

Questions of the Soul, Inquiries of the Body

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Abstract:

This portfolio, the culmination of my artistic and scholarly output at Goddard College, presents my dance film work framed by writings representing and documenting my journey in each of my permutations: dancer, choreographer, writer, dance educator, activist and interdisciplinary artist. The film is focused upon the issue of abuse in the dance world. The research casts a wider net and engages social science, action research, creative research, and both ethno and autoethnographic studies. Scholarship, solo and ensemble creation and critical writing is embedded with personal narrative and poetry. It combines in a quixotic quest to recognize and honor the joy, history and abundance of dance, particularly of ballet. Simultaneously, I challenge, with force and integrity, all that needs to change. The work documented serves as a foundation for further inquiry and action as a creator and activist, an educator and administrator, a writer and poet, an artist and human; merging all of those identities under an umbrella of equity, transparency and accountability.

Key words: abuse, action research, artist, autoethnography, ballet, bullying, choreographer, choreography, dance, ensemble creation, ethnography, equity, inequity, leadership, poetry, power, social science

Artist's Statement

I dance. It is as essential as food and water. I find my life force in the connection between music, spirit, and movement. The intersection of art and activism is where I land, finding immense pleasure and value in both. Dance is a visceral and beautiful art form. It lives and breathes as a purely aesthetic practice. It exists as a form of entertainment, providing simple joy and serves as a mode of personal expression and exaltation, both physical and spiritual. Yet, when combined with a social and moral quest, it has the power to change both the individual and the world. Transcending language, education, and circumstance, dance speaks directly to the soul, inviting action and transformation.

I am an interdisciplinary artist and activist, working primarily as a choreographer, creative and critical writer, nascent poet, and dance educator. My work includes stage and film direction, performance, and design work; as a stylist/costumer, a jewelry designer and art director for film and stage. In both my solo and collaborative work, I seek to answer the following question: How does exploring the creative and emotional elements of seemingly unfixable problems create pathways to solutions and enlightenment? What questions are we not yet asking? With a combination of rigorous academic research and a deeply personal emotional practice, I explore where the trauma of individual experiences, both personal and institutional, reside in the body and how they manifest in the world.

My current work focuses on sexual grooming and assault in dance. I break down the ramifications of growing up in a world where this type of mistreatment is normalized. Though the effects of toxic training environments have been studied in relation to the individuals harmed, I currently focus on the system: the triad of abuser, victim and witness. I explore the connections between the lack of diverse representation within dance leadership and the normalization of abuse, both sexual and emotional, that occurs both in and out of the studio during an artist's formative (and professional) years. My mission is to end that leadership imbalance and the ongoing cycle of abuse which damages not only dance artists but by extension, society as a whole.

Chapter One:

The Very Things That Hold You Down Are Going to Lift You Up (*Dumbo*)

*But what I really wanted to say
Is
Stop*

*Stop running
Stop mumbling
Stop the complicity, the failing
The dodging, the wailing
You know what happened as
The rain
Turned black
You know what turned
Fear and pain and shattered glass*

*The rain continues to fall
Heavy, hard
Fractal light reflected off of molten stone.*

When I was 17 or 18 years old, a sheltered baby ballerina, I booked a holiday season with a small regional ballet company to tour their production of the Nutcracker. I was incredibly excited. It was my first real job. I couldn't believe that I would earn money to simply dance all day, clad in pointe shoes and pink tights, tutus and tiaras. The day's finale, ice buckets and Advil, never outweighed that sparkling reality. It was the start of a dream come true.

I don't remember all of the roles that I danced that season. There have been so many Nutcrackers since that have merged and melted together. I definitely danced as the center girl in the Mirliton Trio. I distinctly recall losing my grip on the wooden base of my long ribbon, watching in horror as the prop flew into the audience as I completed my series of fouetté turns. My turns didn't falter even as my breath caught in my throat! No patrons were injured in the mishap but the slow motion arc of that bright green ribbon with its wooden handle floating over the audience is seared into my brain. I am also certain that I was a flower, a snowflake (maybe even the Snow Queen,

as I often was...) and either a parent or a doll in the party scene; each role a staple in the yearly tradition which fills theaters big and small.

The one role that I do remember dancing was Arabian Coffee. Part of the “Land of the Sweets,” Arabian Coffee is a problematic divertissement in terms of Orientalism, misogyny, exhibitionism, racism and other cultural inaccuracies. (Fisher, 2003) Other critics have also called it out, particularly Chloe Angyal (*The Nutcracker*, n.d.), and journalist Alice Robb who, in a much more critical article than the puff piece she takes it from, quotes a New York Times article with George Balanchine describing the dance as “conceived as ‘something for the fathers,’ a woman portraying ‘Arabian coffee’ slinks around the stage in a belly skirt, bells attached to her ankles.” Robb goes on to advocate completely revamping the ballet. “...there’s something particularly egregious about stereotypes that not only perpetuate a strictly limited racial vision, but that are actually acted out on stage, with children as their intended audience.” Quoting Aubrey Lynch from Dance Theatre of Harlem, “It’s crying out to be reinvented, the person who does it will be a hero.” This is starting to happen in response to both increasing cultural awareness and the activism of Phil Chan and Georgina Pazoquin and *Final Bow For Yellowface* (*Choreography*, n.d.). Many ballet companies, such as England’s Royal Ballet (*Royal Ballet Tweaks ‘Arabian Dance’ Scene in The Nutcracker to Ensure Show Is Inclusive*, n.d.) and Seattle’s Pacific Northwest Ballet, have begun to retool both the Arabian Coffee and Chinese Tea divertissements, sometimes even cutting them entirely. (Robb, 2014)

As much as the racist overtones of this section of the ballet bother me, and I fully embrace re-choreographing it to address these problems, my memories of it have nothing to do with cultural appropriation, racist stereotypes, or problematic depictions by 19th century Europeans of unknown distant lands. I wish that I had been aware of these issues as a young dancer. I was not. What I was aware of was who I danced with, what I wore, and what I felt. And that is why, in a rehearsal for my thesis film, my memories of this long forgotten performance suddenly resurfaced; painful, hot and embarrassing.

In my studies and my choreography, I explore sexual grooming in dance, specifically ballet, in order to address the cycle of abuse. In interviews and in my own experience, the normalization of children and very young adults as sexually expressive and sexually objectified beings onstage has emerged as an important factor in sexual assault offstage. This is well documented in the dance competition and convention world, where tiny dancers in bra tops and booty shorts shake and shimmy. Several well known conventions, most notably *Break The Floor*, have had recent scandals, with celebrity dance "masters" called out on social media. The call outs have led to investigations ("Dancers Say They Were Sexually Harassed or Groomed by Famous Choreographers and the Dance Company Failed to Protect Them," 2021), and changes in leadership (Bocknek, 2021). In some cases, like that of former Boston Ballet principal Dusty Button and her husband, who are both accused of multiple instances of abuse, there have been both civil and criminal charges. (Zitser, n.d.) Dancer Sage Humphries is one of seven dancers who have spoken up about their experiences. (News, n.d.) While Dusty Button crosses the ballet and convention spaces, and these charges stem from both arenas, it seems that in many cases, the institution of classical ballet has been held on a pedestal. It should not be. The recent disclosure of a culture of scandal at New York City Ballet shows how deeply ingrained into the industry this behavior is. Both a texting scandal and accusations of abuse brought against the longtime artistic director of the company roiled the company in 2018 and 2019. After initial flurries of attention and condemnation, both situations resolved without any permanent solutions. Peter Martins retired from NYCB with the board dismissing all allegations. (Pogrebin, 2018) He reportedly still draws a salary of \$1,000,000.00 a year. (Stahl, 2021) Amar Ramasar, part of the texting scandal that involved several dancers and board members, was reinstated as a principal dancer after an investigation and suspension. He danced a leading role on Broadway during the interim and danced his final performance with NYCB May 29, 2022. (Hernández, 2021) (*New York City Ballet (@nycballet) · Instagram Photos and Videos*, n.d.) While there are some exceptions to the lack of accountability, as evidenced by the conviction of Yat-Sen Chang, a former English National Ballet principal dancer (*Ex-Principal Dancer at English National Ballet Jailed for Abusing*

Students / UK News / The Guardian, n.d.), these situations point to a culture where the normalization of this dynamic is pervasive.

During a long career, first as a dancer and now a choreographer, I have started to find my own voice; as an advocate, as a writer and a researcher. In my dance research, in formal interviews, within the choreographic process and in informal discussions with dancers, the phrase “it was all so normal” emerges over and over. This essay is not officially part of my IRB approved academic study. It does not seek to address every problem in classical ballet. Instead I discuss and dissect, in a deeply personal manner, just one multifaceted issue; the normalization of inappropriate sexuality in both training and performances and the tentacles that behavior extends into every aspect of a young dancer’s experience. It is a journey, a recollection of memory and an opportunity to pose questions for ongoing work. It is the essential recognition that a phenomena that I see and condemn happening in and to others happened to me. I too had so normalized it at the time, buried it so deep inside that it faded to nothing, until, like all buried nothings, it roared back as a huge something with a ferocious bite.

My partner for the Arabian Pas De Deux was a principal dancer with the large, nationally revered ballet company near me. He was older, by far it seemed, though that may have been perception rather than reality. He was definitely more mature than anyone that I, an extremely shy college freshman, had ever known. I was a kid taking my fall semester off from school to dance. He was a star with a reputation for being “friendly” or a “flirt” or a “slut.” In spite of that (because of that?) everyone was jealous of me. I got to dance with him, to flirt with him and to seduce him on stage, where it was ostensibly safe to do so. He was tall and dark, handsome and strong. I was dazzled by his presence. I had no idea what I was doing or what I was playing with.

I don’t spend a lot of time reminiscing about Nutcrackers past. The ballet comes into my world once a year and now, rather than worrying about performing seemingly endless runs, I worry about helping the next generation of dancers shine. I fret about

whether or not the orchestral version that I use is too fast or slow. I focus on choreography that will show them off without taxing them beyond what they can handle. And, more each and every year, I worry about how to approach material that may not actually be appropriate for young, emotionally malleable humans. It's an odd situation, upholding a tradition that you do not believe in. I have only choreographed an Arabian Coffee one time and was lucky enough to have a real life couple dance the roles. We did not do any subservient choreography, nor was there a harem. The only issue was the traditional Nutcracker costuming; a bare chest for the cavalier and a bra and harem pants for the ballerina, standard for the ballet. The dancers did not express any inhibitions with the costuming, but then again, no one asked them. And of course, I was not the costume designer, nor was I consulted on costuming. It was simply part of the yearly tradition.

I do not remember if, when I was in the role of dancer, I outwardly expressed any inhibitions about the costume. My educated guess is that I absolutely did not. As a student and as a young professional, I never spoke up about anything. I do recall the shame of physical exposure. I was incredibly shy about my body as a young dancer. I still am. At that time, I was seriously flirting with anorexia and body dysmorphia, which would blossom when I moved to New York and rule my life to this day.

A dancer's emotional identity is often indistinguishable from their physical being. "The evolution of an identity as a ballet dancer absorbs the young dancer in attaching positive meaning to lived experiences related to pain and suffering as the dancer learns to deny, re-frame or suppress pain and negative emotions' ". (*Most recently in Schooling the dancer: the evolution of an identity as a ballet dancer, Angela Pickard**) Dancers' bodies are literally constructed from their experiences in class. Their experiences of depersonalization are normalized, both positively and negatively. These experiences often include physical manipulations, verbal shaming, and an overriding culture which separates the body from the mind. Artists as disparate as Michael Jackson (*The Contributions of Michael Jackson | The Vast World of Dance*, n.d.) and George Balanchine have cautioned dancers against thinking too much. (Croce, 2009).

In addition to our identity as dancers being indistinguishable from our bodies, much of our self worth is externalized as well. What we see in the mirror, how we interpret the feedback from choreographers, teachers and artistic directors, and how our peers react to us each has a profound effect on how we perceive our place in the community. This leaves us vulnerable to each and every extra bit of attention, positive or negative. (Diehl, 2016) (Radell et al., 2014)

Memory: I stood onstage- Exposed and fearful, excited and proud; a new professional in pointe shoes that someone else paid for and a costume that exposed (I believed) all of my flaws. He stood next to me; tall with a broad bare chest and dark hair, his large hands on my waist, brushing against my breasts, my buttocks, between my legs. Did he really touch me there, on stage in front of hundreds of people, pausing just a moment too long? Did he? Are my memories clear or distorted by time? Maybe the silk costume was what I felt brush against me, high up against my inner thigh. Perhaps the darkening of his eyes was simply a reaction to the light. The gasp that I might have swallowed, might have buried deep inside of myself might not have happened, might not have descended, folding in on itself, over and over, until it landed deep and silent and embedded in with all of the other moments that I saw and said nothing, felt and did nothing and in all honesty hurt someone else and registered nothing. What he did to me he did to himself. What I do to you I do to myself. So if I am silent and inactive in the face of harm to me, I am silent and inactive in the face of harm to you. To break it all down is to save us all.

The gasp that I may have swallowed then, and had swallowed before, and would swallow again, turned into, not exactly a rock, but a weighted black hole deep inside. I found in violence a way to distract from it. Violence to the self is cathartic and addictive. In my world, many forms of violence result in positive feedback. The starvation, the running, the extra classes and physical work create a body of sinew and stone, where all softness and light is removed but which somehow fits into the ideal of the current ballet aesthetic. The sudden feedback one receives honors the

silence and the violence and rewards you for it. The accolades as you carve yourself away are also addictive. What harm I do to me, I do to you.

The black hole combined with other black holes, creating a yawning chasm. (Taylor, 2021) Rather than speak out against the harm happening to me, I stayed silent and the violence increased in a hopeless quest to fill that expanding black hole. That escalated violence took the form of a razor blade; shiny and sharp, the cuts mirroring the shape of the mouth, screaming, crying out in silent shame. I have since learned that far from being alone in that shame, it is pervasive in the dance world. My very visible scars often serve as an opening for my current students to come to me, seeking someone who will understand them. I can only hope that I can serve as a bridge between what was normalized in the past and what we want to recreate for the future. Perhaps the harm that I did to myself can prevent future harm to you.

How do you dismantle silence and stop that violence? Perhaps we start with breaking apart what is “normal.” What is normal in ballet? In dance? Normal is bones protruding. Normal is toes bandaged and bleeding. Normal is flying through the air, turning like a top, being thrown and caught! Normal is a verbal take down in front of the class. Normal is a director who yells, ridicules or chastises a dancer for petty reasons that in no way warrant such abuse. Yet normal is also knowing from a very young age and from deep inside your soul that your life as a dancer is all you have. Your physical and emotional being are the same and you feel that you will literally die if you have to stop. Within that world of extremes, where your very life depends upon the favor of a very few people, giving those people whatever they want, no matter how it makes you feel, is also normal. Letting those people do to you whatever they want to do is normal. Not saying anything when you see them do harm to someone else is normal. Swallowing disappointment and disgust and fear is normal. We all do it. It goes further; hands that are too brutal, then too close. Comments that are couched in care but are barbaric and mean. Policies that allow abuse to exist unchecked, out in the open, because so many generations have experienced the same behavior, all of that is also normal, therefore unremarkable and not a problem.

