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## **Penn Masti: An Ethnography on Penn's Premier Co-ed South Asian Fusion Dance Troupe**

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# **Penn Masti: An Ethnography on Penn's Premier Co-ed South Asian Fusion Dance Troupe**

## **Abstract**

The University of Pennsylvania is host to a variety of different student groups. With a total population of around 20,000 undergraduate and graduate students, it also boasts one of the most ethnically diverse campuses in the country. Within this landscape, a particular attention to one South Asian performing arts group is our focus. Penn Masti, Penn's premier co-ed South Asian Fusion dance troupe is unique not only for the styles of dance they perform and the incorporation of both masculine and feminine forms of dance (unlike many of its counterparts) but it is also an example of a group that has achieved markedly high levels of growth and success in a very short timeframe. This paper attempts use an interdisciplinary analysis to understand the causes and sources for this growth through an ethnographic lens (mainly through participant observation and one-on-one interviews). Essentially, Masti is an organization wherein power and influence can be utilized through the management of members' desires subsequently creating an avenue for certain individuals to impact the team's future direction and that the continued growth of the team will require a distinction between individual desires and the specific components necessary for the team's growth in the long term.

## **Disciplines**

Anthropology

PENN MASTI: AN ETHNOGRAPHY ON PENN'S PREMIER CO-ED  
SOUTH ASIAN FUSION DANCE TROUPE

By

Mithin Thomas

In

Anthropology

Submitted to the

Department of Anthropology

University of Pennsylvania

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Fariha Khan

2015

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## **Abstract**

The University of Pennsylvania is host to a variety of different student groups. With a total population of around 20,000 undergraduate and graduate students, it also boasts one of the most ethnically diverse campuses in the country. Within this landscape, a particular attention to one South Asian performing arts group is our focus. Penn Masti, Penn's premier co-ed South Asian Fusion dance troupe is unique not only for the styles of dance they perform and the incorporation of both masculine and feminine forms of dance (unlike many of its counterparts) but it is also an example of a group that has achieved markedly high levels of growth and success in a very short timeframe. This paper attempts use an interdisciplinary analysis to understand the causes and sources for this growth through an ethnographic lens (mainly through participant observation and one-on-one interviews). Essentially, Masti is an organization wherein power and influence can be utilized through the management of members' desires subsequently creating an avenue for certain individuals to impact the team's future direction and that the continued growth of the team will require a distinction between individual desires and the specific components necessary for the team's growth in the long term.

*“I've done did a lot of shit just to live this here lifestyle. We came straight from the bottom to the top, my lifestyle. Nigga livin' life like a volcano and this only the beginnin'. I'm on the top of the mountain, puffin' on clouds and niggas still beginnin'”*

It is past midnight on a late Friday evening at the University of Pennsylvania, and the above lyrics of the song “Lifestyle”, produced by a group of artists under the name Rich Gang are heard pounding through the air from a fraternity house on Spruce Street. A handful of members on Penn Masti, Penn’s premiere co-ed South Asian Fusion Dance Troupe, have just been informed that they are one of the management picks for a national South Asian Fusion Dance competition called Bollywood America. Accompanied by the music are harrowing screams and shrieks of joy. Since its founding, this is the first time that Masti has ever competed in a national dance competition and its members have no way of containing their excitement for this prospect. As more and more members stream to the house in awe of the news they have just heard, they are all greeted with hugs and tears of happiness.

Soon, the music and the shouting become so loud that a group of policeman decide to empty out the house. Nevertheless, the police will not end this night of celebration as one of the members signal another location to continue the festivities. As the dancers walk through campus, they are still in sheer shock of the news. One of them can be heard saying, “Can you believe this? How did this happen?” Another member can be heard shouting nonchalantly as he makes his way to the new location, “Daaahhhhhhh!” As they arrive at the location, friends of the teammates join and congratulate them on the accomplishment. It is a great beginning to the weekend and though there are several hundred hours of rehearsal in front of them in preparation for this great feat, this is surely a night that none of them will ever forget.

## **Background**

The University of Pennsylvania is one of the most prestigious schools in the United States. Founded by Benjamin Franklin in 1740, it also holds the title of the oldest university in the country. As part of the Ivy League and the boasting one of the world's best business schools in the world, it is also revolutionary for the number of minority students who are admitted to the school annually. Statistically, Penn is comprised of about 10,000 undergraduate and graduate students. Of the undergraduates, about 55% of the students identify as white, 20-25% identify as Asian American, 10-13% identify as African American, and 10-13% identify as Hispanic/Latino. With a quarter of the population self-identifying as Asian American, a vibrant community has formed for students of Asian descents. There are over 70+ groups who identify and raise awareness about a particular culture or ethnic group within the Asian American landscape. These groups vary from professional groups, cultural groups, Greek groups, performing arts groups and even political advocacy groups. Penn also stands out as one of the few institutions with an active Asian American Studies Program (ASAM) and a resource center specific to Asian Americans called the Pan-Asian American Community House (PAACH). Additionally, Penn also a vibrant performing arts community.

Many of the earlier performing arts groups that were founded at Penn fall under a coalition named the Performing Arts Council (PAC). Within this council, are four different sub councils divided by different types of performing arts: A Cappella Arts Council (ACK), Dance Arts Council (DAC), Singers, Musicians, and Comedians (SMAC), and the Theater Arts Council (TAC-e). ("Performing Arts Council", 2015). Specifically in DAC, there are 13 dance groups of which Masti is not one. To join DAC, there is an application process which is concluded by a deliberation process where the existing groups in DAC vote to accept a potential new group. To date, Masti has applied to DAC twice and has been rejected both times. Joining DAC gives many benefits

including funding, public exposure through DAC organized events, and a pre-confirmed annual show venue (on a Friday and Saturday)<sup>1</sup>. However, these benefits also come with more stringent supervision of a group's budget, ticket sales, outside performances, as well as reduced show date flexibility. The interplay between DAC and non-DAC groups is an interesting dynamic that make Masti what it is and how it interacts with other groups but will not be something that is substantially explored in this work. However, Masti's founding was the result of a disparity that DAC did not fulfill at the time. Penn Masti was founded in the fall of 2003 by Pooja Sethi and Ramya Bhatt, two friends who saw the need to create a co-ed South Asian Fusion dance troupe.

“The purpose of this co-ed dance troupe is to educate the University Pennsylvania community and beyond about a variety of South Asian music and Bollywood filmy dance through instructional sessions, competitions, and performances. The group aims to perform South Asian dance that focuses on [male] and [female] interactions and movements. The group also performs theatrical dance in order to express scenes that can be found in Bollywood movies and to spread South Asian culture.”

(see Appendix IV: Masti Constitution, 2012).

## **Introduction**

An important distinction that should be made before diving into the intricacies of this particular social group is the sheer limitations that any one academic discipline can provide in a study of this magnitude. George Murdock captures this paradigm quite eloquently: “A number of disciplines that had previously pursued independent courses in the analysis of particular facets of man's individual and social behavior have been discovered to dovetail into one another so neatly

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<sup>1</sup> Because Masti is not on DAC, their annual show is usually held on a Sunday due to the number of dance groups that occupy the most popular theater for dance during Fridays and Saturdays: Iron Gate Theater. The specifics of Masti's annual show will be described in the Organizational Dynamics section.

that they are well on the road to being fused into a single integrated science” (Murdock, 1965). Indeed, there are truths to what Murdock is saying. In the context of studying humans or the groups they belong to, simply isolating oneself to a discipline of anthropology, sociology, psychology, or psychoanalysis would not do justice to comprehend its full workings of any group. Murdock described this as the unification of “LEarning, SOciety, CULTure, and PErsonality THEorY,” also known as “lesocupethy” (Murdock, 1965). As I embarked on my research into group dynamics, organizational strategy, and cultural transmission, I found it difficult to separate myself from these other fields in addition to anthropology to understand the inner workings of Masti. Knowledge of the structure of a society or group, in accordance with culture, and personality are all equally fundamental to accurately explain what Masti is. As biological species with innate desires, culture is simply a vehicle in which behavior is internalized in accordance with society’s demands. The practical result of any one being’s negotiation among these demands with his or her own is one’s personality (Murdock, 1965). Given these four discipline’s interloping natures, snippets of cross-disciplinary analysis will be used in this primarily ethnographic work.

Penn Masti is more than just a dance team and I have had the personal pleasure of being part of this troupe for the past four years. If you ask any member of the team, common descriptions of the team include the concept of a “family” and a huge emphasis on the relationships that are made on the team (Anonymous, 2015). For the members, Masti is as much dance as it is socializing with friends who happened to enjoy dancing. But like any organization, change is inevitable especially in one whose members, on average, leave every three or four years and Masti has not only changed organizationally but also socially and culturally. As such, this paper will attempt to recognize and analyze these changes over the past four years. Most of this analysis will be conducted through data collected from first-hand participant observation as well as in-person one-

on-one recorded interviews that have been anonymized. These observations and findings, will be assessed alongside theoretical perspectives surrounding group identity, learning, behavior, personality and culture. As a team of roughly 24 dancers this season, the candidates that were interviewed<sup>2</sup> come from a variety of different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds and experiences. Alongside current members for the season, I was also able to establish interviews with alumni who graduated within the past four years. Overall, I acquired interviews with the following members varied by years on the team, year of graduation and gender: 14 females and 13 males; 7 freshmen, 5 sophomores, 4 juniors, 5 seniors, 2 alumni who graduated in 2014, 2 who graduated in 2013, and 2 who graduated in 2012; 10 members with 1 year experience on the team, 5 members with 2 years of experience, 8 members with 3 years of experience, and 4 members with 4 years of experience on the team. In addition to this, I have also collected anecdotal data from nearly every single member of the team since the 2012 graduating class. Demographically, the team has always predominantly consisted of members of Indian descent. Nevertheless, members of Pakistani, Chinese, Vietnamese and Caucasian descent have also been a part of the team within the last couple of years. Most members are domestic to the United States but there have also been many members who were international students.

It is with this data that I hope to make a conclusive analysis that 1) on Masti power and influence is distributed through the management of members' desires and the successful cognition of these desires can allow one to acquire said power and influence under Masti's particular democratic organizational structure accompanied by its specific cultural practices and that 2) Masti is an example of an organization that constantly struggles with the preservation of internal and external social capital and the perpetuation of a unique and creative art form that combines multiple

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<sup>2</sup> Interviewees were obtained initially through an email sent to all members of Masti that have been on the team within the last four years (see Appendix I). See Appendix III for Interview questions.

identities. In the first part of this paper, I will outline Masti's organizational schematic over the past four years while the second portion of the paper will summarize specific cultural practices employed by the troupe. In the last section, both of these previous sections will be analyzed together for a unified conceptualization of these intertwining components in the above two theses and how they contribute to our understanding of Masti and group dynamics overall.

