

# Cotlow Award Application Form 2009

**Department of Anthropology**

**The George Washington University**

**Washington, DC 20052**

## 1. Personal Information

Applicant's name: Kristina Zarenko

Degree sought: BA International Affairs and Anthropology

Field of study/major/minor/concentration: Concentration: Cross-cultural communications (for IA major) Minor: German

Expected date of graduation: May 2011

Faculty Advisor(s) (who have served as your mentor or mentors for this proposal): Alexander Dent and Barbara Miller

## 2. Language Skills

Does the proposed project involve the use of a "field language"? No

If yes, state what the language is and your degree of fluency in speaking, reading, and writing it:

Project Title:

"It Ain't What You Do It's The Way That You Do It": Identity Politics in West Coast Swing Dancing and Lindy Hop

Abstract of the Project (provide a summary description of the project's goals, location, methods, and relevance to anthropology) [80 word maximum]:

This study will look at identity formation of Lindy Hop and West Coast Swing dancers in Pittsburgh, PA and Washington, DC. The two dances had common roots in the United States in the 1930s, but now are separated by conflicting attachments to either "traditional" or "main-stream" tendencies. Dancers create identities through self imposed ways of distinguishing between the dances. Clothing choices and the use of jokes are some ways dancers police the difference between dances. My research will give a more detailed explanation of the way in which "tradition" and "innovation" are related to each other in the context of dance.

**4. Description of the Project** (describe your overall research goals, what the project is generally about, and where you will conduct the research and why) [250 word maximum]:

Lindy Hop is a fast-paced, 6- or 8- count, dance that maintains a vintage image drawn from the 1930s and 1940s. West Coast Swing, also a 6- or 8-count dance, maintains a contemporary image. Despite West Coast Swing (WCS) and Lindy Hop sharing common origins and stylistic history, there is a rift between the two dance communities. I have often heard Lindy dancers refer to WCS as “the dark side”. By contrast, WCS dancers think of Lindy Hoppers as too frantic because of their very fast music. My research promises to explore how clothing preferences, music, and ways of dancing have repercussions in identity politics both on and off, the dance floor.

Both dance communities identify themselves based partially on ideas about “the other” community. (Savigliano 1995:xiv) I will investigate this process through fieldwork in two sites: Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and Washington, DC. I will conduct participant observation, as well as both unstructured and formal interviews. My research will build from and expand upon the anthropological of identity through dance.

My research will primarily take place in Pittsburgh, PA and Washington, DC where I have assimilated into both the Lindy and WCS scenes over time, while trying to hide my dance ‘accents’. Dancers used to point out that they could tell through my technique that I did both dances. Through research at these two sites, I will be able to learn how the younger and smaller scenes in Pittsburgh compare with the bigger and older scenes in DC. Both scenes range in ethnicity and age, but ages tend to be more concentrated in people in their 20s-30s. I will explore the ways in which these questions of identity formation differ across scenes, paying particular attention to the disparity in the length of time they have been “established”.

**5. Significance of the Project to Anthropology** (in this literature review describe how the proposed research relates to other anthropological research on the topic, and/or region as relevant; use social science style citation--no footnotes) [400 word maximum]:

A revival of Lindy Hop started in the 1990s. Results of the revival included renewed interest in learning to Swing dance as well as new media through bands like Big Bad Voodoo Daddy and advertisements such as a famous Gap Khakis commercial. (Parish 1999:50, Renshaw 2006: 86) The revival sparked research in Swing and its relation to race, music, and identity. (Hancock 2008: 783, Renshaw 2006: 83-94) My research will be different in that it will look at identity formation across two stylistically similar dances whose dancers police differences strictly in identity. Furthermore, my research will investigate how identity differences impact non-dance domains of social life.

Renshaw analyzes Swing dance as a resistance movement against authority, parental and cultural.(2006: 83) Swing serves to preserve and proclaim individuals as unique within the context of popular culture. This uniqueness stems from adopting a dance culture that still represents the 1930s and 1940s. Lindy dancers embody Savigliano’s concept of “otherness” by resisting authority and mainstream culture. (1995:xiv) By following a different set of societal norms, Lindy dancers place themselves on the fringe of society into a smaller community of “otherness”. (Savigliano 1995:xiv, Downey 2005:34) Renshaw focuses on the practice of ‘thrifting’, shopping at thrift stores for vintage garments to create a genuine, unique look, within Lindy Hop. ‘Thrifting’ projects the Swing identity. (Renshaw 2006:88) With this vintage image and traditional sounding music, Lindy dancers base their identity on traditions originating in the 1930s and 1940s.

West Coast Swing (WCS) branched off from Lindy Hop in the western United States in the 1930s. While the footwork is similar, technical and stylistic differences set WCS and Lindy apart. (Moody 2008: 53-55; Callahan 2005: 5) WCS dancers do not separate themselves from mainstream culture, they embrace it. WCS is a more flexible dance. The flexibility is a way of allowing dancers to create a “contemporary” identity and therefore separate themselves from the “traditional” identity values of Lindy Hop.

