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‘Go shake this off’: Masculinities, mental health and a moment of dance in *Ted Lasso*’s ‘Beard After Hours’

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Abstract

In television, there is a phenomenon of unexpected dance scenes in non-dance, non-musical texts. This article expands the currently limited research on this popular screen trope. Rich in dance and musical references, Apple TV+’s *Ted Lasso* (2020–23) presents an unexpected moment of dance in Season 2’s departure episode, ‘Beard After Hours’ (Season 2, Episode 9). I argue that the dance performed by Coach Beard (Brendan Hunt) further unfolds the series’ exploration of masculinities and mental health by expressing and producing my original concept of ‘pleasant pessimism’. Generated from Lauren Berlant’s notion of ‘cruel optimism’, pleasant pessimism resists cruel optimism and its fantasies of an unattainable good life, establishes acceptance of reality as is and offers an alternative way of being that is, however unintentionally, transformative. Merging this concept with gender studies and dance theory (primarily Laban Movement Analysis), I demonstrate how Beard’s dance into a world of pleasant pessimism expands masculinities and advocates for mental health through the production of (self-)acceptance. Ultimately, I argue, the moment of dance achieves the good life that is always out of reach with cruel optimism.

Keywords

dancing

masculinity

cruel optimism

pleasant pessimism

comedy

television

Coach Beard

Laban Movement Analysis

Introduction

In television series *Ted Lasso* (2020–23), Season 2, Episode 9, ‘Beard After Hours’ (written by Brett Goldstein and Joe Kelly, directed by Sam Jones) is distinctive for prominently featuring an unexpected dance scene. Other episodes of the series do include overtly choreographed, rehearsed routines to *NSYNC’s ‘Bye Bye Bye’ in ‘Midnight Train to Royston’ (Season 2, Episode 11) and *The Sound of Music*’s ‘So Long, Farewell’ in the (at present) final episode titled after the song (Season 3, Episode 12). ‘Beard After Hours’, however, presents a dance that is choreographed to appear spontaneous and unrehearsed. The moment of dance acts as a microcosm of the episode’s relation to the series, departing from what is expected and centring on secondary character Coach Beard (Brendan Hunt). In this article, I argue that the episode’s use of dance further unfolds the series’ narrative space pertaining to masculinities and (male) mental health by moving into being, what I call, ‘pleasant pessimism’. Briefly, with a more detailed explanation to follow, pleasant pessimism is an original concept that I generate from Lauren Berlant’s notion of ‘cruel optimism’ in the monograph of the same name (2011). Resisting cruel optimism and practising acceptance, it is about remaining in reality with no expectations of positive (or negative) difference and finding it pleasurable because it avoids the cruelty of fantasizing about, and needlessly

striving towards, impossible possibilities. In my close analysis of the text, I merge this concept of pleasant pessimism with dance theory and gender studies in order to demonstrate how a moment of dance produces transformation and an alternative way of being.

Across television, moments of dance are increasingly common. Dance is expected in certain kinds of screen narratives – musicals, dance films, music videos and, naturally, recorded dance performances. There is also a phenomenon of unexpected dance scenes like the one in ‘Beard After Hours’; they appear in genres ranging from comedy to horror to drama. There are sudden musical outbursts in *American Horror Story*’s (2011–present) ‘The Name Game’ (Season 2, Episode 10), *Mad Men*’s (2007–15) ‘Waterloo’ (Season 7, Episode 7) and *Yellowjackets*’ (2021–present) ‘Burial’ (Season 2, Episode 7); superheroes, antiheroes and villains alike dance in *Legion* (2017–19) and *Ms. Marvel* (2022); unexpected characters let loose in *Severance*’s (2022–present) ‘Defiant Jazz’ (Season 1, Episode 7), *Wednesday*’s (2022–present) ‘Woe What a Night’ (Season 1, Episode 4) and *The Great*’s (2020–23) ‘Once Upon a Time’ (Season 3, Episode 10). Despite the current preponderance of such moments of dance, the field of research for this popular screen trope is limited. Research on dance in screen texts often pays attention to those narratives where dance is expected and rarely includes dance in television’s fictional narratives. For example, Erin Brannigan’s *Dancefilm* (2011) articulates the important dynamic between dance and film and engages with various categories of dancefilm, including popular film genres; Knut Hickethier’s work on dance images emphasizes popular and mainstream dance feature films, asserting the use of dance ‘to create special moods, characterize situations and open up particular narrative spaces’ (2011: 160); and *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and the Popular Screen* (2014) addresses a lack of scholarship that blends dance studies with popular culture and film and media analysis, but maintains a focus on texts with expected dance scenes such as films that are about dance or televised dance competitions. This article establishes space for the inclusion

of texts that previously have been overlooked in the research of dance and the (popular) screen.