Students and alumni of several high profile programs are starting to speak up and out. A former teacher from the University of Utah's prestigious ballet program said, "there is a long history of authoritarian teaching in ballet. That means there's a blurring of teaching and abuse." She continued, referencing the culture of ballet instruction, "many of her former colleagues at the U. were brought up in the conservatory system of teaching, 'cultures of what I describe as fear and intimidation.'" (*Ballet Alumni Described Body Shaming, Bias and Intimidation. University of Utah Faculty Vow Continued Reform.*, n.d.) Over 53 former students from North Carolina School of the Arts have filed suit alleging over forty years of abuses. (Stevens, 2022) Abuse cannot continue unabated for over four decades in one place unless that abuse is perceived and treated as normal behavior. The continuation of the behavior is dependent upon fear and compliance and silence.

So, again I ask, how do you dismantle that silence? The witnesses who stand by and say nothing? The victims who take the abuse but say nothing? The leaders, so fearful of losing control, who do nothing. How do you give voice to reform? How do you stop the violence? I think you break down the entire system; step by step, class by class, school by school, company by company, competition by competition, each relationship that was forged in a culture of imbalance and fear. Can we do that and maintain any love? Any remnant of tradition or history? In the ruins is it possible to excavate the gems, like rhinestone tiaras lost among the scraps? Is there a way to choose and then re-assemble the parts we keep into something beautiful? I think so. I think that we, as a collective entity, must break down the concept of normal in ballet, in dance and redefine it. We need to separate the behavior of those in charge from the behaviors that result from the treatment of those perpetuating those harms. The resulting behaviors are not melodramatic and "crazy" as displayed in most modern and classic media such as *The Red Shoes* (Powell & Pressburger, 1948) *Black Swan* (Aronofsky, 2010), or *Tiny Pretty Things* (*Tiny Pretty Things*, 2020). They are instead predictable, heartbreaking, completely normal responses to terrible situations. In the media, these normal responses are amplified to an extreme degree. This is dangerous. It makes the harms that are actually occurring in dance abnormal

and entertainment. While DANCE can be a form of entertainment, dancers themselves are not. They, WE, are humans deserving of a creative space that does not destroy us by encouraging us to destroy ourselves.

Memory: I am sitting in my New York apartment, crying. I share the two room flat with four other dancers and have carved out a tiny corner of the community space for my own. I am tucked into that corner, knees pulled in tight. I have just gotten off the phone with the artistic director of the regional ballet company where I have spent the fall season as a principal ballerina. My repertoire included *Myrtha*, Queen of the Wilis, in *Giselle* and of course various *Nutcracker* divertissements. I was scheduled to dance the Snow Queen but was bumped from that role when a new male principal dancer was hired and he insisted upon dancing not with me, but with his wife. My reviews for *Giselle* are stellar, freshly pasted into a scrapbook. I weigh approximately 105 pounds, and as is normal for a ballet dancer, have protruding bones and translucent skin. I eat one meal a day: rice with corn and peas. I often skip the rice. At this moment, while curled up on the floor, I have just been told that I am being let go from the spring season because my body is too “womanly”. Our main work for this spring season is a ballet about female sexuality, a version of *Carmina Burana*, choreographed by a famous dancer, an established choreographer from a major New York company. When he finds out, he is furious. He stands up for me, has me reinstated. I do dance that spring but am let go again at the end of the season. The damage is done. I stop eating entirely.



Me, early in my New York dance years, before I stopped eating entirely. Photo: Weiferd Watts

Ballet, and by extension the entire dance community, is a convoluted world, where adults are supposed to look like young teens and teens and very young adults are supposed to dance and act like fully mature adults, but are preyed upon precisely because they are not. Lines are continuously crossed. Parties occur where students drink with teachers, ending up in situations where the rules of consent are blurred and erased. Corrections are made on the body which are framed as work but are actually stimulating to the teacher. Silence is embedded in the curriculum under the guise of respect and tradition. Competition is encouraged as a way to silence witnesses. Adults who are supposed to protect students and young dancers turn the other way. We witness and we are silent. It is reprehensible.

Memory fragments: 1) My distracting breasts are discussed openly as either an asset or drawback to a ballet career in a conversation with my teacher. My mother instigates the conversation. It is determined that as long as I remain thin enough, they are not. Reference point; I wear a size 32 with an A or B cup size bra. 2) My high school drama teacher has ongoing relationships with students. Everyone knows about it. The chosen ones are always boys, so while we don't quite understand, it doesn't affect the girls, therefore all we know is that we don't matter as much. One girl finally breaks the silence. She thinks the biased treatment is unfair and reports the teacher for favoritism. The teacher goes to jail for having sex with students. I show up at an audition for a professional Equity production ten years later and he is the director, reassimilated into the theatre community. I go into the bathroom and throw up, but do the audition anyway. I am cast, but turn down the show. I show up at a funeral 20 years later and he is the final speaker, eulogizing my first dance teacher. One of his victims speaks just before he does. No one in the room reacts. Even jail time is normalized, simply part of being a dance leader. 3) Fast forward. I am hired at a studio in Los Angeles. The owner has been convicted of assaulting students, both sexually and verbally and is jailed. I take the job, justifying it because he is not there. He comes back. I feel complicit but I need the work. I start to hear tidbits of information; he is returning to old ways. I finally find the courage to leave. It's been years. I too have normalized it. I too am guilty. I hate myself.

Throbbing

Pressing hard

Breath caught

ANXIOUS

Pushing

Pulsing blood

Throat closed

SILENT

You are standing so

Fucking close

Hot wind on my neck

I feel you

Your need

Burning

The space between us is

Vast

Taken without permission

Scarlet cheeks

Betray

Fly away little bird

Above

The

Fray

Chapter Two:

It is Wiser to Find Out Than To Suppose (Mark Twain)

In order to re-create a dance world that is just and kind and giving, it can seem as if everything we know needs to go, even/ especially those pink tights and tiaras that I dreamed about long ago. Much of it should, including but in no way limited to racism, classism, elitism, sexism, gender phobias and simple snobbery. Much of the traditional training also has to go; the hands forcing turnout, extension and compliance, the weight of expectation, the ideals of misogynistic men and self loathing women and the rules which govern all of our days yet serve to protect only those in power. The challenge, once it all goes away, is uncovering and honoring what stays. Underneath all of the soot, what crystals can emerge and how do we find them?

In my preliminary research for what became my thesis study, setting the stage for evolving ongoing study well past the confines of this degree, I interviewed four people in various stages of their dance careers. The first interview was informal and did not have the framework of an academic study. It led to the next set of interviews, which were conducted within the framework of IRB approval; an ethnographic study on bullying and sexual grooming in dance. My questions initially focused on bullying as a precursor to sexual grooming. The premise was that those who suffered bullying as children outside of the studio were more likely to be targeted as victims of grooming inside of the studio. While the small study did not support that premise, the normalization of sexual promiscuity, grooming, and abuse was consistent among each participant's experiences. This normalization takes place among all populations; dancers, teachers, administrators, artistic directors, choreographers and parents, making it particularly difficult to reject during training and early career development.

The interviews for this pilot study were difficult to conduct. The primary aim of this pilot study was to qualitatively explore subjective reporting related to whether there is an increased risk of sexual grooming and subsequent sexual abuse in dancers who have a history of being bullied than in comparison to those that do not. If the

pattern was identified, further research would be warranted. This research included: (1) Exploring whether the normalization (Moola & Krahn, 2017) of certain behaviors that exist within dance training and within the institution, including bullying, sexual assault, non-consensual touching, and shaming, exacerbate the problem [of grooming and subsequent assault]; (2) Identifying steps that educators and administrators can take to ameliorate this harm (Papaefstathiou et al., 2013). While the initial premise of bullying as a precursor to assault was not supported by the evidence presented, the supporting idea, that the normalization of these behaviors exacerbates the problems, was. I will follow that thread in future projects through subsequent research, writing and choreographic inquiry.

After an initial survey, which asked just a few general questions about a history of bullying and sexual grooming, I narrowed down my field of participants and invited about eight to participate in longer, one on one interviews over zoom. Five people agreed, though only three followed through. The interviews took place over one weekend and covered the globe. Questions covered early family life, dance training, teachers, friends, sexual orientation and life. Each one lasted approximately ninety minutes. The unremarkableness of discussing sexual grooming, sexual intimidation, sexual favors and retribution was ugly and upsetting. I found myself personally drawn in and had to make comments and notes throughout the process about my loss of impartiality. That lack of impartiality may have also served the interview process, creating safety for the participants with the correct perception that they were finally being heard. For example, when asked about what we could do more of, participant N responded with the following:

Participant N: *Like you, like, somebody's asking you about it. Like, no one's ever asked me about this. So like, the fact that you're asking me if there's additional action that I would feel comfortable with is crazy to me. And, and I guess, I, the only thing I thought it was like, can you ask people like, if they're okay. Like, can we start asking dancers if they're experiencing a negative thing? Nobody asks you, you're not going to tell somebody if nobody asks you. So I think we just need to ask people if they're doing okay.*

Somebody is asking about it. Somebody is questioning the normalcy of this behavior. It is a start.

The following section is a gathering of quotes, arranged by subject, which have been fodder for my writing, my choreography, and will lead to future research. I have only included quotes from the IRB approved survey. I have made some comments and have begun to draw some conclusions, but for the most part, this is raw material, both in subject matter and in how much it has been digested as research evidence. These questions, these people, these harms will continue to guide my work well past graduation and into the next iteration of my research.

1. A dancer's value is solely determined by their physicality and others' responses to it. The lines of what is acceptable in terms of sexuality are blurred and confusing, particularly in regards to body type.

Participant D: *Oh, your worth is your face. Your worth is your body.*

Participant C: *And there was also this you know, within myself trying to understand myself as a dancer, trying to understand myself and femininity as a human. And it was always you know, if you did this, you would.. you would.. you would be much more feminine.*

So it was that there's this man who controls my future, I can never be good enough. And whatever I do one thing that he says that needs to change whether it be my food or my hair makeup or my leotard, it was always met with something else. It kind of feels like he got off on that too. Yeah.

2. There is a tension between rewarding sexuality and suppressing it. This tension is played out across all aspects of the performing arts as related to dance.

Participant C: *I wasn't comfortable with his corrections. I don't know what that really means to me and I will never say anything for sure without knowing anything for sure. Especially when it involves another person. But I very much constantly felt objectified by him. And not in a child way. And I don't know if that is part of the way that he spoke to me um or what... there's there's just something there. Something there that to this day makes my stomach turn. But I can't tell you anything. Exactly. Or pinpoint anything but it's just an unsettling feeling.*

Participant C: *I just feel like just hidden innuendos and undertones and corrections in like breath work just, just like the, I guess more so like in modern just like the running of hands over, I just I just feel like everybody, not everybody.. I feel like.. because that's not fair. I feel like there was a large majority that absolutely knew what they could get away with and how far to push.. just to that line where it was art. And, and for the sake of dance.*

3. There is a lack of autonomy over one's body. Consent, up until quite recently ("Sarah Lozoff," n.d.) (*Scottish Ballet Brings in "intimacy Coaches" for First Time in Its History | The Scotsman*, n.d.) has not been a part of dance training or the rehearsal process.

Participant C: *You have to be prepared for places that you wouldn't normally think to touch people to to be touched because that's the choreography. You may end up having to put, like your arm somewhere or your hands somewhere now just like, even if not giving anybody that benefit of doubt out even if that was meant innocently, that is not how you say that to a group of like 13 and 14 year old girls. It very much was that, you know, that there are things that will happen and that's part of the art. There was never an option for any type of consent because that was the art and that's what you needed to do.*

4. There are blurred lines between teachers and students, particularly in genres such as hip hop and contemporary.

Participant D: *Two things were really a shock during that experience. The first one was like, teacher, student relationships. Everyone knew, but no one knew. And it was okay. But everyone knew, they were like, you know, I'm gonna drop you off, like half a block away from the place. So they don't know, we drove in here together. Um, but then we would like talk about hanging out together during class.*

Participant D: *Oh, I guess it happens everywhere. Like, there's that blurred line between, like, teachers and students everywhere you go. And that's normal and you just have to deal with it. It didn't occur to me until after I guess I graduated from -----, that it was like, I don't think I don't think that's supposed to be a possibility between teachers and students. Like I, for me, it was like, Oh, these girls, these cute young girls are having fun, let them learn their lessons and not like, hey, no, actually stop what you're doing. That's not okay.*

5. Everyone knew, at all times, what was going on.

Participant N: *It is, it is so well known among like male dancers in their 20s and teens that this is the thing. Like, this is not a secret. Like, people know that JK will like hit on you after class or like, be inappropriate with you. People also know that JW will, like grope you during the lunge. Like this, it is not like an isolated incident. And also something that like, was so normalized, and probably still is like, so normal. It's like, oh, yeah, like, they're just like, you know, like male dance teachers. You know.*

Participant N: *So these men like we knew, we just like, knew that they were sleeping with kids, and it was kind of bad. And then it was also kind of like*

not... there was a part of you that was like, wow, like, they're getting so much attention. There was a part of you that was like, not that I wish that was me. But like, you know what I mean, it wasn't, it didn't seem all negative, there was a good part of it.

6. Grooming is pervasive across the industry, in all genres, at both the training and performance levels. It happens in plain sight and there is often a side effect of turning students against each other to prevent them from turning in adults.

Participant C: There was definitely grooming that was happening. There is grooming with me during puberty, absolutely. I was part of, before puberty, was part of this kind of hand picked group who were supposed to go all the way through ... I know some people have good memories of him but he's a disgusting vile human being that always always gave me spidey senses and the hairs on my back stand up. Um, but also my desire to endlessly please him was also there. He was the one that would critique anything that he ever saw me eat. He told me not to eat. He was the one that told me I would make a lucky man.. that I would be a very good wife to a very lucky man.

7. When a dancer's only value is their physical being, they are often rewarded for exploiting it or, conversely, retaliated against when favors are withheld.

Participant N: I definitely remember feeling uncomfortable. And it was, you know, the conflict post puberty. And I got really good really fast and was like, I want to be a good dancer. And I remember started like, choreographers started noticing me and that was great. Um, I think the primary example the thing uncomfortable was I. It was back in the day when like, master teachers were like, getting famous. And like you would have like famous people come to your dance studio... being uncomfortable by the fact that it was an

assistant team of, you know, like four or five teenage boys and these like grown adult men in their 20s and 30s.... And like them sharing hotel rooms together and like, after going to teach at a studio being like, come back to the hotel room, like we'll have, you know, we'll drink and like, just like adults drinking with children is the crazy..looking back is the craziest thing I've ever thought of. I would never do that and think it's normal. And then like hearing stories of of the two of them engaging in absolutely inappropriate sexual conduct with students 1,000% It never happened to me, I don't think I was ever approached, which I'm very thankful for. And I don't remember ever feeling pressured. But I remember feeling deeply uncomfortable with the atmosphere and knowing that it was happening to other people.