## **Organizational Dynamics**

"I loved my time on Masti. I think it has been one of the most defining experience of my college career." (Anonymous, 2015). Like any social group, there are certain criteria that are necessary for one to actually join the team. And when I say criteria, they are loosely defined requirements that individuals on the team create for themselves to guide their thoughts within the audition process. Similar to most dance troupes, Masti holds auditions for potential new members to join at the beginning of the Fall Semester and at the end of the Spring Semester. These dates have been dictated by the placement of the annual show happening sometime early in the Spring Semester. The dates for the audition itself are usually set by the President and Vice President and marketing for said audition is generally a team-wide effort. In this framework, members attempt to convince their classmates or those who are a year younger or older than them to come tryout. The actual audition process involves two rounds. The first round involves teaching one 30-second piece that usually incorporates as many styles as Masti does; these traditionally being bollywood filmy, bhangra, hip-hop, raas, and classical bharatanatyam<sup>3</sup> also known as "b-nat" within 4-5 eight counts of a song that is chosen by the majority of the team. This *tryout piece* usually has some subtle variations for men and women to emphasize more masculine and feminine types of dancing.

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<sup>3</sup> The history or background of these different styles and how they have come to be styles that Masti traditionally performs will not be explored in this work.

After the first round of tryouts are callbacks. Callbacks are a way for the team to see the improvement of a particular candidate from the first round to the second round and are only given to candidates who seem to show potential<sup>4</sup> from the first round. Potential members are asked to do both the piece from the first round of tryouts and a new piece that will be taught at callbacks. The callback piece is also usually about 30 seconds long and tend to be a dance or part of a dance that Masti has done in a previous show. The actual piece that is used varies based on what the team would like to see from both sexes in addition to how the tryout piece was performed by the candidates who made it to callbacks from the first round. After callbacks, Masti members deliberate on those who they think should make the team. In fact, a team member once told me, “we never regret taking someone on Masti” and this is clearly seen by the fact that any potential new member requires a unanimous vote from current members in order to make the team (Anonymous, 2014).

After new members have been decided, an initiation process is scheduled and carried out. The initiation process itself is harmless. Aside from some variation from year to year, some consistent initiation rituals include going to new members’ dormitory rooms or other specified location and proceeding to give them a false in-person condolence of rejection, having them bhangra-step and raas-step down Locust Walk (one of the main arteries of campus), sing “I Want It That Way” by Backstreet Boys across the 38th street bridge, finish a can of nutella among the new members, and smash whipped cream and lettuce on the faces of fellow new members while blindfolded. The initiation process also involves performing the pathaka bhangra step<sup>5</sup> to any existing member of the team on command regardless of time and location for the duration of a

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<sup>4</sup> Potential will later be discussed in the Cultural Dynamics section. This is a topic with a host of differentiated opinions and is reflective of Masti as an organization.

<sup>5</sup> A common bhangra motion that involves forming a diagonal with one’s hands and crossing it in front of one’s body while doing a bhangra step.

week after initiation. If the new members complete the initiation process and accept their invitation to join the team, they officially become new members of the team<sup>6</sup>.

## **The Executive Board**

On campus, Masti is known as a “show team” meaning that much of its time is dedicated to organizing and hosting an annual show entirely planned and performed by members of the troupe. Thus, much of the responsibilities that are split amongst the team is dedicated to fulfilling this one purpose. Organizing and hosting one’s own show requires the configuration of many moving parts. Many of these parts are logistically organized by Masti’s executive board who are responsible for carrying out the team’s vision for any given year. The executive board is made up of a President, Vice President, Treasurer, and Outreach Chair. Constitutionally, the President is responsible for

“setting the direction of Masti while ensuring its long-term growth and well-being. He/she shall oversee the proper functioning of Masti. He/she will bear ultimate responsibility to the University administration for all actions taken and all statements made by Masti. He/she shall be responsible for setting an agenda and timeline for each semester in conjunction with the other Board Members. He/she shall set agendas for and chair all meetings. He/she shall retain the power to decide any non-election vote in the event of a tie. He/she is the caretaker of the Constitution, proposing its ratification, enforcing its rules, and updating it to reflect amendments that have been passed by the General Body. He/she is responsible for managing internal communication regarding notes from meetings. He/she is

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<sup>6</sup> There has never been a precedent of a potential new member who failed to complete the initiation process but there have been potential members who have chosen not to be part of the team after the initiation process for different reasons.

responsible for all official emails on behalf of Masti and will serve as the contact person at all times. He/she will act as the liaison to the South Asia Society.”

(Appendix IV: Masti Constitution, 2012)

Despite many of the powers that the President holds, most of them are not strictly used or enforced. For example, aside from the first five stipulations, no President in the last four years has decided a non-election vote despite a tie-breaker. Moreover, aside from practice and meetings with the Vice President, the executive board conducts most of their work over email. The Constitution is also rarely a document that is referred to regarding official procedure. Furthermore, the Vice President has even less constitutional responsibility. He/she

“shall work closely with the President in all of his/her duties. He/she shall assume the duties of the President in his absence or as delegated by the President. He/she shall reserve rooms for practices and meetings. He/she is responsible for giving out “strikes” (as described in Section XI) and keeping track of “strikes”.

(Appendix IV: Masti Constitution, 2012)

As one can see, the Vice President is mainly in charge of acquiring practice space, and taking attendance for practice via the strike system<sup>7</sup>. Though the Vice President is stipulated to be subordinate to the President, most President and Vice President pairs have worked more collaboratively than hierarchically. As such, both the President and Vice President usually command the most power, respect, and authority on the team. Conversely, the Outreach Chair and Treasurer, have always been more auxiliary board members restricted to their very specific responsibilities of finance and external presence. Constitutionally, the Outreach Chair,

’is responsible for acquiring performances for the team throughout the year. In

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<sup>7</sup> The strike system was the first policy that was instituted on the team to combat lateness. Since its conception, it has undergone some changes which will be explored in later sections.

addition, he/she will act as the contact person between Masti and other programs. The outreach chair is required to maintain constant contact with all those who request Masti to perform. He/she must keep the team updated on performance opportunities and manage all aspects of the performances, including, but not limited to, costumes, music cuts, and formations. He/she shall act as a liaison between Masti and dance competition managements. He/she will be responsible for applications to dance competitions throughout the year and assist in competition preparation.”

(Appendix IV: Masti Constitution, 2012)

Despite constitutional stipulations, the Outreach Chair’s role has steadily increased over the past four years as there has been a larger focus towards external competitions and exhibitions. Lastly, the Treasurer is the caretaker of Masti’s finances and apart from attending meetings held by the Student Activities Council<sup>8</sup>, is responsible for archiving transactions that are largely executed by other individuals on the executive board or other general team members for both organizational and social purchases.

## **Functional & Creative Committees**

In the effort to create an annual show, Masti has differentiated the functional aspects of the show from the creative components. The functional components include music, video, and costumes while the creative components comprises show theme, themes of respective pieces within the show, the dances within each piece, as well as any associated lighting or prop designation for said piece. For the remainder of this work, a distinction regarding a piece and a

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<sup>8</sup> The Student Activities Council (SAC) is a student run organization that finances the majority of Penn’s student groups. Almost every group on campus receives funding from SAC and it is the primary way that groups officially become recognized by the University.

dance need to be made. A piece represents major thematic components within a specific show. For example, the 2013 show theme was “Go The Bleep to Sleep: A Series of Mastified Bedtime Stories.” Pieces within the show included memorable stories such as The Jungle Book, Mulan, Aladdin, Cinderella, and Alice in Wonderland. Within each of these respective pieces are a number of dances (usually around five or so) which are choreographed by members on the team. Dances generally tend to be 40 seconds to a minute long and are usually distinguished by a transition in songs (Anonymous, 2013). The way in which Masti has approached the delegation of these responsibilities has varied through the past four years. In the 2011-2012 academic year, the show theme, for example, was decided in early September towards the beginning of the academic year while subsequent years saw earlier and earlier designation of the theme. Generally, this theme is decided with a majority consensus among all members of the troupe. The 2011-2012 year also saw the delegation of music, video, and costume components delegated in early September. These components were headed by one committee director who managed a committee of troupe members all of whom were volunteers including the committee director. Likewise, the creative component of specific pieces encapsulated within a single show theme were managed by separate creative committees led by a director as well as committee members, again all of whom were volunteers. The dances and their respective choreographers have usually been assigned by the President and Vice President. In total, there were eight pieces this year, with 5-6 dances per piece totaling to around 43 dances.

“Structurally, I think biggest change happened [after] my freshmen year... Our team got a new President and VP between freshmen and sophomore year who basically revamped the entire team” (Anonymous, 2015). As our informant mentions, in the 2012-2013 academic year, many of the above components were decided in late April in the previous semester as opposed early

September the following semester. Specific functional committee directors were voted in by a majority of the team in an election process while creative committee heads were decided through an application process screened by the President and Vice President.<sup>9</sup> Functional committee members joined their respective committees by volunteering for them while creative committee members were eliminated altogether. Creatively, this year saw the first introduction of leads within any respective piece. Leads, in the Bollywood sense are the heroes and villains of any specific story. To take the 2013 show example again, leads for Aladdin would be Aladdin, Jasmine, and Jafar. Leads are generally highlighted on stage with different costumes as well as by specific voiceovers that are acted by them. Before this year, there was no separate distinction for leads. In total, the number of pieces were reduced to seven with 4-5 dances per piece totaling 31 dances.

The following year (2013-2014) was met with more drastic changes including more inter-collaborative functional and creative committees and rightfully so. Though deceptively functional, the previous year's organizational structure featured "too many convoluted parts. People who were the head of something had to answer to someone else who was the head of something else while simultaneously being a choreographer or CD managing the person who was also managing you" (Anonymous, 2013). In the 2013-2014 year, members of a specific creative committee were assigned specific functional tasks within that creative committee. Taking the example of the 2013 show again, for instance, all the members of the Mulan creative committee took up the responsibility of putting together the music, video, and costume components of the piece. Thus, each creative committee was comprised of four people: three members in charge of functional components and an overall point person. Taken together, each committee member with a

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<sup>9</sup> Though there was an election process for functional committee directors, there were not enough members who showed interest in fulfilling the positions of Music Director and Video Director during the 2012-2013 academic year. As such, these positions were filled through an application process similar to that of the creative directors.

functional responsibility made up an entire functional committee with a specific functional director. For example, all of the members in charge of music within their respective creative committees made up a functional music committee headed by a separate music director. This year did not see the incorporation of leads. This year also saw a total of seven pieces equaling 30 dances.

Lastly, this past year (2014-2015) saw similar conceptions of delegation. However, conception of a show theme, though initially meant to be decided the semester before was not officially decided until the end of the 2014 calendar year. Nevertheless, as counterintuitive as it may seem, specific pieces to be encapsulated within the broader show theme were finalized long before the actual show theme was. Functionally, this year also saw the incorporation of an application process for both creative and functional directors. Due to a shortage of candidates, some functional committee responsibilities were distributed to members on the team who were most skilled at the specific task. For example, two members on the team took up the role of music director this year to fill the vacancy. Like the previous year, creative directors became entirely responsible for the vision of a specific piece while functional committee responsibilities were distributed across their respective committee members who were volunteers. This year also did not see the incorporation of leads and the overall number of pieces was reduced to a total of six equaling 27 dances.

