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Experiences of Contemporary Dance Choreographers of Color in the Pacific Northwest

Sue Ann Huang

A dissertation in practice proposal submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctorate of Education
in Educational Leadership

University of Washington Tacoma

2021

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Abstract

In the context of racism in the U.S., dancers and choreographers of color are underrepresented in contemporary dance. Critical race theory (CRT) was utilized as the framework to understand the literature, frame interview questions, and interpret the findings. A review of the literature reviews many ways dance institutions and organizations perpetuate racism. Racism is reinforced in dance education, through messages to dancers that they do not belong, and necessitating additional emotional labor to navigate systems. Dance artists of color resist racism by choosing to have a presence in contemporary dance. This study explored the experiences of 13 choreographers of color in the Pacific Northwest (PNW) asking the research question: what are the intersections of dance, identity, and resistance among contemporary dance choreographers of color in the PNW? The participants shared their experiences with racism and resisting through interviews. The findings focused on four themes and a number of subthemes that capture the ways participants experienced racism in the PNW contemporary dance community and chose to resist. The four themes from the research are: ways racism caused participants to experience isolation, ways racism caused participants to experience tokenism, ways participants demonstrated their internal commitment to choreograph, and ways participants are changing the narrative of racism in contemporary dance. Applying a CRT lens to the findings illuminates the permanence of racism, Whiteness as a property right, interest convergence, and the power of counterstories. Implications include reflection on the findings and impacts for individuals and organizations committed to reducing racism for artists of color as well as encouraging joy and healing with artists of color.

Keywords: dance, contemporary dance, dancers of color, choreographers of color, artists of color, racism, isolation, tokenism, counterstories, critical race theory, activism

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Experiences of Contemporary Dance Choreographers of Color in the Pacific Northwest**Introduction**

As a 5-foot-tall woman, I am almost always the shortest person in the dance studio or on stage.

I am regularly asked to travel bigger, and to take up more space.

For a long time, I was not comfortable taking up space.

I was not comfortable using my voice to challenge systems of inequality.

The hegemony made me doubt what I was observing and feeling.

I am not afraid anymore to take up space and use my voice.

I try to be vulnerable as a dancer and as an educator.

I try to be fully present.

When I am dancing. When I am working. When I am just being.

Whether I am using my body or my voice or my words, I will not be silent.

I will be seen.

And I will be heard.

I will take space.

And I will share that space with others whose voices are not being heard.

I do not want to dance like no one is watching.

I want to dance like the world is watching.

And I want to make it count.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, I have been lucky to be able to work from home, maintain employment, and to be low-risk for significant health impacts should I have contacted

the virus. I live in Seattle, WA, where the first cases of COVID-19 in the United States appeared. Washington is a state with a governor that has responded to prioritize health and safety; thus, I have lived in various forms of quarantine and shutdown since March 2020. Along with missing in-person interactions with family, friends, and colleagues, I have missed dancing and performing. I am lucky to belong to a dance community in Seattle that prioritizes health and safety and also recognizes that dancers experience art and movement differently in the studio and on the stage, compared to over video classes streamed at their homes. Starting in September 2020, the studio I dance at, eXit SPACE School of Dance, has followed the county guidelines to re-open the studio and allow dancers to return safely to the studio. I do not anticipate feeling fully whole again until I can see my loved ones in-person; however, being able to dance in the studio again has filled a hole in me that I have been missing during the pandemic.

I have regularly been taking one class a week, with Marlo Martin, the owner and founder of the studio. In her classes, there is always a full warm-up to make sure we are centered within our bodies, and then we end class with a longer movement combination. In November 2020, after the election, the combination we did before a Thanksgiving – January studio closure, was to “A Beautiful Noise,” performed by Alicia Keys and Brandi Carlile (Keys et al., 2020). The song was created to inspire people to vote in the election and was released on October 29, 2020. The dance combination Martin choreographed was to the following lyrics in the song:

I have a voice

And I let it speak for the ones

Who aren't yet really free

It's killing me

No one's saying what we need to hear

I will not let silence win
When I see all the pain our people are in
There's no other choice
'Cause I have a voice
It is loud, it is clear

Martin's choreography is always embodied, grounded, wide-sweeping, spiraling, going in and out of the floor, and both connected to but not always dependent on the music. Dancing to these lyrics and with Martin's movement, I feel powerful, expressive, seen, and reminded that my body and movement is another way that my voice can be heard. When I am dancing, I take up space. I move across the studio or the stage. Movement makes me feel and experience life in a different way than at other times in my life. When I am dancing, I am still fully me, but I am a slightly different me. I have the opportunity to tell a different story and present myself in a different way.

