do 50 push-ups instead of the 25 assigned for the females. Fendy finishes the push-up session by saying:

“And once you can perform 100 rifle spins without breaking a sweat, note the continued improvement in your weapon technique, you can thank me then.”
(Personal Observation, translated in Italics, January 2016).

From the previous examples, it is evident that the crucial role of the male body in the construction of masculinity is reflected in all three troupes, as some physical characteristics of the bodies of these men underline their perception as masculine. Muscularity in the arms, legs and torso, as well as the use of physical strength, supports the alignment with hegemonic masculinity. These physical features are features of the body that an individual can to some extent control or modify. As such, they play a very important part in the performance of masculinity (for the individuals choose to alter these features in a certain way) and act as signifiers in the construction of hegemonic masculinity. While these practices certainly vary over time and among different groups, all three troupes under analysis in this research can be viewed as prime examples of how certain features of the male body are modified (and thus depicted) in a way that promotes the hegemonic ideal of masculinity.

In VW, Rafael also highlights an interesting moment that commonly takes place during practice sessions. He shares:

“I observe this a lot, from the men in the team. During practices, during rehearsal... Personal appearance is very important for these men, like doing your hair or wearing nice clothes, sends a message to the other female members that you actually got ready for the rehearsal, while also intending to impress them.”
(Personal Conversation, translated in Italics, February 2016).

Males in VW literally sets themselves as the benchmark of what men have to look like and be like in order to be considered masculine and thus desirable for women. Here, the perception of the body and appearance acts as a very important signifier of one's

gender identity and affects one's actions in everyday life. As Butler (1991) has argued in her ground breaking essay "Imitation and Gender Insubordination", using performances of drag as her main point of argumentation, gender (and, as such, masculinity as well as femininity) is a social performance. Butler writes: "Drag is not putting on of a gender that belongs properly to some other group, [...] that 'masculine' belongs to 'male' and 'feminine' belongs to female. There is no 'proper' gender, a gender proper to one sex rather than another, which is in some sense that sex's cultural property. [...] Drag constitutes the mundane way in which genders are appropriated, theatricalized, worn, and done; it implies that all gendering is a kind of impersonation and approximation" (1991, p. 13 - 31). In our society, as Butler indicates, "masculine" is still seen as belonging to "male," and "feminine" to "female". Both of these gender constructions are based on the body, and are constantly re-enacted in our everyday lives. Here, gender (henceforth masculinity and femininity) is a kind of imitation for which there is no original. It is a kind of imitation that produces the very notion of the original as an effect and consequence of the imitation itself (Butler, 1991).

If gender is something that is performed by all of us, most commonly unconsciously, based on the possession of certain anatomical features (penis – male, vagina – female), then males within VW are indeed performing cultural masculinity. However, they do so in different ways in their everyday lives. Some chooses to do their hair, while others wear certain outfits to show off their muscular physique. The crucial aspect here is that the men in VW perform masculinity to an extent that makes it obvious that they are performing. As such, their masculinity as expressed by their behaviors and bodies reveals the fragility of the performativity of gender. Their masculinity is expressive of what I, based on Butler's concept of gender performativity, deem to be a socially constructed form of masculinity.

For BCE, when performing, they need to know when to perform ballet movements such as *plie'*, *releve'*, point their feet, breathe, shape the legs during a kick, and upper body alignment. As ballet is seen as one of the main dance forms being used in winter guard, and coming from a dance background myself, I had incorporated a lot of dance movements throughout BCE's 2016 program "Relativity". The instructors at BCE always engaged the performers in asking for suggestions to develop and deepen their dance movement vocabulary. One of the females, who prefers to be referred to as Zummy, always gives new and interesting dance ideas for the troupe. For example:

"Use a demi plie²⁸ to drop down into the movement, and there you go! Change in weight." (Personal Observation, translated in Italics, March 2016).

"Hey guys, when we are moving backwards during this section, let's try to do it in releve'. This elevates the body, smooth out the travel and, yes, provides another level change." (Personal Observation, translated in Italics, April 2016)

"Try half of the unit in plie', and half in releve' for this section. Maybe we can create a better effect?" (Personal Observation, translated in Italics, May 2016).

Most of the dance suggestions came from females, in order to turn a certain phrase in the movements to be more expressive. In accomplishing these movements, it became evident that males struggled a lot more than females, as males were more focused on the physical aspect of the routines, such as the rifle tosses. In their own attempts to spin and catch the rifles, Zummy and her fellow female team mates express how difficult the basic skills of the rifles are to master, and how painful it can be when it is done wrongly. When it comes to rifles and sabers, the males take charge in conducting warm up routines and exercises, while the females struggle to keep up. Male members in BCE often indicate their views that the females take at least three times as long to master the rifle work compared to the males. In effect, more time is spent during practices on rifle and saber

routines compared to the dance routines being taught by Zumy. As a result, the men in BCE always dictate the flow and structure of every practice session, where the women have to follow and keep up with them. This clearly shows that compared to the activity present in high schools, the males are more dominant in community colorguard troupes.

This high degree of dominance and assertiveness also emphasizes another core belief of hegemonic masculinity: the dominance over others. As noted by Hatty (2000), “the opportunity and capacity to dominate Others is integral to hegemonic masculinity. The use of force [...] is viewed as one of the instruments of power and as one of the modes of behavior by which hierarchy is perpetuated in society” (p. 181). This dominance can best be seen during rifle warm up routines, as the men are in control and dominate the women. This accentuation of dominance underlines another aspect of hegemonic masculinity: the man as the active part in the gender dichotomy (Craib, 1988).

In his book *Media and Male Identity: The Making and Remaking of Men*, Macnamara (2006) points out that traditional gender roles see males as “hunters and providers, protectors, breadwinners [...] and leaders” (p. 49). This is also supported by O’Neill’s (1988) perception of masculinity, where he says, “The qualities of masculinity [...] seem invariable, and are associated with the male as breadwinner, provider, worker, the active and public half of the species: a man is strong, aggressive, rational, independent, task-oriented and successful” (p. 88).

This masculine activeness and task-orientedness, the man as “the strong and aggressive leader, provider, worker”, can be seen portrayed by the males in BCE. The men’s masculinity is herewith reinforced, as they are shown as the leader and the active maker, whereas the female counterpart (exemplified by Zumy and her fellow female team

mates) is suggested to be rather passive, as they are the ones who have to follow. They are not able to, or find it difficult to, execute movements of the rifle and saber.