Though the entire show is produced by the work of the functional and creative committee, there are three other members who are logistically in charge of putting all these components together and making the rest of the Penn community aware of the show: two Show Chairs and one Marketing Director (along with their committee). The manner in which Show Chairs and Marketing Directors have been elected have not changed significantly. During the past four years, both of these positions were elected prior to deciding the show theme for the year (September and

April thereafter). Generally, the two Show Chairs have a propensity to be new members on the team who have performed in at least one annual show while the Marketing Director<sup>10</sup> tends to be a member on the team who is most skilled at design. In terms of responsibilities, the Show Chairs take charge towards the end of the fall semester as preparation for the annual show (usually in February) begins to increase. They are in charge of securing a venue as well as finalizing show dates and times, creating transition cues between set show pieces, coordinating deadlines for the various functional committees, designating external individuals who will act as a stage crew (including photographers, videographers, and ushers), managing ticketing, and securing props, lighting, and any new additions to show.

The position of the Show Chairs is single-handedly one of the most time-consuming and stressful positions on the team next to the role of the President and Vice President as it requires delegation and coordination of almost every single member on the team along with persons outside the team for the successful production of the show. Alternatively, the Marketing Director is one of the positions on the team that is active throughout the entire academic year. Before show time, they are responsible for maintaining the team's social media pages, creating marketing materials for tryouts, external events, and the show itself, and organize an annual photoshoot.

## **Dancers & Choreographers**

The President and Vice President are largely responsible for delineating the team members who are in particular dances within a piece. They are also responsible for figuring out who choreographs specific dances within set pieces. The way this has been finalized has changed somewhat across the last four years. In the 2011-2012 academic year, following the meeting that

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<sup>10</sup> The Marketing Director was formerly known as the Public Relations Chair. The title was changed in the 2012-2013 academic year.

set the show theme, an open document was created where one would sign up to choreograph whatever pieces that interested them. This process generally led to disproportionate choreographing groups with some having more than enough people while others were left with not enough choreographers. “There [was] no, ‘you have to choreo this type of piece or this style’. Really you [could] do whatever you want and it [was] inserted into the show” (Anonymous, 2015). For some dances, the President and Vice President also had to assign choreographers to fill gaps in the show as they were less popular choices for choreographing groups.

The following year saw the introduction of “preference” and the unofficial authority for the President and Vice President to select who choreographs what dances in the show. Naturally, this led to some members who were more satisfied with their assignments than others. Nevertheless, it provided a manner in which almost every single dance was choreographed. Some considerations that were taken into choosing who choreographs what included experience with a specific dance style, and group dynamics within any one choreographing group. The 2013-2014 year saw an even more formalized quantitative matrix<sup>11</sup> designed on an Excel spreadsheet to allocate preference among members. This system was also introduced alongside a new lateness policy<sup>12</sup> called the “Red Day” system. In essence, every member on the team is allocated 3 Red Days which they can use to miss one session of practice up to three times over the academic year that are pre-scheduled before the official beginning of practice.. In addition to that, each member also gets one emergency Red Day that they can use at any time in case of unintended emergencies.

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<sup>11</sup> The matrix scales one’s preference to choreograph a certain dance or desire to be in a dance from 1-10. The system aims to assign members dances by preference to essentially keep team utility as high as possible. One’s utility to the team is determined by utility constraints such as how punctual one is to practice. The matrix essentially attempts to match the total amount of utility one has with their preferences after constraints have been accounted for in any given dance or choreography assignment.

<sup>12</sup> The previous year’s lateness policy involved a strike system where three strikes of being late would incur a \$5 penalty to be paid to the team. It did not affect one’s chances in being in a particular dance or being able to choreograph a specific dance.

If any member comes late to a practice, they receive a Yellow Day and three Yellow Days equal a Red Day that is in addition to the ones that are pre-scheduled. Both of these systems worked together to produce an optimal preference quantity for any one member on the team. Unlike the previous year where choreographing preference was evaluated by the President and Vice President, this year, it was dictated by how many Yellow and Red Days that team members had. Basically, the more punctual one was, the more likely that they would be dancing in a dance they wanted to and be able to choreograph a dance of their interest. Lastly, this past year saw a continuation of the Red Day system accompanied with the Excel preference sheet. However, one major loophole that was discovered in both of these years was the lack of authority the lateness policy possessed after all dancers and choreographers were assigned. Taking or removing people in any way after their assignment would actually be a logistical complication much closer to show. Thus, lateness generally re-presents itself as an issue after the first semester.

### **Performances, Exhibitions, & Competitions**

Performances, Exhibitions, and Competitions are largely managed by the Outreach Chair. In a way, this role is the equivalent of a Show Chair on a much smaller scale. Performances are usually requested of the troupe at various times during the year and the Outreach Chair will have to inquire internally regarding how many members are free to perform for a certain event. Most performances are possible with a minimum of six dancers. Exhibitions, or non-competition routines performed outside of Penn are less frequently done. The last time Masti performed at a major exhibition was a year ago at a Bhangra<sup>13</sup> Competition in Pittsburgh. Both on-campus performances and off-campus exhibitions both require different amounts of logistical and rehearsal

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<sup>13</sup> Bhangra refers to several types of dance originating from the Punjab region of Pakistan and India.

coordination. The routine is generally set by the Outreach Chair along with approval from the President and Vice President and rehearsals are added onto regular practice for the annual show.

A competition set requires much more logistical preparation than either on-campus performances or off-campus exhibitions. They generally necessitate a minimum number of performers and demand elements such as the creation of a theme, introduction video, and more intricate choreography and music cut. These components are necessary to make the set more competitive within the South Asian Fusion Circuit. The first time that Masti seriously competed in this circuit was in the Spring of 2011 followed by competition performances during the Fall of 2012, the Spring of 2014, and the Spring of 2015. Out of all these competitions, Masti only placed at one of the competitions that happened this year.

These organizational components are important to highlight in relation to understanding Masti as they are the primary veins through which members on the team are able to exert influence over other members. The structure of how leadership positions are organized specifically allow individuals to not only exert force to manage the team but also access to information. And quite literally, information is power on Masti. Michel Foucault's research on power unravels this quite nicely. He describes how “claims to knowledge and the truth are the means by which institutions, bureaucracies, and even individuals dominate others” (Moberg, 2013). Essentially, those in leadership positions are given authority through democratic processes but while in power, their legitimization is granted through the management of information. From the placement of dancers due to the lateness policy (through knowledge of who is/is not punctual) to approving artistic visions of creative directors, the President and Vice President have the most power (followed by a relatively flat distribution of power across different committees of team management) because of their access to privileged cultural and structural information. Decision-making, therefore, rests

largely with those in these positions and it is these individuals who impact the direction of the team in the long term either through their respective expectations of the team or lack thereof within the scope of a particular academic year. However, leadership positions are not the only way one can exert power. One's social involvement on the team can also allow them to exert tremendous influence on the team without a leadership position.

## **Cultural Dynamics**

“I joined Masti right when I joined college and I was an active member my entire four years at Penn so I can't imagine doing college not being on Masti” (Anonymous, 2015). Masti in Hindi means “fun”, or “mischief”. Some members even say that it can also mean “flirtatious fun”, a rather fitting name for a co-ed dance troupe. And as the quote provided by one alumni member above, in general, what makes Masti appealing is its easygoing and fun nature. Parks and Sanna describe this phenomenon as an attraction to a group of people who are desirable, “that is they possess characteristics that society as a whole values. [such as] friendliness, [&] happiness... Association with groups of socially desirable people are typically pleasant... because these groups have prestige due to their skills” (Parks, 1999) Masti's friendliness and happy nature can especially be seen in many of the traditions that Masti continues to uphold every year. For example, even before potential members audition the piece they learned for tryouts, Masti makes the males and females perform for each other almost resembling a gendered practice. Both Masti members and potential members alike watch and cheer each other on as respective groups perform for the other before the auditioning process begins. Another notable tradition follows a couple weeks after fall initiation. Older members take new members to Cusi for s'mores, quiz them on team members' names and ask each rookie member to pick three people on the team to describe their first impression of them. This serves as a fun way to make new members more comfortable around

older members in a relaxed environment. From initial gatherings to almost spending every minute of one's free time with Masti, it's cultural practices are truly what makes Masti more than just a dance troupe. In the words of one senior member, "my time on Masti has been increasingly all-consuming... but also has returned more each year" (Anonymous, 2015). Thus, each year becomes more and more fulfilling not only because of an increased attachment to the annual show but also because of the number of social bonds that are made on the team.

## **Teaching & Practices**

Practices have usually erred on the amount of 7-9 hours a week where weeks leading up to the annual show or a major performance have seen even more hours of rehearsal. Interestingly, what is planned to be accomplished during practice is dictated by the President and Vice President but what actually happens at practice is usually left to the discretion of how members on the team feel that particular day. There are times where practice is utterly chaotic and fun and there are time when you do not hear a pin drop and this generally varies depending on who is leading a practice on a particular day. Informally, Masti does not simply ascribe respect for people in leadership positions. For example, when Masti members first learn a dance, it is taught by the choreographer who crafted said dance. This can be one, two or even three people. A large part of teaching the team is both preparation on behalf of the choreographer and respect for the choreographer on behalf of the team. In terms of respect, commanding the attention of the team is a skill that few members in the troupe have completely mastered. In general, it is harder for younger members on the team to command attention just due to their inexperience. Nevertheless, there are exceptions to those who can command attention simply by being loud and authoritative. Despite being a new member, for example, one female member on the team is loud just through her personality (Anonymous, 2014). Though surprising for a new member, the first time she was able to teach a

dance, members paid more attention to learn the piece due to her commanding nature. This does not mean that older members on the team have a free ticket to command attention. To lead practice effectively, members almost expect a certain archetypical leader with specific qualities. Various studies on leadership have shown that some of these qualities include intelligence, sensitivity, verbal skill, and dedication and members who attempt to teach while lacking these qualities are subconsciously viewed as unskilled and undeserving of respect (Cronshaw, 1987).

In essence, much of this revolves around one's personality. For instance, another female member with three years of experience on the team for example, does not have a authoritative personality. Therefore, she has a much more difficult time commanding the attention of the team during practice. The more one can command the rest of the team's attention, the faster they can teach and the easier it is to reveal that they are deserving of respect. Though some members do not completely agree with this practice, none can refute that certain people on team have more influence on the team than others merely due to how they carry themselves. When asked whether some members had more influence on the team than others, a young male member responded without hesitation, "Some people are more influential than others. President and Vice President have the most influence... After that, it's the upperclassmen. Whoever spends the most time on Masti are the most influential." (Anonymous, 2015).