Participant N: I don't... I remember feeling, like a vague sense of like, I should be like, this is like good for me, like I should, I should be making out with this person. Like, it's great that he's showing interest in me. I remember, because I don't think I ever felt like it was like, I wanted it personally or sexually. But I do remember feeling like this will benefit me in some way.

Participant C: I was so baffled with allowing my sexuality to be valid. That it was still that like, well, it's your job as a woman, to make a man happy. Which I recognize how fucked that really is.

Participant N: I do think that like when I, I do think that I like, I stopped getting asked to assist at a certain point. And I think it was around the same point where I was like, this is crazy. Like, I was like, I'm not gonna participate in, like going to hotel rooms with men. And I think I stopped, like responding to Instagram messages. And then I wasn't asked to assist anymore and that was okay.

8. There is a pervasive lack of accountability throughout the industry. Even when reported, sexual assault and grooming and inappropriate teacher/student relations are ignored by leadership.

Participant D: *There was this one ballet teacher who apparently had been there forever, like years and years and years. He was, he was a guy, he was a great teacher for female students, but he would cross boundaries with the male students, and then mask it as it's education. I'm like, fixing your posture. But I'm like, I'm sorry. You don't need to like touch your.. grab there to fix anybody's posture. And like, the boys would try to complain. But there's this toxic masculinity is very much still a thing and like patriarchy is thriving in Columbia still, um, so the idea of like, a male professor that is well established, being gay and harassing his male students was, like, inconceivable. Like that could not have, why would that even happen? Why, that's not even an option. So then, when the kids would go and speak up, they would be like, oh, you're exaggerating, like, you're just being like, if you don't want him correcting you, then it's your loss, because you're not going to be a better dancer. It's like, actually, but like, no. And, yeah, so anyone, everyone, anytime anyone spoke up, because he was known as being like, so strict and so like, harsh with everything, they thought that it was us not being strong enough to take criticism and not him doing things he wasn't supposed to do. I think he still teaches there today, to this day. Um, but I don't think it's free that most of the people in the course are women. Because in whatever reason, within that within that, that environment, we're safer because all your all your male teachers tend to or at least all my male teachers were gay, very outspoken about it, but so they wouldn't I never felt unsafe for myself. But I know my, my male counterparts, students, I know they did, and they tried to speak out and nothing happened.*

Participant D cont. : *It was, it was uncomfortable and was also really confusing because, he again, if you were a girl, he was a great teacher, because he had no interest in you. He was like, oh, you're just the thing that I'm going to teach how to do ballet properly. Um, so his corrections and everything he kept, I did learn a lot from him, which was so conflicting with how, how horrible it was for for my classmates, so we would be in class and I*

would be like, I don't know, we were doing like an adagio, and I'm getting all this great feedback. And I'm like doing things and like, moving forward. And then he goes next to another student, a male student, and don't be like, oh, like with flimsy arm arms like that, you're never going to accomplish anything. Or like stuff like that, where it's like, how can you so much like build me up so much? And then just seconds later turn around and like literally crush this person for no good reason whatsoever? Um, so yeah, it was, it was it was it was hard. Then even when we tried to speak up, they were still like, oh, you're just like, you're not understanding what's happening. It's fine. Thank you for telling us. We'll see what we can do.

9. Finally, what should we be doing?

Participant N: Yeah. Um I don't know. I mean, I guess I just, I just always think about, like, how could any of this have been prevented? And like, I think there's a part of it; that the only reason that I've spoken about this is a) because other people spoke about it. And I saw them doing it and like being safe and like being fine.

Participant N: (and repeated from above)

Like you, like, somebody's asking you about it. Like, no one's ever asked me about this. So like, the fact that you're asking me if there's additional action that I would feel comfortable with is crazy to me. And, and I guess, I, the only thing I thought it was like, can you ask people like, if they're okay. Like, can we start asking dancers if they're experiencing a negative thing? Nobody asks you, you're not going to tell somebody if nobody asks you. So I think we just need to ask people if they're doing okay.

Participant C: There is no reason why every single person that teaches a child dance where you are physically putting your hands on a child and manipulating their bodies, that you should not have every single clearance, every background check and there should be an advisory board that does

this. (Nancy: Yep) There needs to be regulation on that. I don't care. I care how you teach somebody to properly do a developpe. I care about that. It is essential that we have the bare minimum that we ask our academic teachers. The bare minimum. 100% behind you. Yes. And I think that if, if a student, whether it's a competition school, a ballet school, a modern school, I don't care. There needs to be five hours a year. That's nothing. Where actual proper nutritional education, where an actual physiotherapist comes in and explains kinesiology to the age group that we're talking about. Just basic things, just basic. If you are really serious, and you want to prepare yourself for a world in dance, basic things on how to care for yourself. Should be such an easy sell. Especially to parents. Like minimal, minimal, these are minimal things.

I love ballet. The greatest joys in my life have been onstage in pointe shoes and tights; making music visible, flying through the air, spinning like a top, creating ephemeral relationships that exist only for a moment and then shift into something else entirely. I have basked in the light of that magic with other dancers and audiences. These are the times that I have felt most alive and most spiritual. I also embody everything that is wrong with this art form. I live with the remnants of abuse on my body and in my soul. I have experienced harm and have perpetuated harm on others, I have tried to destroy myself. I have almost succeeded. But, I am still here and still love dance and now have to find a way forward. Teaching and choreographing have opened entirely new worlds. I cannot continue, consciously or unconsciously, to perpetuate the normalcy of a culture of cyclical abuse. While I acknowledge and honor history and the skills, ballets and traditions that have been brilliantly passed down, I stand in truth and say that much of it must go. This research, this is where I start- by asking, by listening, and by finally speaking.

Chapter three:

Fragmentary Evidence; Detritus

Fragmentary evidence: any type of material left at - or taken from - a crime scene, or the result of contact between two surfaces

Detritus: waste or debris of any kind

Every contact leaves a trace...

Fragment

Shatter, splinter, fracture

collapse

Evidence

Verification, confirmation

Affirmation, authentication

Proof

Broken truth shrouded in ghostly dust

Ash remaining

On my

Breast

Skin

Heart

Translucent reminders

Stain

Fragmentary evidence

Stories implode

Detritus remains

Witness alone

Project Overview

Fragmentary Evidence; Detritus serves as the culmination of my scholarly and artistic output at Goddard. It is intended to illustrate, using dance film as the medium, the fractures that metastasize within an entire dance community when abuse occurs, is witnessed, and is then internalized and normalized. I hope that I have created a project that invokes in its audience a visceral recognition of the chaos that lives within those of us who have these lived experiences; as victim, as perpetrator, as witness.

Idea:

I entered Goddard with a clear plan for my final piece; I wanted to create a dance centered on the triad of victim, bully/abuser, and witness. I originally envisioned a theater piece which would show the tragedy of the uninvolved witness and the harm done to the victim by that inaction and distance. Over the span of the next two years, through research and experience and the recollection of lived truths, I realized that there is not such a stark delineation in the tragedies of each victim, bully and witness. There is a broad spectrum of harm and people inhabit many and often multiple roles. Additionally, I realized that I could play more with the concepts and perceptions of each participant by making a film, a skill somewhat honed through the pandemic and some additional classes. I believe that film gives me the power to manipulate point of view. What I hope to have created is a deeply integrated ethnographic and autoethnographic dance film incorporating research, both choreography and poetry exploration, personal emotional content, creative collaboration and the lived experiences of many disparate voices. A formal research project clarified the spiraling effects that the normalization of bullying, abuse, sexual pressure, sexual assault and shame cause in the actions and inactions of the community, resulting in harm to individuals, the dance community and the world at large. This film is just one piece in a lifelong journey towards a reimagined dance world, where the cycles of abuse in all forms are no longer normalized and humans are free to create, explore, and exist without harm.

Process:

Ethical statement:

As I do for all of my work, I strove to create an equitable environment for both the rehearsal and performance for *Fragmentary Evidence; Detritus*. My rehearsal and performance spaces are designed as brave spaces (*The 6 Pillars of a Brave Space*, n.d.) where the free exploration of movement and ideas is made possible by inviting vulnerability, perspective, a healthy relationship with fear and discomfort, critical thought, good intentions and mindfulness. I lead with integrity, compassion and a commitment to inclusive casting, embodied diversity and genuine collaboration. This includes paying everyone a fair wage. It includes taking into account my carbon footprint. It includes autonomy for each person within the process; everyone has a voice. Finally, I have zero tolerance for bullying, shaming, or any physical, emotional or sexual abuse. If ultimately, something goes awry, I take full ownership of the situation and address it immediately.

Casting and the Rehearsal Process:

In any artistic creation involving human performers, the success of the project, which can be defined in a myriad of ways, depends upon the very performers cast. Human beings are intensely unique creatures and creating with one human is absolutely different than creating with another. Therefore, in terms of both ethics and artistry, diversity is always forefront in my projects. The dancers who took part in this project represent a microcosm of society. In addition to the range of physical body types, they represent a mix of races, gender identities and sexual identities. There was sadly not much diversity in age, less than ten years (19-29). The thought of dancing in the film myself crossed my mind, but circumstances prevented me from exploring that idea further.

Dancers were invited to take part in the workshop phase of this film without a requirement that they commit to the performance phase. It was initially my intention to use all of the dancers from the workshop in the film, however, there were issues with schedules and timing and a few dancers who were not a great fit due to level of experience or technical prowess. Dancers joined the rehearsal process at

different times. Some were there the entire time and some joined in January, right before we filmed.

There were both positive and negative aspects to this extremely fluid casting process. I was able to include many more people in the initial conversation and creation process which added to the richness of the rehearsal period. I was able to incorporate many more viewpoints into the patchwork of background that we drew from. However, the lack of commitment eventually took away from the process. Once we had a choreographed map to follow we had to spend time reteaching phrases over and over which started to diminish the work. I also had to do a lot of rethinking and regrouping when one of my original leads dropped out due to another opportunity. I originally had a real life couple in the lead roles. They felt safe working intimately in the space together, which I relied upon, especially due to the truncated rehearsal process. I loved these two dancers together and appreciated their aesthetic. When one had to drop out, I went to a dark place, thinking the film would be ruined. It ultimately served the film to have a different dancer in that role. We worked slowly and with compassion, obtaining consent for each intimate gesture and touch, notably in contrast to the experiences that had led each dancer to the room.

I ultimately had a cast of ten dancers:

- ❖ Darby Epperson is one of my favorite dancers to work with. I have known her since my first day at AMDA, the performing arts college at which I taught for eight years. She has worked with me consistently since her graduation as a dancer, assistant and dance captain. I trust her implicitly. She identifies as a cisgender queer woman.
- ❖ Grace Parker Horrocks danced the lead in my practicum film. She embodies much of the harm and beauty of the dance world, having experienced the disconnect of growing up gay in the classical ballet world. We have a strong mentor/dancer relationship. She often says that she was able to return to dance through my classes. Over the last four years, she has done so with great success and is now represented and working as a professional dancer.

- ❖ Jacob Byrd is also a graduate of AMDA and has worked with me regularly since his graduation. He came into this project in January and added a beautiful light energy to the piece.
- ❖ Kate Coleman is another of my go to dancers who has worked with me extensively since her graduation from AMDA several years ago. She is one of the leading lights of the Los Angeles contemporary dance scene. She is also a trans rights activist and identifies as queer.
- ❖ Gabriella Dominguez also attended AMDA but dropped out after her first year. We continued to work together as she found her way. She is a sensitive artist navigating painful family issues and brought a tender vulnerability to the sessions. She is also working successfully as a dancer in Los Angeles.
- ❖ William McAfee is one of the babies of the group, a brand new graduate. We worked together a lot in the student / teacher model and I was personally thrilled to give him his first professional gig. He is already a busy working dancer and is going to have a huge career.
- ❖ Mariko McCully was new to me, a referral from Kate. She also is a successful working dancer and model in Los Angeles, a joy to work with.
- ❖ Alucard Mendoza is a chameleon shapeshifter whom I met while taking a class together in September. I will ask them to dance in every project that I have going forward. What a brilliant mover and lovely human.
- ❖ Sydney Richardson is still a student, a dance major at UCLA. She follows me on Instagram and we had started to have a deeper online conversation covering issues such as race, equity in dance and abuse. When I started rehearsal for this project, I invited her to a rehearsal to see if her real person was anything like her online persona. It was and she stayed and I am grateful for having taken the risk.
- ❖ David Underwood III is also a new graduate from AMDA. I worked with them extensively during their studies and was one of their mentors in finding a way to express themselves as a gender fluid dancer. What a gift it was to have III, as they like to be called, in this film.

I was also able to bring in five young dancers to film the opening shot. These dancers are my current students.

This film, though very specific in theme and story, was somewhat amorphous in creation. I started with freewriting, improv sessions and poetry. I studied the flocking of birds and their protective group dynamics. I came across the idea of “selfish herd theory,” where a threatened animal pushes towards the center of the flock, creating constant motion as the threat shifts to the outermost animal. (Shere, n.d.) Research indicates that animal personalities can change depending on how they influence or are influenced by a flock or school. There are different rules for flocks depending on what the purpose of the flight is. Finally, individuals act differently within flocks depending upon their relationship status; those who have paired for life react differently in the flock to those who are single. (Witze, 2020) The health and security of the flock depends upon the actions of the individuals. Although this idea is new in terms of this specific theme or subject in dance, flocking as a movement language is not new. For example, one of the most important choreographers working in ballet today, Crystal Pite, debuted *Flight Pattern* in 2017. (*Flight Pattern — Productions — Royal Opera House*, n.d.), The ballet is a commentary or requiem on the Syrian refugee crisis, and employed flight patterns of birds. (Royal Opera House, 2017),

I'm thinking about boxes
Categories
Types
The dulling that occurs when
We have to/ try to/ are asked to
Fit
Into spaces
Smaller than our
Souls
When wings are clipped
Hooves shod

Voices

silenced

I spent a lot of time doing my own solo improvisation, working specific prompts such as shame, despair and hope. I played with the idea of letting the dancers create their own movement, but wanted to make sure that I had a movement vocabulary for them to choose from. The writing sessions and the solo improvisation sessions merged, creating movement phrases that I ultimately used in the choreography; falling into angles, then abruptly straightening only to fall at an angle in a different direction. The creation of a physical embodiment of listening, being shocked, then falling back into the conversation. By employing a combination of canon (Canon is a dance technique that requires dancers to take it in turns to perform a movement. This movement is then identically copied and performed by others.) (*Contemporary Dance Terms. Definitions.*, n.d.) and improvisation. I hoped to physicalize the idea of a thought or idea traveling through the corps de ballet as a visible wave with each dancer taking it in slightly differently, somewhat like a child's game of telephone. I recorded all of this solo work to later bring it into the group sessions.