During rehearsals and competitions, all three troupes already have routines and pre-performance “rituals” (such as mini games to calm the nerves) in place. It is important for them not to change this for a competition performance, because according to Rafael:

“Performers take comfort in routines.

Before every rehearsal for competitions, we take a granola bar and extra bottle of water, some like to take an apple... Before running on empty as you try to get them to focus for warm-ups. We need the energy for our warm-ups. Because our warm-ups consist a lot of tossing, requires a lot of energy. It is very tiring, even the warm-ups. This has been our routine since 2014, and we have stuck to it.”
(Personal Conversation, translated in Italics, August 2016).

Similarly, Audi of GC says that his most effective method for quelling team anxiety before competitions was simply to toss the rifles in the air during warm up sessions. This was also a way for the all-male GC troupe to gain more confidence before entering the competition space. As I observed during the 2015 Kuala Lumpur International Youth Marching Band Competition, which was held at Stadium Hoki Jalan Duta, the males were indirectly “showing off” their skills and tosses in front of the passing crowd outside the venue. This was a way for them to calm the nerves while at the same time running through their routines. I noticed that the crowd would stop in front of their warm up block to observe and take pictures.

When taking a closer look at the content of both VW and GC’s warm up sessions, one more aspect can be identified that significantly contributes to the troupe’s construction of hegemonic masculinity: the masculine man as somebody who actively

seeks risk, the masculine man as an adventurer and frontiersman (Mansfield, 2006), as “manhood is linked with challenge, risk and with mastery over challenges from nature, technology and other men” (MacKinnon, 2003, p. 93). During warm up sessions that takes place outside of competition venues, males in VW and GC present themselves as highly heterosexual individuals. By constantly challenging themselves and taking a lot of risks, the characteristics of men in both GC and VW can be identified as signifiers for heterosexuality. They promote the perception of a masculine male to be heterosexual, indicating that the rifle tosses are aimed at showing of their skills, strength and the courage to take risks. As such, these men eliminate any doubt regarding their heterosexuality and they are characterized as a heterosexual individual.

The men in GC portrays their skills and strength handling the rifles, but most importantly has the confidence to appear in public and be acknowledged as the only all-male colorguard troupe in Malaysia. The identification of males as masculine is herewith put in a framing of heterosexuality, in comparison to homosexuality and effeminacy associated with males who enroll in high school colorguards. Thus, it perpetuates the notion of heterosexuality and becomes a very important signifier for hegemonic masculinity. As all of the members of GC graduated from VICCB, this reminds me of a time when showing off our flag warm ups would not have been possible with the VICCB back in 2003. Being a member of the colorguard section during that year, I recall having no warm-up sessions prior to our performances, as most of the members were reluctant to appear in public with flags. There were no rifles being used at the time, thus the fear of our manliness being questioned became a concern.

Airil, one of the members from GC, remembers the intense talent and drive of the group to push their boundaries. “*We would throw caution to the wind and experiment*

with death defying tricks, tosses, and flag exchanges to be placed within the show,” (Personal Conversation, translated in Italics, April 2015). During that year, GC’s program entitled *Prince of Egypt* asks of its performers a tremendous amount of strength, endurance, and character development. The program explores the narratives of the character Prince of Egypt, a popular tale of the Egyptian prince, Moses. The program was executed with the use of a lot of strength and stamina, delving not only into male strength and prowess but into their precision and equipment handling capabilities. In “Prince of Egypt”, the show culminates in a strong rifle feature that is brought to life by the all-male cast that also earned them a silver medal in Hong Kong.

Another example of this risk-taking characteristics could be seen in VW. The dense multiplicity of action in VW’s 2016 program was a program that highlighted the males during the Winter Guard International Malaysia Championships, held in Stadium Badminton Cheras in December 2016. The rifle tosses came thick and fast, and a knowledgeable audience rewarded each catch with an applause. The continual charge of risk combined with moments of technical capabilities and physical prowess was definitely a crowd pleaser. Throughout the performance, the colorguard members used a ladder to enhance their stunts. The ladders, flowing dance moves and intricate rifle work, performed to a mixture of music, narration and sound effects, represented VW’s theme of “Emotions.” The show won them second place during the competition that year.

On that night, VW brought incredible emotion and energy to their program based on the various emotions a teenager goes through during the period when a young boy comes of age. VW’s choreographers had difficulty coming up with concepts according to Rafael, but eventually found inspiration. Rafael says:

“We wanted to try out something new. We wanted to take more risks and present a more challenging program. It all started with a ladder, and after realizing the tricks possible with a ladder, the rest came easy.” (Personal Conversation, translated in Italics, December 2016).

As BCE’s 2015 program “Relativity” starts, the colorguard members glide effortlessly across the stage performing to a mixture of slow and dramatic music effects that gradually builds in intensity. Around the two-minute mark, the music hits a climax and the tempo becomes faster, where the males would switch up their flags with rifles. In the most difficult stunt of the performance, Ady Safwan and his teammate, Muhammad Amirul, tosses their rifles, letting it rotate six times in the air as they perform a body turn (almost similar to a *pirouette*)²⁹ before catching the rifles. According to Ady, *“Tossing a six on its own is one of the most difficult stunts in colorguard. To turn underneath the toss while doing it takes considerable skill”* (Personal Conversation, translated in Italics, August 2015). Here, we see another example of how these men are willing to challenge themselves and take risks, a signifier of hegemonic masculinity.

Huzaimi also shares other pre-performance “rituals” he uses with GC on long bus rides. These forms of “rituals” asserts the men in GC to act out their masculinity, even within a confined space, reassuring their manliness. Huzaimi says:

“We play games in the bus, any kind of games that are suitable for guys... that they would willingly do... something like an arm wrestling contest, or a push-up contest. Yes, we did push-ups in a moving vehicle [laughs]. We also sing and do all sorts of chants to calm the nerves, shouting at the top of our lungs, throwing all our nervousness and anxiety out the window.” (Personal Conversation, translated in Italics, December 2015).

Rafaeil from VW recalls one of its most problematic trips in 2016, when the troupe had competed in a colorguard competition in Thailand. During that year, an injury

occurred to a few members, both male and female, the night before preliminary round during rehearsal sessions. As a result, sections within the show had to be reworked that same night, and in the bus on the way to the arena the next morning. He found it harder for the females to cope with the pain and all the changes made to the show, where they would simply experience an emotional breakdown and cry. On the other hand, the males would simply *“laughed it out”* according to Rafeil.

