

Dear CMU Ballroom Family,

Our first week of lessons has concluded, and we are so glad to have met so many of you at lessons and at Rush.

It has come to our attention that we need to communicate better on the issue of "gendered" dance roles in ballroom dancing and in dance in general. Nuance to terminology and context is often hard to know without having been involved in dance for a while.

The core issue at hand is this: there are indeed two roles in a partner dance, from a technique and steps perspective. What the roles are called is beginning to change in recent years as our world becomes less heteronormative. Partner dancing has been around for a very, very long time, and in the past, the roles were called the "man" and the "woman" or "lady". Over time, it became more common to refer to the roles as the "leader" and "follower", or even in recent years as "initiator" and "responder", but in both the social and competitive ballroom world, remnants of the old terminology remain.

Our club holds the view that this terminology is metaphorical / symbolic, and that the words "man" and "woman" or other similarly gendered terms should be understood to mean initiator and responder. We wholeheartedly support initiators and responders of every gender, and have had plenty of "nontraditional" partnerships who were active in our club and represented us at competitions. And though we prefer and try to use the non-gendered terminology, you may encounter people who still use it (and even us or our coaches occasionally when we forget. Remember, they have been involved in partner dancing their entire lives). We definitely do not want to make our members feel misgendered or like their identity or dance choices are being questioned. We support you, and if you ever feel that you are not supported, please speak to any of the 5 officers of our club (Me, Arthur Barelli, McKenzie Van Der Hagen, Adiva Dutta, and Marie Ivantchenko).

The ballroom world at large is slowly changing and becoming more accepting / supportive of the new terminology, and even the national competitive organizations now allow nontraditional partnerships at the national championships etc. This does not mean, however, that the ballroom world, with its century of history, is already as progressive as many of you are. You are the new generation of dancers, and your presence and perspectives will contribute to continued change. All we ask of you is patience, kindness, and to please speak up to one of us if you have a problem so that we may address it.

Please reach out to one of us if this does not address your concerns; we want to create a positive environment for everyone to enjoy and learn in.

Respectfully yours,

--

Matías Jonsson

CMUBDC Captain

B.S. Physics, Computational track

Additional Major Computer Science

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