We began these sessions with discussions about the ideas behind the film; bully, victim and witness. As we developed the idea of the corps de ballet serving as the witness, Darby asked a brilliant question; Is the audience or viewer also in the place of witness in the piece? We incorporated that idea into the film as well, giving that role to the camera. I shared the research on the aftereffects of witnessing violence and how it remains in the body; that trauma is ameliorated if action to stop the harm is taken. All of this discussion would eventually be connected to physical movement. (Barhight et al., 2013) (Rivers et al., 2009) (*We Must Bear Witness*, 2010)

I began the physical exploration by giving the dancers several phrases which included the angles and interspersed straight thrusts that I had worked out ahead of time. The dancers worked in unison and then played with the movement in canon. After that, we explored some improvisation phrases with very specific limitations; we kept it very tight and worked within four planes. The next step was to create an improvised phrase and toss it to the next person, and let the phrase, like a rumor, mutate from dancer to dancer. We then combined the phrases, starting in unison, moving into a canon and then through the improvisation "gossip", finally returning

to the given phrase. The final element added was a circular running pattern to incorporate the idea of flocking. Eventually we manipulated the phrases through a process called retrograde where you literally unwind the phrase. It has the effect of running film backward. I connected it to the desire to turn back time.

In a very large break from my regular method of working, I did not choreograph this work to music. We used various songs, rhythms and different pieces to maintain cohesiveness during the process, but the film was scored after completion. This echoed the disconnect between what dancers feel and what the audience or witness thinks is being experienced. When viewing the film, the audience will see dancers moving in concert “to” the music but that is an illusion.

The process of creating phrases on my body and bringing that movement into the studio came to an abrupt stop in October. I was involved in what now appears to be a life changing accident. I was seriously injured. We took a month off, then had two rehearsals in November. At this point, I was unable to workshop movement on my own body, demonstrate what I wanted or even feel for myself whether or not the movement worked. I had to rely much more heavily on the dancers in the room. It was a painful experience and brought up all sorts of other issues of identity. I then contracted Covid and we had to pause again for another entire month. We reconvened in mid January with the final cast for two rehearsals before we shot the film on Jan 23, 2022.

My inner world is raucous
Violent, mean
Pretty phrases, illustrated with line drawings
Watercolors
Scattered
In poetry collections
Curated into
instagram posts
Gathering likes and hearts
Do not mirror the
Thick red slashes

the black holes, jagged edges, torn pages
Desperate scratches in journal after journal
Seeking
Ranting
Sobbing
Discarding

I am tired of using
Other people's words
to color my world
Monotone, diminished
Trite
Self help masquerading as art
Xanax
Pot

My words need to pulse with
Anger, despair, love
Obsession
The loss of urgency in the translation
Cuts to the core

You
A you
Has stolen my stories
My anguish, my singularity

You
A you
Has put into words
What I cannot

You
A you
Has
Words that are
Better stronger clearer

Louder

Beautiful

Even

But

Those words lessen my

Rage

Those words soften my

Anger

Those words bury my

Voice

I am tired of using

Other people's words

to color my world

I need

I want

To find and hold

My own

Shoot and Post Production:

I originally hoped to shoot on a sound stage at Hussian College/In Studio, where I am the Commercial Dance Department Program Coordinator. All faculty and staff have access to sound stage RS-1 at Los Angeles Center Studios but student projects have priority. Two weeks before my shoot, a student booked the space and I needed to find another space. I ended up in the large dance studio at The Performing Arts Center in Van Nuys. I was a faculty member at this large professional training studio for several years. The space is tainted. The owner of the studio was jailed for sexual abuse. The abuse happened before I joined the faculty, and when I joined he was not actively involved in the running of the studio. Over the years, he gradually returned to full status and rumors started to float again, focused more on emotional abuse. I stayed in this job longer than I should have, trying to wish those rumors away, but it eventually became too much and when the opportunity came to leave, I did. However, finding space to shoot is tricky and I knew that I could use this space without too much trouble. I wonder if I ruined the film by shooting there. Much of

what I dislike in the final edit is environmental. I wonder how or if shooting in a “dirty” space affected the final product, even though I was the only one on the team who knew that history with the building. I’m not sure how to gauge this and just made note of it. Ethics are not always as black and white as they can seem, especially in this industry. It would be difficult to find ANY space that did not have history and dark stories to tell. Additionally, not all of my experience was negative and bringing in some money to a dance studio that survived the pandemic is a good thing.

And yet, and yet....I keep returning to the idea that because the space itself is tainted or dirty, this underlying problem tainted my work, marking the footage with shame. Or, perhaps the opposite is true. That the act of creating work that acknowledges the harm serves to cleanse the space of it, similar to a ritual of saging. Could the act of dancing the harm serve to say, “I see and hear you and will change things going forward.”

The shoot day itself went quite smoothly. I worked with the same camera team that I used to shoot my practicum film.

- ❖ Sam Chavez is the Director of Photography and Editor. Another former student and recent graduate, she is already an in demand dance cinematographer in Los Angeles. She is a queer WOC, an amazing working dancer herself and someone that I really enjoy collaborating with. She confided in me that the process of working on these two films has given her the permission that she needed to start to address her own abuse story with her art.
- ❖ Ramone Garcia is another AMDA graduate and works incredibly well with Sam. Ramone also identifies as both Latino and gay. They both were part of the rehearsal process and we were able to work quickly and efficiently in the space.
- ❖ Michael Sheck did the lighting off of my initial design. His parents own the studio and raised him to be part of the industry. He is a hugely successful lighting designer and works all over the country.

There was a concrete issue with shooting in this space that required rethinking. I was not able to control the lighting from outside of the room, so my initial plan to shoot 360 degrees was not possible. It made it much more difficult for the camera to be in with the dancers and created a bit more of an outside eye. The backdrop was also quite wrinkled which I feared would look awful in the film and I had a hard time getting over it. Once again, it felt as if the immorality of shooting in a dirty space, where such behavior actually occurred, would stain the film. My hope is that it ended up simply adding a layer of unrest to the final project. .

The most difficult part of film creation is the edit. Maintaining the clarity of storytelling in an abstract piece is a daunting challenge. For this piece, that challenge was maintaining focus on the main character (Grace). We encountered several issues in maintaining that storyline. The first was technical. We lost some important footage due to a faulty sim card. The second was the compelling work of other dancers. There were moments that were stunning in the performances of several dancers (Notably Kate and Alucard) that did not serve the particular narrative of the film. Those moments had to be cut or faded so that the viewer follows the main character's journey. Finally, the lack of a musical map for the editor was an interesting wrinkle. We had to build the dynamics FOR the score to follow rather than the other way around. Since the composer was able to follow the map we created, I believe that we succeeded.

The score to a film is integral to the storyline and success of the piece. For this film, I wanted to focus on the dissonance between what dancers project and what they feel inside. The music had to have an uneasy feeling. My composer, Kyle DeTarnowsky, is a dear friend and an incredible musician. He is donating the music for this project because "there is no way that you can afford me." He was able to take my random musical references: Arvo Part, Ludvico Einudi, and Stravinsky and turn them into a score that moves the story forward. I worked with him through several drafts to get to a place where the undertones of the score were darker and somewhat discomfiting.



Cast and Creative Team

Documentation:

I have included poetry throughout the reflection and the poem *Fragmentary Evidence* is also embedded in the film.

[Dancer Informed Consent Forms are here.](#)

[Rehearsal videos are here.](#)

[Budget](#)

[Final Film](#)

Evaluation:

There are two lenses with which to view the success of this project. The first is the experiential quality of the endeavor; the intra and interpersonal reactions of all participants including the dancers and creative team members. Through that prism, I believe that the project went brilliantly. We used an art form that had harmed almost everyone in the room to heal our multifaceted wounds using the same art form by creating a brave and welcoming space. I leave several dancers' words here:

If I could choose one word for Nancy's process it would be fearless; Unafraid to speak up on, share, and create work reflecting the specific though unfortunately not unique experience of the after effects of grooming and assault in a young dancers world, Nancy was blunt about the subject matter which allowed for a safe space to share and breathe through creating a piece with such heavy subject matter. This was not an easy process, physically or emotionally, but if it was then it wouldn't be as accurate a representation of these traumas. Assigning meaning to movement is one of my favorite elements of dance, and Nancy started with meaning and ended in movement-a method that I think created a body of work that accurately shows how this can feel for the survivors of this traumas, centering them rather than the viewer. I felt honored to portray my character and tell this story, and I'm hopeful it will create more conversation around this subject.-- Grace

You were an amazing director, thank you for giving me space to explore and heal from trauma. I would not have been able to handle the subject matter if it weren't for your considerate direction. I cannot thank you enough for being so gracious and inspiring! I hope to work with you again in the future! Exploring this subject matter was incredibly scary for me. More than often, I would find myself working through emotions or memories that had been deeply repressed; admittedly, there were times I was on the verge of tears while dancing. But despite how uncomfortable it was, I found solace in the fact that I wasn't alone. The vulnerability of my castmates and director allowed me to work through the things I had been too ashamed to even think about. The entire process was cathartic, and I cannot thank everyone involved enough for the rejuvenating experience. I feel like a weight has been lifted off my chest that I'd forgotten I was carrying.--David III

This process was extremely impactful on my life and career as it challenged me to be vulnerable in a new way while stepping into a character that was

different from my life experience. I feel honored to be a part of a project that tackles the truths of sexual assault in this industry and its effects on not only those who experience it but also are witness to it. I definitely felt my maturity grow as a dancer in this process as the choreography emitted a new type of strength and storytelling that had power in simplicity and intricacy of movement. It also held plenty of emotion in the way I approached each movement. I found myself in rehearsals and outside of rehearsals, whether it be in my dance courses at UCLA or my own self-study, reflecting a lot on the story we were tasked to portray. I focused a lot on the intention being extremely tied to the storyline while also focusing on my own health as this topic is very deep. I found freedom in this reflection, learning in rehearsals, and ultimately filming as I had never been pushed in such a capacity in my years of training and was finally able to be a part of a project that I really am passionate about. Lastly, the process of moving through a small phrase into a larger scale choreography was such an intriguing process to be involved in. To have a small framework that was built on each week, felt immersive as I got to see a bit of your way of creating movement as I learned. I loved how each piece of movement had an element of the story within and threaded together to ultimately express this theme of the dance. To watch the dance come together is something I normally don't get to be a part of so I found it helpful as a student to learn a new way of composition that can be achieved through phrasing and improvisational techniques. Thank you so much for this opportunity and I am so grateful that this was my first real gig experience.--Sydney

This process was one of the first I was a part of in person since the start of the pandemic. The space that Nancy creates is always warm and full of care, but with this being a subject that can bring a lot to the surface, the room came together to support one another and the vision of the piece. The moments of emotion about the subject matter were met with gentle energies. Emotions were welcomed into the space and ritualistically processed in a form similar to meditation; acknowledging the feeling, recognizing the root, allowing it to fill you and be present, and releasing it into the universe through movement. I'm incredibly grateful for the art and the space that Nancy created.--Kate

This project was a very important subject matter so I am happy to have worked with such a wonderful cast. Everyone was able to really invest and put their full effort in which made it go smooth I felt. We needed to show a handful of feelings but one main feeling was how serious witnessing something terrible and not reporting/talking can hurt the person that

witnessed it. I'm glad to have been a part of such a great project headed by Nancy!--William

This piece was a safe space to process just how much pain is threaded through our industry. In every rehearsal we had meaningful conversations about the direction and intention of the piece, while simultaneously establishing and clarifying choreography. This meant that, by the day of the shoot, I felt fully equipped with a clear understanding of the material both physically and emotionally. I was able to use the information that was already established in my body and just focus on my own feelings, in a room filled with nothing but care and support-- Mariko

The second lens is that of artistic success. It is, as of this writing, too early to know if that happened. The goal is to tell a story and have that story resonate deeply with the audience. As I share the film, I hope to hear from people who find it moving, who find it cathartic, who find it challenging or disturbing, who find themselves in it. If I do, then I will know that I have achieved something close to success.

Final Assessment:

My final assessment of this piece narrows to the following question: Does the artistic "success" of the piece matter if the process was generative and healing for the cast? From the perspective of ethics, the piece is a success: It was produced with equity, representation and societal change as a starting point, based upon the philosophical idea that by changing the way that we make art (or any social system), we are able to change society at large. (Press, n.d.) I also actively incorporated research into the art. The research was conducted following best practices and focused on the ethnography of the dance world, including inquiries into patriarchy, misogyny, white supremacy, the culture of sexual abuse, power dynamics and feminist studies. It also included personal histories and individual journeys within those systems and an autoethnographic study into my own history and how that has shaped my perspectives. The feedback from the dancers was very positive, However, assessment implies judgment: was the work successful? Here multitudes of other issues come into play. These include perfectionism, aesthetics and external validation. As we neared completion, I hated the piece. I feared it would fail as a piece of art. I feared that the storytelling for the first two thirds would be unclear, that

the choreography was not captured well and that the ideas of canon, retrograde and mutation were lost in the film. I was not sure that the score was serving the story and I was not certain that the audience would take away from it what I intended. Were these issues of my perfectionism and self loathing or were they legitimate concerns? Until outside eyes and minds could view and comment upon the work, that final assessment would have to wait.

Addendum:

After the dancers were given access to view the final film, a few sent me short reflections. (Several told me their thoughts, also all positive, but not in writing) I share them here.

Beautiful! Immense gratitude and love to you. Darby

This is AMAZING! The video left me speechless and teary eyed. Thank you so much (again) for letting me be a part of this beautiful, beautiful piece. I can't wait to share it with my family and friends. David

This is GORGEOUS. Thank you for having me in such an important work, I'm honored every time. Love you!! Grace

Hello! I just got a chance to check out the film and it looks SICK! Congrats on it being done! It's beautiful! Ramone

Numerous messages filled with pride, joy and excitement about the final product...Sam

In actuality, my own insecurities aside, the film is a success. The artists were able to participate in a process that made space for their healing and gave them room to explore their internal landscape in a brave and open artistic arena. They are proud of their work and want to share it. Each of them has expressed excitement and willingness to work together in the future. The story is clear in the final edit and the

music helps create a world that is just off of a child's fairy tale ideals. I believe that what I learned about creation research while creating this piece will translate and expand going into the future.









IF YOU HAVE EXPERIENCED OR WITNESSED ABUSE IN THE DANCE WORLD, PLEASE DO NOT STAY SILENT.
PLEASE GET HELP.