By broadening the scope of interdisciplinary research incorporating dance and the screen, I exemplify how dance within a non-dance, non-musical television text does, to restate Hickethier's words, 'create special moods, characterize situations and open up particular narrative spaces' (2011: 160). In this instance, creating a mood of and characterizing a situation through the production of pleasant pessimism, the use of dance deepens the narrative space for alternative masculinities and male mental health that is at the forefront of 'Beard After Hours' as well as *Ted Lasso* as a series. I use the plural masculinities because, as Rebecca Feasey contends in *Masculinity and Popular Television*, 'a study of masculinities rather than the more monolithic masculinity allows for an examination of the myriad and multiple ways in which masculinity can manifest itself both on and off screen' (2008: 2). In *Contemporary Masculinities in Fiction, Film and Television*, Brian Baker supports this reading, showing that there are 'various ranges of representations of masculinity available in contemporary culture [...] [and] masculinities are not reducible to one "self" or type' (2015: 243). Indeed, the moment of dance in 'Beard After Hours' undoes the idea of one type of masculinity and creates a (narrative) space to transform into one's full self, a space for male vulnerability and acceptance.

Ted Lasso's challenge to more conventional, limited representations of masculinities in the world of association football (soccer) have been widely considered by the media, particularly in relation to the series' titular character. In *TIME*, Judy Berman refers to AFC Richmond Coach Ted Lasso (Jason Sudeikis) as 'a sort of happy-go-lucky fantasy creature [...] deliberately constructed to teach other adult men how to behave in the world', and presents him as an example of 'the creation of positive male characters [that] will be fraught for as long as the cluster of systemic ills known as "toxic masculinity" endures' (2021:

n.pag.). In *The Atlantic*, Sophie Gilbert describes Ted as ‘a unicorn in a landscape of TV fathers and father figures who torture their children, murder their mistresses, cheat with interns, or fail their family altogether’ (2021: n.pag.). In the *New York Times*, Elamin Abdelmahmoud maintains that ‘the show’s greatest success is making an alternative, soft masculinity seem possible and worth pursuing, even if it remains a fantasy’ (2023: n.pag.). With hopefulness towards the soft, positive, fantasy-like masculinities in *Ted Lasso*, Abdelmahmoud examines the series as a development of how ‘men in sports television and movies are often wounded and broken, and sport is the arena of redemption, the thing that is going to put them back together’ (2023: n.pag.). The Peabody Awards, too, sees value in this representation of alternative masculinities in sport, awarding the series for ‘offering the perfect counter to the enduring prevalence of toxic masculinity, both on-screen and off, in a moment when the nation [United States] truly needs inspiring models of kindness’ (Peabody Awards Official Website 2021: n.pag.).

Realizing sport as a redemptive space then, *Ted Lasso* develops the aspect of football culture that allows men to express emotions somewhat freely – tears, embraces and kisses over wins and losses, ecstatic celebrations, occasionally violent anger. As Alan Bairner stresses, football grounds are ‘sites of acts of emotional remembering that can exert a powerful hold’ and ‘spaces in which people gather, ostensibly and in large part, with a shared set of feelings but which are such that it is also possible for the individual to experience emotions that are purely personal’ (2014: 19). ‘Beard After Hours’ expands the personal experience of football, not for Ted but for Coach Beard. Beard’s emotions take hold at the ground then spiral beyond the space and into his personal life, impacting his overall mental health. This narrative is an example of how the series dissents from the prevailing expectation of men in football to conform to a limited (stereo)type of masculinity, a type that can only

express emotion about the game. In *The Media and the Models of Masculinity*, Mark Moss argues:

The traditional association with sports as masculine enterprise allows men to feel and to fulfill their masculine impulses. It is a place where they define their manhood and what they think of as vital for the display of masculine behavior. (2011: 166)

Through an exploration of male mental health, 'Beard After Hours' expands what manhood, masculine impulses and masculine behaviour look like in sport. Beard's dance, specifically, exhibits an acceptance of this expanded, expansive display.