The dance shapes every aspect of the dancers’ understanding and experiences, extending dance identity beyond the confines of the dance scene.(Downey 2005:20) Bourdieu’s theory of *habitus* explains that behavior is defined by characteristics and tendencies specific to each individual. (Downey 2005:207) In accordance with *habitus*, Swing dancer’s identities, though formed within dance scenes, will give to and take from their everyday lives, affecting all elements of everyday behavior. A Lindy dancer using Swing music for an alarm in the morning or a WCS dancer joining a WCS group on Facebook are some minor examples of the overlap. More major overlaps include the tendency to socialize with people from the same dance group. I will thus study identity formation and its effects on everyday behavior. Additionally, I will observe the ways that dancers view “otherness” and maintain the separation between two dance identities: from the individual and that of “others”.

**6. Methods** (clearly outline or list your research questions; describe the data you will collect and how you will collect it; discuss your analytical methods; and show how the data will address the research questions) [300 word maximum]:

- How does the split between traditional and contemporary attribute to the divide between Lindy and West Coast Swing? (Do dancers see their dances as “traditional” or “contemporary”? Is the divide as clean as a dance being one or the other?)
- What is the impact of dance identity on other domains of social life?
  - Do dancers think about dance when making non-dance related decisions?
  - In what ways does dance identity impact life outside of dancing?
  - Is the impact on life outside of dancing the result of conscious or unconscious decisions? (How often do you think about dancing when not at a dance?)
  - Does dance identity have effects on life outside of the social realm as well?
- To what do dancers attribute meaning in building their identity? (What actions do you take to maintain your identity as a Lindy/WCS dancer?)
  - Is knowing the steps and being able to execute well enough? (What makes you a Lindy/WCS dancer and not someone who only learns the steps, for example like an actor in a movie?)
- How do dancers regulate the boundaries of their dance through identity?
  - Must a person meet specific criteria to be identified as a Lindy/WCS dancer?
  - How does one learn to meet these identity criteria? (Did you learn by being shown? Through observation? Who showed you or who did you watch?)
  - Are there linguistic ways of policing boundaries as well as physical ones? (Have you heard jokes made by Lindy/WCS dancers about the other side? Examples?)

I have been a Swing dancer for almost seven years. I assimilated into the Lindy and WCS scenes first in Pittsburgh and then during my time at GW in DC. Due to the length of time

I have been dancing, I have built up strong connections with dancers in both locations. I have close dancing friends ranging from students, teachers, a national champion, competitors in many levels, and even those who have switched dance scenes altogether. They also vary in geographic origins and dance background. As I will be dancing during research, these relations will allow me to perform participant observation and conduct interviews without taking time to build a rapport with my subjects and integrate myself into the scenes.

I will perform participant observation in Pittsburgh at Wightman Community Center for Lindy on Saturdays and WCS every Thursday plus one Friday per month and Rangos Hall on Carnegie Mellon University's campus for a small Lindy dance every other Sunday. In DC, participant observation will occur for Lindy at Glen Echo's Spanish Ballroom on Saturday nights and Chevy Chase Ballroom on Monday nights. For WCS, I will go to the Bethesda Women's Center on Tuesday nights and Cherry Hill on Friday nights. In interviews and participant observation, I will research to what the dancers attach personal significance. This entails looking at how the dancers view their own identity, how it expands beyond the dance scene, and if it permeates their everyday life. I will ask people in various roles within dancing who I am familiar with to be interviewed over coffee which I will buy for them. The interviews, both will ask questions tailored to the participants and their primary dance style. I will look for verbal and non-verbal ways that the dancers differentiate themselves, both from the other dance and mainstream culture, through analyzing things such as how the dancers describe themselves, whether they join other dance groups, and with whom they primarily socialize. For context within the scene I will create a general, voluntary survey asking for people's background within and outside of dancing which I will distribute with a header thoroughly explaining my project.

**7. Research Ethics** (describe how you will ensure that your research project is conducted in accordance with anthropology guidelines and the guidelines of your particular field within anthropology, and in the case of "Human Subjects Research," according to the criteria of GW's Institutional Review Board. For the former, consult the Web site of the American Anthropological Association (<http://www.aaanet.org>). For the latter, discuss requirements with your faculty mentor and/or with Professor Barbara Miller, the IRB rep in the Anthropology Department. Most student projects involving living humans fit in the IRB category of "excluded," meaning that IRB forms do not need to be submitted, if they follow AAA ethical guidelines in terms of informed consent and avoidance of harm to participants, do not involve medical topics and do not identify particular individuals. In some instances, the IRB approval does need to be sought, usually in the "expedited" category." Information on these categories is also available at <http://www.gwumc.edu/research/human/aboutus/html>) [150 word maximum]:

I will follow both GW and AAA guidelines for human research subjects by fully explaining my project and obtaining verbal consent before proceeding with interviews or other data collection methods. I anticipate no tensions to arise in the form of hurt reputations, taken offense, or otherwise. However, as a precaution and in accordance with GW and AAA guidelines, I plan to keep my participants' anonymity by using pseudonyms and keeping my data securely under password protection. My research involves no medical topics and therefore falls under the exempt or expedited category of IRB, which I will turn in promptly after hearing the decision on my proposal.