YOU CAN REACH OUT TO SOMEONE YOU TRUST OR TO ONE OF THE RESOURCES LISTED BELOW:

NATIONAL SEXUAL ASSAULT HOTLINE: 1-800-656-4673

DANCE EQUITY ASSOCIATION: WWW.DANCEEQUITYASSOCIATION.COM

YOUTH PROTECTION ADVOCATES IN DANCE: WWW.YPADNOW.COM

THE DANCERS ANONYMOUS: WWW.THEDANCERSANONYMOUS.ORG

Chapter Four

The Only Journey is the One Within. (Rainer Maria Rilke)

When I left _____
My father
Anger
Not love
In his eyes
Told me I would
Go
To
Hell
I knew he was wrong
I didn't talk about _____
The _____
The _____
The _____
I put on a mask
Smiles
Mascara
Make up over the _____
So he maybe
Possibly
Is it possible that he
Couldn't

Wouldn't

Didn't

See

We hide _____

Behind

Social acceptance

Femininity

Fitting in

I did not

Speak

Tell

Confess

Each time he

I just smiled

If asked

Gently whispered

I don't want to

I don't want to talk about it

I

Don't

Want

To

Talk

About

I wrote a short essay (Some might call it a rant) during my first year at Goddard that simply stated several (because you can never bring up all) of the things that had happened related to my research and to the dance and theatre worlds during that particular packet period. There were issues that that I could have written about or should have written about but was too overwhelmed with sadness because of those very issues to actually write about:

Racism and it's intersectionality:

I was going to write about the Los Angeles Theatre community (mainly small professional theaters under the AEA 99 seat plan, augmented by a few larger houses) imploding. There are several colluding factors at this point: a disastrous Ovation awards ceremony which exposed the failure of leadership within the LA Stage Alliance (Ho, 2021), highly credible sexual harassment accusations against one of the community's most popular and socially relevant directors (Andrew Diego | Facebook, n.d.) and the ongoing battle with Actor's Equity Association (AMERICAN THEATRE | What Has Equity Won in Los Angeles?, n.d.). These are all separate issues and situations but the intersectionality of it all is something to tease out. I was going to, but now I am not. Nor am I going to write about the several online workshops that I have attended on race and racial relations: There were discussions about crediting the authentic source of dance in America and world wide, there were discussions about the unique experiences of the AAPI community both within the greater Los Angeles Dance scene and another on the unique experiences of ballet dancers. I was going to write about how race interacts with sexism and the struggles of the LGBTQUIA community and the

differently abled community and about the unrelenting bad news sandwiched between the theater community's reaction to Scott Rudin and the film community's non-reaction to Scott Rudin. I was going to write about it all but now I am not. I am going to save it because it never stops and there will be just as much to write about next week as there is now. I will write about it then. (Nancy Dobbs Owen, n.d.)

There is, in any work that attempts to deconstruct systemic inequity, even within a confined industry, an immense amount of material to read, dissect, and consume. Research on one topic leads one down rabbit holes then on a run back up onto uninhabited tree branches from which one can take off on flights to entirely different countries. Sometimes the journey leads back to the research inquiries that started the conversation. Oftimes it raises an entirely new set of inquiries and questions. Over my two years at Goddard, I have embarked upon many of these journeys. Though the focus of my research and creation has remained upon the triad of abuser, victim and witness in the dance world, I have along the way planted the seeds for years of work combating institutionalized abuse including racism, misogyny, genderphobia and sexual assault in dance. My hope is that this work could extend to the world at large. I am using an expansive definition of abuse and include bullying, assault, racism, misogyny, and cultural erasure.

While this on-going work was to be expected, I also traveled inward, through my own ancestry and experiences, circling deeper inside and emerging with an entirely new mode of artistic expression. This essay is an attempt to take stock of all of the research and work that did not explicitly end up in my thesis but was essential to deepening my understanding of the intersecting populations and types of abuse, underrepresentation and ingrained systems of inequity and inequality in dance, as well as the overlapping, inter and intradisciplinary art forms that have collided in my work. It is an essay taking stock of all that I could have written about but didn't.

In a way, I started my studies well before I knew of Goddard or had considered returning to school. I wrote a series of long form articles for LA Dance Chronicle

(Owen, n.d.) on abuse in dance. These articles were where the first seeds were planted, testing my theory that the abuse cycles in the institution of dance perpetuate the power imbalance and lack of representation of certain populations in leadership positions. These articles, initially inspired by the thoughtless comment (Kaufman, n.d.) made by a host on *Good Morning America* targeting the young prince of England, led to an ongoing exploration researching the various ways that bullying, genderphobia, and other forms of abuse often allow a certain type of person to rise to the top of the industry. In many cases, only those who make it through the hazing rituals are left and they repeat the abuse that had been inflicted upon them onto the next generation. There are numerous examples. For instance, accusations that Lourdes Lopez, Artistic Director of Miami City Ballet, is abusive in regard to dancer bodies and weight (“Dancers Say It’s Time to Talk About Ballet Companies That Body-Shame,” 2020), the suicide of British Choreographer Liam Scarlett after accusations of ongoing sexual assault (Sulcas, 2021) and lawsuits at both the University of Utah (*Ballet Alumni Described Body Shaming, Bias and Intimidation. University of Utah Faculty Vow Continued Reform.*, n.d.) and North Carolina School of the Arts (Stevens, 2022).

I feel I need to add again, I deeply love ballet and by extension, dance. I wrote a note in my fourth packet in my G3 semester:

I think, in some of this research, I have lost a bit of what is important about dance. With all of the flaws and inequities and dangers, it is still a glorious art form, universal in its appeal and essential in its value. There is beauty in the creation, the sharing, the viewing of and the performing of all forms of dance. Dance resonates most deeply for me as classical ballet, because that is where my heart took flight, in a ballet studio at the advanced age of fourteen. I just wanted to put in writing that I truly love ballet and all other forms of dance. This love of the art form is my motivation. I want to fix the traumas and harms that exist in the industry because I love dance, particularly ballet, not because I hate it.

Although homophobia and gender studies, rather than race relations, precipitated embarking upon my degree at Goddard (I specifically left race out of my LA Dance Chronicle articles), I began my MFA research by taking a deep dive into race and the overwhelming whiteness of the western dance canon, grounding my research in the past and in the world beyond just dance. I led with Eddie Glaude's *Begin Again*, James Baldwin's *America and its Urgent Lessons for Our Own* (Glaude Jr, 2020) and essays by W.E.B. Dubois (Philip S Foner, n.d.). I also looked to the Reconstruction era, pulling out Eric Foner's *Reconstruction, America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (Foner, n.d.) The questions that these great thinkers pose about remaking society can and should be extrapolated into the dance world. How do we make art in a just manner? (And, what is "just") How do we remake institutions so that they honor those who have come before as well as those working now? How do we ensure that the history we are following is accurate (for the word "true" is left to interpretation) and not distorted through the lens of the more powerful? Eric Foner goes into a great deal of detail on "Shadow" or "Secret" History which is defined by the Collins English Dictionary as "a version of historical events which differs from the official or commonly accepted record and purports to be the true version." (Shadow History Definition and Meaning | Collins English Dictionary, n.d.)

With these questions in mind, I watched several lectures. A few stood out; Karida Griffith, a brilliant tap artist (Karida Griffith Walker, 2020), gave a workshop emphasizing the importance of understanding the backdrop of history when one discusses dance today. She posits that the entirety of the Black experience serves as a literal backdrop for any issue that occurs in dance, whether it is a comment made by a teacher or choreographer, the roles and styles dancers dance and whether or not communities are welcoming to dancers who do not fit into the Euro-centric mold. Two lectures given by Theresa Ruth Howard (*Theresa Ruth Howard - YouTube*, n.d.) (*Symposium | Theresa Ruth Howard "Dark Muse, 2020*) also stood out during my initial studies at Goddard. Though the subject matter of each differed, there were underlying themes of representation, abuse, self-actualization and expression. She posed a similar question to my own: "If dancers, especially women, had more agency, would there be more leaders?" In the Dark Muse lecture, she goes into the shadow

history of ballet. Just like political history, social history, and racial history, dance history is passed down through a white lens. I also explored the work of Phil Chan and Georgina Pazoquin, who advocate for Asian Artists in dance through their non-profit organization, Final Bow For Yellow Face. (*Choreography*, n.d.). These citations represent just a fraction of the works that I studied. Artists are finally starting to speak out about the ingrained injustices of the industry. By uncovering, in a systematic way, the shadow history of marginalized populations in the arts, we can rebuild or reconstruct a more equitable and representative industry. We do this by continuously questioning the establishment's version of history, revealing the actual history of dance which contains all of the diversity of humankind that the accepted and prevailing standards seem to dismiss.

In between my fourth and fifth semesters, I read a brilliant book by Hope Mohr, *Shifting Cultural Power, Case Studies and Questions in Performance* (Mohr, 2021). Throughout a series of performance residencies and workshops Ms. Mohr, a dancer and attorney now based in the Bay Area, explores the power dynamics of race in who presents dance. She chronicles in real time the actual changes needed in an organization to actualize true diversity. She steps back and focuses on the ways that her privilege, as a white artist, affects the artists that she is working to support. The entire structure of the organization changes, financially and in where the decision making power lies.

Like Ms. Mohr, I spent some time in law school, though unlike her, I simply decided that I did not want to be a lawyer. Much of what I learned there fell away, but one thing stayed: the Socratic Method : the method of inquiry and instruction employed by Socrates especially as represented in the dialogues of Plato and consisting of a series of questionings the object of which is to elicit a clear and consistent expression of something supposed to be implicitly known by all rational beings. (*Definition of SOCRATIC METHOD*, n.d.). Much like Talmudic study, questioning as a way forward seems essential as we move into a more equitable and less abusive society: questioning history, norms and “the way it has always been.”

Referring to Talmudic study is odd for me. I am surprised that during my academic journey I have found myself on this least expected tree branch: Judaism. I have a fraught relationship with religion in general. The religion of my ancestors is no different. I was discomfited, as I worked my way through texts and podcasts, lectures and symposiums, that I kept circling back around to it. The violence of the current time and the rising tide of antisemitism has added to the urgency of my inquiries. I was suddenly encountering swastikas in my daily life and experienced several verbal assaults for the first time ever.

I have not dealt with much anti semitism.

I forget, sometimes, that my ancestry is written on my face.

It is not generally a part of my daily life.

Or it wasn't, prior to the last four years.

I remember vividly the first time I rode my bike past a freshly painted swastika;

Shocking but not dangerous.

The fliers posted all over Sherman Oaks a few weeks later were also shocking.

Upsetting in their detail.

It was not until I was late to a performance with my assistant for a play I was directing....

We pulled into a parking space and she tapped the car.

There was no damage, but a man tried to threaten her.

I tried to be tough and asked if I needed to take pictures.

He called me a fucking kike.

It was terrifying and illuminating and a moment where I questioned who I am.

Not because he recognized my ancestry

but

because

for just a split second,

I thought to respond with his.

There have been a few scattered times throughout my life that I have aggressively identified with my Jewish ancestry. In the fourth grade I fought my teacher, who had given us an assignment about our family roots, for my right to claim Palestine as my land of origin. I, a child who rarely spoke, fought with her. I said that my family had come from Palestine, that my roots were there. I wanted to wear an Israeli blouse and serve falafel for my class presentation. She argued, saying that Israel was only several decades old and that my family could not have come from there. I argued my case, though with little understanding of the war and atrocities of 1970s and early 1980s Israel. I just knew somewhere deep inside that I didn't have another home. My presentation was on Palestine. I received an A. Later I would choose Russia and Austria as the place of my ancestry connecting to and becoming obsessed with the Holocaust. My first acting role was Anne in *The Diary of Anne Frank* in 6th grade. I felt intensely connected to her and looked through family photos, wondering if we were related. (She actually did look a lot like my mother at the same age) But things changed. I started to question everything and after a few heated conversations with my rabbi as a young teen, I left Judaism behind. Yet, recently, surprisingly and perhaps simply because of the increased antisemitism of the Trump era, I have been more somatically aware of myself as a person of Jewish ancestry. And for the first time, curious about the connection between Judaism and dance.

Talismans

I've started to wear

The talismans

Of my ancestors

My grandmother's weighty gold bracelet

My mother's tiny jade Buddah

Paired

With a golden butterfly wing

Diamond earrings

Brilliant shards

Once set simply

Then ornately

Then simply again

The dowry that women hand down

One to

Another

Sewn into dresses

Hidden among socks and bras

Our independence, our security

(In)visible upon our bodies

Pierced

Into our

Ears

Wrapped

Around our

Wrists

Hanging

On our

Necks

The history of fleeing

Carried in

Our bones

Our organs

Our blood

I never thought

That's not true

I never thought

Though maybe I feared

I never thought

Does anyone really

Think about the possibility

Before

In Syria

Poland

Afghanistan

Vietnam

Sudan

New Orleans

Belongings gathered

In the dark of night

A threat

A flag

A symbol

Chants

Or worse

Chaos

In the streets

Shaking earth

Flood

Fire

Smoke and ash and destruction

I never thought

*That I would
Like my grandmother
And hers before
Have to run
With only what I can carry*

*My cat on my back
A passport in my pocket
A computer in my bag*

*My grandmother's legacy
Heavy on my wrist
Golden in the moonlight*

In relation to my dance research, this foray into Judaism was inextricably linked to both dance activism and the civil rights movement. I watched a fantastic two part lecture series, *Activism Through Dance* (Steps Beyond Foundation, n.d.), produced by the Steps Foundation and moderated by Donald Byrd. The series was divided into an Historical Perspective with panelists Dr. Thomas Franz, Theresa Ruth Howard, Dr. Rebecca Rossen and Dr. John Perpener and a Contemporary Perspective with panelists Rosy Simas, Nia-Amina and Jade Soloman. The first focused on the relationship between Jewish Women Choreographers of the 1930s and the emergence of Black Dance activists in the 1950s onward. The second half of the series focused on conversations about approaching dance as activism, about who is an activist and where, to and from whom permission to perform is granted.

The connection between Black choreographers and Women Jewish choreographers was initially surprising, perhaps because Jews have also been erased from ballet history, with name changes and other tricks of assimilation. (*Jewish Women and Ballet in the United States*, n.d.) I was not aware that they(we) were so prominent in modern dance. I remember watching the Joffrey Ballet dance Agnes DeMille's Rodeo when I was a young teen. The blond ballerina with her straight shiny hair, tiny nose

and long fingers was a foreign object to me. I was sure that I could never be a part of that world and I was partially correct. I have been told to get a nose job, straighten and lighten my hair, and lose weight throughout my career.