As I foreground dance as a tool for signifying and making meaning in relation to masculinities and mental health, I uphold Dana Mills's reading of dance as 'an embodied method of communication' that is a 'subversive practice' and 'challenges [...] men's perceptions of themselves as members of communities' (2017: 2). I place this assertion of dance's disruptive quality within the field of dance in popular television and recognize Beard's moment of dance as a catalyst for change. What is more, I respond to Mills's insistence that we are 'attentive to moments in which human beings around the world claim spaces for their bodies and their danced voices; in which they allow dance to move them beyond boundaries' (2017: 122). I argue that the dance in 'Beard After Hours' exemplifies such movement, demonstrating how it claims space, strives for change and seeks exits from patriarchal expectations relating to being a man in the (football) world. In turn, I show how a screen text can employ dance as a way to interrogate societal systems and realize new, alternative or othered ways of being.

Central to my approach is Laban Movement Analysis (LMA). LMA provides a framework to describe, conceptualize and interpret human movement. Originating from the

work of dancer, choreographer and dance theorist Rudolf Laban, this method was developed through key texts like *Effort* (1947) with F. C. Lawrence, *Modern Educational Dance* (1948) and *The Mastery of Movement* ([1950] 1988); it has since been further developed by theorists such as Irmgard Bartenieff and Lisa Ullmann. In *The Mastery of Movement*, Laban refers to the body as an ‘instrument of expression’ that ‘acts like an orchestra’ ([1950] 1988: 34). Laban advances this image of the orchestra by recognizing how ‘various parts can combine in concerted action, or one part may perform alone as a “soloist” while others pause’; he acknowledges that any action ‘has to be understood in relation to the whole which should always be affected, either by participating harmoniously or by deliberately counteracting or by pausing’ ([1950] 1988: 34). Utilizing LMA and analysing movement according to the body as a whole, I gain a deeper apprehension of how dance expresses and represents meaning, how dance produces and composes meaning. Specific terms linked to LMA’s choreutic analysis – or space harmony analysis, on an individual’s relation to their surrounding space – are described as they become relevant. Eukinetic analysis – on the dynamics of movement – involves observation of three motion factors: space, concerning movement that is said to be either direct or indirect; time, consisting of either sudden or sustained movement; and weight, which is said to be firm (heavy) or fine (light). When these motion factors are combined, an action can be described according to a scale of eight possible effort qualities. These qualities are parenthetically described throughout as well as italicized. There is also a more complex fourth motion factor called flow, which suggests a difference between movement that is bound (guided, carefully supervised, restrained) and free (unguided, abandoned, released). Once determined through space, time and weight, this factor can act as a qualifier of the main effort qualities. Amalgamating such analysis with a cultural reading, I illuminate new ways into and heighten my study of dance in ‘Beard After Hours’.

An Introduction to Pleasant Pessimism

As introduced in the opening paragraph, pleasant pessimism is a concept that I generate from Lauren Berlant's book *Cruel Optimism* (2011). Berlant's notion proposes that people are attached to fantasies of the good life – equality, upward social mobility, security and so on – and that such fantasies are unattainable in today's precarious world. Adapting Berlant's description of cruel optimism, I subvert evocative phrases in order to create and elucidate my concept of pleasant pessimism. Not necessarily seeking to produce cruel optimism's opposite, I present an approach that is more about neutrality towards negative or positive feeling than being negative or positive feeling itself. This neutrality offers an alternative way to address poor mental health and undergo arguably unintentional transformation; it offers a new way to experience and live in the world that is neither positive nor negative.