Here, another binary opposition that promotes heteronormative forms of masculinity that is represented by the men in VW is related to the emotional state of the members. A common stereotype of women is that they are more emotional than men (Macdonald, 1995), a stereotype which is also visible from the above passage. While it is suggested that the females in VW are very emotional, the behavior of the men and their presentation implies that a masculine man has to be in control of his emotions, or even cannot be emotional at all. This is supported by the wordings that Rafeil uses, *“laugh it out”*. This statement not only portrays the men as capable of managing their emotions, but also indirectly aimed at the female’s emotions. Women in VW are thus satirized as being highly emotional beings, whereas males are shown as not only to be in control of their emotions, but also have the ability to point out a female’s emotional character. They use this ability to keep their patriarchal superiority intact, and as such, reinforcing their masculine power. After all the fiascos of that year, Rafeil continues:

“One of the best and most memorable experiences of my time with VW was taking the troupe to compete in Thailand, where we had the chance to portray our skills and talents. In fact, in Thailand, there are a lot of males enrolling in colorguard, thus we couldn’t wait to show what our men from Malaysia can do!”
(Personal Conversation, translated in Italics, December 2016).

In my analysis thus far, I have concentrated on the construction of masculinity by distancing myself and observing the three troupes, looking at their behaviors, presentation, mannerisms, and character patterns. However, an analysis of the construction of masculinity in colorguard is incomplete without taking a look at the construction of masculinity through the perception and thoughts of these men. In the following section, I begin to understand this construction of masculinity at a deeper level, of what it means to be a male colorguard, but more importantly, to determine what it means to be considered as masculine.

4.3 Analyzing Masculinity in Colorguards Through Conversations

Colorguards fit many of the characteristics described by Turino of “participatory ensembles” (2008). Because of their inclusive nature, repetitious content, and the heightened awareness engendered in members of not only the aural but also the visual presence of those around them, colorguards carry a component of the “heightened social interaction” (Turino, 2008, p. 28) characteristic of participatory ensembles. More recently, they have also turned into a widespread national phenomenon, and thus provide a compelling case-study for gendered norms within the Malaysian colorguard community. In doing so, I analyze the performance of gender and masculinity through the narratives of four men who are currently active in colorguards within community colorguard troupes. These narratives vividly portray the lived reality of coping with what one participant described as a constant challenge participating in colorguards in the local community.

To understand how masculinity is constructed through the eyes of the men in the case studies, I conducted interviews with four male colorguard members over the span on 24 months. They are, Muhammad Airil Anuar bin Mustaqim from GC (labelled as G1),

Wan Zariff Murshidi bin Wan Ghazali from VW (labelled as G2) and two from BCE, Ady Safwan bin Adlin and Muhammad Amirul bin Mukminin (labelled as G3 and G4 respectively). Two prominent themes emerged from the participants' narratives: performing gender, and constructing masculinity. A common construction across both themes is that gender is something that one does; it is a performance and it draws on society's ideas of normative masculine behaviors for men, which will be explained further in the following pages.

All of the participants appear to hold the view that gender is achieved through behavior. This is concurrent with sex role typing (Bem, 1974; Bem, 1975; West & Zimmerman, 1987). According to the participants in this research, masculinity can be achieved through the action of watching or playing sport or even through particular characteristics and behaviors. The imagery that the participants draw on to develop their constructions of gender are dualistic in that sport is seen as masculine, while dance is viewed as feminine. Likewise, the participants constructed their understandings of gender through the representations of the strong, hard, masculine male performer and the weak, soft, feminine females and their labor within colorguard. The following analysis highlights a few excerpts of the conversations I had with my informants.

G1 strongly believes that being masculine is a performance. In response to the question: "How would you describe your personal sense of masculinity to someone who isn't involved in colorguard?" G1 stated that:

"Masculinity is simply the manner in which one behaves (like a man). Certain personality, vocal and habits make up the traits of masculinity. I would just let them know I am [just me] as to the characters I portray in colorguard. I am "straight" and it does not affect my performance." (Appendix F, translated in Italics).

When asked to elaborate on what kind of personality, vocal and habitual traits he meant, G1 answered that:

“I'm generally loud, expressive and my confidence is easily noticeable. I also tend to speak in slang and use curse words all the time. Other habitual traits include generally being expressive with my hand gestures... Especially when I swear... [both laughs]” (Appendix F, translated in Italics).

Therefore, G1 appears to construct masculinity as something one can perform. G1's list of characteristics and behaviors do not conform to widely held beliefs surrounding masculine behaviors (see Bourdieu, 1993; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). G1's understanding of masculinity would therefore conform to the position taken by myself as the researcher, which is that there are many ways to be a man, some of which are currently constructed as feminine (see Bourdieu, 1993).

G3 also links masculinity with behavior. G3 answered the question: “What are the stereotypes about male colorguard performers that you have heard or come across, and what would your responses to these stereotypes be?” With a very strong stance that men, despite their sexuality, should behave in masculine ways, G3 responded:

“The most obvious is that, apparently, all men who do dance are gay. I encountered it with regards to myself personally up until the age of about 17. I however, still encounter it as I see it in our own troupe. No mockery is made of being a man who spins flags, but if you act "like a sissy", there is a certain amount of ridicule towards that person. I must admit, even by me. It makes me angry to see a fellow companion feeding the stereotype that I despise and in my opinion, colorguard is for strong men, so act like a man or get a sex change.” (Appendix H, translated in Italics).

When asked to further elaborate on his answer, G3 continued to expand on what he meant by “it”, what the term “act like a sissy” meant to him, and what he meant by “act like a man”:

“By “it” I mean the mockery and stereotypes. To act like a sissy would be to act in a stereotypical way like gay men, or men in an overly feminine way. What is nowadays referred to as “nyah”. I despise the stereotype because I believe that if you were born a male, you should not try to be something you are not, like a female. By this I also mean to act like a man.” (Appendix H, translated in Italics).

As is evident from the above quotes, G3 further constructs masculinity as separate from sexuality in that he believes men do not need to behave like women, no matter their sexual identity. This perspective fits well with both Butler’s (2002) and West and Zimmerman’s (1987) belief that gender is performed. The above passages also describe the state in which an individual aligns its behavior with the behavior that is expected of a member of its sex, to an extent that makes its performance of a specific gender obvious. The individual is highly self-reflexive and aware of the attributes, characteristics and behavior patterns that are culturally associated with its biological sex, and it actively mocks them as a means of challenging them. Based on these gendered roles and characteristics, men who performs in colorguard works in a way that reinforces hegemonic masculinity. By projecting an image of masculinity on the bodies of these men, it reveals our culture’s tendency to equate sex to gender and, while trying to mock it, ultimately reinforces traditional gender roles and heteronormative masculinity.