The connection between the two marginalized groups made sense once the panelists discussed training and history, particularly The New Dance Group, where both Pearl Primus and Kathryn Dunham trained. The New Dance Group was founded in 1932 (*The New Dance Group: Transforming Individuals and Community*, n.d.) as a dance collective dedicated to advocating for social change through dance activism. Dr. Rossen brought up the fact that Jews were not considered “white” until they had reached class mobility, sometime in the latter half of the century. There was a real connection at that time between the Black and Jewish populations and in dance it seems that there was a real symbiotic relationship. I am not sure that in today’s climate, it holds. I have been in DEI meetings and discussions where Jews are disparaged as part of the white problem. In de-colonization work, Judaism is fraught as well. I have looked at several articles (*A Response to Cummings and Shoikhedbrod: Towards Decolonizing the Jewish Question? | Historical Materialism*, n.d.) (*Jews Are An Indigenous People. Let’s Decolonize Our Identity.*, 2020) (*Decolonizing Jewishness: On Jewish Liberation in the 21st Century | Tikkun*, n.d.) that treat Judaism as both a victim of colonization and as a perpetrator. I wonder where the line between the disparaging “well meaning white woman” and “Jewish activist” is. The plight of the Palestians deepens the fissures. Though many Jews do not identify as Zionists, the distinction is often lost on those outside of the community. In terms of my own internalized anti-semitism wrapped up in self hate, this is a difficult balancing act and one for which I have no answers. I hope that studying this foundational relationship in dance history can continue to be illuminating, both in terms of my personal journey and as a guide for moving dance activism forward

The entire journey at Goddard has been a circular journey back to myself, my own family trauma and the universality of all of these traumas. And when sitting on that unexpected branch of study, contemplating Judaism and how it is essential to my

internal workings, I took flight, off to a different country altogether and embarked upon a study of poetry.

A memory poem

I am standing at the edge of the pool

I am seven.....or eight

Scrawny, with translucent skin

Big green eyes and freckles

I have never been away from home.

I am standing at the edge of the pool

I don't know how to swim

I like unicorns and fairies

I have not yet begun to dream of drowning

I still dream of flying

I am standing at the edge of the pool

I have been asked if I know what to do

I am too shy to answer no

I stare at the bees frolicking on the surface

I wish I could fly away

I am standing at the edge of the pool

Kids are laughing and screaming

Counselors are trying to maintain order

The cacophony of sound floats away

All I hear is the beating of my heart and my caught breath

I am standing at the edge of the pool

I don't know how to swim

The sounds; laughter, screaming, the tension of the impatient adults;

come roaring back

*I am standing at the edge of the pool and I don't know how to swim
I jump in*

I believe that poetry is going to be the most lasting and transformative element of my graduate studies. I am in awe of this art form. I have spent the last two years diving into the work of Mary Oliver, Audre Lorde, Langston Hughes, Rupi Kaur, Maggie Smith, Rainer Maria Rilke, Amanda Lovelace, Rita Dove, Gale Jackson, Donna Kelly, Amanda Gorman, Maggie Nelson, Kae Tempest, Elizabeth Rosner....the list is endless, expanding exponentially by the day. I see mirrored in the names of the poets the very identities that I have been exploring in dance; Jewish, Black, Feminist, Activist. I have experienced pathways into my own identity that I have not been able to access through dance or any other form of artistic expression that I have previously experienced.

Prompt: Curl

*My curls define me
Unruly
Unwilling to fit into
The constraints
Of your order*

*Chestnut copper crimson
Spirals
Frizzy mess
Glorious crown*

*A give away
A talisman of my identity
With my long nose
And bright green
Eyes
Clarification for those who
Want
To
Deliver
An
Antisemitic jab or*

Blow

*Betraying my ancestry
Each tendril a
Rebuke of
Your rules
Your standards
Your suppression*

*Honoring the biblical warrior
Judith
The name of my
Mother*

*My curls are my
Armor
Shield and
Strength
Power*

*My curls define me and
They are starting
To
Disintegrate
Victim to the daily abuses of
Age
Pain
Disappointment
Fear
Starvation*

Thinning the crown

*My very definition
Starting to
Decay*

*The whorls in my sink not always crimson or auburn
But now
More than occasionally
Grey and brittle
Surprising me when*

*I catch
Myself
In the mirror*

*Gather and hide the strands
In a
Phylactery of sorts
Not as reminder
Of prayers
But as
Relic
Of self
(Un) Contained*

Chapter Five:

Now, As We Close One Chapter, The Pen Is Gradually Inking Up, Preparing Itself To Write The Next (Mie Hansson)

Family threads

A vein of self destruction

Runs through my family

Work hard

Play hard

All of the dangerous sports

Skiing

Horseback riding

Cycling

Speed and risk

Drama

My dad

A United States Air Force

Bomb expert

Attempted

To

Disassemble

A bomb

He blew it up instead

Imbedding

A shard of metal

Just under his left eye

I inherited

The shard

The compulsion for danger

*My sister
Maybe
Definitely
Thrives on speed and risk
Needs it to survive
They were partners
My dad and sister
Racing down snowy mountains
I fly alone down city streets*

*Speed is fun
Risk enticing
But
And
Also
Addictive*

*When life is
Hard/incomprehensible
When emotions are
immense/undefinable
When relationships are
volatile/ hurtful /out of control
The allure of a ride, a run is irresistible
Motivation is murky
Fun
Compulsion
Joy
Escape
Oblivion

The risk itself*

*Becomes the game
A quest for a euphoric high*

*When inner pain
Is too great
Take to the skies
Hurtle down
A mountain slope
Speed recklessly
Through city traffic
Catapult yourself
Over obstacles
Astride a
Glorious steed
The wind in your hair
Whipping your face
Loud enough to shut out the voices inside*

*Until you hit the ground
Shattering bones
Turning skin
Scarlet
Indigo
Aubergine
Black*

*Submerging/suppressing all of the voices
The void
The emptiness
The yawning need
Creating a twisted harmony
Of self,*

*Of past, present and future
Where your heart may finally
Slow
Down*

*Feel the years
Bumps and bruises
Feel the
Disappointment
Barbs and slights
Feel it all settle
Then
Disintegrate
As black turns to sage
To gold
To
Light*

After graduating from college at twenty, I continued to dance professionally, initially in San Francisco, then in New York. I moved back to California to dance with Oakland Ballet when I sustained an ankle injury and was told that I needed surgery. I had the surgery, which did not fix the problem, but sidelined me for long enough to believe I should change careers. I took the LSAT while still under the after effects of anesthesia, wrote an essay about how the cutthroat world of ballet had prepared me for law school and applied to schools. It worked and I attended a top law school for a year. During that year I worked at a restraining order clinic, helping mostly women file temporary restraining orders against their domestic partners. In truth, I too was in an abusive relationship, yet any self-awareness of that irony was buried deep. I smiled through the fear and never applied the lessons in survival that I gave to all of those women to my own life. I simply grit my teeth and went on. First stop was a prestigious summer internship as a research clerk for Joseph T. Sneed. He was an old school conservative justice on the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals, appointed by Richard

Nixon. During my tenure in his office, though I loved the research, I realized that the last thing that I wanted to be was a lawyer. When I told him, my voice shaking, of my decision, he smiled. "The world does not need more lawyers my dear. It needs more artists. Go." I took his blessing and attempted to withdraw from school, but the dean disagreed with both the judge and me, instead granting me a year's leave of absence. I booked my first ballet gig two weeks later and the National Tour of *The Phantom of the Opera* a few months after that. I went back to the dean to offer him house seats to the show.

When I was accepted into grad school, I wondered if that year of study, 20 years prior, would transfer into my program. Once again, I wrote an essay, this time to assure those reading it that my basic knowledge of contract and tort law would deeply impact my studies into the inequities of the dance world. Once again, my essay proved persuasive and I entered Goddard as a second semester student.

I was partially correct. My law school training did serve me well, but not in the ways that I thought. Rather than the knowledge that I gained during that year of study, what I pulled from was the process. Law school is still taught using the Socratic method, where the professor stands at the front of the class asking questions, and poor terrified students are called upon to answer them. The hope is that by questioning, with increasing exactitude and detail, the professor will lead one to eventually achieve a true understanding and see the path to justice. As a law student, I sat near the back of classrooms, painfully shy and terrified that I would be called upon. I did not want to speak up. I wanted to bury my head in books, in research and in papers. Speaking up was not my chosen method, until the one day it was.

We were discussing tort law though I do not recall the case. I had been reading ahead in the text and was flustered. A different case, perhaps three or four ahead of where we were in class, was in direct opposition to the one that the professor (the same person who occupied the office of dean) was discussing. My hand, almost unbeknownst to me, shot up. "Dean Martinez, doesn't that case expressly contradict

the finding in case xyz. How does the court reconcile those two findings? How are PEOPLE supposed to understand that?" There was a rustling of pages. A buzzy tension and the angry murmurs of overly conscientious students filled the air, "Where is she? What case is she reading? How far ahead is she?" Law students are very competitive and they were agitated. The dean/professor smiled slightly. "Well, now, that is the question. We follow precedent and we constantly ask questions to ascertain whether or not those rules have shifted."

For society to work, citizens rely upon each other to follow the basic rules. A red light means stop, green go. Pedestrians have the right of way when crossing the street, as does the car to the right at a four way stop. Children are protected. There are laws and rules and traditions that all serve to bring order into a world of chaos.

When the rules are eroded or altered, damage occurs. What is worse is when there are not rules but norms. Because norms are informal and ephemeral, there is a greater risk that what is normalized can be harmful. As norms are gradually shifted, we are unable to identify the change, or see where the harm is occurring. When a driver opens a door onto a cyclist, breaking traffic laws and sending that cyclist flying into the street, the rule broken is clearly identifiable. When a ballet teacher follows years of tradition but lingers with a hand on a child's inner thigh for just a moment longer than is acceptable, over and over, how does that child recognize that a rule has been broken? The damage still occurs in a second, but is concretized with the repetition, both in the individual and within the institution. The damage itself becomes normalized. While it is also true that norms can shift society in a positive direction, even in elemental areas, such as civil rights, there is the danger that if rules and rights are not codified, we are vulnerable to norms shifting and the privileges that we think are rights can be taken away. This is where we, as citizens, as participants, as humans, need to question. The questioning must be constant and focused, so that norms that benefit society are codified into law and norms that create normalcy in abuse are identified and ended.

How do we ask the questions? In the Socratic and Talmudic traditions, both the question and the identity of the questioner is essential. In legal studies and Socratic exchanges, there is a learned or powerful leader asking the questions. They are teaching within an existing system, asking questions that they know the answers to, with a predetermined outcome. Industry leaders who are in power and want to stay there will ask questions with a predetermined outcome as to not affect the power balance. Judaism turns the paradigm upside down. Talmudic scholars are taught from childhood to question the truths put before them, that wisdom lies in the questioner, not the leader. A child who questions a revered Rabbi is not impertinent but lauded, especially for the third, fourth or fifth query. As a teen, I tortured my rabbi with questions about how God can exist in a world with so much darkness. We did not arrive at any satisfactory answers. Indeed, I no longer actively practice any form of Judaism. However, I remember the welcoming space for my angry cross examination. It was the questioning itself that was honored. During my Goddard studies, I rediscovered (or perhaps simply re-acknowledged) the wisdom of the Talmudic tradition. We ask the questions; the people, the participants, the students. And we find the answers not in the teachers or advisors (though we may very much want those answers to come from those people) but in the work.

As a dancer, even one losing the freedom to dance as I once did, I ask questions with my body. In choreography, the answers come with a quickening of breath, an ignition of muscle, or a sudden burst of movement. Inquiries are inspired by the feeling of the movement, as a response to music, to stimuli in the space, to a prompt in the air. If I ask a question and start to move, I find a response there. And then, I move those questions into relationship with other dancers. This creation research¹ is my future. Though I value study and writers and books and science, the greatest truths come into view when we move our bodies in investigation.

¹ Research Creation is a method of study created by a community of artists, researchers and activists based in Canada that is accepted by the scientific community and fully funded. I did not encounter this particular school of study or these researchers until late in my work (at least not consciously) and have reversed the order of the words intentionally. Natalie Loveless has a brilliant manifesto which I will use and follow going forward in my work. (Loveless, 2019)

This journey at Goddard has been a circle back to myself and to my ancestry; a return to my questioning child. How can I make the world better and how can I do it with dance? Unlike the terrified law school student, working to help people while stuck in the same situation as those very people, but unable to acknowledge it. I now have the tools to recognize when my body is in memory or in danger and am able to use that awareness as a tool, questioning and speaking up and out and against those who dismiss it by telling us that such behavior is normal and just part of being a dancer, of being an artist, of being a woman or a person of color or non-binary. I can repeatedly question those norms and with those questions I can effect change. This is what I leave Goddard with; a path forward in creative experimentation, research and activism. A concrete method with which to enact change by constantly challenging and questioning the norms and rules by which the industry is run. By documenting, expressing what needs to shift, and then moving into positions of leadership to enact that change, I will finally use the tools that I first encountered as a child, then again as a law student, and now as a fully formed artist/activist, with a voice and a passion and a quest.

A Thankful Poem (or part 2)

*I stood, once, on the edge of a pool
Swimming was not yet in my skill set
But afraid to ask for help
I jumped*

*Years later I stood on the edge of a famous bridge
I gazed up at the orange cables, hands resting on the guardrail
Measuring the dive
As cars sped by*

*I stood quiet and still
Watching the waves below and the seagulls above
Hair whipped by the wind*

Deafened by the noise inside and out

I stood

It was cold but unusually clear

The suspension towers reaching to the heavens

Clouds dotting the skyline

I stood frozen on the bridge screaming

I think I was screaming

I know I was screaming

I feel that I must have been screaming

A girl, for from this vantage, I was still a girl

Stood alone

On the edge of a bridge

Like she had once stood at the edge of a pool

Silent

Frozen

Unable to ask

For help

I stood alone

Clutching my jacket

Feeling the wind, anticipating the fall

Breathing

I stood

Hands on the rail

On my toes

Ready

*I stood
Then after a very long while
I took one last breath and
Walked
Away.*

Highly Curated Annotated Bibliography, Arranged by Subject

Historic Background, Civil Rights, Social Constructs:

Foner, Dr. Philip S., *W.E.B. DuBois Speaks, Speeches and Addresses 1890-1919* New York: Pathfinder, 1970 (Philip S Foner, n.d.)

A collection of essays by W.E.B. DuBois. 1. Is Race Separation Practicable? (May, 1908) and 2. Race Prejudice (March 5, 1910). Both essays, each over 100 years old, resonate directly with the restructuring of today's society particularly in terms of the "separate but equal" language of race separation and perceived ideas of superiority. The following questions were addressed:

1. Is the old status of acknowledged superiority and inferiority between the white and (B)lack race in America no longer possible?
2. Are the race differences in this case irreconcilable?
3. Is racial separation practicable?

This collection of essays, with foundational questions in regard to race and race relations is essential to keeping my work grounded in reality.