Earning respect on the team is an informal process. Besides leadership positions, there are few ways for members to appropriately assert authority. For instance, a sophomore member noted that "the senior leaders in general... I have a tendency to trust what [they] say just because [they] have been on the team for this long and know what's best for the team" (Anonymous, 2015). Simply being on the team longer or being a better dancer relative to others is an example of how some members on the team earn more respect than others. Being able to learn choreography and

perform it cleanly and energetically also makes some members stand out more than others. Molm describes this process as status generation (Molm, 1986). Essentially, “people with high ability in one area is capable in other, unrelated areas,” in this case leadership (Parks, 1999). Members who have the most experience on the team generally tend to be better dancers just due to the amount of experience they had (with exceptions). However, there also tends to be an informal rivalry within a graduating class regarding the most skilled dancer. Presently, it is almost unilaterally agreed that the current ex-President is the most skilled dancer on the team. Nevertheless, whether it is because she was the ex-President that so many members perceive this, may be a separate problem altogether. Specifically, throughout my observation of the team, three female dancers have slowly revealed their expertise in dance over the past three years. For a large part of the three years, it was hard to distinguish one person among the three to be better than another. However, immediately after one became President, the discussion ceased to exist. Another underclassmen member noted that “regardless of [the President and Vice President] representing the team’s best interests, the things [they] say [or do] will be valued higher because they are the President/Vice President” (2015). At the same time, as soon to be graduating seniors, the other two members also subsequently became less involved on the team reducing their exposure to new members. This reveals a cyclic relationship of leadership positions and other unrelated qualities. In this scenario, status generation is still occurring but in reverse. The ability of one to acquire a leadership position (in this case, the Presidency) qualifies one’s capability in dance in relation to the other two members where such a distinction before was more convoluted. Objectively, it is debatable if any one person outshines another as each of them have very specific fortes. Yet, due to a reduced involvement on the team on the part of the other two members, input in terms of choreography and

creative vision decreased and the styles of dance that these two members could have excelled at also decreased further propagating status generation and the myth of one best dancer.

Simultaneously, creative choreography is also an avenue to earn respect. It is unilaterally accepted that choreography is the heart of a dance and quite simply there are members who are better choreographers than others. Nevertheless, though better dancers are usually better choreographers, there are exceptions. One senior male member on the team, for example, is arguably one of the best Bhangra dancers on the team. However, despite his ability to perform the said style excellently, his ability to choreograph to Bhangra is less impressive. Choreographers predominantly prioritize one or two styles of dance when they produce something new and they generally excel at performing those styles as well. It is not clear how members become better choreographers than others but one possible explanation is the sheer amount of time put into perfecting a style of dance and researching other groups who also perform that style. While the senior male member highlighted above is less impressive in choreography, a junior male member who puts considerably more time and energy into researching other Bhangra teams has created some of the most popularly liked Bhangra segments in Masti's history just within the past two years (Anonymous, 2015).

## **Outside of Practice**

Masti is one of the few groups on campus that spends a significant amount of time with its members outside its principal goal. Though it is fundamentally a dance team, members of the troupe will describe how close the team is because of how much time is spent outside of practice. One way that the team spends time outside of practice is through organized events such as mixers with other groups, team visits, attending shows together, and traveling. All of these events are organized by the Outreach Chair and they are the primary vehicle for attaining an active presence

on campus aside from performing. Organized mixers are scheduled at key times during the academic year such as before a big party or during Spring Fling<sup>14</sup> when it is assumed a majority of the members are available to socialize with another group. In contrast, team visits and attending a show as a team are ways to support other teams who also produce a show. Team visits usually involve buying food and drink funded by Masti for another team or group while attending a show together simply involves reserving tickets as a group. Both are friendly gestures that Masti regularly partakes in to maintain relationship with other groups. Lastly, traveling is a component that is necessary for competitions or off-campus exhibitions. These are largely dictated by member availability and is another way that Masti brings its members closer as a group. There are some traditions, however that are institutionalized specifically for both sexes to bond with each other.

Halfway into the year, Masti holds a notable tradition called Masti Dates. This happens during Winter Bootcamp<sup>15</sup> and essentially, the male members of the team (also known as Ys) ask out the female members of the team (respectively known as Xs) on the team to a one-on-one lunch or dinner date during Bootcamp. The Ys usually propose in a charming fashion and there have even been precedents of multiple Ys asking multiple Xs in distinct and creative ways. Some recent examples include serenades, baked goods, as well as scavenger hunts. Ys are also encouraged to propose the date with Xs whom they do not know well to facilitate an avenue for both sexes to get to know each other better. While Masti Dates are a formalized way to entertain traditional gender stereotypes, Masti Formal is the exact opposite. Towards the end of the academic year, as with many groups at Penn, Masti celebrates its year with a formal banquet. Unlike many groups

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<sup>14</sup> Spring Fling is an annual concert organized by students and supported by the University. The days leading up to Fling as well as Fling itself is known to be one of the highlights of a Penn experience due to a number of events that happen on campus.

<sup>15</sup> Bootcamp is generally a time before each semester where the team is required to arrive on campus 4-5 days before classes start to rehearse and learn pieces. Because school has not started, it is a notable exercise practiced among many dance teams on Penn's campus.

however, Masti does not allow members to bring a date. Instead, the Xs have to propose to the Ys and formally ask them to be their dates for Formal. Similar to the Ys during Masti Dates, the proposals are usually extremely elaborate or charming. This tradition, like the Masti Dates are an avenue for both sexes to bond and is a testament to its fun nature that makes the team desirable to outsiders. For example, one senior member's decision to tryout entirely hinged on Masti's co-ed nature: "I thought co-ed was much more interesting than all girls. It was between Masti and Naach and it wasn't really much of a hard decision at all because all girls seemed boring... Masti just seemed more fun and exciting" (Anonymous, 2015).

Aside from organized events, Masti also partakes in social bonding through informal events. From eating meals together, to going out to bars and parties, a significant part of being on the team involves these kind of informal gatherings. And this is one of the areas in which there is a large discrepancy between Ys and Xs on the team. Informal gatherings are mostly possible because of the team email listserv via Google and text group via GroupMe. Older members on the team generally initiate most of these gatherings and every member of the team is invited to come "hang out". Aside from meals, which vary on availability and class schedules, other socials involve gathering in a common area and talking while doing schoolwork. Lefebvre describes how social spaces are 'relations of production' are reproduced (1976). Relations of production is a Marxist terms denoting the totality of social relationships one must enter to survive to reproduce their means of life (Lefebvre, 1976). In Masti's context, the social space is therefore an environment in which cultural transmission is allowed to transfer from one individual to another. Different years have seen different spaces act as an avenue for social cohesion but these spaces are largely another pathway for members on the team to get closer to one another. Two years ago, for example, an infamous location where Masti members studied was "Rodin Booths", a study area located in one

of the residential apartments on campus called Rodin. Even though not everyone lived in this particular apartment there were enough members who came to study at this location that it became a hub of activity and socializing. Similarly, this year's location of choice is a room within another apartment called Harnwell. The room is even named after four Masti members who live there and they have been able to make this room a hub of activity by hosting multiple formal and informal events even going as far as leaving the apartment unlocked for any Masti member to come at any time of day. Despite the creation of these spaces, there does exist a dichotomy of who gets the most out of them and it tends to be those who use the spaces the most.

In light of this, there is a general sense of closeness and camaraderie among the Ys because they are more available to come to these spaces to spend time with each other. On the other hand, Xs do this much less often. And this is largely due to how one does schoolwork. "I really think its just how guys and girls on the team prioritize their time. Girls just don't want to stay up while guys are willing to do that" (Anonymous, 2014). Aside from going to class, Ys generally spend more time during the day napping, or grabbing meals with different people while Xs do school work or study. As such, Ys spend more time during the evenings or late at night studying or catching up on school work. Unlike the Xs though, Ys attempt to study and do school work with other members on the team while Xs tend to prefer studying alone unless asked. As with any trend, there are exceptions and there are Ys who spend less time and Xs who spend more time with the team than average. One senior male member with 2 years of experience for example, spends the least amount of time with Masti of any Y and this is partially due to the other organizations that he is a part of (Anonymous, 2014). On the flipside, a female member with 3 years of experience was exalted as an honorary Y due to the amount of time she spent with Masti members outside of practice. The differences in the amount of time spent outside of practice may also be explained by a nature of

procrastination shared among the Ys. As most of them tend to study, do school work or assignments last minute, their ability to spend time with each other leading up to any deadline is more while Xs generally pre-schedule how much time they will be able to spend in a given day. One female ex-President once noted that “a lot of what it is the girls on the team are on a different schedule than the guys” (Anonymous, 2014). Therefore being able to attend informal hangouts is much more difficult for Xs as they are largely constructed at a moment’s notice. In addition to one’s availability to attend social gatherings on Masti, internal social capital on the team is a significant element of one’s cultural experience on the team.

## **Social Capital**

How one carries themselves on the team both inside and outside of practice creates some forms of social capital for their stance on the team. In *The Forms of Capital*, Pierre Bourdieu defines social capital as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Richardson, 1986). Thus, social capital is largely derived through favorable and unfavorable interactions with team members and is imperative to comprehending how decision-making is carried out on the team. Through one’s strengths as a dancer, choreographer and sociability, members on the team ascribe a level of influence with said person. This influence then formalizes in team-wide discussions, and deliberations. Team-wide discussions include the annual show theme meeting, music cut discussions, tryout deliberations, and discussions on major performances or competition routines. Members also acquire influence merely by the number of years they are on the team. Senior members tend to be able to influence younger members with anecdotes of the past and more confidence in their ability to speak about

the team. Social capital is also modified through one's dedication to the team and one's interactions with other members on the team.

For example, there have been members on the team who have put in a lot of time and effort into the team but see that effort be misconstrued altogether. One example of this is an ex-President of the team who became very jaded by his experience. Though he conceivably did the most work for the team the year he was President, it came at the cost of his individual academic and social goals. During that academic year, it was also evident that Masti has no way of recognizing individuals which may have added to his jaded experience. The year following his presidency, this member joined a rival dance team. Unfortunately, through this act, this member effectively ceased sociability with Masti. In other words, because "the reproduction of social capital presupposes an unceasing effort of sociability, a continuous series of exchanges in which recognition is endlessly affirmed and reaffirmed," younger members on the team no longer discerned the contributions this member provided such as the cultural practices and initiatives he brought as a previous President (Richardson, 1986). Similarly, an ex-Vice President also became jaded with his experience due to similar reasons as the ex-President mentioned before. Unlike the ex-President, however, this member chose to become part-time the year following his leadership role on the team and much of the work that he had put towards the team in the prior year was never seen among newer members who later joined the team. In both scenarios, the amount of influence both members have was changed drastically due to their choices after holding their respective leadership positions. As Bourdieu says, social capital "in this case... are more or less really enacted and so maintained and reinforced, in exchanges" (Richardson, 1986). This in turn, changed how they were perceived by current and newer members on the team. Both of these instances reveal situations where favorable interactions among team members allowed these individuals to acquire leadership. However,

despite the ability they once had in being able to direct and lead the team, it disappeared as soon as their commitment to the team was questioned. This happens because the predominant pathway of acquiring social capital is either through social interactions with members or through tangibly revealing their skill in dance, choreography, or teaching. Thus, members who are part-time or no longer on the team virtually acquire very little social capital if any at all.

As Bourdieu mentions, social capital must be maintained or reproduced through interactions or ‘exchanges’ with members on the team (Richardson, 1986). Thus, social capital not only modifies the influence members have currently but how influential they can become in the future through leadership positions. Individuals who have a relatively amicable history of interactions effectively have the most support in any deliberation. This is especially true in the case of leadership positions and discussions surrounding potential new members. Members who have had disputes with other members on the team are thus more likely to be disregarded or not supported during these deliberation processes. For example, an underclassmen female member with very strong opinions has had difficulty blending in with the team smoothly. Because of her sensitive nature, several members have pointed out how hard it is to work with her. Due to their interactions with her in either a dance or work setting, members on the team have distanced themselves from seeing her in a leadership role (Anonymous, 2015). Social capital in this regard is maintained through good relationships with other members on the team. Unlike many of the practices outlined above regarding social and cultural norms inside and outside of practice as well as the generation of social capital that have remained consistent throughout time, the next section will outline how these consistent practices impacted the team through one facet that has continually changed over time: one’s individual expectations and desires for the team’s growth.