Similarly, G2 set the idea of masculinity apart from sexuality. G2 expressed his belief that one could perform masculinity by recounting an event from his life where he needed to portray a masculine, yet possibly homosexual man in a choreography:

“Our troupe consist of mostly males... our 2015 program, I recall... entitled “Catharsis” had a section which is mainly a duet for two men... involving lifts. When my colleague and I first performed it, a lot of people praised us not only for the interpretation but the cohesiveness we created with the rifles.” (Appendix G, translated in Italics).

I asked G2 to elaborate on “What about being a man performing this show earned him praise” and if he could “remember what a few people said to him”:

“The idea behind the piece is for it to show off our strength and agility handling the rifles at super-fast tempo. The duet hints at a potential relation between the two men but it is in no way meant to suggest an obvious “male” and “female” role as we observe in most relationships. Our instructor was happy with our work and he said something along the lines of “it was beautifully executed with a great sense of strength and agility”. Our weapons tech was equally impressed and let us know that we did an “amazing job”. He dislikes it when the men in our troupe appear whimsical and sissy-like, unless it’s intended to look so. He appreciated the masculine manner in which we performed the duet.” (Appendix G, translated in Italics).

G4 shared the beliefs of G1 and G3 in that he saw masculinity as being about behavior, as different ways of performing:

Q: Okay, so are there different techniques in training, some more feminine and more masculine and could you describe those to me?

“There’s not really different techniques, it just depends on your teacher and how the women are flexible... can do a split, it can be soft... and a boy can’t, we do other things... we work on our rifles more... on flags... must do it harder, it must not have... it must not be too umm... what’s the word I’m looking for... it must not flow too much... it must have more umm... resistance behind it.” (Appendix I, translated in Italics).

G2, on the other hand, did link masculinity and sexuality. G2 expands on this point below:

Q: What are the physical requirements for a male colorguard performer and what should they look like?

“[Hmm...] there’s different perceptions... like for example there were a couple of different males in this troupe, and one particular girl... there are only two girls here... was teaching these guys to dance like a female, thin and you know, very feminine body lines, and then I was on the other side of the spectrum, where they wanted the strength, you know, umm, I would say the strong guy in the team, you need to lift the women, and men, and all the rest of it, umm, and lots of work.”

Q: Okay. What about those lifts?

“Ahh... male and male working, we would do a little dance together while holding the flag, and then she would put it down and I would lift him... by the waist... my hand at his waist...” (Appendix G, translated in Italics).

Although all of the participants’ view masculinity as behavior, most believe it exists free of sexuality, while only one thinks they are linked. Thus far, masculinity has been conceptualized through the image of a strong, hard style of performing. Therefore, participants seem to hold the view that gender is something one does and that one’s apparent gender can change by virtue of the way that one behaves. Further, according to the participants, masculine traits such as assertiveness and dominance (Bem, 1974) can be expressed through different styles of performance. In this way, male colorguard performers seem to move between being masculine and feminine quite restrictively. They try their best to appear masculine in front of others while performing a certain movement, while also avoiding being seen as overly feminine; a leg split, for example. It is this rigidity with which they embody their genders that they can begin to challenge the socially dominant ideas of what it means to be a man. While some participants link the

concepts of masculinity with sexuality by the basis of performing a certain movement, others do not, and this may be due to the fact that certain behaviors which they believe to be connected to certain sexual orientations as well as genders.

The participants have constructed different ways of performing one's gender as being equated with different sex. Again, participants draw on the imagery of the feminine versus the masculine colorguard performer. This connection indicates that some of the participants see behaviors and masculinity as being linked in some way. Indeed, the idea of colorguard being a feminine art form is often tied to homosexuality. It would appear that the participants have attempted to link sport with colorguard in order to make sense of the contradictory positions they hold in society, being male colorguard performers (Desmond, 1991). Thus, they may manage this conflict in their identity constructions by identifying with, what they believe is a profession that is largely viewed by society as masculine: sport.

When asked to explain why he thinks people hold these stereotypes about male colorguard performers, G1 suggested that:

“Most Malaysian men, and women, believe in a strong, sports-fanatic nation. If you don't play sport, there is something wrong with you as a man. I don't know where it came from as others, probably other countries, maybe, don't have this notion. A generalization I know, but look at the arts overseas, how they thrive and encourage it. This is what was made apparent to me from a young age and anyone can guess when they look around that this is true.” (Appendix F, translated in Italics).

G1 suggests that colorguard is more than just spinning flags, that it is also athletic. In response to the question: “What are the physical requirements for a male colorguard performer and what should they look like?” G1 said that:

“A male guard has to be strong, both in mind and body. A man needs to be able to partner a woman, lift and support her. A man needs to be able to toss an equipment incredibly high in the air while performing various sequences, like turning underneath the toss with his feet and legs. We need to be build up our physique, and in general, be athletically fit...” (Appendix F, translated in Italics).

By linking being a masculine colorguard performer with being strong and athletic, G1 also draws on the image of sport as a masculine activity and also links colorguard with sport. G1 further stated, in response to the question: “What advice would you give to a young man who wants to build a career, or simply start out in colorguard?”; “Can you give some examples of what they would go through physically, mentally and emotionally?”:

“Colorguard is an athletic sport, so they will need to go through pretty much the same things an athlete would but with (possible) added rejection and mockery from people who don't know any better. We exercise to build those muscles for a reason. Guard members also suffer injuries, just like in any other sport... I have bruised my arm many times due to a badly-timed rifle catch.” (Appendix F, translated in Italics).

Further, G2 began to draw links between the experiences of athletes and his experiences as a colorguard performer. He argued that all sports professionals experience injuries and need therapy, thus making colorguard more like a sport, given that he too had experienced injuries from his routines.

Q: When you say like something that your body is not supposed to be doing what do you mean by that?

“Well look at any sports person suffers from injuries, any major sports person suffers from injuries, it's with the territory, and I just don't believe the body's meant to be, drilled like that every day.” (Appendix G, translated in Italics).