Stories shape how we understand the world and ourselves. Performing arts are an essential way we tell stories. Dance has the power to tell stories and communicate with bodies and movement that transcends words. Amin (2016), a dance scholar focused on African diaspora dance performance and pedagogy, describes:

Dance is both a performing art and a humanities discipline. As a primal and exclusive aspect of the humane experience pre-dating both spoken and written language, dance functions in part as an embodied text by which heritage and tradition can be preserved, communicated and interpreted. Further, dance is a means by which "the current conditions of national life" are explored and expressed. (p. 17)

Dance is art as well as an expression of culture and history (Smith, 2008). Dance created by a diverse range of storytellers is critical to have a full range of narratives and perspectives of heritage and tradition. Dancers and choreographers of color are underrepresented and undervalued in the United States. Underrepresentation has many implications, including a lack of role modeling for youth of color, a perpetuation of what dance is normalized and valued, and a lack of space for dancers and choreographers to tell their stories.

In this dissertation in practice I provide a brief context for the racial climate in concert and contemporary dance (which I will define in the literature review) at a national level in the United States and specifically in Seattle, my positionality, my specific research question, and a discussion of critical race theory (CRT) as the project framework. I then present the relevant literature exploring contemporary dance history, racism in dance education, racist messages artists of color receive, how dance is political for artists of color, and how choreographers resist through counterstories. In the methods section I describe the research design, data collection strategy, data analysis strategy, and provide profiles of participants involved in the project. I then go over the findings from my research, highlighting participants experiences with racism through isolation and tokenism, their internal commitment to their art, and the ways they resist dominant narratives. Finally, in the discussion, I utilize CRT to interpret the findings and connect them back to the literature. I present implications for a range of audiences and future opportunities for research. I conclude with my final reflections on the experience of the research.

Statement of Problem

Within the context of racism in the United States, dancers and choreographers of color are underrepresented in contemporary dance. Underrepresentation has many implications, including a lack of role modeling for youth of color, a perpetuation of what dance is normalized

and valued, and a lack of space for dancers and choreographers to tell their stories. Some of the reasons for this underrepresentation include the perpetuation of Whiteness in contemporary dance through the prioritization of White¹ dancers and bodies as well as the prioritization of dance forms associated with Whiteness (Barr & Oliver, 2016; Davis, 2018; Davis & Phillips-Fein, 2018; Kerr-Berry, 2018). While White supremacy is maintained throughout the U.S. and within the contemporary dance world, dancers and choreographers of color will continue to be underrepresented and undervalued. Borrowing from film studies, all film and art has a desired message and there are no mistakes (Johnson & Blanchard, 2008). White choreographers and producers of dance choose to not include artists of color and that is intentional to maintain White supremacy.

When I think about racism within contemporary dance, I think about the silencing, invisibility, and hypervisibility of people of color.² I have felt invisible in dance spaces and wondered whether my racial identity has impacted casting or if choreographers see me in their movement. I have talked with friends who are choreographers of color, and they have shared stories about racism in college dance programs, applying for grants, and trying to present work. I think about choreographers of color internalize White supremacy and the additional emotional labor required to recognize, unpack, dismantle, and then disrupt the dominant narratives around who should be a dancer, who should be a choreographer, whose stories should be told, and how those stories should be told.

I co-created the Tint Dance Festival to provide a space that intentionally centered dancers and choreographers of color. The festival is not perfect, and we certainly have work to do to

¹ For the purposes of this dissertation, I capitalize Black and White to designate race rather than color (APA, 2020).