To define a pessimistic attachment, I first turn to Berlant's explanation of an optimistic attachment. Berlant writes that it 'involves a sustaining inclination to return to the scene of fantasy that enables you to expect that *this* time, nearness to *this* thing will help you or a world to become different in just the right way' (2011: 2, original emphasis). If an optimistic attachment is the process of returning to a fantasy with expectations of positive difference, of 'right' change, a pessimistic attachment is an inclination towards remaining in a reality with no expectations of positive difference, of becoming different in just the right way. That is not to say that the individual expects difference in just the 'wrong' way either, some incorrect or immoral way. Rather, one possesses no attachment to a better or worse future but indulges in a neutrality that lacks expectancy. So, if optimism is cruel when 'the object/scene that ignites a sense of possibility actually makes it impossible to attain the expansive transformation for which a person or a people risks striving' (Berlant 2011: 2), pessimism is pleasant when there is no engagement with an object or a scene of fantasy to

ignite a sense of possibility. By accepting and living in reality as is, one can experience transformation at the same time as not necessarily expecting that transformation to happen.

Essentially, pleasant pessimism avoids the cruelty of impossible possibilities, the inability to transform and needless striving, but it is not devoid of hope, contradictory as that may seem. By evading unrealistic fantasy, pleasant pessimism allows for the peaceful acceptance of the way things are. Thus, it ignites a sense of impossibility that makes it possible to transform without the weight of something that could be bigger and better, without an endless feeling of not being enough, not having enough, not doing enough. Further developing pleasant pessimism's subversion of cruel optimism, I switch Berlant's wording in the following description of cruel optimism:

[I]t is cruel insofar as the very pleasures of being inside a relation have become sustaining regardless of the content of the relation, such that a person or a world finds itself bound to a situation of profound threat that is, at the same time, profoundly confirming. (2011: 2)

For pleasant pessimism, it is, vice versa, more about being bound to a situation of profound confirmation that is, at the same time, profoundly threatening.

Moving into my close analysis of 'Beard After Hours', I contend that the use of dance creates and exemplifies such pleasant pessimism, as Beard accepts what already is and subsequently experiences pleasure despite existing threats. This offering of an alternative approach to life avoids the 'double bind' of Berlant's cruel optimism, that is, 'even with an image of a better good life available to sustain your optimism, it is awkward and it is threatening to detach from what is already not working' (2011: 263). I argue that the episode realizes a better good life without this detachment. Instead, the moment of dance

incorporates, faces and manages what is already not working with no expectations of positive difference and, in doing so, it secures the good life through unintentional transformation.

‘Try this on’: Dance and Pleasant Pessimism in ‘Beard After Hours’

Dance is part of football culture. In England, where *Ted Lasso* is mostly set, there are well-known celebratory dances like Peter Crouch’s robot, Jesse Lingard’s take on the Milly Rock and David Moyes’s ‘dad dance’. It seems no coincidence that the introduction to titular character Ted is through a dance that sees him join the pantheon of character-defining dances in comedy television, like Elaine’s kick-dancing in *Seinfeld* (1989–98) (‘The Little Kicks’, Season 8, Episode 4) and David Brent’s cringe-inducing style in *The Office* (2001–03) (‘Charity’, Season 2, Episode 5). In the pilot episode (Season 1, Episode 1), the dance challenges negative stereotypes of the locker room, such as chauvinistic ‘locker room talk’. Performed in front of Ted’s former American football team, it depicts the locker room as a space that can nurture the social needs of men, reduce stress levels and be a supportive environment. In a parallel moment in ‘So Long, Farewell’, Ted again performs this victory dance with the AFC Richmond team surrounding him on the football pitch. From this dance, to moonwalking and soft-shoeing to connect with boss Rebecca Welton (Hannah Waddingham), to re-creating Carlton’s dance from *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* (1990–96) to connect with his player Roy Kent (Brett Goldstein), Ted repeatedly employs dance as a way to break down the walls that individuals build around themselves and produce feelings of intimacy and joy. Dance, like football, acts as a uniting equalizer and establishes an emotive pathway within the communities that Ted inspires and cultivates.