## **Individual Desires vs Team Growth**

The inclusion of any individual in a group requires that individual to adhere to special values or norms of the said group. The values themselves vary from group to group and Masti is no exception. For example, one informant mentioned how “after the first year... we started to form opinions of what the team’s goals should be and those became my goals or expectations of the direction that the team should be headed in” (Anonymous, 2015). Perhaps one of the fundamental points of conflict within any group is the negotiation of one’s individual desires with that of the group’s desires. Masti is one of the few groups that exist on Penn’s campus that values one’s individuality in exchange for accepting the rest of Masti’s individuality. In any scenario, it is hard to pinpoint the framework of Masti without a grasp of the individuals that comprise the team in any given year. After all, it is the frequent negotiation of individuals, their sensitivities, insensitivities, and desires that make up the team atmosphere for any particular year. Four years ago, Masti underwent a dramatic shift. It was the first year that the troupe had accepted nine new members (four in the spring and five in the fall afterwards). Besides the nine new members<sup>16</sup>, the team was composed of three sophomores, three juniors, and seven seniors. Almost half the team was brand new. Thus, the responsibility of cultural transmission rested solely on the upperclassmen. Mesoudi defines cultural transmission as the “process by which knowledge, beliefs, skills, practices, norms, values and other forms of non-genetic information are passed from individual to individual via social learning mechanisms such as imitation and teaching” (Ellen, 2013). As dominating figures on the team, the upperclassmen valued the acceptance of individuality and the perpetuation of fun along with dance quality and choreography. Needless to say, combined with leadership that prioritized one’s interdependence to the team, Masti members

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<sup>16</sup> Four of the new members taken in the spring were incoming sophomores while the five new members taken in the fall were freshmen.

felt connected to each other not only because of personal relationships but also because associating oneself with Masti always meant that one was accepted. Acceptance became both a team desire as well as an individual desire due to strong upperclassmen setting this type of precedent.

The following year, the team composition changed dramatically. It was met with five new members (two in the spring, and three in the fall), totaling two freshmen, eight sophomores, seven juniors, and three seniors. Aside from five new members, there were 15 existing members who by this year had certain expectations and goals for the team having been members for at least a year. The previous year's relaxed attitude regarding dance had resulted in a relatively poor production in terms of the annual show and many members attributed it to the team's lack of priority on dance and what researchers call social loafing. Social loafing, defined as "the reduced efforts that are often exhibited by individual group members when they work collectively at a task" (Parks, 1999). Many members saw the annual show as the only tangible reflection of their work in any given year and the prior year disappointed many. Organizational changes such as the ones outlined above took hold. Practices became stricter, a lateness policy was instituted, and expectations regarding dance and how much one improved began to plant itself in many members. Essentially, one's contribution to the team became more central to one's experience on the team as opposed to a collective association with Masti. As studies suggest, by creating a system that identified members who are late, and who underperformed, show quality increased tremendously (William et al, Kerr & Bruun, 1981). Even though leadership valued the improvement and quality of dance, not all members agreed on this method by which it was to be pursued. A cultural divide among members in terms of dance quality slowly began to emerge. It was obvious that males (who were less trained than females)<sup>17</sup> generally needed to work harder to become cleaner and better dancers so they

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<sup>17</sup> Males generally have no prior experience when they join the team. They are evaluated on the potential to become better dancers by existing members on the team depending on their performance at tryouts. Most men just need a

became an immediate scapegoat for the lack of dance quality in the previous year. However, most males on the team appreciated the fact that they were consistently able to perform with higher energy on stage than females on the team did, and it translated as a concrete result to their efforts in practice. In a largely gendered Western European space where “dance remains a culturally suspect endeavor for male adolescents,” the need to assert some validity to their dancing has always been prominent among the Ys (Fisher, 2009). Therefore, high quality dance became a matter of taste essentially perceived by different cohorts on the team to be composed of different criteria. Taste, defined by Bourdieu as “an acquired disposition to ‘differentiate’ and ‘appreciate’... to establish and mark differences by a process of distinction which is not a distinct knowledge” tells us that it is difficult to comprehend an objective method to evaluate these different opinions (Bourdieu, 1984). Therefore, whether any of these criteria alone could improve the team’s dance quality or the quality of choreography was not openly challenged but a tangible rift between the Ys and Xs emerged. Differences in taste thus produced some conflict and confusion. As it was the first year with the incorporation of leads for each piece, the way in which those leads were selected and how they should be portrayed on stage varied from individual to individual. Furthermore, choreography was under more supervision by creative directors as they now became the gatekeepers of the inception of creative vision and its implementation on stage. Despite organizational changes the President and Vice President were clear in expressing that,

“This creative process is a team effort. You have already accomplished a lot by creating your storyboards with your visions. Now, it's time to open up the floor for discussion and improvements about your ideas. The same respect should be given to other teammates' suggestions as was given to those of the [Vice President] and me. Be adaptive and flexible

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basic sense of rhythm. On the contrary, females that tryout are generally trained dancers. Due to this schematic, there are generally higher standards for females who make the team than males.

as much as possible. These dances belong to Masti, not to any individual person - please keep this in mind as we move forward.”

(Anonymous, 2012)

Nevertheless, the organizational changes and the incorporation of leads made it hard for individual members to ascribe the same collective team identity as they did the previous year. In the attempt to achieve tangible work for the team, members formed differing opinions on what it meant to create a good music cut, or a good sequence of costume changes, but these conflicts and disagreements were rarely expressed publicly. Members nevertheless, began to attach specific tastes, attributes, and skillsets to particular members reducing the notion of a need to work for a collective.

The following year exemplified a direct reaction to the previous one. This year, there were five new members (three from the spring, and two from the fall), totaling two freshmen, four sophomores, eight juniors, and eight seniors. With a top-heavy team, (now with 17 existing members) and many members feeling their desires not being properly addressed in the previous year, leadership heavily prioritized adhering to individual preferences and desires. Thus initiated the beginning of the Red Day system and an Excel spreadsheet that allocates choreography and dance preferences based on one's lateness to practice. Leads were removed and there was a general understanding that those with leadership positions had the most control over creative input regarding the annual show. To creatively influence the show, one had to become part of a creative or functional committee or choreograph. The systems that were implemented this year allowed one's utility to the team be based on one's punctuality to practice or through skills they can provide a functional or creative committee. The system allowed for a way to eliminate social loafing by identifying members who were late and subsequently evaluating their performance through a

committee (Harkins, 1985). In return, members were rewarded with their most sought preference in dance or choreography. With individual desires considered at such a high priority, it started becoming unclear whether members on the team acted out of self-interest or for the interest of the team overall.

With eight graduating seniors, the following year resembled the four years prior to it. A bottom heavy year where cultural transmission was mostly the responsibility of older members. However, unlike four years prior to it, the remnants of individual priority emanated among members currently on the team. This year was met with the most new members Masti has ever taken in history. The team was comprised of eleven new members (three sophomores in the spring and eight freshmen in the fall), two sophomores, four juniors, and seven seniors. With a lack of a consensus among existing team members on the overall direction of the team, individual perceptions of what is considered the right direction for the team became more and more divergent this year. Despite a lack of consensus among members regarding the direction of the team, leadership (and especially the President and Vice President) were still respected and were ultimately responsible for directing the team. There are two specific reasons why this leadership was respected: one relays back to the creation of social capital. In addition to their ability to get elected, the President and Vice President of this academic year also acquired social capital through their prowess in dance which arguably made them some of the best dancers in the troupe. Both the President and Vice President had generated enough status to be able to maintain authority on the team (Parks, 1999). Secondly, in conjunction with the Outreach Chair, the desire to compete against other teams external to Penn drove the team to apply to several large-scale competitions. As the anecdote in the beginning of the paper reveals, Masti was accepted into three of these competitions.

Our summary of cultural dynamics provides a tremendous amount of insight on the various practices that have been performed throughout Masti's history. Some of these have changed across the years while others have been relatively consistent. Nonetheless, they provide an acknowledgement of a team where individuals constantly negotiate between their own unique desires with that of the rest of the team. Though Masti provides a broader "familial"<sup>18</sup> culture, members on the team find themselves wanting and expecting more of the team the longer they are present. Terry and Hogg describes this as the active processes of collective identity formation. "Collective identity is a description of the group to which the individual belongs and as such, serves as the normative backdrop against which the individual can articulate their own unique attributes" (Sammut, 2013). Members on Masti not only value the idea of the individual self but especially value it in contrast to the rest of the members on the team. In most of its cultural practices, members are taught to desire admiration or respect by other members on the team while also constantly asserting their individuality in producing an art form. And within the realm of individual and team environments, this process is largely at odds with Masti's organizational structure where power and information are handled by few. Masti consistently demands individuality from its members while organizationally shunning it. In the words of one senior member, "my time on Masti has been increasingly all-consuming" (Anonymous, 2015). In our analysis below, I outline exactly how Masti culturally expects more of its members with every passing year while only allowing those expectations to be fulfilled in very specific roles. I will also highlight that it is the careful management of individual desires and collective identity that has allowed Masti to see such exponential growth in such a short amount of time. Furthermore, if this

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<sup>18</sup> Members describe Masti as a family because of many of its cultural practices aimed at bringing members closer together.

balance is not handled delicately in the coming future, either one facet of Masti can overwhelm the other, essentially disrupting this growth and dismantling Masti's collective identity.

## **Analysis/Discussion**

For much of its history, Masti and its members have successfully been able to adhere to a very distinct cultural identity. However, this identity is vulnerable to instability as the troupe continues to promote growth in terms of dance quality without paying attention to its cultural history (Sammut, 2013). Masti was founded at a time when there was no other co-ed South Asian Fusion dance team on campus. As such, it fulfilled roles that neither the current all-female South Asian Fusion dance troupe (PenNaach) nor the current all-male South Asian Fusion dance troupe (Penn Dhamaka) could be engaged in: 1) bringing together both sexes on a South Asian dance team, and 2) focusing on dance as an extension of fun. When Masti began as an organization, it was simply a group of friends who wanted to dance. Initially the only performance Masti partook in was during South Asia Society's (SAS) annual culture show in the fall semester. Soon, inspired by the annual shows of other teams on campus, Masti put on their first annual show four years after its founding in 2003. Already, we see a group that is capable of rapid change in a very short time frame and it is not marginal change either. In its history Masti has interestingly changed in blocks of four years. These changes can be separated into its development in its initial founding years, its first four show years and the development of a distinct Masti culture, and its very rapid ascent into a nationally competing team. Over the course of these years, several traditions, and rites have been created and also discontinued. As Dirks points out "each ritual is [a] patterned activity, to be sure, but it is also invented anew as it happens" (1994). With each consecutive repetition of these traditions, Masti has changed ever so slightly. Nevertheless, these changes are

accompanied with distinct facets of Masti that have subconsciously pervaded its atmosphere for the past four years.