² For the purposes of this dissertation, I use people of color (POC) and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) interchangeably.

reflect on the ways we are complicit in White supremacy. However, I have heard anecdotally from some of the dancers and choreographers of color that Tint was a unique space for them to be with other dancers of color in a way they had not previously had or at least rarely had in their dance experiences. In a world centered in Whiteness, grantors and dance educators will often not believe the lived experiences of people of color without explicit data, with White definitions of what is considered data. I believe the lived experiences and stories of my friends and dancers and choreographers of color, and I recognize that we are in a society where White artists and grantors do not. In addition to my work with the Tint Dance Festival, I hope that my research will continue to create the data that will help choreographers of color navigate the inherently racist dance world.

Representation of dancers and choreographers of color in contemporary dance is crucial for role modeling to young dancers the possibilities of a dance career. It is hard for young dancers to picture a career or even pursuing dance as a hobby without role models (Geller, 2016; Macdonald, 2019b). Dance Theatre of Harlem created a YouTube video in 2017 (Dance Theatre Harlem, 2017) to advertise upcoming season and demonstrated the importance of representation in inspiring young dancers (Blackwelder, 2017). As well-known, Seattle-based choreographers, Byrd and Tirrell, have demonstrated in their respective works, dance has the power to shift the norms from continuing to perpetuate Whiteness in who dances and who gets to tell stories. With the hoped-for increase in the representation of choreographers of color, there will be more opportunities to center the stories of people of color through movement. For the choreographers of color who are creating movement in the Pacific Northwest (PNW), what is their experience as they navigate racism as people of color? I hope the results of this study can deepen the understanding of the experiences of choreographers of color in the PNW for the larger

contemporary dance community. There is energy around supporting and celebrating dancers and choreographers of color right now in the PNW dance community. I hope that I can build upon this by opening space for choreographers of color in the PNW to share their stories.

Underrepresentation of artists of color impacts individuals and the larger dance community (Barr & Oliver, 2016; Davis, 2018; Davis & Phillips-Fein, 2018; Kerr-Berry, 2018; King, 2020). Additionally, with the added contexts of the dual pandemics – COVID-19, the resulting economic impacts, and racism – there is added urgency to do this research. People of color are disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic (CDC, 2021; Kurtzleben, 2020; Marshall, 2020; Maxwell & Solomon, 2020; Sáenz & Sparks, 2020). With this study, I hope to better understand the experiences of choreographers of color and to amplify their stories. The health needs for people to stay at home to prevent the spread of the virus and the economic impacts of closing businesses have had a significant impact on arts organizations, including the dance world (Americans for the Arts, 2020; ArtsFund, 2020; Dance/NYC, 2020). Most dance and choreography happen in-person, through classes, rehearsals, and performances. While some have moved to virtual modalities and some outdoor, socially distant ones occasionally, Americans for the Arts (2020) reports a \$9.1 billion impact nationally and a ~\$16.7 million impact within King County. Arts Fund, a non-profit supporting arts organization in King and Pierce Counties, published a report (2020) based on a survey in April 2020 of arts, cultural, and scientific nonprofits in the Central Puget Sound area reporting that close to 5000 employees had been furloughed or laid off, almost 100% of organizations had to cancel programs due to COVID-19 and that about 75% of organizations had canceled fundraisers.

Larger, established dance organizations, like American Ballet Theater (ABT) are more likely to have relief funds or established donors who will try to financially support the companies

and dancers (Harss, 2020). In some of these companies, if dancers are salaried, they are not guaranteed indefinitely when dance organizations are barely taking in income, if at all. These larger, established dance organizations, are often predominantly White. While all dance artists are being impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, dancers and choreographers of color are likely disproportionately impacted. Dance/NYC (2020) launched a survey to better understand the impact of coronavirus on dance workers and companies, recognizing that people of color and disabled artists are likely to be impacted more significantly. The survey results are focused on dance in New York, a significantly more racially diverse area than the PNW; however, some of the trends from the data likely carry over to the PNW. From results in May 2020 (Dance/NYC 2020), of the 1166 responses from individual people, 63% reported cash flow issues for basic needs, 77% indicated needing funds for housing, and 75% indicated needing funds for food and groceries. The survey results indicated the disproportionately greater need for people of color.

The underrepresentation of artists of color within contemporary dance compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic impacts choreographers of color. Will choreographers of color be able to continue their dance work during and after the virus, or will the economic impacts and racism result in some of these choreographers needing to pause their dance work to survive?