Glaude, Eddie S. Jr. *Begin Again, James Baldwin's America and It's Urgent Lesson For Our Own.* New York: Random House, 2020 (Glaude Jr, 2020)

Written by the James S. McDonnell Distinguished University Professor of African American Studies at Princeton University, this book follows the journey of James Baldwin and his intellectual and emotional confrontation with racism, heartbreak, and redemption. He then follows Baldwin's lead and bears witness to the current era under Trump. It is a mix of history, memoir and biography all connected to social commentary, fueled by an underlying and justified rage.

This book gave me an unexpected pathway into my studies. The way that Glaude travels back and forth between the past and present, connecting racial struggles of the past to the present through the vision of an artist was a perfect launching point for my studies.

Griffith, Karida, *Racism and The Dance World: From Historical Context to the Current Climate (lecture series), Portland, 2020* (Karida Griffith Walker, 2020)

Griffith has put together a fantastic series of videos and workshops specifically focused upon bringing the discussion of race into the dance studio, for students ranging in age from very young to college. Ms. Griffith emphasizes the importance of understanding the backdrop of history when one discusses dance today. According to Griffith, the entirety of the Black experience serves as a literal backdrop for any issue that occurs in dance.

Howard, Theresa Ruth. *Dark Muse: Balanchine and Blackness (lecture) : New York, 2020.* (Symposium | Theresa Ruth Howard "Dark Muse, 2020)

Theresa Ruth Howard spoke at The Museum of Fashion Institute of Technology in March of 2020. She focused on the Shadow History of Ballet, including early plans for NYCB, which included equal numbers of Black and white dancers, but with some horrifying caveats such as masking the Black dancers, the influence of Black Dancer and choreographer Kathryn Dunham on Balanchine and the appropriation of Black Culture, renamed "Americana".

Ms. Howard's multiple lectures and writings are essential to understanding the Shadow Histories of Black dancers and Black creators. Her conversations are brilliant, thought provoking and always lead to numerous other sources.

Ballet Culture: Current Literature:

Angyal, Chloe. *Turning Pointe, How a New Generation of Dancers is Saving Ballet from Itself.* New York. Bold Type Books. 2021 (Angyal, 2021)

Journalist Chloe Angyal's highly anticipated book on ballet was released on May 4. Divided into nine chapters with an introduction and conclusion, Ms. Angyal covers all of the major issues with ballet today including gender phobia and bias, misogyny, however, she misses a major point. She misses the love, the camaraderie, the reason and the drive that we all dance. I agree with many of her talking points. She addresses the body issues of non-gender conforming dancers, the lack of women in leadership and choreographic positions, the neverending racism and cultural appropriation and the physical pain that dancers go through. She covers it all, but I

left the book angry, not just at the ballet world, but at her for everything that she left out. She never danced professionally and I believe that a book like this, that claims to have answers for all that ails the industry needs to be written by someone that LIVES the industry, who understands what drives dancers to stay in this world. After reading her book, even I question why anyone would.

I did find one chapter quite good however. Chapter 8, A New Story (Angyal, pp 199-220) looks to the dearth of female identifying choreographers and non-white choreographers in classical ballet. She discusses the pathway to creating work for ballet companies, the different ways that women and men are treated in their training and how their energies are expended in company life. The truth is the men are mentored more, have more time to create and given the opportunity to fail. (This is of course endemic in most professions, not just ballet.) She also brings up many of the ideas, explored in my first semester packets, of shadow history and the erasure of the contributions of women. (Angyal pp 199-201). She echos other journalists in ridiculing ballet companies that tout their creativity and daring for having a series of all white cis-gendered male choreographers. She quotes Kyle Abraham about tokenism and his efforts to diversify companies' dancer and choreographer rosters. (Angyal pp 205-206). Finally she discusses Orientalism and Phil Chan's work with *Final Bow for Yellowface*. (Angyal pp 216-218). This chapter brings us into the 21st century in a way that the rest of the book does not.

The author claims to have researched the book quite extensively, talking to over one hundred dance professionals. However, it felt more like she had read a lot of other people's work. I understand that is an inflammatory statement, but my impression was clarified when Kathleen McGuire showed surprise (and excitement) at being quoted in the book. (Angyal, pp 102, 108, 109-110). When I commented that I assumed she knew, she said that she had not been interviewed, just her work quoted. Kathleen is one of the leading voices for dancers' mental health in the industry. To not interview her for this book seems almost a dereliction of duty. It led me to wonder how much of the other research was second hand. I had an uncomfortable feeling that she had read my articles on the subject and did not credit them. It could

be that the research simply overlapped, but after talking to Kathleen, and to some other colleagues, off the record, I'm not convinced that I am wrong in that unease.

Larsen, Gavin *Being a Ballerina, The Power and Perfection of a Dancing Life* University Press of Florida, 2021 (Larsen, 2021)

This memoir by Gavin Larsen is a series of essays, written in both first and third person, explores the very human side of being a ballerina. Ms. Larsen danced professionally, mostly as a principal dancer, for eighteen years. She went through the School of American Ballet, got her first job with Pacific Northwest Ballet and then moved through a few companies before landing as a principal dancer with Oregon Ballet Theatre, where she danced for ten years. This book does not add to my research on the traumas experienced by many many dancers. She did not, at least from what she shared in this book, experience any of the darker aspects of the industry. In fact, her career was golden, with a mere six months of freelance work, some of which was spent dancing for Suzanne Farrell's company. Ms. Larsen is the Eurocentric ideal of a ballerina, with waist length dirty blond hair, translucent skin, big eyes, a small head and a long lean body with articulate feet and hands. She never mentions weight, not once. Though the book does not mention trauma or abuse, and is blind to the issues of diversity and equity, it does still serve a valuable function. She elucidates, in really beautiful prose, why so many dancers stay. This is no small thing.

Akinleye, Adesola (editor/curator), *(Re)Claiming Ballet*. Chicago. Intellect, The University of Chicago Press. 2021 (Akinleye, 2021)

This is a serious collection of essays and journal articles, focused on healing the ballet community and written by leading scholars and advocates in ballet. Importantly, as the editor points out, the authors are members of the community writing from within the institutions rather than from without; Black dancers, queer dancers, progressive teachers and educators. The book is divided into four parts: Histories, Knowledges (personal stories and experiences), Resilience and Consciousnesses. Each section resonated with different parts of my research, both scholarly and

choreographically. A selection of annotations on individual essays, in the order in which they appear in the anthology, follows.

Ballet Beyond Boundaries. Brenda Dixon Gottschild (pp 99-15)

Ms. Gottschild, one of the ballet world's greatest scholars, details her journey as a Black ballerina (with an aside detailing her daughter's short journey), dance scholar and dance critic. The elements that most struck me were those of where and what she was able to write on. Though she was a classically trained dancer, she was often regulated to covering modern dance. She is brilliant and the rest of her canon is on my reading list.

Auftanzen statt Aufgeben and the Anti-fascist Ballet School. Elizabeth Ward (pp 116-128)

Ms. Ward details her evolution from ballet dancer to dance activist, starting with the loss of a favorite teacher to AIDS, moving to her first AIDS Walk and ACT UP encounter and finishing with the current global breakdown. She engages with ballet as a force for social movement and as a physical art form, leaving the patriarchal and social constructs of the institutions behind. I was intrigued by her concept of holding classical positions through shaking and exhaustion, showing rather than hiding the effort.

Dancing across historically racist borders. Kehinde Ishangi (pp 129-145)

The essay made a compelling argument for somatic and structural movement education as a force to combat racism and body shaming in ballet. The author focused on musculoskeletal structure in order to address the increased technical demands of ballet and neoclassical ballet. She contends that the recognition that anatomical structures and their functional relationships are things that all human bodies have in common, and the assessment of the physical ability of an individual should not be based upon race or skin color. Science rather than the subjective lens of historical prejudices should lead.

Aesthetics of trauma, development and functionality. Luc Vanier and Elizabeth Johnson (pp 275-292)

The most salient point of this essay was the difference between the approach of the two authors; Mr. Vanier had to unwind his understanding of his privilege as a cisgender white male in the world of ballet training while Ms. Johnson had to undo the trauma of her abusive teachers and training. They then together explore the creation of a teaching method that deconstructs mind/body habits formed by trauma. This includes increased body awareness (in contrast to the out of body experience they claim many dancers experience), a re-patterning of movement pathways, and a framework for integration.

Ballet's binary genders in a rainbow-spectrum world: A call for progressive pedagogies. Melonie B. Murray (pp 240-254)

The essay opens with a literature review establishing that rather than a static art form, ballet has in fact, evolved significantly over the centuries of its existence. The overwhelming problems of abuse, sexual predatory practices, power imbalances, bullying and other forms of trauma are laid out, with increased importance placed on the current era. Added to those problems are the pedagogical practices which train dancers within a strict gender binary. The author then establishes the need for further evolution, not only in performance spaces but in the classroom, particularly in regard to gender and the gender binary. I will return to this essay and author as I continue to refine my research study.

Trauma, Bullying, and Abuse:

(Much of my environmental and situational research was conducted in the news and dance media, and is not annotated here.)

Boylorn, Robin M and Orbe, Mark P. *Critical Autoethnography: Intersecting Cultural Identities in Everyday Life*. Walnut Creek, Left Coast Press. 2014 (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014)

A series of articles and essays that each use autoethnography to explore inter and intra personal relationships, culture and (mis)communication. The first chapter makes a case for autoethnography as a research method which marries “storytelling with cultural and social phenomena (p13), uncovering both personal and cultural phenomena that is best understood through narrative interrogation. The following chapters are laid out in four chapters, with essays that complement each other while highlighting the diverse identities and lived experiences of the authors.

Menakem, Resmaa. *My Grandmother’s Hands. Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies*. Las Vegas. Central Recovery Press, 2017 (Menakem, 2017)

This book details the trauma of systemic racism on bodies: Black bodies, white bodies and police bodies, Dr. Menakem weaves together research, history, and action to address the intergenerational trauma of white supremacy on everyone. He gives body centric exercises after each chapter, as well as a clear wrap up. It is a combination of memoir, academic tome and practical guidebook to racial healing.

The exercises and “rememberings” at the end of each chapter proved a brilliant guide to working with trauma in my second piece this semester. The somatic memory meditations led me and my dancers to much deeper and more revelatory experiences in each rehearsal for my second piece.

Van De Kolk, Bessel *The Body Keeps The Score, Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* Penguin Books, 2015 (M.D, 2015)

This book, by Dr. Bessel van der Kolk, is probably the bible of trauma research. When applied to dancers, it is revolutionary. The book is divided into five parts: The Rediscovery of Trauma, This Is Your Brain on Trauma, The Minds of Children, The Imprint of Trauma and Paths to Recovery. In addition to the main text, there is a

companion workbook to aid in the process of understanding and recovering from trauma. The book posits that trauma is incredibly common, both held from childhood and experienced as an adult. Dr. van der Kolk began his research focused on veterans. They process trauma and hold it in similar ways, unable to relate to those who have not been exposed to the same experiences. They don't feel real without it. The experiences of dancers, starting at young ages, and then continuing throughout young adulthood, results in a similar hold on the body. The power imbalance, the assumption that acts of horror are the norm, and the resulting PTSD of the dance world is somewhat analogous to that of the military. (though of course the actual trauma itself is different.) Dr. van der Kolk's book is revolutionary in that it treats all of these traumas in a similar fashion, because the body itself, not the mind, holds the damage. This is an incredibly deep and complex book, but I took two main ideas away from it. Trauma can be healed. The final third of the book details paths to recovery. The second is that recovery is not a solo process. We need to recover in relationship with others.

Ernest T. Stringer, *Action Research*. Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications, 2007
(Stringer, 2007)

This book provides a great overview of community-based action research. The book moves through nine chapters, starting with the nature of research in general, then providing an overview of action research. The brilliance of action research is that it focuses on specific situations and localized solutions, which translates really well to the dance world. It is grounded in a qualitative research paradigm whose purpose is to gain greater clarity and understanding of a question, problem, or issue.

Investigations seek to clarify an issue and to reveal the way participants themselves describe their actual experience of the issue. In other words; how things happen and how it affects them. He also emphasizes the role of researcher as catalyst rather than observer or authoritarian. It is empowering for all parties involved. Finally, he invites you to ask questions about what you don't know about the given situation, about issues that are not readily apparent. He frames research as a form of community building rather than neutral outside observation.

Stringer then moves into theoretical foundations of societal issues, methods of both gathering and processing data and a process for data analysis. He outlines a very basic research routine: look, think, act. This is followed by procedures to formulate solutions to problems, both simple and complex, that community based research encounters. These sections include extensive clarifications on the ethics involved in such personal research processes. (All of which I have included in my own study.) He concludes with ways of formulating formal reports and a final reflection upon the entire process. The book is very user friendly and includes reflection and practice sections at the end of each chapter.

Academic Journal Articles:

Does Bystander Behavior Make a Difference? How Passive and Active Bystanders in the Group Moderate the Effects of Bullying Exposure. Ng,Kara. Niven,Karen. and Notelaers, Guy (2021) (Ng et al., 2021)

This quantitative study aims to investigate how bystander behaviors, within the context of the work group, can shape the effects of bullying experiences on targets' well-being outcomes, focusing on somatic outcomes and work engagement. The difference between active constructive bystanders and passive bystanders is substantial. The active constructive bystanders served as an additional resource for those being bullied, providing additional energy for targets to deal with the abuse. The number of passive bystanders in a group exacerbated the negative relationship between exposure to bullying behaviors and targets' work engagement, mirroring qualitative studies. The greater the number of passive bystanders, the worse the effects of the bullying on the targets.

A Dance with Many Secrets: The Experience of Emotional Harm from the Perspective of Past Professional Female Ballet Dancers in Canada

(Moola & Krahn, 2017)

This phenomenological study examined the power structure and effects of it upon female professional ballet dancers in Canada. Twenty past dancers from across the country participated in this study by taking part in semi-structured interviews, with

the data coded and then the themes were refined. The literature review identified a gap in the study of abuse in classical ballet, with the *Child Protection in Ballet: Experiences and Views of Teachers, Administrators, and Ballet Students* (Papaefstathiou et al., 2013) study as the first. Though welfare codes (of conduct) have been developed, the views of the dancers in regard to emotional abuse are absent from the literature. Several themes emerged: Emotional abuse, sexual abuse, and normalization of inappropriate and abusive situations, including injury. The study is a gateway to additional research.

Child Protection in Ballet: Experiences and Views of Teachers, Administrators, and Ballet Students (Papaefstathiou et al., 2013)

An exploratory study looking to identify 1) Key elements of good practice for child protection in ballet and 2) What discourses are adopted by ballet stakeholders when discussing their experiences. The literature review highlights the need for child protection in sport and dance, details safeguards already in place, and identifies issues specific to ballet such as injury prevalence, the culture of pain, and the power imbalance in the teacher-student relationship. A case study research design was chosen, in order to consider each individual's experience. A single organization was studied. Participation was voluntary and only six students, five dancers and two administrators participated. Three methods were used: self report semi-structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and policy documents. A reflective journal of the process was also kept. Strict ethical procedures were in place. Content analysis was applied to the first question and discourse to the second question. The study highlighted good CP practice in the school but also highlighted several issues requiring further research: rationalizing and normalizing of negative experiences, the limitations of the study due to small sample size, the culture of pain, and the need for overall improvement in ballet.