## **Management of Desires**

By now, it is easy to see that there are various ways that one acquires influence and more specifically power on the team. Leadership is the most obvious of these forms and there are multiple leadership positions. However, to acquire leadership it requires enough favorable social capital that team members elect a specific individual into a leadership position. And this is where the majority of our analysis takes place. Though the importance of social capital and the variety of opportunities that one can use was described above, the process in which one acquires social capital is largely through the management of the desires of other members on the team. And this seems like a convoluted idea at first. How exactly does one manage another's desires? To a large extent, it is not so much as managing one's desires as it is inquiring and obtaining knowledge about them. Sociologists will tell you that "people are motivated to identify themselves in group terms for two main reasons: subjective uncertainty reduction and enhancement of self-esteem. People strive to avoid uncertainty about who they are, how they should behave, and how other people will behave" (Hornsey & Hoff, 2000). In many ways, Masti, in its onset is a perfect exemplification of a group such as this. New members who become part of the team are instantly coddled, and valorized to the point that most new members do not fear being who they are, and how they should behave. As pointed out above, practices are run primarily by the President and Vice President but the content of any said practice become wholly dependent on how members of the team feel that day. Thus, the President and Vice President are responsible for not only the knowledge of the emotional tendencies of individuals on the team but also its successful management on any given day of practice. More specifically, this is not just limited to their emotional tendencies but also their

desires for the day or their ongoing desires for the team. Successful management of these needs is how the President and Vice President can maintain authority and more importantly power. And the successful management of one's desires gives one a sense of acceptance and belonging. This sense of acceptance and belonging are subsequently passed onto new members every generation through the process of cultural transmission (Ellen, 2013). Ironically, it is the exact management of another's acceptance and belonging that enhances the social capital of some members above others.

Unconsciously, many members ascribe their feeling of acceptance to the entire team. However, this is not an accurate assertion on the part of many new members. For example, though Masti participates in a unanimous voting procedure to determine new members, the unanimous nature of this voting procedure can be highly questioned. The most easily contradictory example that can be highlighted involves one's absence at deliberations. Absence automatically strips one from the ability to vote and therefore automatically invalidates the procedure of unanimity of everyone on the team to the unanimity of everyone present for deliberations. Of course, this has marginal effect on one's inclusivity on the team as a new member but let us continue. To further exacerbate the importance of the management of one's desires, it is important to understand that once a candidate makes the team, there are huge distinctions between their expectations of the team during their first year compared to that which develops in subsequent years. Almost every informant mentioned their lack of experience with dance teams and their ensuing lack of expectations for the Masti as they joined (Anonymous et al. 2014). Though new members do not have any particular expectations of the team when they initially join they do derive them from those who simultaneously have social capital on the team as dancers or as members who are able to manage their needs and desires. Colloquially, most people understand this as having a friendly relationship with one another but it is slightly more complex. First of all, one's intrinsic motivation to transmit

one's own individual desires to another is subconscious and this is largely seen through what individuals say in their interviews compared to their actions within the team itself. For example, one of the biggest trends within Masti is the nostalgia of one's first year on the team. As one member puts it, "my newbie year was incredible: getting to know everyone on the team... they treat you really special" (Anonymous, 2015). One's first year on the team generally tends to be one's best experience with the team. As coddled underclassmen, a group where upperclassmen actively reach out to younger members is rare. As such, newbies quickly find role models who reach out to them the most frequently and subsequently culturally transmit their values regarding the team with the values of their role models (Ellen, 2013). Though this is not an actively deliberate process, it has major implications of how the team continues to develop year after year.

Role models are generally members on the team with enough social capital to capture the interest of a rookie member on the team. Social capital is intrinsically tied to one's relations with members on the team as well as their prowess as dancers. As rookie members generate a sense of acceptance and belonging with their role model(s), they align their values with that of their role models. Kelmen describes this process as Internalization where "information in the form of values, is carried within the individual" (Hare, 1982). As values align, interests are shared but because of a general underclassmen-upperclassmen hierarchical relationship, the role model's ability to manage the desires of younger members is unseen. The interplay between obtaining, and sharing values, desires, and interests for the rookie member allows the role model to generate power and influence over them. This form of cultural transmission over specific members allows specific role models to generate opinions within the scope of the team that are favorable for said rookie member. This sequence of events ultimately allows the initial role model to have power and influence within

the team. In essence, the management of any member's desires, needs, and values become the core of one's ability to have power and influence in decision-making within the team.

At first look, some may be eager to point out that dance prowess may be independent of this phenomenon but further analysis reveals the intertwining nature of the management of desires with one's intrinsic motivation to acquire said prowess. Improving one's dancing ability enhances social capital but improving dance in itself is a desire that was managed and manifested by those with power and influence. The 2012-2013 academic year for instance, is a great example of how those in leadership not only changed the landscape of the team from a more energetic and fun troupe to a more serious and organized team but also how their expectations for the team was transmitted to younger members on the team. Much of this changing landscape is due to leadership (more specifically the President and Vice President), who made practices more efficient and strict, emphasizing the role of production quality as an essential component of the troupe's identity. Fast forward two years and it is the new members of the 2012-2013<sup>19</sup> academic year that are leading the charge towards a nationally competitive Masti. As Foucault describes on an international scale, the landscape in which power arrangements answer to the common people have changed over time and Masti is no exception (Moberg, 2013). "The values we think are constant, timeless, and absolute are really in constant flux relative to who has power and how it gets used" (Moberg, 2013). Basically, due to the social capital of those in power, there is a downward trickling effect that led more and more young members to ascribe to similar desires. Power, therefore is not only gained by managing another's desires but the successful inception of and co-collaboration of one's own desires with another. And it is also through this process that one has influence on the team. Therefore, Masti's particular organizational structure coupled with its cultural practices allow this

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<sup>19</sup> As with any trend, it is important to note that there are exceptions. Though a majority of this new member class have revealed aspirations to compete, there were some who expressed more interest in it than others.

phenomenon to be common on the team. The members who are cognizant of this phenomenon are thus more capable of taking advantage of it to advance the team in a direction they see fit. Simultaneously, those who are not cognizant of it are still responsible for directing the team along a certain pathway through this subconscious process.

## **Social Capital vs Dance**

Social Capital has clear implications for power and influence on the team. But how exactly does it interact with the team's growth in terms of dance and production quality? Throughout the small history that I have uncovered about Masti, it is clear that this troupe is capable of rapid change over time. Nevertheless, one particular feature has been relatively consistent through many of its formative years. My final thesis will explore how Masti is a group that constantly struggles with the creation of a team-wide social capital through their artistic production while individual members simultaneously attempt to acquire internal social capital to influence the future direction of the troupe. To understand Masti's continual desire to exceed, we have to look at its history.

As a team that was initially founded to perform at only one venue, Masti has very humble beginnings. Because of its short history, Masti's popularity on campus was limited to a very small spectrum of the South Asian community at Penn, which mostly included friends of the troupe members. Presumably, as members realized that their capital on campus could be increased by hosting a production on campus, they soon did so in a matter of four years. It was held in the Hall of Flags room in Houston Hall, a prominent location on campus but certainly not a theater of any sorts. The following year, the team upgraded to the Harold Prince Theater on campus, a second tier theater on campus for dance troupes. Harold Prince Theater was certainly an incredible improvement from the Hall of Flags but it is notoriously unpopular due to its lack of a stage left

wing<sup>20</sup>. Nevertheless, Masti's third show was held in the prestigious Iron Gate Theater, a much sought after location among many groups, dance and a capella, for its well designed stage, lighting, and sound fixtures. Unfortunately, it came at a cost. Because of the popularity of the theater, the only slot open to Masti was on a Sunday. And for the past five years, Masti has consistently held a Sunday show except in 2014. As mentioned in the Introduction, the slots for all the theaters on campus are queued by PAC and groups in PAC get preference over their show venue<sup>21</sup>. Masti luckily acquired a Friday/Saturday slot in the 2014 academic year because a PAC group essentially disbanded forfeiting their slot. Unfortunately, the following year, another group in PAC requested Iron Gate which no longer allowed Masti to use that slot.

On campus, Masti has always been a team that has been compared to PenNaach and Penn Dhamaka. However, since both teams have always been in PAC, Masti has always been at a slight disadvantage to them in terms of popularity and skill level. However, because all these teams have to replenish their members on a semi-annual basis, a large factor of their growth is determined by the members they take, the standard that is kept throughout several years and luck. Interestingly, the number of students who perform at a level that a team wants fluctuates year to year. This forces a team to sometimes take more or less of the people than they would ideally desire. This coupled with conflicting personalities puts a lot of pressure on leadership to maintain the growth of any one team. Over the past couple of years, Masti has grown tremendously due to three reasons: a desire to continuously improve, a willingness to adapt their dance styles, and luck. In terms of dance styles and production among the South Asian dance troupes, Masti has been the only team

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<sup>20</sup> Essentially, regular theaters allow one to traverse the back of the stage through both sides while Harold Prince only allows one to do so through stage right.

<sup>21</sup> Any one group's venue is determined in combination with their cumulative ticket sales the previous year as well as their own preference as a group. Groups outside of PAC have to secure a venue on their own and it is not possible to secure space before PAC does as PAC essentially has first priority in booking venues at the beginning of the academic year.

to grow along the ebbs and flows of its members' desires while Naach and Dhamaka have tried to remain more or less the same over the past couple of years. Every so often, there are individuals in all three teams that attempt to bring uniqueness to the troupe but only Masti has given an avenue for those members to fully explore their individuality in this realm. Part of the reason that Masti is capable of this is because of their consistent desire to improve. Knowing that there is not something specific to Masti to make them stand out among the other South Asian teams on campus, the only way Masti can survive is through this delegation of creativity. Effrat's functional theory of group development allows us to see this in stages. He describes a four phase sequence called LAIG.

“First the purpose of the group must be defined and the commitment of members secured (L), then resources and skills must be provided or acquired (A), next roles must be developed and a sufficiently high level of morale achieved (I), and then the group is ready to work on the task with the coordination of leadership (G)”

(Hare, 1982).

Unlike the other teams, what Masti lacked was many of the resources and skills that other teams had at phase A. Effrat describes that it is most likely for a “revolution within the revolution” to occur exactly at this stage. At a crucial junction in Masti's growth over the last decade, its desirable, fun-loving nature was something that members were fully committed to. However, due to the lack of resources or skill level, Masti was effectively trapped in a phase until “dissatisfied members... [re-organized] the group” essentially revolutionizing the group (Anonymous, 2015).

This mode of thought, of course, has its own perils. While the desire to improve and a willingness to adapt is Masti's key to survival, it requires the individuals on the team to use their individuality as a vehicle of creation. Subsequently, a reason why Masti's rival competition on campus fails to grow at a pace that Masti does is due to their dominant hierarchical organization.