In order to build the association between sports and colorguard, G2 drew on his experience of training in a rugby team:

“Umm... I’ve trained with the rugby team, in high school. We are very physical, routines and exercise. And then training with guards, to master our technique, we do hundreds of spins, building up the muscles. Different trainings, same hard work, injuries, physicality.” (Appendix G, translated in Italics).

As Stern (2003) points out in her essay “Masculinism(s) and the Male Image: What Does It Mean To Be A Man?”, men are expected to be powerful, strong, effective and even domineering, and the male musculature can be identified as the symbolic embodiment of these traits (p. 222). This phenomenon, as Edwards (2006) points out in “Cultures of Masculinity”, has its roots in the association of physical labor with masculinity: “Laboring [...] was also defined as ‘masculine’ through its relationship to the male body, requiring or developing musculature and strength and adding further signatures of physical labor and skill or quite simply getting one’s hands dirty as ‘masculine’ activities [...]” (p. 157). As such, musculature is reinforcing the sense of masculinity as hardness (p. 159). Dworkin and Wachs (2009) agree that strength and power are seen as the fundamental goals and attributes of the male body (p. 84). By choosing athletic and muscular activities, the men equate colorguard to strength and power and, as such, the product itself to masculinity.

The equation of colorguards to athleticism, sport and injuries, as well as strength and power underlies the assumption of the active pursuit of another traditional masculine character trait, the participation in sports. Edwards (2006) argues that the rising popularity of participating in sports in general as well as in weight lifting in particular is not coincidental with the decline of jobs that require physical labor in recent decades (p. 157). In his book, *The Naked Man: A Study of the Male Body*, author Desmond Morris (2008)

directly relates a man's participation in sports to his attitude towards masculinity, as "everything from weightlifting to mountain climbing, and from arm-wrestling to polar trekking is undertaken, not because it will serve any practical purpose but because it will enable certain males to show their disgust at the increasing softness of twenty-first-century men" (p. 16). As such, by signifying high sportive activity the athletic bodies of the men in colorguard indirectly criticize less athletic bodies. Even further, due to their athleticism and participation in sports, such as G2's experience playing in a rugby team for example, he qualifies as what Morris describes as the "twenty-first-century hunter" that "can fulfil his urge to chase and aim by engaging in sport" (p. 19), as "the ancient, primeval hunter may be dead, but the modern, symbolic hunter lives on" (p. 20). As such, G2 equates colorguard to physical characteristics as well as behaviors associated with rugby players: athleticism, strength, aggressiveness, and determination.

The association of athleticism and musculature with masculinity is underlined by further aspects of the muscular bodies of these men which are being staged as the ideal masculine bodies. As a result of this depiction, masculine bodies in this way become a benchmark for both the men's conception of masculinity and their masculinity ideal, as "masculinity is commonly seen by essentialist accounts to emanate from the body and to be driven by it" (Edwards, 2006, p. 152) and "after all, one can hardly be a man without a male body" (p. 140).

When asked how he would describe his personal sense of masculinity to someone who isn't involved in colorguard, G3 suggested that it would be difficult because he does not watch sport:

"Umm... [both laughs] that's pretty hard because [laughs] I don't watch sports. Umm... so, I get on with people that aren't in the industry but it's normally as far

as like family, friends I don't really have many friends that are outside the industry. I mean I wouldn't know how I would actually describe it to them." (Appendix H, translated in Italics).

G3 further elaborated on this point in response to a follow up question regarding the ways he thought watching sports would make it easier for him to describe his sense of masculinity to other people:

"I don't think it would make it easier, I suppose that wasn't clear on that question, I mean it just means it's that I'm still a guy it will be like I am a guy, I still enjoy sports, but I don't, I'm not into sports, I don't watch them, not that I'm saying, I just, I've got no interest in them. So it would be easier if I could, if I, to describe to them, like look guys I still watch sports even though I do colorguard, which I don't, is that what you mean?"

Q: No that does make sense, so do you think that people outside of colorguard see sports as, generally, a masculine thing and so that would make it easier?

"Definitely, definitely a masculine thing." (Appendix H, translated in Italics).

G4 clearly believes that watching sport is widely perceived as masculine in Malaysia, and so by engaging in such behavior he would be able to demonstrate his masculinity to others. G4 expands on G2's statements in when asked to explain why he thinks there is more support for the sports as opposed to the arts in Malaysia:

"We're a sporty country, you know, I think we're a sporty country, that's the way it is, you know, the guys would rather watch football, and Formula Ones and whatever else they watch, go and sit, what male, in his right mind wants to go and sit and watch a dance show? Not too many I know [both laughs], but the guys will watch football and whatever sports are on, on the weekend, you know." (Appendix I, translated in Italics).

G2 responded to the question: “What are the stereotypes about male colorguard performers that you have heard or come across, and what would your responses to these stereotypes be?” by saying that:

“The most common stereotype is that male colorguard performers are... soft, sissy. Often, this is not true. Most male guards are more masculine, due to the nature of how we perform it and people don’t understand the difference. Another stereotype is that male guards are not good at sport. Often, we, as colorguards, are better because of our understanding of our bodies in relation to movement. I play football, and rugby, a lot. I can relate.” (Appendix G, translated in Italics).

When asked to further explain what he meant by the nature of how colorguard is being performed, G3 went on to say that:

“When colorguard was established a few years ago in my high school, it was derived from the old-school military. With the flags. Then, colorguard as a form of dance, or, art, performance, was molded on women in high school, like look at Asma for example, so it largely became a female art form here in Malaysia, and men would merely enhance the female's beauty. So, by nature of it, I mean it was always seen as a female thing to do, perhaps still is. (Appendix H, translated in Italics).

G4 also stated in response to the question “What are the stereotypes about male colorguard performers that you’ve heard or come across and what would your response to them be?”, that:

“Well most of them, if they say 90%, if they, all male colorguard, dancers, are sissy, gay, all the female traits.” (Appendix I, translated in Italics).

When asked to explain the reason why he believes people think that, G4 answered:

“Because it’s such a feminine umm, profession, and you’re in bright costumes, and you’re waving flags with girls, and everything’s pretty and fancy, and fairy tale so they automatically go there. They don’t see the art and what’s behind it and the love for challenge, and how hard it is [Laughs]” (Appendix I, translated in Italics).