Observing Bullying at School: The Mental Health Implications of Witness Status. Rivers, Ian. Poteat, V. Paul. Noret, Nathalie. Ashurst, Nigel (2009) (Rivers et al.)

A large-scale study of 2,002 students, aged 12-16 attending 14 schools in the UK investigated the mental health implications of witnessing peer violence. After an

extensive literature review detailing the different ways that bystanders have been characterized in earlier studies (assistants, reinforcers, outsiders, and defenders) the authors identify a lack of uniformity in the research as applied to childhood exposure to violence. Studies do show an increased vulnerability to adverse emotional outcomes when witnesses to domestic violence, the victimization of sexual minority youth. There is also literature supporting the existence of cognitive dissonance among observers of bullying behavior when the observer does not act, though they think they should. This study aimed to identify and confirm that both bullying and the witnessing of bullying would be significantly associated with higher levels of mental health risk and substance abuse; among witnesses who had not been victims or perpetrators and those who had. The findings supported these initial hypotheses. Several explanations were given; Some individuals may be reliving earlier experiences of victimization. Alternatively, some may fear for their own future victimization. There may also be situations where witnesses want to intervene, but do not, and this causes cognitive dissonance. There are long term implications for educators, school administrators and psychologists, with a need for greater attention to be paid to witnesses, which could also help build positive behavioral strategies to counter bullying, foster empathy or build on strengths, so that these witnesses can take on roles of defender rather than outsider, all of which would decrease the likelihood of psychological distress.

Recollections of Bullying at School and Their Long-Term Implications for Lesbians, Gay Men, and Bisexuals. Rivers, Ian. (2004) (Rivers 2004)

This study explores the relationship between bullying at school, adult mental health issues and posttraumatic stress among UK residents who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual. The salient finding is that symptoms usually associated with posttraumatic stress are a feature of the adult lives of those who experienced bullying as a result of their actual or perceived sexual orientation. An interesting note in the study: those who reported symptoms of posttraumatic stress also reported being much more accepting of their homosexuality or bisexuality. The study suggests that the negative

experiences that they had with bullying may have moved them to come to terms with their sexuality earlier. However, those who were bullied more had higher numbers of participants who were still troubled by recollections of bullying, by self-harm, self medication and running away from home. The study concludes that posttraumatic stress is a feature of the adult lives of gay, lesbian and bisexual victims of bullying. Over 25% continue to experience psychological distress when recalling school days, one in ten has flashbacks and the use of drugs and alcohol affect one in twenty.

Podcasts:

Dance Better The One Where I Get The Results, Apple Podcasts. 2022 with Kathleen McGuire of Minding the Gap. (Dance; Better., n.d.)

Minding the Gap is one of the leading advocacy organizations focused on dancers' mental health in the world. Founder Kathleen Gaines is a writer, speaker, facilitator, industry leader and former dancer. (and friend). McGuire just completed an incredibly dense survey of the dancers at Point Park University. She shared many of the results on the Nov. 4 Dance Better podcast, hosted by former dancer and current ballet coach Sarah Schiewer. The findings centered around mental health, not abuse per se, but the results could be added to the literature studying whether or not the vulnerabilities that dancers exhibit in their mental health, particularly in terms of emotional resilience, set them up to be more vulnerable to abuse. There were also practical steps to take within dance programs right now, some of which I am already implementing. Finally, it is a great example of action research; clarification and illumination of each issue which comes directly from the participants' lived experiences.

Dance Better . The One on Mental Health and Injuries. Apple Podcasts. 2022 with Dr. Paula Thomson. (Dance; Better., n.d.)

This was a very dense discussion on the relationship between trauma and injury that is not directly related to the original trauma. Dr. Thomson discussed numerous studies; both general population studies and her own work which focuses on

performing artists, particularly dancers, but also singers, actors, and choreographers. There was a lot of information but there were a few standout ideas that struck me as important to my research. (And some additional ideas to take into my teaching) First was a connection between childhood trauma and adversity and an inability to regulate physically (particularly metabolically) and two, the connection between early trauma and the ability to heal from injuries. The language was complicated and the findings multi-layered, but what I was left with confirmed that we cannot separate what happens in childhood from our bodies as older adolescents and adults. My question remains; Is that internal damage visible to an outside eye, exposing vulnerabilities that could possibly be exploited?

NB: Dr. Thomson is a personal and professional mentor.

MOVERS SHAKERS MAKERS - Ballet for the 21st Century - Ballet and Mental Health - The Survey Pt II. London. 2021 (MAKERS & MAKERS, n.d.)

Hosted by Emma Lister and Zoë Ashe-Brown. The hosts of this British based podcast created a survey of pre-professional and professional dancers' experiences with abuse in both their training and subsequent professional careers. They posted a survey and then a two episode follow-up to that survey. The first episode focused on the dancers' responses and the second was an interview with a psychologist and former dancer, Terry Hyde. I found the first episode quite compelling. (I found the second one rather mundane and general actually, as if the guest did not really do his research, which bore out in the subsequent conversation that I had with Emma.) It was one of the first conversations that I have found about ballet that specifically referred to those who witness trauma and the long lasting effects on that witness.

Follow up conversation with Emma Lister on Monday, Jan. 11, 2021: Though much of the conversation was, to be honest, gossipy and off the record, two major themes emerged that I will be following up on in my work.

1. There seems to be an assumption that bullying and abuse is mainly a part of training and dissipates as dancers advance. Though I found my treatment was much worse as a professional dancer, I thought that was the exception rather than the norm. Lister's survey, extensive though not scientific, seems to bear

this out. Experiences with bullying, body shaming, and sexual abuse INCREASE in the professional world rather than decrease.

2. I had a breakthrough on the artistic side as well. While describing the scope of my work to Emma, I told her about my proposed final project: a ballet about the triad of bully, victim and witness and that the ballet would be told from the point of view of the witness. Emma said that she had always seen the swans in Swan Lake as a witness and I almost simultaneously said the same about the wilis in Giselle. The corps de ballet mirrors the classroom and rehearsal studio. This idea is sticking with me. I love it and can't stop thinking about ways to incorporate it into a contemporary ballet. I feel it may be an entry into the structure of the piece. This is of course not a new structure. The Greek Chorus in opera and theater serves the same function, but I had not previously thought of using this ancient structure in a new socially relevant work.

Dance Activism:

Steps Beyond Foundation ("Artists Talk · Activism Through Dance," n.d.)

Artists Talk: Activism Through Dance, Part 1: A Historical Perspective

I watched the first part of a two part series (the next one goes live on March 21, 2021) and later discussed it with the Performance Creation Group Discussion Pod.

Featuring an amazing panel of dance historians and creators; Dr. Thomas Franz, Theresa Ruth Howard, Dr. Rebecca Rossen and Dr. John Perpener and moderated by Donald Byrd, the discussion focused on the relationship between Black Choreographers and Female Jewish Choreographers, particularly in the era covering 1940-1970. The connection between Black choreographers and Women Jewish choreographers was initially surprising but made sense once the panelists discussed training and history, particularly The New Dance Group, where both Pearl Primus and Kathryn Dunham trained. The New Dance Group was founded in 1932 (The New Dance Group: Transforming Individuals and Community, n.d.) as a dance collective dedicated to advocating for social change through dance activism. Dr. Rossen brought up the fact that Jews were not considered "white" until they had reached

class mobility, sometime in the latter half of the century. There was a real connection at that time between the Black and Jewish populations and in dance it seems that there was a real symbiotic relationship. The main question raised: Does a work have to be overtly political to be considered activism or can the simple act of a specific person performing in a specific place be in and of itself political.

Artists Talk, Activism Through Dance Part 2: A Contemporary Perspective

("Artists Talk · Activism Through Dance," n.d.)

The second part of this Step Foundation Dance Activism series was released on March 21. Moderator Donald Byrd returned with three female identifying BIPOC choreographers; Rosy Simas (Rosy Simas, n.d.), Nia-Amina (99+) Nia-Amina Minor | LinkedIn, n.d.) and Jade Soloman (Jade Solomon, n.d.). The panel was focused much more on current work where the body itself as activist and the place where permission to create work and change exists. There was focus on community, intergenerational work, and some talk of giving consent to be seen in certain ways; as sexualized, as a representative of a community, as an activist.

Mohr, Hope. *Shifting Cultural Power; Case Studies and Questions in Performance*. Akron. The University of Akron Press. 2021 (Mohr, 2021)

Hope Mohr is a dancer, choreographer and lawyer who now lives and works in the San Francisco Bay Area, after a successful New York dance career, where she worked with many postmodern choreographers, all of whom were both white and in the Judson Dance Theatre Lineage. This book, a compilation of case studies, performance archive, prompts and exercises and questions for the future, looks to a deeply changed dance community, one in which the white leader is decentralized in the work. There is a deeply personal and confessional approach to the work, with failures as painstakingly explored as successes. The author and reader are both left with actionable insights to decolonize, deconstruct and redistribute creative power in the dance community.

Choreography:

Buckwalter, Melinda. *Composing While Dancing, An Improviser's Companion*. The University of Wisconsin Press, (2010) (Buckwalter, 2010)

Melinda Buckwalter has made a primer of sorts, a dense collection of experiences, instructions and bits of a modern dance history into a guide for working with improvisational dance as a form of performance art. The book is divided into nine chapters which deal respectively with; 1) Source material, 2) Form, 3) Time, 4) Space and Obstacles 5) The Duality of How Dance is Perceived, Both Internally and Externally 6) Music, 7) The Eyes and Focus, 8) Partnering and 9) The Magical Object. The book was extremely helpful in organizing the concepts of improvisation and choreography that I was already familiar with and embracing and gave me a stamp of validation, sorely needed in this process.

Move, Social and Cultural Documentary Series, Netflix: 2020

This documentary series profiles choreographers around the world, highlighting their diverse backgrounds, mentors, hardships and their artistic philosophies. I watched episodes 1, 2, and 5 on Jon Boogz and Lil Buck, Ohad Naharin and Akram Khan respectively. I focused on the mind and body connection that the latter two choreographers cultivate and how that affects their aesthetic, messaging and personal practice.

Crystal Pite rehearses her new piece with The Royal Ballet, The Royal Opera House. London. 2017 (Royal Opera House, 2017)

Crystal Pite: I watched many many interviews, documentaries and samples of Ms. Pite's work. Though all of her work is highly influential and inspirational to me, the most specific to this portfolio is related to her 2017 ballet, Flight Pattern. This hour and a half film documents commences with a discussion between choreographer Crystal Pite and Emma Southworth, Studio Producer for the Royal Ballet. It then follows Ms. Pite in rehearsal as she works with the dancers of the company to create this seminal work, inspired by the Syrian Refugee Crisis.

Poetry and Writing Texts:

Bugeja, Michael J. *The Art and Craft of Poetry*. *Writer's Digest Books*. Cincinnati. 1994 (Bugeja, 1994)

A large tome broken into three main sections: Journals and Genres, Tools of the Trade and Formats and Forms. This is an academic text which is augmented with lessons, poetry (very heavily weighted with white male poets) and exercises, as well as samples of the author's work, both successful and not as successful. It was a good introduction to the art form.

Oliver, Mary. *A Poetry Handbook*. *A Harvest Original*, Harcourt Intl. New York. 1994 (Oliver, 1994)

A spare guidebook to poetry writing, this book by the Pulitzer and National Book Award winning poet is like walking through poetry with your favorite mentor or professor, demanding and precise, yet also focused on seeing both the bigger picture and the most minute detail. She illustrates in beautiful, spare prose why the form and the tradition matter when creating poetry and how one's personal choices are stronger coming from a place of knowledge of craft.

Rilke, Rainer Maria. *Letters to a Young Poet*. *Norton Paperback*. London. 1934, reissue 1993 (Rilke, 1934)

From 1903 -1908 Rilke wrote a series of remarkable responses to a young male poet on surviving life as a sensitive observer in the reality of a harsh and unkind world. The series of letters serve as a guide to an artistic life. Rilke writes beautiful personal perspectives on love, loss and loneliness and also gives insight into his own writing process. This book is a gift to the reader, full of unexpected phrases and deep truths.

Smith, Maggie. *Keep Moving, Notes on Loss, Creativity and Change*. *One Signal Publishers, Simon and Schuster*. New York. 2020 (Smith, 2020)

This is an odd book, a combination of short essays and inspirational statements that the author created for herself each day. The inspirational statements began as a way

to motivate her to get out of bed, as a set of daily goals in the year after her nineteen year marriage dissolved and each one ended “Keep Moving.” What is next? Keep. Moving. The essays were written later, after she had worked through the initial grief and loss. There is a theme that runs through them of fire, which burns but at the same time, renews. She speaks of her children, her miscarriages, her depression, their loss, fears, and shame. The writing is beautiful, if the subject is well trod. When thinking of how to apply this to my own work, I come back to the honesty on the page; most feelings are universal. We all suffer loss, feel insecure or scared, or shamed. Cruelty is endemic in our society and no one gets out without bearing its scars. It is how we wear those scars that matters; do we let the wall of fire stop us or do we stand, like the giant pine trees and redwood forests and let the fire feed our souls, rising again from the ashes to keep moving forward.

Yuknavitch, Lidia. *Letter to My Rage; An Evolution*. Scribd. 2021 (Yuknavich, n.d.)

This short online book consists of an astonishing series of personal letters to the author’s internal rage that move through her life and traumas. The acceptance of anger in it is liberating and inspiring. We (especially those who identify as female) are so conditioned to hide and soften our rage when the force of it, appropriately aimed, is truly unstoppable. The writing in this collection is brilliant, something between poetry and prose, with an immensely appealing musicality and force.

Poetry Research and Exploration:

McNamara, Brooke. *Bury the Seed, Poems for Releasing More Life Into You*. Boulder: Performance Integral, 2020

McNamara, Brooke. *Feed Your Vow, Poems for Falling into Fullness*. Boulder: Performance Integral, 2015

I read these poetry anthologies and took part in the Nine Poems to Enliven Your Days Program over email. Brooke’s poetry is created to support introspection and is

very body centric. I have used it as a sort of a jumping off point for my own poetry exploration.

Smith, Maggie. *Bluets*. Wave Books. Seattle and New York. 2009 (Nelson, 2009)

A modern book of poetry, centered on the color blue as metaphor for multiple facets of life. The author explores love, loss, depression and humankind's place in the larger ecosphere. The book is composed of 230 prose paragraphs as if the person who wrote it had passed on, perhaps just from a period in her life.

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