Dhamaka for example, allows members on the team to choreograph entire pieces but their entry into their annual show is determined by their executive board. On the other hand, though Masti's President and Vice President determine who choreographs what, it is split among individual dances within pieces according to preferences of members essentially allowing anyone to choreograph almost whatever they want for the show. Also, because Dhamaka has a stringent process in which choreographer acquires a slot in the show, they valorize and give due credit to these individuals during the actual show. On the flipside, Masti not only does not mention who choreographs what piece or dance, they do not mention any work that a single individual contributes to the production emphasizing a collective effort in the production of the show (Anonymous, 2015). By stressing that no one individual ever take credit for anything in the show, Masti creates a sense of a family; a team where every individual creates something for their fellow members. "I like that unlike other groups that Masti really lets our newbies grow as dancers by letting them be an active part of the show through choreo and other things" (Anonymous, 2014). However, despite its growth over the last decade, this defining part of Masti's culture is at the risk of extinction.

If you ask members on the team, Masti is unanimously described as a family. Most senior members will highlight good times as well as bad times and resolute understanding that despite both, a family still stays loyal to each other. "Family is about ups and downs. You can't just always get what you want" (Anonymous, 2015). And fittingly, evolutionary anthropologists will say that historically families had to stick together for their survival. Nonetheless, there is a difference between a family that attempts to accept each individual member versus one that only sees each other during the holidays. My metaphor slightly exaggerates the situation but because of such rapid change and growth in a short amount of time, Masti is beginning to lose its footing with its roots and is essentially facing an identity crisis with its members. "There's always been two camps on

Masti, the people who want to have fun and the ones that really want to take the team to the next level” (Anonymous, 2015). In the past couple of years, there has always been two distinct groups of individuals on Masti. There are those who aspire for Masti to be as best as it can be in terms of dance and production quality while there are those who aspire for Masti to be their “safe space” to get away from the stresses of a Penn education, and essentially a fun getaway (Anonymous, 2015). These two groups of Masti members have fluctuated in number over time. At the onset of the team, many members were on the spectrum of having Masti be a team whose members dance for the enjoyment of the art. As the team grew, more and more members became part of the spectrum who aspired to take Masti to the next level. Interestingly, what allowed Masti to advance as much as it did was its duality between its fun-loving nature balanced with its aspirations for improvement. In fact, a study on Indian culture sheds light on this cultural phenomenon. Unlike traditional stereotypes regarding Eastern cultures, Hofstede, for example, revealed that although largely collectivistic, Indian culture is one of contradictions (Hofstede, 1980). “The form of collectivism found in Indian society is a mix of individualism and collectivism” where respect for others is coupled with “a competitive approach to achievement situations to attain social distinction and social prominence” (Salili, 2008). As a team with a majority of its members of Indian descent, Masti’s fun loving nature is the key to a collectivistic bond that makes individuals on the team loyal to each other while an individualistic aspiration for greater goals helps Masti to produce the quality that it does in a national venue.

Nonetheless, an important contrast that permeated the team throughout the past 2 years was an increased desire to compete on a regional and national scale. In order to do so, a cultural switch was made where there was a larger emphasis on dance and production quality quantifying the value of any one member of the team, The troupe was only as strong and clean as its weakest

members and ultimately being successful at a competition not only meant a victory to the team but a victory to oneself as a dancer and performer. It validated individuals as dancers where practices and videos of other performances failed them. It validated individuals as better dancers next to rival teams such as Dhamaka and Naach. But most of all, through these competitions, individuals sought internal social capital on the team as high quality dancers in comparison to each other. Essentially, the collectivistic culture that Salili and Hofstede mention was being overshadowed by one that was more individualistic and competitive (Hofstede, 1980 & Salili, 2008). Competing against other teams validated growth and prowess in dance more so than the annual show. And as mentioned above, validating oneself as a dancer was one of the few ways for individuals to acquire social capital within the team and it becomes all too necessary as members conflate the need to grow as a team with one's individual desire to grow and how one thinks the team can or should grow. And this is where Masti struggles with itself.

Due to such rapid growth in dance and production quality, members are likened follow a similar path in terms of their own individual growth and due to structural and organizational dynamics that have been set in place favoring individualism and preference over the past two years, individuals on the team are more willing and likely to act on behalf of their own interests more so than the interests of the team as a collective. This is dually complicated by the nature of Masti's founding as a team that has always aspired for greater things (while lacking the resources or skill) while doing so in a fun atmosphere (Hare, 1982). Due to the convoluted nature of these aspirations being primarily driven by individuals, one's individual desires are conflated with that of the team's. "Masti has always been a place where you can be yourself... so much so that sometimes people forget that we are all very different people with very different opinions" (Anonymous, 2015). Because individual members are sold on the basic principles of Masti (acceptance and a

constant need for growth) when they join, these intertwining longings combine within an individual blurring the line between what is needed by the individual and the team. If Masti is to evolve, individual members themselves must be able to unravel and differentiate between their own individual desires for the team with those that preserve the future of the team.

## **Limitations**

There are several limitations and shortcomings to this specific case study. The first is my own bias as a researcher. Being a male senior member on the team allows me to have some access to information shared among the team but also disallows me to gather the perspectives of select members on the team. This issue is pervasive even in the interviews as I observed some members on the team being more comfortable unpacking certain elements of the team compared to others. As a male member on the team, the social dynamic has always allowed Ys on the team to become more closer or at least spend time more frequently than the Xs. This affords me more privileged observation and data from the Ys as opposed to Xs. Much of the information from the Xs have primarily been collected through participant observation and rare one-on-one occasions while the Ys have revealed more personal details regarding their thoughts on the team. That is not to say that this case study is empty of in depth female perspectives. However, there are less so when compared to the Ys. Secondly, even though the Ys are a consistent close group of team members, as with any large team, there are certain friend circles that could reveal more information about the perspectives of individual members. These circles can cross genders and classes and generally are based on likeness and shared interests. Lastly, though this ethnography includes snippets of historical and background information since the troupe's founding, the analysis is largely based on evidence from the past four years which does not provide a completely holistic perspective regarding team dynamics.

## **Conclusion**

It is late Sunday afternoon at the Renaissance Hotel lobby in downtown Phoenix. Some members of Masti can be seen frantically working on their various assignments due in the upcoming week while others can be seen clutching oversized, fleece pillows in the lobby trying to recover from some of sleep deprivation they suffered from the week before. Others can be seen chitchatting or taking photos with members of other dance teams across the nation. As I sit alongside my team members, I wonder how the entire academic year passed by so fast. I think about the sheer amount of hours put into practice over the last several months and wonder how much value the entire competition circuit gave to the troupe. The competition itself was won by University of California, Los Angeles Nashaa and the runner up was Georgia Tech Qurbani. Most participants admitted that the results were quite upsetting. Another team from the University of Michigan, Izzat was thought to have atleast been placed if not placed first. It has indeed been quite an experience for Masti to come to an acclaimed national competition such as Bollywood America. Though they did not place in the competition itself, Masti members know it will definitely be a hallmark in history for themselves and the team.

Throughout the course of this paper, I have outlined almost every single aspect of Masti from its organizational components to its cultural practices. Within both of these unique frameworks, a close analysis reveals distinct ways in which Masti members behave. This behavior is not only described from an anthropological perspective but disciplines such as sociology and psychology have also helped uncover the needs and desires of the members on the troupe. Though largely flat, Masti does operate from a hierarchical standpoint. As such, the President and Vice President are conferred the most power or ability to influence the direction of the team. Within this scope, other leadership positions cover different areas of the team's needs such as external

relationships with other groups and the production of an annual show. Though each member has specific responsibilities, it is the careful management of both their individual desires and the overall flow of the team that dictate Masti's growth. This coupled with the cultural practices of everything from status generation to the reduction of social loafing that Masti continues to uphold reveal a need to carefully navigate the team landscape in order for one to ensure their personal visions for the team are successfully implemented. These observations have yielded us some potential takeaways regarding group dynamics overall.

Power and influence in groups are informally distributed to those who are cognizant of the individual desires of members in the group despite institutional frameworks of organizational structure. Those who are cognizant of individual members' desires can successfully manipulate them to acquire power in groups who operate on a democratic basis. Masti's organizational structure coupled with its institutional and informal opportunities of social bonding are a premier example of this phenomenon happening without the conscious awareness of its members. It is possible that in any scenario of group formation, the successful incorporation of both cultural dynamics that promote social cohesion along with similar institutional organizational power configurations can allow one to exploit this phenomenon. Additionally, Masti is an organization that is constantly struggling to gain internal and external social capital while negotiating it with the successful production of a unique and creative art form that combines multiple identities and personalities. These two components are intrinsically at odds with each other unless a system to balance both needs are created. To preserve Masti's rate of growth requires the implementation of a schematic that is able to unravel the desires of individual members and distinctly separate them from the components that will promote the evolution of the team. Masti's current arrangement conflates the desires of individuals in leadership positions with that of the team's overall vision

which disallows the group to adapt to its members. It is possible that following Masti's model of a unique balance of cultural practices that promote social cohesion along with institutional organizational power configurations can allow groups to exhibit similarly rapid growth and evolution.

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# Appendix

## Appendix I: Email Invitation for Research Participation

Hello Masti,

It is with great honor that I announce the subject of my senior thesis this semester: Masti! As an Anthropology major, not only is this an amazing topic to study but as you all know, it is something that is close to my heart and so I am really interested in uncovering any findings about Masti within an ethnographic scope. My primary research topic will be a general history of the team as well as its organizational dynamics within the past four years that I have been on the team. In terms of methodology, some of you have been familiar with the interviews that I have conducted before for previous classes. I will most likely continue with these either in person or over the phone to get as much data as possible in the next few weeks so any sort of time you can spare for me will be greatly appreciated. My final thesis will be available for anyone to read but as participants in my thesis, all of the information you provide will be anonymous. Until it is completed the only person who will have access to read or comment on it will be myself and my senior thesis adviser this semester, Dr. Fariha Khan, who is copied on this email. If you have any questions regarding the research or how it will be conducted, please do not hesitate to contact either Dr. Khan or me. If you do not want to participate, let me know as well. Thank you. See you all soon!

Best,  
Mithin

## Appendix II: Research Questions

- How is power distributed on the team? Who makes the final decision? Are there alternate sources of power besides the executive board?
- How are conflicts negotiated between different groups of people?
- How does dance and one's experience on the team reinforce one's ethnic identity?
- What role does tradition play in reinforcing one's place on the team?
- How does the way Masti structures and organizes itself tell about the nature of groups and organizations as a whole?

## Appendix III: Interview Questions

- How has your time on Masti been? What made you tryout?
- Did you have previous dance experience? What did your parents think? Do your siblings do something similar?
- What are/were some of your expectations of the team? Do others have similar/different expectations?
- How is Masti a family? What does being a family entail?
- What issues have you come across during your time on Masti? How have they been negotiated?
- How is Masti connected to the broader Penn community?

- How do Masti alumni contribute to your experience on the team?
- Does Masti provide some cultural identity building?
- Who are some of your closest friends on the team?
- How is power distributed on the team? Do certain people have more influence than others?

## **Appendix IV: Penn Masti Constitution 2012**

### **PENN MASTI** **CONSTITUTION AND BYLAWS**

#### **Article I. Name**

The name of the organization is Penn Masti.

#### **Article II. Purpose**

The purpose of this coed dance troupe is to educate the University Pennsylvania community and beyond about a variety of South Asian music and Bollywood filmy dance through instructional sessions, competitions, and performances. The group aims to perform South Asian dance that focuses on guy and girl interactions and movements. The group also performs theatrical dance in order to express scenes that can be found in Bollywood movies and to spread South Asian culture.