**8. Research Product** (discuss how you will use and present your findings including, for example, a presentation at a professional meeting, a film, a museum exhibit, a publishable paper, a thesis) [150 words maximum]:

At the end of this project, I plan to compile my findings in a paper to present at the Cotlow Award Conference. I will provide my findings to the research participants. Additionally, I will make my findings available to the swing dance communities in both locations through a website, such as [dancejamproductions.com](http://dancejamproductions.com), [swingoutdc.com](http://swingoutdc.com), or [pghdance.com](http://pghdance.com). These websites all have forums which allow dancers to post and view information about Swing dancing. This research combines my interest in Anthropology and long-term passion for dancing. I hope to create a more comprehensive study of Swing dancing in the future as part of graduate work in Anthropology.

**9. Timetable** (provide a brief description of the schedule of your research activities week-by-week or as appropriate): May 17<sup>th</sup> – August 15<sup>th</sup>

My research will be split up between two locations. Beginning May 17<sup>th</sup>, I will start attending dances in Pittsburgh. During the first week I will approach participants, explain my project and gain verbal consent. I will also set up the first round of interviews for the following week. I will proceed by conducting two interviews per week, attending Lindy and West Coast dances, and gathering and organizing information. I plan to conduct a total of fifteen interviews; ten of which will take place in Pittsburgh.

I plan to also do research in DC for about three and a half weeks, most likely split into two segments, one in June and one in July. During these weeks, I will also explain my project and gain consent from participants, attend Lindy and West Coast dances, set up and conduct five interviews, and engage in participant observation.

**10. Budget Amount and Projected Expenditures (put in this order for my calculations, will clean up and organize once finalized)**

Projected Expenditures (list the expenditure categories for your project, for example, transportation--international, domestic, local; room and board; and research supplies). Funds from a Cotlow award cannot be used for tuition, academic fees, or for purchasing equipments such as a laptop or camera [awards range from a few hundred dollars to \$1800]

**Travel**

**Pittsburgh**

**To and from dances:** \$120 (price of gas from <http://kdka.com/gasprices>)

**Pittsburgh -DC**

**Two round-trip train rides:** \$176 (Amtrak.com)

**Dancing**

**Pittsburgh Cost of Dancing:** \$115

West Coast Swing: \$60

Lindy: \$63

**DC Cost of Dancing:** \$82

Lindy: \$60  
West Coast Swing: \$22

**Interviews**

**Tea/coffee for participants: \$60**

**I will not need funding for housing in either Pittsburgh or DC.**

Total Amount Requested: \$ 553 .

**11. Staff:** None

**12. Outside Financial Support** (list any other sources of funding for the project, either obtained or applied for, with amounts and restrictions): None

**13. References Cited/Select Bibliography** (list the sources you have cited in the proposal and/or used as background research. Use the style defined by the American Anthropological Association [see <http://aaanet.org>]; list a minimum of 10 sources to a maximum of one page).

Callahan, Jamie L.

2005 Speaking a secret language: West Coast Swing as a community of practice of informal and incidental learners. *Research in Dance Education* 6(1/2): 3-23.

Doane, Randal

2006 The habitus of dancing: notes on the swing dance revival in New York City. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 35(1): 84-116.

Downey, Robert

2005 *Learning Capoeira: Lessons in Cunning from an Afro-Brazilian Art*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Hancock, Black Hawk

2008 Put a Little Color On That!. *Sociological Perspectives* 51(4): 783-802.

Heath, Deborah

1994 The Politics of Appropriateness and Appropriation: Recontextualizing Women's Dance Women's Dance in Urban Senegal. *American Ethnologist* 21(1): 88-103.

Kaeppler, Adrienne L.

1978 Dance in Anthropological Perspective. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 7: 31-49.

Kurath, Gertrude Prokosch

1960 Panorama of Dance Ethnology. *Current Anthropology* 1(3): 233-254.

Moody, Diane

2008 It's A West Coast Swing Thing. *Dance Today* 53(78): 53-56.

Parish, Paul

1999 A Revival in Full Swing. *Dance Magazine* 73(9): 50.

Reed, Susan A.

1998 The Politics and Poetics of Dance. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 27: 503-532

Renshaw, Scott W.

2006 Postmodern Swing Dance and Secondary Adjustment: Identity as Process. *Symbolic Interaction* 29(1): 83-94.

Savigliano, Marta E.

1995 *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion*. Boulder: Westview Press.

**14. Permits** (demonstrate that you have, or are seeking, any necessary permits such as a research permit, a research visa, an antiquities permit, letter of welcome from an institution, etc. Attach copies to this proposal).

I need no permits to conduct this research project. I will turn in any IRB forms required upon hearing the decision on my proposal.

**15. Transcript** (submit a copy of your transcript with this proposal; it can be either official or unofficial. Without a transcript, your proposal is incomplete and will not be considered).

See attachment for unofficial transcript.