Additionally, the ongoing pandemic of racism in the U.S. increases the need to decenter Whiteness and find opportunity to center people of color and provide spaces of joy and healing. This research was an opportunity to center the stories of choreographers of color in the PNW who are striving to resist racism by the act of creating dance and prioritizing joy and healing. By sharing their stories and experiences with racism, I hope the choreographers will find strength and power in their collective voices and will also find it healing to unpack some of the racism they have experienced.

Study Context

Within the context of racism in the U.S., dancers and choreographers of color are underrepresented in contemporary dance. Based on population estimates last completed in July 2019 in the United States, 60.1% of the population identifies as White, with 39.9% identifying as people of color³ – one or multiple races (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Specifically for Seattle, Washington, a city touted for its progressive views and politics (Balk, 2020; RAE, 2017; Green, 2018), the same population estimates completed in July 2019 note that 63.8% of the population in Seattle identify as White and 36.2% identifying as people of color (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). While Seattle has a slightly lower percentage of people of color compared to the U.S., it is more racially homogenous (primarily White) compared to other cities noted for their progressive views (Balk, 2015). For Portland, Oregon, another supposedly progressive city in the PNW (RAE, 2017), 70.6% of the population identifies as White and 29.4% identify as people of color (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). A few examples of large cities with significantly higher percentages of people of color are: Los Angeles is 71.5% people of color, Chicago is 67.2% people of color, San Francisco is 59.4% people of color, and New York City is 67.9% people of color (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). In the PNW, both Seattle and Portland have a slightly smaller population of people of color than the national average, and a significantly smaller population compared to other progressive cities.

Both on the national level and in the PNW, dancers and choreographers of color are underrepresented. Data USA, a joint venture between Deloitte and Datawheel, which aggregates

³ For the purposes of this dissertation, I am not capitalizing people of color (APA, 2020). I include Black/African American (which I use interchangeably unless other specifying a different national origin), Latinx (used to be more gender inclusive rather than utilizing language that only acknowledge a gender binary (APA, 2020)), Indigenous, Asian American, Pacific Islander, and multiracial/multiethnic in my definition of people of color.

multiple government sources, is helpful to bring numbers to this issue. According to data pulled from the U.S. Census Bureau through the American Community Survey (ACS) in 2018, 79.1% of dancers and choreographers⁴ in the U.S. identify as White. Among the racial categories listed in this data, 6.2% identify as Black, 8.7% identify as multiracial, 2.9% identify as Asian, and 3.1% did not identify with one of the listed options. According to the dataset, the percentage of dancers and choreographers who identify as Indigenous or Pacific Islander is too low to be reported. With the complexity of how racial categories are determined in the census, there is not disaggregated data for Latinx dancers and choreographers. Although the data are dependent on participation in the ACS, it is likely that even with some variance in percentages, the majority of people choosing to make dance their primary work are White.

In addition to these data that demonstrate the underrepresentation of dancers and choreographers of color in the U.S., several news articles also indicate that there are very few dancers of color both nationally and in the PNW and that it is still common for companies to have their first dancer of color or first dancer of color in a prominent or important role. In June 2015, Misty Copeland became the first Black female principal dancer for the American Ballet Theatre (ABT) (Cooper, 2015) in the company's 75 years of existence. ABT is one of the most prestigious ballet companies in the United States; finally having a Black female principal dancer in ABC was significant. Although New York City Ballet had its first Black principal dancer, Arthur Mitchell, in 1955, seven years after its founding 1948 (Macdonald, 2019a), dancers of color in lead roles are still rare enough that New York City Ballet had another first in November 2019. In November 2019, 11-year-old Charlotte Nebres became the first Black dancer to be cast

⁴ The ACS includes questions with open ended responses for work, so the dancers and choreographers accounted for in these data identify that dance is their primary work. These data do not account for dancers whose primary work is not dance.

as “Marie” the young female lead in *The Nutcracker* for New York City Ballet (Kourlas, 2019). It continues to be rare that people of color, and specifically Black dancers get lead roles in ballet. It took ABT and New York City Ballet 75 and 71 years respectively to give Black women principal status and a role of Marie. Despite a number of notable dance companies in New York with primarily dancers of color, progress in the dance world, and in these instances, specifically ballet, took this long even in New York City, the heart of performing arts and one of the most racially diverse cities in the country.