Whilst Ted continues a football tradition of celebratory dance imbued with collective joy, Beard offers an alternative dance, a new way of dancing in football that expands its masculinities and engages with male mental health. Taking place after AFC Richmond’s loss

to Manchester City in a crucial semi-final match of the FA Cup, 'Beard After Hours' follows Beard's night-long odyssey where the loss reveals his depression and anxiety, especially in relation to his tumultuous relationship with his aptly named girlfriend Jane Payne (Phoebe Walsh). As an episode-long reference to Martin Scorsese's *After Hours* (1985), a film that explores themes of loneliness, urban estrangement and sexual repression, the episode presents a tonal shift that mimics Scorsese's black comedy and moves away from *Ted Lasso*'s lighter, more upbeat approach. At the episode's beginning, Beard tells Ted that he wants to 'go shake this off' and walks away alone. This action initiates the shift and what entertainment journalist Kathryn VanArendonk calls the 'departure episode'. The departure episode is an umbrella term for 'any tangential, self-contained, strange, or otherwise notable episode that departs from a TV show's norms' and is 'a way to let narrative epiphanies spring out of a formal shift' (2023: n.pag.). This departure from the series is further highlighted by a melancholy version of the theme tune sung by Jeff Tweedy, and the absence of the usual opening credits sequence. It is also embodied by an unrealistically large blue moon hanging in the sky – a nod to Manchester City's anthem, 'Blue Moon' – that symbolizes, elevates and inflates Beard's troubles. At the same time, this strange moon foreshadows the episode's more absurd elements – from Beard's harsh inner dialogue represented by celebrity footballers and pundits Thierry Henry and Gary Lineker's commentary to a secret rave in the crypt of a church.

Before reaching that church, his odyssey's final destination, Beard's journey is presented as a quest to strengthen his mental health as he walks, drinks and fights his way across London. As part of this quest, he acquires items of clothing that result in a 'picture consequences' appearance – a drawing game where one player draws the head and folds over the paper to hide it, the next player draws the body and folds and the final player draws the legs before the mismatched image is revealed. At the pub, paired with his AFC Richmond

sportswear, Beard dresses himself in newsboy cap, spotted scarf and checked blazer from the 'Misplaced & Discovered' box; later, after tearing his tracksuit bottoms, he puts on colourfully striped and sequined bell-bottoms. Rather than a fragmented identity being presented as undesirable, the costuming signifies Beard's expanding masculinities. Roger Horrocks describes society's requirements that manhood be 'a self-destructive identity, a deeply masochistic self-denial, a shrinkage of the self, a turning away from whole areas of life' (1994: 25). But Beard's self-destruction, his fragmentation, is simultaneously a form of self-construction and self-acceptance. His appearance illustrates an indulgence in who he already is, a growing into the self and a stepping into new areas of life. With a single item left to discover before he arrives at the church where Jane is, Beard begins to allow himself to be entirely himself.

Adapting his physical identity so that his expansive self can emerge, Beard's quest is a rite of passage. He enacts Arnold van Gennep's tripartite structure of 'preliminal rites (rites of separation), liminal rites (rites of transition), and postliminal rites (rites of incorporation)' ([1960] 2004: 11). This ceremonial process sees Beard leave one group to enter another or, in this specific case, leave cruel optimism to enter pleasant pessimism. Beard's separation from cruel optimism occurs during his picture consequences journey, the transition happens upon entry to the liminal space of the church and the incorporation takes place at the rave in the crypt. It is after accidentally breaking his front door key, ending the rite of separation by literally separating himself from the space where he imagines Henry and Lineker viciously insulting him, that Beard finds the church for entry into the liminal rite stage. There, he removes his rain-soaked blazer in another adjustment to his identity, walks down the church's central aisle and sits on a pew to pray. Beard tells God that he is 'under no illusions that [Jane] could solve what ails [him]' but that 'the world just feels more interesting' with her. This verbal recognition of pleasant pessimism, of beginning to accept the way things are,

guides Beard to his moment of dance and the post-liminal stage. During the prayer, Beard holds himself in the sagittal (or ‘wheel’) plane – the plane composed of the sagittal (forward–backward) and vertical (up–down) dimensions; he leans forward on the pew in front of him and looks ahead at the stained-glass windows. After the verbalization, the rain stops and Beard moves to the horizontal (or ‘table’) plane – a compound of the horizontal (side–side) and sagittal (forward–backward) dimensions; he turns his head to the left then turns it to the right when he hears a pulsating bass beat. This shift to the horizontal plane foretells Beard’s final item on the quest, a hula hoop. Without expectations of positive (or negative) difference and nearing acceptance of his life as is, Beard identifies a transportive, transformative arch that acts as a microcosm of the liminal church space. A long shot captures the church’s candlelight on one side of the arch and the rave’s electrical light on the other side; it shows Beard’s hands linger on the threshold and his forward-leaning, hunched posture directing him towards his fully realized, expanded identity in a world of pleasant pessimism. Emerging into the crypt from behind a theatrical curtain, another threshold, Beard enters a space between life and death that exists as a transitory, pop-up dance space, a space for him to complete his rite of passage.

