



Dear Collins Ave Entertainment and Lifetime Network,  
October, 2017

We are reaching out on behalf of [Y.P.A.D. – Youth Protection Advocates in Dance](#). We are a non-profit based in Los Angeles. Our network of Dance Professionals and Educators, Psychologists, Researchers, Nutritionists, Injury Prevention Specialists, among many others have the shared goal of creating dance environments that advocate for the emotional, physical and sexual health of youth in the Dance world. We truly admire the empowering and healthy media you create. However, several of our member studios have reached out to our Organization with concerns about the recent Dance Moms episodes featuring young dancers performing Burlesque choreography. Unfortunately, this is not the first time we have been contacted regarding your content. YPAD's Founder Leslie Scott is based in Los Angeles and would welcome the opportunity to meet with you in person to discuss the concerns shared in this letter in hopes of building a bridge. We would appreciate the chance to share the latest evidence based research regarding these sensitive topics and discuss possible ways to unite in keeping youth happy, healthy and safe in dance.

The artistic choices in “The Last Dance” projects high levels of sexualized content using the cumulative effect of costuming, choreography, music and concept. Please review our “Tools Not Rules” Manual ([www.ypad4change.org/standards](http://www.ypad4change.org/standards)) written by Ph.D. specialists and dance leaders that puts researched and clear language on healthy boundaries for artistic choices when working with youth in performing arts. This takes the vagueness out of the word “appropriate”. The marketing leading up to the release of this episode makes it clear the controversial nature of this choice was purposely being capitalized on to increase viewing. Our concern with this content is adolescents were used to obtain this result, the mental and emotional impact it will have on the dancers themselves, as well as young viewers of the TV show.

Speaking from one group of artists to another, we hope we can unite in the ideology that artistic freedom is important, however when working with children we must give up certain liberties to put their health and safety before our own need for creative expression, accolades and industry success. Our hope is you will read this with a humble willingness to listen and authentic reflection. Many of us in YPAD used to make damaging artistic choices with children, but in the Spirit of Maya Angelou, once we knew better we did better.

Here are some of YPAD's concerns:

1.) Evidence Based Research- Studies on objectification of youth dancers through both costuming, music, concepts and choreography have shown that overtly sexual content on minors can encourage an unhealthy self-image and send messages to the audience that can create objectification and may lead to self-sexualizing, which the [American Psychological Association's task force report on the sexualization of girls](#) unequivocally found can lead to mental illness; anxiety, depression, depressive mood, body image issues, codependency, eating disorders, unsafe sexual choices, vulnerable as an acceptable sex target and more. This is especially true within the teen demographic that is in need of guidance and education on the difference between healthy sexuality, sexualization and objectification. Adolescence are possibly making real life choices regarding their bodies, partners and sex that may lead to real life consequences. They are also experiencing a second and last wave of brain malleability, so they are incredibly influenced from a brain wiring perspective at this age.

Please review our educational video on this topic featuring our Advisory Panel Member Tomi-Ann Roberts, Ph.D., who served on the APA task force on the sexualization of girls. She is a leading specialist in sexualization and objectification. She is a Stanford graduate and now the Department Chair of the Psychology Department at Colorado College. She would also welcome a meeting with you. You can review her credentials by visiting our Advisory Panel page at [www.ypad4change.org/Advisory-Panel](http://www.ypad4change.org/Advisory-Panel) and watch her video at [www.ypad4change.org/resources](http://www.ypad4change.org/resources).

2.) Preparation for a Professional Career- In order to prepare teens who may pursue a professional dance career we must not only focus on physical preparation but include education and guidance on emotional and mental empowerment and physical and sexual safety. Sexual harassment and sexual assault is not specific to dance but does happen in the professional dance industry to youth and adults. Like many professions under the umbrella of entertainment, abuse of power, sexual assault and objectification occurs in the workplace and is pervasive and underreported. YPAD's sex abuse division takes 1-3 reports of abuse in dance environments a week. Teen dancers who have sound technique, foundational skills and proper strength conditioning will be capable of a vast number of genres and physical requirements needed to dance in heels and perform athletic movement. However, YPAD believes what youth dancers and parents would benefit from and lead to true success and longevity as a professional dancer, with their mental health and empowerment intact, is the education we share in the YPAD Seminars, where they are taught they have the right to say no if a job, choreographer, producer, or anyone asks them to do something in a sexual manner they feel violates their body agency or makes them feel uncomfortable or unsafe. This should be comprehensive, whether they are young children, teens or adults.

Saying teen dancers need to learn as adolescence to dance in sexualized ways to

"make it" is actually further evidence they are being objectified, commodified and exploited and not looked upon as full Holistic beings, whose emotional and sexual safety are the responsibility of the adults in charge.

3.) Harsh Public Criticism- We are concerned about the dancers in this piece, who once again are being commodified and exploited and exposed to continual critiques by the public. This routine is available on TV and Online, and as such these girls will be continually judged on not only their dance ability, but their character. We are concerned that exposure to heavy critique, in some cases name calling the children and blaming them for the content of this piece, may affect the dancer's emotional and mental well-being. There is already evidence of this critique in many online threads attached to video clips of the routine, with several comments that could be extremely damaging to a young person.

4.) Impact on Viewers- There is a potentially harmful impact on viewers. A large portion of the viewing audience is minors, who look up to the dancers featured on Dance Moms; as such we are concerned about the messaging that a routine of such content gives to viewers who may wish to re-create the content. YPAD has received multiple reports of parents pulling children out of dance or not allowing a child to enroll in the first place due to the damages media has done to the integrity of dance. This is unacceptable. Dance has proven to be a powerful vehicle to grow healthy self-esteem, brain development, build communities and teach life skills that are paramount for any occupational aspiration. To degrade the art form of dance to something people view as unsafe is harming and robbing future generations access to the positive aspects.

5.) Encouraging Teens Are Appropriate Sex Targets-There is also concern that some of the viewing audience may be predatory, as the [FBI reports](#) 750,000 predators are online every day. Anecdotal evidence and YPAD's discussions with investigators have proven dance is on the radar of online predators. They may seek out these dancers or other dancers, which we already have [evidence](#) of, because of their portrayal of sexualization and how that impacts the brain wiring and broken beliefs of viewers. Studies have proven that presenting children, (adolescence are still children without a fully developed prefrontal cortex that is the center of logic and reason) in sexualized ways leads the viewer to believe they are more culpable in their own harm, are less moral and encourages victim blaming. Anytime sexualization is imposed on a minor it is NOT the child's fault.

YPAD recognizes the powerful influence of TV and social media on people of all ages. It can be a wonderful platform to share artistry and connection regardless of geographic location. With dance related TV programming increasing 500% in the last 12 years we certainly see the positive benefits to our community and how media is molding the minds and hearts of future dance media makers and artists.

As advocates for healthy and safe dance using evidence based research as the lens, we would welcome the opportunity to meet with you. We would like to share our research and mandate – our hopes of course, being that future content for the show be thoughtfully created, family friendly, and put the emotional, physical and sexual safety of dancers as a relevant priority in your decision making, up and beyond following harmful trends or pursuing profits. We truly believe this will increase your viewership, global community respect and represent the same integrity that you display in other programming choices, while at the same time protecting youth and the art form of dance. All is attainable.

We look forward to connecting with you. Thank you for your consideration.

Friends in Dance,

Youth Protection Advocates in Dance (YPAD)

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