Seattle also has a lot of work to do regarding representation in dance. Pacific Northwest Ballet (PNB) is the premiere ballet company in Seattle. As of 2019, 84% of PNB identifies as White (including dancers, staff, crew, musicians, etc.), with 74% of dancers identifying as White (Macdonald, 2019b). Prior to October 2018, nationally, ballet dancers of color did not even have access to pointe shoes that were the correct skin tones if they had darker skin (Marshall, 2018). PNB recently shifted the dress code to allow dancers of color in the school to wear tights and ballet shoes that match their skin tones, instead of the previously required pink tights and shoes that match White dancers’ skin (Macdonald, 2019b). The fact that seemingly small things like dress code have just shifted demonstrate clear messages to dancers of color as to who is the expected ballerina.

Changes are slowly happening in the Seattle dance community. An example of the slow change is with Pacific Northwest Ballet’s annual *The Nutcracker* performance. PNB has performed *The Nutcracker* since 1975 (Fullington, 2021). PNB did not make changes to costumes and movement to reduce the racial caricature in one of the variations in Balanchine’s 1954 version of the choreography until Winter 2019 (Macdonald, 2019c). In the second half of the ballet, the story takes place in a magical land where dancers present various cultures through

a number of dance variations, including one known as the Chinese Tea variation. The artistic director of PNB, Peter Boal, had concerns about the choreography stereotyping Asian culture, specifically the pointing of index fingers and bobbing of heads, so he worked with the Balanchine Trust to get approval to make some shifts in the movement (Macdonald, 2019c). When predominantly White ballet company directors have predominantly White ballet dancers perpetuate Asian stereotypes through the caricatures, the dance reinforces stereotypes and perpetuates White supremacy. Changing the Chinese tea variation to be less stereotypical is long overdue, and just happened in 2019. Additionally, there are still other caricatures in the ballet that PNB has not adjusted and perhaps ballet companies, including PNB, need to reflect on whether perpetuating racist stereotypes through *The Nutcracker* is a tradition that these ballet companies even want to continue every Winter season.

Seattle's dance scene has small pockets that celebrate and center dancers and choreographers of color. One choreographer in Seattle, Donald Byrd, has seen the potential in dance to address social change for decades (Burke, 2019). Donald Byrd is a Black choreographer and dancer and is the founder and artistic director of Spectrum Dance Theater, a contemporary dance company comprised of racially diverse members that engages with social issues. This company is a great example of some of the power in dance with a diverse group of dancers; however, the demographics of this company are not typical. Another artist challenging whose stories need to be told through dance and other art, is Dani Tirrell. Dani Tirrell is the creator of "Black Bois," a multidisciplinary show in Seattle that premiered in 2018, featuring an all-Black and all-local cast of performers, that had an encore in February 2020 that continued and built upon the original (Paul, 2020). Black Bois was "an unapologetic celebration of Black folk, Black artistry, and Black queer identity" showcasing a range of dance movement, music, and spoken

word centered around the African diaspora (Paul, 2020). Black Bois was inspired by, in Tirrell's words, the need to "talk about the resilience and the strength of Black males" (Paul, 2020).

While there are a few examples of PNW dance artists centering dancers and choreographers of color, this small number is insufficient alone to open up space for more dances and choreographers of color to center their own stories.

Critical Race Theory

This research project utilizes a critical race theory (CRT) framework. CRT developed in the mid-1970s as an outgrowth of Critical Legal Studies and a response to needing new social justice frameworks following the civil rights era (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Led by a number of legal scholars, including most prominently Derrick Bell, this coalition challenged critical legal studies as insufficient for addressing the subtleties of racism in law (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). In this way, CRT functions as both a theory and operates within an activist dimension (Delgado & Stefancic). While there are several tenets employed by critical race theories, I highlight seven that are most salient throughout CRT research and practices (Delgadi & Stefancic, 2017; Zamudio et al., 2011):

- Racism is understood to be a central structure in society that is always and will always be present in relationships and institutions; racism is a permanent feature in our society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Zamudio et al., 2011).
- Race is socially constructed with no correlation to anything biological (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Zamudio et al., 2011). And because race is socially constructed, racialization is both a historical and present experience (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Zamudio et al., 2011).