The stereotyping of male colorguard performers as soft, weak and as being very effeminate may be society’s way of suppressing the possible influence that male colorguard performers may have over challenging dominant constructions of masculinity (Connell, 1995). By equating colorguard with femininity, society exerts control over male colorguard performers by equating them with females. This moves them out of an influential position, and into a marginalized category. Unlike in the USA, male colorguard practitioners are a marginalized group within the Malaysian society. Colorguard is constructed as an inappropriate profession for men, and males who engage in colorguard are often ridiculed since high school. Therefore, male colorguard performers inhabit a contested space. In order to navigate their gender identities, they draw on certain constructions of gender and sexuality.

It is also important to note that it was difficult for me to assume that there were no gay men present within these troupes. None of the participants I have interviewed, or have had a personal conversation with, openly talked about their sexuality. I am limited to an assumption, based on my observations and conversations during the period of conducting this research. As the men in all three troupes projected signs and signifiers of heteronormativity, it was safe to assume that they were indeed “straight” men. Nevertheless, even if there were gay men within these troupes, they were still required to portray the masculine figure through the display of physical strength, endurance, technical skill, and risk-taking abilities. This positions community colorguards as a highly masculine form.

In community colorguard troupes, male colorguard performers construct their masculinity through the image of colorguard as a sport. Given that colorguard, being generally known as a dance form, goes against conventional ideas of masculinity in Malaysia, colorguard is socially constructed as an invalid and inappropriate choice for men, as indicated by not only the social but through lived experiences of my interviewees. This construction is evident in the verbal bullying and marginalization of male colorguard performers. However, with more males treating colorguard as a sport rather than dance, more males are starting to enroll in community colorguard troupes. As a result, there has been a positive shift in perception towards the colorguard activity in recent years.

4.4 Reception on Male Involvement in Colorguards

Just as so many of these performers can attest, colorguard has a tremendous impact upon the performers of these groups and the audiences who watch them. As a result, in recent years, there has been a significant shift in public perceptions on males who enroll in colorguard. Jimmy Wong, the band director of the Victoria Institution Cadet Corps Band, believes that the spike in popularity of males enrolling in colorguard is due to a change in direction - it's becoming less about the dance aspect and more about the physical activity. "These men are required to be more of an athlete," (Jimmy Wong, Personal Conversation, 22 May, 2018). Some schools are beginning to give physical education credit to colorguard members, and universities such as Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) are offering extra curriculum classes in colorguard.

"They are outliers in their school, but in colorguard they find a home where they feel challenged, motivated, and can freely express themselves," (Rafaeil, Personal Conversation, translated in Italics, 14th August, 2018).

In 2018, Vortex Winterguard had received a lot of praises from the audience members after performing their 2018 program “Catharsis”. I managed to record accounts of a few members in the audience, who wished to remain anonymous:

“You can’t really tell whether they are doing dance or sport. I feel that the difficulty of the activity, not to mention their dedication, is on the same level as Olympic sports people. So many different skills and stunts. They’ve got an awful lot to say about the world we live in.” (Anonymous. Personal Conversation. Translated in Italics. 14th August, 2018).

Another member of the audience had this to say about the men in colorguard:

“This is a really great place for kids who never fit in anywhere else, academics or sports, or the social whirl. This was a safe place where they could grow. Within any sport a healthy competition exists between individuals that inspires you to be better at your craft. But, there is a very specific energy that manifests from these young men performing alongside women in colorguard, as a team, that is indescribable.” (Anonymous. Personal Conversation. Translated in Italics. 14th August, 2018).

In 2014, BCE received a lot of praises from the audience in Jember, Indonesia. During the show, the members were able to accomplish difficult routines not only with the flags, but with the rifles and sabers as well. The females, meanwhile, found it hard to keep up with the males in terms of strength and endurance. Here, it can also be said that the success of the males was pinnacle in BCE’s achievement that year. Ady shares one of his favourite moments from the show:

“I know I’ve done my job when I managed to catch all those rifle tosses, and the audience feels certain emotions because they appreciated the risk taken. The crowd was really loud in Indonesia. It’s a great feeling.” (Personal Conversation, translated in Italics, December 2016).

Through the years since the year 2013, all three troupes have carved a name for themselves in both local and international events and competitions. In the year 2015, both GC and BCE competed at local competitions in Kuala Lumpur. They also journeyed to larger events abroad, where GC took part in the Hong Kong Marching Band Competition in Hong Kong in 2015, VW took part in the Thailand Open Colorguard Competition in 2016, while BCE took part in the Jember Open Marching Band Competition (JOMC) in Jember, Indonesia in both 2015 and 2016. Apart from having a platform to showcase their strength and skills, there is another factor among males within these ensembles that explains their motivation for enrolling in colorguard: brotherhood.

Of his time with GC, Airil says:

“These are the friendships; these are the things that have shaped me. This brotherhood bond creates an energy that makes you feel immortal and ready to take on any challenge that presents itself. It is this energy that audiences can feel and cheer on.” (Personal Conversation, translated in Italics, December 2015).

This bond is one that the members continue to feel so strongly throughout their lives. Hafiz Khairuddin of VW remembers an encounter with his teammate:

“It was as if we had just walked off the performance floor, getting caught up and remembering some of the best times of our lives.” (Personal Conversation, translated in Italics, December 2016).

Another member of VW, Wan Zhariff, adds:

“It creates this brotherhood within the team that I’ve never really felt in previously in high school.” (Personal Conversation, translated in Italics, December 2016).

Male colorguard members have a shared love for performing that brings them together. Fendy of BCE, expands this view further:

“Males join the brotherhood. They work together. With other men, other women. It teaches them teamwork. Colorguard members have to work together to understand what they need to do to create an incredible experience for their audiences.” (Personal Conversation, translated in Italics, December 2015).

In community colorguard troupes, I realized that the concept of brotherhood was very important for male colorguard members. The idea of brotherhood enables men to violate some of the dominant cultural tenets of manhood. Customarily, emotional inexpressiveness and independence are associated with masculinity (Sattell, 1976; Vaccaro, Schrock, and McCabe, 2011). When men act in ways that are contrary to dominant views of masculinity, some groups of men may seek to reframe what it means to be masculine. Within the colorguard setting, heterosexual men work together to reframe closeness and emotional expression to distance themselves from women and gay men. As “brother” is a male-specific status (Martin and Hummer, 1989), using the notion of brotherhood to showcase closeness and emotional expressiveness serves to reframe such stereotypically feminine acts as something that is authentically masculine.