#### **Article III. Organization**

- The General Body shall consist of all Members as defined in Article IV.
- The Executive Board shall be ultimately responsible for the well-being of the organization. The Executive Board shall consist of four elected active members: President, Vice President, Treasurer, and Outreach Chair.
- The Committee Chairs shall consist of elected active members to assist with appropriate duties.
- The Creative Directors shall consist of appointed active members for each dance.

#### **Article IV. Membership**

- Membership will be open to the entire student body at the University of Pennsylvania.
- All active members of Masti share the same level of participation with the exception of Board Members, Chairs, and Directors, who take on greater responsibility as noted by their position. Additionally, part-time members have a different level of participation as noted by the terms of their part-time membership.
- Auditions for new Members will be held at the beginning of the fall semester and at the end of the spring semester. Members will be chosen based on dancing ability and willingness to commit to the organization.
  - The necessity of call back auditions will be decided upon by a majority vote by the Members.
  - Decisions regarding induction of new Members into the group shall be decided by a consensus vote.
- If a problem arises with a Member, the issue will be brought forth to the Board. The Board will approach the Member with various solutions to rectify the situation. If a mutual decision is not reached by the Board and the Member in question, there will be a meeting of the General Body in which a vote will take place to determine the solution. If a consensus vote of the General Body favoring removal of the Member is reached, the Member will be dismissed from the troupe.
- Part-time status will be granted to any member after a meeting with the President and Vice President. The President and Vice President will work with the part-time member to set a schedule for part-time status and will delineate the terms of the status change.

#### **Article V. The Executive Board and Its Officers**

#### A. The Executive Board

- The Board shall approve and act on all plans of Masti brought under its consideration and all financial commitments of the team by a simple majority vote.
- Failure to meet obligations of a board position is grounds for impeachment and subsequent removal. An Officer may be removed by a consensus vote of the General Body.

#### B. Officers and Their Duties

- The Office of the President
  - The President shall be responsible for setting the direction of Masti while ensuring its long-term growth and well-being.
  - He/she shall oversee the proper functioning of Masti.
  - He/she will bear ultimate responsibility to the University administration for all actions taken and all statements made by Masti.
  - He/she shall be responsible for setting an agenda and timeline for each semester in conjunction with the other Board Members.
  - He/she shall set agendas for and chair all meetings.
  - He/she shall retain the power to decide any non-election vote in the event of a tie.
  - He/she is the caretaker of the Constitution, proposing its ratification, enforcing its rules, and updating it to reflect amendments that have been passed by the General Body.
  - He/she is responsible for managing internal communication regarding notes from meetings.
  - He/she is responsible for all official emails on behalf of Masti and will serve as the contact person at all times.
  - He/she will act as the liaison to the South Asia Society.
- The Office of the Vice President
  - The Vice President shall work closely with the President in all of his/her duties.
  - He/she shall assume the duties of the President in his absence or as delegated by the President.
  - He/she shall reserve rooms for practices and meetings.
  - He/she is responsible for giving out “strikes” (as described in Section XI) and keeping track of “strikes”.
  - Organize “instructional” events that are open to the Penn community.
- The Office of the Treasurer/Webmaster
  - The Treasurer shall manage all funds of Masti and control all of its financial affairs. This includes managing the collection and disbursement of funds and authorization of expenditures, subject to approval of the President.
  - He/she shall collect membership dues from every active member every semester.
  - He/she shall maintain the financial records and run the budget of Masti and provide Financial Reports to the President as needed.
  - He/she shall bear the responsibility to members of Masti regarding all financial matters.
  - He/she shall register Masti at the Office of Student Life at the beginning of each semester.
  - He/she shall serve as the official Representative to the Student Activities Council (SAC), thereby attending all SAC meetings and reporting all relevant information to the Board. The Business Administrator may designate a member of Masti as the Alternate Masti Representative.
  - He/she shall prepare the annual budget request for SAC and record all contingency fund requests made on behalf of Masti.

- o He/she is responsible for maintaining Masti's website.
- Outreach Chair
  - o Outreach Chair is responsible for acquiring performances for the team throughout the year. In addition, he/she will act as the contact person between Masti and other programs. The outreach chair is required to maintain constant contact with all those who request Masti to perform. He/she must keep the team updated on performance opportunities and manage all aspects of the performances, including, but not limited to, costumes, music cuts, and formations.
  - o He/she shall act as a liaison between Masti and dance competition managements. He/she will be responsible for applications to dance competitions throughout the year and assist in competition preparation.

C. Eligibility for Office and Length of Term

- Any member of Masti may hold the position of President, Vice President, and Treasurer.
- All positions on the Board shall last one year.

D. Vacancies

- For officers who cannot fulfill their duties because of resignation or removal or those who fail to meet University requirements that prevent them from holding office, reelection for that office must be held within two academic months of the vacancy if the Board deems it necessary.
- If the Office of the President is vacated, the Vice President shall take the position of President for the remainder of the term. He/she shall then fulfill the duties of the President and the Vice President during the interim. If a special election is deemed necessary, the vacant office shall be that of the Vice President.
- If the Office of the Vice President is vacated, the President will take his duties during the interim. The vacant office for the special election will be that of the Vice President.
- If the Office of the Treasurer is vacated, the Vice President will take his/her duties during the interim.
- If the Office of the Outreach Chair is vacated, the Vice President will take his/her duties during the interim.

**Article VI. Elections**

- Elections shall be held once every academic year in the spring semester for the following academic year on a date determined by the Executive Board. The date of the elections should be announced at least two weeks prior by written or oral communication to all members of Masti.
- Elections will be run by the incumbent President (unless they are running for a position). If the President is running for a position, an outgoing member shall be appointed to take their place.
- Nominations must be made one week prior to election by giving official notice to the Executive Board verbally or in writing.
- All candidates must be members of Masti.
- Each candidate may run for one position and may "drop down" to another two positions if he does not win his/her first choice. Notification of "drop down" choices must be made one week prior to election by giving official notice to the Executive Board.
- All candidates will be given three minutes to speak. After all candidates for a position have spoken, there will be a question and answer period of three minutes per candidate, after which there will be a vote.
- Voters must be members of Masti.
- Votes must be made by secret ballot.
- A candidate must receive a simple majority to win.

- If more than two people are running and neither receives a majority, there must be a runoff election between the top two vote-getters immediately. There will be no additional speeches or question and answer periods.
- In the case of a tie, the incumbent President (or appointee thereof) shall cast the deciding vote.
- If no one runs for a Board Member position, the President and Vice President will split and delegate the duties of the vacant position. If no one runs for any other position, members will be given a chance after elections to submit a written application to the President and Vice President.

#### **Article VII. Committee Positions**

- Committee Positions are elected according to the same election guidelines set in Article VI to assist with any appropriate duties, with the exception of Creative Directors, who will be selected via written application submitted to the President and Vice President.
- Such positions may include but are not limited to *Show Chair, Musical Director, Video Director, Marketing Chair, Costume Chair, and Creative Directors*.
  1. *Show Chair* is responsible for finding an annual show venue. He/she should handle preparation for all audio/visual components of the show. He/she is in charge of dress rehearsals and overlooks video production, show publicity, ticketing, and costumes for the show. In addition, the Show Chair is responsible for coordinating guest acts for the show.
  2. *Musical Director* is responsible for all musical aspects of Masti. He/she shall work with the Creative Directors and choreographers to produce song cuts, including recording voiceovers, transitions, and sound effects.
  3. *Video Director* is responsible for scripting, shooting, and editing all videos for the annual show. He/she will also assist in scripting, shooting, and editing all promotional videos for Masti. He/she shall also maintain Masti's Youtube channel, as well as record practices when needed.
  4. *Marketing Chair* is responsible for publicizing and marketing all Masti events (including performances, tryouts, etc). All fliers, show programs/brochures, and banners shall be taken care of by the Marketing Chair. He/she is also responsible for maintaining Masti's social media presence and expanding Masti's image on campus.
  5. *Costume Chair* is responsible for coordinating and selecting proper costumes and props for performances. He/She shall work with the Creative Directors and choreographers to coordinate necessary costume changes.
  6. *Creative Directors* are responsible for coordinating all creative aspects of a part of the annual spring show, including, but not limited to, choreography, transitions, costumes and props, lighting cues, music, video, and dance description.
- Committee members are not Board members and therefore do not have the same voting privileges regarding executive decisions.

#### **Article VIII. Dance Choreographers**

- Dance Choreographers are organized to facilitate the efficient choreography and teaching of dances.
- Each Choreography Group shall be composed of 2 members of Masti.
- Timelines for progression of dances shall be set by the President and Vice President.
- All Dance Choreographers shall report to the President, Vice President, and related Creative Director regarding their progress.

- Choreography Screening: Prior to teaching, Dance Choreographers must present their choreography as well as a written Formations Document to the President, Vice President and related Creative Director.

#### **Article IX. Board Meetings**

- The Board will hold weekly meetings that will be chaired by the President, and in his/her absence, the Vice President or an appointed individual.
- The President shall come to each meeting prepared with a full agenda describing the content of the meeting.
- All Board meetings will be open to all Members of Masti.
- The day and time of the weekly Board meetings will be decided at the beginning of each semester.
- General Body Meetings will be held as deemed necessary by the Executive Board.

#### **Article X. Voting Procedures**

- All members of Masti shall vote upon the below decisions. For a decision to be passed in the following cases, it must receive a consensus vote by all Members.
  - Admission of new members.
  - Removal of a member.
- Any other decision that the Board brings to the General Body will be decided by a simple majority vote.

#### **Article XI. Attendance and the Strike System**

- Each full-time member is required to attend all group meetings and group activities.
- All members who plan to be absent from practices or performances must contact the Vice President 24 hours before said activity.
- The primary purpose of the Strike System is to increase the efficiency of the group, while providing individual members flexibility in their personal schedules. It shall not be used for disciplinary or punitive purposes.
- At the beginning of each semester, each member will start with zero strikes.
- Strikes will be assigned at the discretion of the Vice President as follows:
- Arriving more than five minutes late for any activity will result in one strike.
- Unexcused absences from practice, meetings, or activities shall warrant one strike.
- The Vice President will be responsible for keeping track of each member's demerits.
- For each semester, each member can receive up to three strikes without a fine. Once this limit is reached, a fine of \$5.00 will be awarded for every additional strike received.
- A warning shall be given to a member who reaches or exceeds three strikes.
- An absence due to academic reasons will be decided upon by the President and Vice President.

#### **Article XII. Finances**

- Masti is not a dues-paying troupe, however each veteran member on the team is expected to contribute money to the Masti Mixer and Food Fund at the beginning of each semester.
- The amount of dues will be determined by the Outreach Chair and Treasurer at the beginning of every semester.
- The collection and disbursement of funds is the responsibility of the Treasurer.

#### **Article XIV. Instructional Events**

- The team must hold instructional events every year to educate the Penn community of South Asian culture.

#### **Article XV. Amendments**

- Any member of Masti may propose an amendment to the Constitution.
- The decision to pass the amendment shall be made by a 2/3 majority vote of the General Body.

- Amendments shall be effective immediately after passage.
- Anything not mentioned in the Constitution is left to the discretion of the Executive Board.