- The intersection of identities is crucial to consider; people cannot be essentialized to a single aspect of their identity and the intersection of multiple marginalized identities is not additive (Crenshaw, 1989; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Zamudio et al., 2011). Additionally, intersectionality speaks to not only the ways an individual experiences their multiple identities but also to the ways institutions attempt to essentialize to a single aspect of identity as a form of oppression.
- CRT theorists critique the liberal ideas of colorblindness and race neutrality; they maintain that neither of these address racism and thus are used to enforce the status quo (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Zamudio et al., 2011). The myth of meritocracy is also part of the critique. Where liberal theory around meritocracy suggests that anyone who works hard can achieve the American dream, CRT theorists purport that this is a myth and that racist structures prevent some who work hard from being rewarded simply for their merit (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Zamudio et al., 2011).
- CRT views Whiteness as a property right (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Zamudio et al., 2011). Whiteness is a societal norm, and everything reinforces White supremacy (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Zamudio et al. (2011) explain it well: “Whiteness has more value in relation to other races as long as it maintains its exclusive privileges” (p. 33). Additionally, Whiteness as property protects White people and their assets and causes harm to people of color and their spaces.
- The next important tenet in critical race theory is interest convergence – progress for people of color will only occur when there is an equal, and likely greater benefit to White people (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Zamudio et al., 2011).

- The final tenet of this list is the power of counterstories (also discussed as storytelling and counternarratives) as a tool to disrupt racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Zamudio et al., 2011). One of the ways White supremacy is maintained is through master narratives – the assumed and normalized views, which are not neutral and instead reinforce power dynamics (Zamudio et al., 2011). Counterstories told from the perspective of marginalized communities have the power to retell the stories centering people of color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Zamudio et al., 2011). These counterstories are an opportunity for people of color to find voice and share their reality. Because reality is socially constructed, these counterstories challenge the masternarratives told about people of color (Ladson-Billings, 1999). To develop voice, it is necessary to understand and reflect oneself, understand the social context that impacts one's life, determine how to respond to that context, and then transfer that reflection into creative expression (Knaus, 2011). Counterstories are the primary tenet this research project seeks to explore as a way to disrupt the racism impacting contemporary dance.

For this research project, I am privileging four tenets of CRT: permanence of racism, Whiteness as property, interest convergence, and counterstories to resist racism. I privilege these four because they are the most helpful in understanding the experiences of racism that participants shared in their interviews. In the next section, I use a CRT lens to provide an overview of the literature that demonstrates these tenets in contemporary dance. The master narrative in contemporary dance is that dancers and choreographers are White and that White choreographers choose to tell stories that center their own experiences and values. White

choreographers have an easier time gaining access to funding and opportunities to present work and are additionally protected by Whiteness. In contrast, racism sets up additional barriers to entry for choreographers of color and makes it clear artists of color are not welcome in contemporary dance. Counterstories in contemporary dance occur when artists of color choose to continue to be in contemporary dance. Artists of color find the resilience and choose to navigate racist systems to have a presence in contemporary dance. Artists of color make the choice to create work despite a racist system that sends continual messages that they do not belong. They make the choice to resist that racist narrative of who should dance and choreograph, who should be spotlighted on stage, and whose stories matter. Choreographers of color create work that resonates with their lived experiences and often choose to work with dancers of color. Choosing to be present and choreograph is an example of counterstories told through movement to resist racist structures in contemporary dance.

Literature Review

I utilized a CRT lens to examine the ways in which the literature discusses how racism has impacted choreographers of color. This literature review provides an overview of contemporary dance history and provide some clarification of terms. I examined how racism is perpetuated in dance training, specifically looking at the curriculum and pedagogy in college dance programs. Next, I provide a review of the literature that asserts that dance is political for people of color. And finally, I share examples of ways choreographers of color have challenged White supremacy through the counterstories in the movement they create.