The statement “join the brotherhood” by Fendy is also reminiscent of older advertisements for military recruitment - a familiar site for male-exclusive activity and promotion of hetero-dominant masculinity. Young men were often socialized into a militaristic version of manhood through the formation of a brotherhood of combatants. This “brotherhood” suggests that it is inclusive to and made up of men with similar interests (Swiencicki, 1998). “Brotherhood,” defined by Franklin (1999, 2004) as a community of men connected through tacit understanding, common experiences, traditions, and identity, in some ways shape behaviors associated with masculinity. Men

in community colorguard utilized the concept of brotherhood to unite those who shared similar interests as well as a marginalized status. The notion of brotherhood enabled them to express similar goals in achieving success. Although these men face many obstacles in the arts world, they did not passively accept those difficulties; they came together and collectively created a brotherhood to help them survive and succeed.

Today, although the colorguard activity is still not a popular endeavor for males in high schools, there is still much room for growth. The existence of community colorguard troupes in the Malaysian marching band activity offers young males an opportunity to re-invent themselves. In this culturally diverse community, these men deconstruct accepted norms of gender and appropriate identities in Malaysian history to create alternative identities of themselves. The dynamic nature and constant re-drawing of structure within these troupes has sanctioned the creation of a masculine performance as well as manipulation of the personal and shared past. This masculine performance is reframing colorguard to be seen as an athletic art form. As a result, in recent years, expectations for how males are viewed within the colorguard community in Malaysia has changed. Men like Zariff, Ady, and Amirul constantly push the boundaries of how colorguard is being performed by challenging the predominant notion of the society towards the activity. The clearest indication for a way forward is the equation of colorguard with sport in order to increase its profile and attempt to alter the feminized constructions of colorguard practitioners. By positioning colorguard as sports, which, through active participation of the males in these community troupes are now starting to be broadly recognized as being masculine, the ways in which masculinity is currently constructed will be exposed by using a vocabulary that is already available. By uncovering these constructions, the potential for altering the ways in which masculinity and colorguard is understood and practiced in Malaysia is made possible.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

5.1 Research Summary

I demonstrate how my research contributes to the study of masculinity in dance. First and foremost, this research has sought to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What are the differences between high school colorguards and community colorguard troupes?
- 2) Why is there a need for young men to construct masculinity in colorguard?
- 3) How is masculinity being performed in community colorguard troupes in Malaysia?
- 4) How is the perception of the public towards men in community colorguard troupes?

The aim of this research is to provide an insight into the current gender politics within the colorguard activity in Malaysia as a point of departure. In Chapter 3, a thorough analysis on the historical development of colorguards in both the United States and in Malaysia is presented before focusing on the current issues pertaining to gender politics within the Malaysian colorguard scene. This research pays attention on the male performers in constructing masculinity in colorguards, since there are currently more males enrolling in community colorguard troupes. The transformation from a female-dominated activity in high school colorguards to community colorguard troupes with more male involvement is examined and analysed in both Chapter 3 and Chapter 4. In Chapter 3, I have highlighted the history of colorguards in the USA, how the activity is carried out in America, and how it has influenced the activity in Malaysia. Chapter 4 thoroughly documents my findings based on observations and conversations I had with male colorguard performers in order to achieve my second and third objective.

This research aims to examine how masculinity is asserted in colorguards which was, and still is, dominated by females. By focusing on males within three community colorguard troupes in Chapter 4, the construction of masculinity by males who performs colorguard as an athletic sport is made clear. The characteristics, behaviors, and self-presentation of the men in colorguards was examined, highlighting the theory of “masculinity” as the focal point. In order to achieve this, numerous observations were conducted during practice sessions, rehearsals and competitions involving the three respective troupes. Interviews and personal conversations also took place, in order to position myself better within the form throughout the period of conducting this research. Through this method, I am able to observe the characteristics and behaviors of these men and how they construct their perception of masculinity.

This research also aims to highlight how the form of masculinity being constructed and negotiated within community colorguard troupes is similar to the form of masculinity generally present in other physical activities that is perceived to be masculine, such as sports. Chapter 4 highlights how males in colorguard performs challenging choreography with heavy equipment in a similar way in which a sportsman is challenged in other physical activities. This performance by males is distinctive and vastly different from the traditional practices performed in high school colorguards in Malaysia. Lastly, with the increasing number of male involvement in colorguard, public perception and acceptance towards males in colorguard has slowly started to change, compared to the early years. I have given a brief account on the subject matter at the end of Chapter 4. To summarize, the objectives of this research are achieved through methods of observations, participant-observations and interviews.

5.2 Research Limitations

It is necessary to highlight some of the limitations of this research, largely due to location, social context and sample size. Firstly, the research is largely focused on participant information within the vicinity of Kuala Lumpur within a specific period of time. The majority of their experiences have taken place in Kuala Lumpur, an urban city in comparison to smaller states such as Penang or Kedah. The localization of the research participants does not take away the legitimacy of their stories and experiences. However, it underscores the transcripts as lived experiences in one particular region of Malaysia. The research only took place within the period of a competitive season (usually beginning from August to December each year), thus it was difficult for me to arrange interviews and meetups outside of this period of time.

Secondly, these interviews took place and experiences occurred within similar social contexts. Although my research participants and interviews are situated in a similar social context, it is worth noting that there are men who have experienced colorguard in different social contexts, such as performing in university or college bands. My research could not give voice to these performers. This study is a specific study that focuses on a small, but significant group. My sample was limited to male performers in an urban environment, which is not representative of all young Malaysian men who do colorguard. My qualitative approach aims at exploring the theoretical patterns rather than generalizing. If I were to relate these findings to the general population, the composition of the sample would be different. Similarly, my sample was only limited to the assumption that all men in community colorguards are “straight” men. Based on my observations and interviews, participants were constantly projecting multiple characteristics of masculinity. Therefore, I can only assume that all men that I have observed and interviewed are “straight” men.

5.3 Suggestions for Future Research

Hegemonic masculinity was perceived to be the most suitable conceptual framework for exploring and understanding how men construct and perform masculinities in colorguard. However, this does not mean that it is the only way to understand masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity, although useful in understanding masculinity, is not the only concept which can be used to understand and explore masculinities. This research could also be framed in a number of other complementary conceptual frameworks. For example, according to McCabe and Ricciardelli (2004), too few studies investigate the interplay of masculinities with age and religion; the importance of age and religion in various contexts. Recruiting a larger group of participants which is not restricted to the localized setting could allow for a comparison to be made between and within groups of participants.