Elements of ritual intensify through the representation of rave, or more broadly club, culture, amplifying Beard’s transition into a new way of being. The rave provides a ritual communal ceremony where ecstatic experiences are reliably produced, and this rave specifically recognizes club culture’s historical connection with the LGBTQ+ community. Blue and pink disco lights shine on and distort Beard’s face when he enters, colourful neon crosses line one of the walls and subvert a symbol of religion, acrobats and hula hoops hang from the ceiling and clubgoers are in costumes and in drag, wear glitter, leather, mesh, feathers. This extravagance and freedom of expression begins to seep into Beard’s being, as he identifies a space that is free from judgement, where he can be who he already is with

acceptance. Wide-eyed, he removes his AFC Richmond zip-up jacket, an emblem of his sporty masculinity. Though Beard wears a logoed t-shirt beneath, the costume adjustment balances his identities from throughout the evening: his top and trainers from football; the cap from the pub; the sequinned, multicoloured bell-bottoms taken from the flat of a woman he encountered earlier on his odyssey. These contradictory masculinities are accepted in this liminal, queer dance space. It is here, too, that Beard experiences his own resurrection through a kind of parabola: from the ground floor of the church, he walks down a set of stairs into the crypt, often used as a place of burial, walks through the dancing clubgoers, then ascends a smaller set of stairs onto the main dance floor. With that ascension, Beard nears the final stage of his rite of passage.

To complete that stage, Beard must fully release himself into dance and a world of pleasant pessimism. As he walks across the dance floor, the clubgoers bounce towards the ground with *dabbing* (direct, sudden, fine) and *thrusting* (direct, sudden, firm) movements. He begins to gently bounce too, as if a boxer warming up upon entrance to the ring. This delicate, repeating *dab* movement is the warm-up for switching from cruel optimism to pleasant pessimism for Beard, and a sound that resembles the literal flick of a switch is heard again and again in the song that plays, Martin Solveig and Dragonette's 'Hello' (2010). The song choice indicates that Beard's rite of passage is almost at its close, almost at the point where he can greet the new, alternative version of himself and be reunited with Jane, who has finally told him that she loves him via text. Finding his position at the dance floor's centre, Beard turns in the horizontal plane and foreshadows the meeting again, as it is Jane who will present him with the final quest item, the hula hoop and its horizontal movement. It is then that an exhausted-looking Beard, with dropped head, half-closed eyes and hunched shoulders, explodes into a big, wild, increasingly liberating display of movement.

In the first part of Beard's dance, he tries to release his anxieties and worries on his own. Dancing in the lateral (or 'door') plane – consisting of vertical (up–down) and horizontal (side–side) dimensions – and in the sagittal plane, Beard *slashes* (indirect, quick, firm movement) his arms and his head from side to side then *thrusts*, or punches, his arms up and down in front of him. This transition from the *slash* to the *thrust* is jarring. Beard's movement changes from indirect to direct and free to bound, limiting his release. It is the emergence of Jane that establishes a necessary break in movement, arresting Beard in stillness in order to reset the process. Standing in front of Beard, Jane presents that last item on the quest, the hula hoop. Telling him to '[t]ry this on', Jane places the hula hoop over Beard's head and he is surrounded and embraced by a symbol of his reality, his new world of pleasant pessimism. It is also a correlate of his kinesphere. In *Choreutics*, Laban describes the kinesphere as follows:

The kinesphere is the sphere around the body whose periphery can be reached by easily extended limbs without stepping away from that place which is the point of support when standing on one foot, which we shall call the 'stance'. [...] When we move out of the limits of our original kinesphere we create a new stance, and transport the kinesphere to a new place. We never, of course, leave our movement sphere but carry it always with us, like an aura. ([1966] 2011: 10)

With the quest complete and in the final stage of Beard's rite of passage, the hula hoop visualizes and emphasizes the boundaries of the kinesphere, the movement sphere. This emphasis accentuates the episode's choice to utilize dance as a method of communication and a means to transform. Surrounded by his kinesphere-hula hoop, Beard adjusts his movement so that it is mostly in the horizontal plane in accordance with the item's position at his waist.