Contemporary Dance History

Although there are a vast range of dance styles practiced and performed in the United States, the authors of much of the academic literature on dance acknowledge that certain forms

of dance are seen as valid, normal, and expected in the U.S. Specifically, many college dance educators denote that western or White styles of dance and historically linked to Western European origins, ballet and modern, are perceived as normal and valued (Amin, 2016; Davis, 2018; Davis & Phillips-Fein, 2018; Kerr-Berry, 2018). With ballet's origins in Western European courts (Kerr-Berry, 2018; Sehra, 2020), physical and emotive traits associated with the respective nobility are carried through ballet movement – poise, an erect spine, outward rotation from the hips, symmetry in the body, lightness on the feet, controlled demonstrations of emotion (Kerr-Berry, 2018; Sehra, 2020). Although western dance is sometimes used interchangeably with concert dance, this conflation can ignore dances of poor and working classes as well as European folk dances. Concert dance typically refers to ballet and modern, although the term is not actually descriptive and demonstrates the Eurocentrism that permeates throughout education and other institutions (Davis & Phillips-Fein, 2018; Kerr-Berry, 2018). The distinction between east and west is arbitrary and used to center how Western Europeans maintained their power and gave names and status to others around the world (Smith, 2012). Despite additional styles that are considered concert dance, ballet and modern are often the first styles that many educators and dance artists think about first.

Modern dance and contemporary dance are often used interchangeably and with no distinction (Dance Insight, 2014; Looseleaf, 2012; Strauss & Nadel, 2012). Dance educators and historians, and artists who seek to be historically accurate recognize differences based on historical progression and geographic location, with the addition of postmodern dance in between modern and contemporary. In this dissertation, I focus on the usages of these terms in the U.S. Modern dance was created by artists in the early 20th century who wanted to move away from the rigidity of ballet with the inclusion of more expression, individualism, and the option to

remove of the required outward rotation and upright core required by ballet but still with formal and structured techniques (Dance Insight, 2014; Jester, 2014; Looseleaf, 2012; Strauss & Nadel, 2012; Urbanity Dance, 2012). Postmodern dance then evolved from modern dance, seeking to move away from the modern ideals and structures, sometimes prioritizing abstraction, improvisation, the process of dance making, and even incorporating everyday movements (Dance Insight, 2014; Strauss & Nadel, 2012; Urbanity Dance, 2012). Contemporary dance is then the continued evolution from both modern and postmodern dance and often the term for the ever-evolving movement inspired by a number of genres that can sometimes include formal modern or postmodern technique and sometimes the release from formal structures (Dance Insight, 2014; Jester, 2014; Looseleaf, 2012; Strauss & Nadel, 2012; Urbanity Dance, 2012). Much academic literature (Barr & Oliver, 2016; Davis, 2018; Kerr-Berry, 2012; Kerr-Berry, 2018; McCarthy-Brown, 2009) uses the label modern dance while college dance programs vary in prioritized technique aside from ballet labeled modern (Julliard, n.d.; Southern Methodist University, n.d.; SUNY Purchase, n.d.; UC Berkeley, 2020-21; University of Hartford, 2019; Western Oregon University, n.d.), contemporary dance (CalArts, n.d.; Cornish College of the Arts, 2020; NYU Tisch, n.d.; Pacific University, n.d.; UCSD, 2018; University of Oregon, n.d.; Western Washington University, n.d.), or name multiple (University of Washington, 2021). Dance studios range in calling their technique modern or contemporary. Despite their historic and precise differences, for the purposes of this dissertation, modern, postmodern, and contemporary can be thought of as interchangeable because of the ways the concert dance community substitutes the terms. Additionally, in concert dance, artists and educators associate Whiteness with the dance style that references the movement derived and inspired from modern,

postmodern, and contemporary. This dissertation will use the term contemporary dance moving forward.

Racism in Dance Education

Most contemporary dancers have years of training and often go on to pursue dance in higher education. Many college dance programs provide little in the curriculum to learn to teach dance, so most dance teachers continue in the traditions they learned dance (Risner, 2010).

Although those who pursue dance in college often hope to primarily dance and choreograph after they graduate, most end up needing another job to survive, and so many turn to teaching dance (Risner, 2010). To understand a little more about some of the ways their dance education has impacted them, it is important to understand more about dance curriculum and pedagogy.