Research on Malaysian masculinities has largely been focused on the exploration of how heteronormative masculinities have been constructed, particularly referring to the topic of patriarchy. Given the multiple ethnicities in Malaysia, not enough research has been conducted around the Indian and Chinese masculinities. Future research could explore the abovementioned ethnicities, as well as the role of women in the construction of acceptable masculinities in Malaysia. Furthermore, research on the construction of masculinity can be interrogated with the use of other conceptual frameworks as opposed to heterosexual masculinities. It would also be worthwhile to include young women and gay men in studies such as this to explore their views about young men and how they construct and understand masculinity, and their role in the construction and maintenance of particular masculinities. The possibility of a sample analysis focusing on gay male colorguard performers with their own concerns could also be done in the future, as I could not focus on those in depth in this research.

5.4 Closing Notes

This research has made a number of valuable contributions to understandings in the field of masculinities in dance, and more broadly to the field of masculinity studies, embodiment and qualitative research. Looking first at the field of masculinities in dance, this research has provided a detailed analysis that demonstrates how young male colorguard practitioners are required to make sense of the performance of masculinities within a discursive field that consists of a dynamic interplay between shifting, interweaving and conflicting discourses of masculinity and femininity. In turn, by employing an in-depth ethnographic approach, the research has also been able to examine this wider discursive interplay within the daily actions of these specific group of men. In conclusion, I would suggest that the males in community colorguard troupes are pushing the boundaries of masculinity in Malaysia.

This research has contributed to the extremely limited number of studies that are focused on adolescent males and the construction of masculinity in Malaysia. I consider it a beginning to exploring the experiences and realities that is embodied in male dance students. Other areas of research with different approaches need to be explored in order to further understand who they are, how they feel, and what they want to accomplish in and through dance. Participants in this research are in far from being those who have had received professional dance training at a dance academy, or at any other professional institutions. It was an invaluable experience for me to investigate their feelings, thoughts, concerns, and beliefs in colorguards, which in turn provided crucial data to the field of gender and dance education. To me, this research is a milestone celebration because it partially reflects my personal journey from 2003 to now as a colorguard student, dancer, colorguard instructor, and, now, a dance researcher.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Since colorguard is the main focus of this research, I have chosen not to italicize the word.
- ² Based on numerous conversations I had with teachers and marching band instructors throughout Malaysia.
- ³ Effeminate, or effeminacy, which originates from the queer theory, is the manifestation of traits in a boy or man that are more often “associated with feminine nature, behavior, mannerism, style, or gender roles rather than with masculine nature, behavior, mannerisms, style or roles” (Bergling, 2001). It is a term frequently applied to womanly behavior, demeanor, style, clothing and appearance displayed by a boy or man.
- ⁴ To deliver the research, I have resorted to use the spelling of the United States, such as how color, labor, and enrol are spelled.
- ⁵ According to the Oxford Dictionary, color (spelling used in the United States) is the aspect of the appearance of objects and light sources that may be described in terms of hue, lightness, and saturation.
- ⁶ T.J Doucette. Personal Conversation. 18 December, 2011.
- ⁷ A saber is a type of backsword with a curved blade.
- ⁸ According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, modern dance and theatrical dance began to develop in the United States and Europe late in the 19th century, receiving a widespread success in the 20th century. It evolved as a protest against both the balletic and the interpretive dance traditions of the time.
- ⁹ A brass instrument is a musical instrument that produces sound by sympathetic vibration of air in sympathy with the vibration of the player's lips, producing different pitches.
- ¹⁰ A percussion instrument is a musical instrument that is sounded by being struck or scraped by a beater, which in this case, a drumstick.
- ¹¹ Based on numerous conversations I had with teachers and marching band instructors throughout Malaysia.
- ¹² A musical instrument with reed pipes that are sounded by the pressure of wind emitted from a bag squeezed by the player's arm. Bagpipes are associated especially with Scotland, but are also used in folk music in Ireland, Northumberland, and France, and in varying forms across Europe and western Asia.
- ¹³ According to the Oxford Dictionary, the term ‘sissy’ refers to a person regarded as effeminate or cowardly.
- ¹⁴ According to the Oxford Malay-English Translation Dictionary, the term ‘*pondan*’ directly translates to transvestite; a person (usually male) who dresses in clothes of the opposite sex.
- ¹⁵ Through my experience performing with VICCB, the members were constantly being exposed to band performances from the United States, as well as from Thailand and Indonesia via watching videos provided by our band director, Mr Jimmy Wong Yew Mun. As such, we were being informed that Thailand and Indonesia had already successfully adopted the American version of marching bands since the late 1990s, where our director would constantly go on visits to watch competitions abroad.
- ¹⁶ I remember the Keat Hwa Marching Band's performance in 2012 had a single male performer within its colorguard section comprising of sixteen members in total. The male performer was used to support the theme and story line of the performance by moving backdrops in and out of the performance space. He rarely danced or carried any flags.
- ¹⁷ Karyn Sloan, Techniques of Color Guard, Let's Go Team - Cheer, Dance, March Series, (Rosemont: Mason Crest Publishers, 2002) p. 13.
- ¹⁸ Karyn Sloan, Techniques of Color Guard, Let's Go Team - Cheer, Dance, March Series, (Rosemont: Mason Crest Publishers, 2002) p. 60-70.
- ¹⁹ Andy Toth. Personal Conversation. 23 December, 2016.
- ²⁰ T.J Doucette. Personal Conversation. 18 December, 2011.
- ²¹ Movement, as describe by Sloan (2002, pg. 22) refers to the movement of the body, or parts of the body through the use of gestures and motives that elaborates the equipment handling to appear to be more refined.
- ²² Jimmy Wong. Personal Conversation. 16 August, 2012.
- ²³ Tan Shou San. Personal Conversation. 12 March 2016.
- ²⁴ According to the Oxford Dictionary, a piccolo is a small flute sounding an octave higher than the ordinary one.
- ²⁵ According to the Oxford Dictionary, tuba refers to a large brass wind instrument of bass pitch, with three to six valves and a broad bell typically facing upwards.
- ²⁶ A movement in which a dancer bends the knees and straightens them again, usually with the feet turned right out and heels firmly on the ground.
- ²⁷ A movement in which the dancer rises on the tips of the toes.
- ²⁸ An extension to plie, where the dancer bends the knees into almost a squatting position.
- ²⁹ In ballet, a pirouette is an act of spinning on one foot, typically with the raised foot touching the knee of the supporting leg.

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