Effecting his transition to pleasant pessimism, this change lets Beard fully realize himself and accept his relationship with Jane despite its imperfections. Beard's reality is now enough, is pleasant, cynical sometimes, not always positive, restricting even, interesting, more interesting with Jane in it.

As the rite of passage ends, Beard releases himself into dance as if he ecstatically dissolves into his reality. Accepting his life and himself, Beard ascends again to become all that he already is. He walks up the stairs to a platform and moves with a circular motion so that the hula hoop spins horizontally at his centre. As well as encompassing the horizontal plane through the hula hoop, Beard integrates arm movements from *floating* (indirect, sustained, fine movement) to *thrusting* that broaden his use of the effort scale and extend to the lateral and sagittal planes. The hula hoop enables Beard to fully explore his own kinesphere and to become more sophisticated in his movement. This broadening movement denotes the broadening of Beard's available masculinities, as he gains power in reality, in pleasant pessimism, in being who he already is. Spinning the hula hoop with increasing speed, Beard moves it upwards to his elevated hand. This rising force visualizes the increasing lightness of Beard's mental state, and the cheering clubgoers reveal that the joy traverses the dance space in which Beard releases and accepts both his joy and his sadness. After giving a thumbs up to Henry and Lineker, who sit at the bar and drink to his health, Beard lets go of his critical self-talk and lets himself love and be loved. A slow-motion effect captures Beard and Jane locking eyes and entering into a duet.

Dancing together, Beard and Jane form a joint world of pleasant pessimism. Rather than performing for the club with a facing-front stance, Beard lets the hula hoop drop to the floor and steps outside of its perimeters to approach Jane. With Beard renouncing his individual kinesphere, the pair can create a shared kinesphere as an imperfect couple who, as Ted says in '4-5-1' (Season 3, Episode 3), has 'baggage [that] just matches right up'. The

duet partners explore the dance floor like two smiling predators, ready to pounce, facing one another and tracing the single line of a circle together. Switching point of view between Beard and Jane, the camera moves from medium shots to close-up shots that track their increased intimacy. When the music drops, they ecstatically release. Closed mouths become open mouths, as their bodies relax, dilate, and they open up to each other in a world that they dance into creation and share. In this world of pleasant pessimism, Beard and Jane are not interested in something better or necessarily good. In that way, they escape cruel optimism's double bind, to repeat, that 'even with an image of a better good life available to sustain your optimism, it is awkward and it is threatening to detach from what is already not working' (Berlant 2011: 263). Instead, the couple avoid the threat of detaching from what is not working and face it, face reality as is. This acceptance is what lets them love and dance without fantastical expectations of themselves and of one another. Whilst a 'relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing' (Berlant 2011: 1), Beard and Jane's relation of pleasant pessimism means that they desire one another with no expectations of flourishing and, therefore, no way of being an obstacle either. The two accept themselves as individuals and as a couple as already is, even if it is sometimes threatening. By removing pressure and being accepting, their mental health can, however unintentionally, flourish; they can achieve the promise of the good life that is always out of reach with cruel optimism.

Conclusion

Towards the beginning of this article, I recognized Beard's moment of dance as possessing the ability to stimulate transformation and be a catalyst for change. The dance, the completion of Beard's rite of passage, realizes an alternative way of being through movement into pleasant pessimism. So, dance does not just illustrate the series' theme of personal and

collective transformation, but dance exists as the very means by which that transformation is effected and affected. Generating what is being moved into being, Beard's dance acts as an inimitable means for him to embrace his reality and find his place within the world and within a romantic partnership; it exhibits a different way for him to exist as a man in football and society at large, a different way to live with and love another person. In doing so, the dance allows space for expanding masculinities and male vulnerability that challenges limiting societal expectations and escapes the enforced emotional confines that can negatively impact mental health. Embodying, creating and sharing a world of pleasant pessimism, Beard's dance shakes off the shackles of cruel optimism, evades detachment from what is not working and secures the better good life through acceptance.

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