Whiteness as Property in Dance Curriculum

Many choreographers of color who have chosen to make dance their primary work have gone through formal dance education in a college setting. The multiple ways in which Whiteness is reinforced through college dance programs has impacts on what paths choreographers of color pursue beyond their education. The master narrative in dance education is that ballet and modern are the standard and thus college dance curriculum tends to center around these two styles (Davis, 2018). They are presented as dance styles that are presumed to be most valid and important, while labels like ethnic and world dance are used to indicate dance that is different from ballet and modern (Davis & Phillips-Fein, 2018). This master narrative of White dance as normal is what allows dance technique in general to mean ballet and modern (Risner, 2010), while other forms of dance technique need qualifiers (Amin, 2016; Davis & Phillips-Fein, 2018), maintaining the property interest of Whiteness. College dance curriculum structurally supports this Whiteness through dance technique class requirements where the only options are ballet or

modern, and other dance styles such as jazz, tap, African, etc. are offered as electives (Davis & Phillips-Fein, 2018; Kerr-Berry, 2012; McCarthy-Brown, 2014). It is White dance styles, ballet and modern, that have ownership in the dance curriculum, whereas Black dances are merely tenants in the dance landscape (Davis & Phillips-Fein, 2018). When jazz and hip hop, dances with origins in the African diaspora, are often taught without historical and cultural context, this reduces the learner's ability to understand the knowledge that transcends the movement (Mabingo, 2015). The White supremacist assumption is that the movement can be divorced from the history and culture, the way ballet and modern are regularly taught (Mabingo, 2015). It is crucial to not separate the movement from the culture and historical context when teaching dance with African origins (Mabingo, 2015). There are also certain movement techniques, like contact improvisation that are perceived to be for predominantly White dancers (Albright, 2017). How the curriculum is structured and what it prioritizes reinforces Whiteness in these dance programs. Shifting the narrative around movement technique to be more welcoming for dancers of color does not benefit Whiteness, so it is easier for college dance program administrators to maintain the racist structures in the curriculum.

When learning about dance history, the curriculum often focuses on the history of ballet and modern. Although ballet can be seen as a European ethnic/folk dance (Chatterjea, 2017; Kerr-Berry, 2018), when dance educators teach ballet without its cultural and historical context, students learn that ballet transcends culture (Chatterjea, 2017; Davis & Phillips-Fein, 2018). Modern and contemporary dance history is typically taught through a White-centric lens, with White dancers credited with the primary creation of modern dance while the racist history of White choreographers appropriating choreographers of color is ignored (Kerr-Berry, 2018). There is little attention paid to the appropriation of movement from African, Indigenous, and

Asian cultures (Davis & Phillips-Fein, 2018; Kerr-Berry, 2018). Without the acknowledgement that appropriation of movement from Black communities continues today by many popular, White artists, the property right of Whiteness is maintained (DeFrantz, 2016; DeFrantz, 2017). DeFrantz (2017) points out the interest convergence when movement created in Black, queer communities does not become accepted until White artists and politicians do the movement. The impacts of this cultural appropriation and related interest convergence are not taught in most college dance programs. The ways in which the dance history curriculum is taught perpetuates Whiteness as normal in contemporary dance.

Whiteness as Property in Dance Pedagogy

In college dance programs, the common dance pedagogy follows ballet's typical teaching structure, which normalizes a Western European pedagogy. This teaching structure typically involves students in lines facing a teacher, often in front of a mirror, with the teacher demonstrating and then the student imitating (Davis & Phillips-Fein, 2018). Many scholars acknowledge this pedagogy is an example of Freire's (1970/1993) "banking model" which suggests the teachers simply transfer knowledge into passive students (Amin, 2016; Barr & Oliver, 2016; Davis, 2018; Kerr-Berry, 2012). Dance classes that follow this model often consist of warm-up exercises demonstrated by the teacher, then imitated by the student; progressions of movement across the floor, again demonstrated and then imitated; and finally, some sort of large movement phrase, demonstrated and then imitated. This ballet pedagogy typically has a power dynamic with the teacher holding the position of authority, and the student as passive learner (Green, 2001). Instructors will provide a variety of feedback for students, often including group and individual feedback, separating practice time into groups so students can observe their peers, and even physically adjusting students' bodies to correct alignment (Andersson, 2018).

It is problematic to assume all forms of dance should be taught in a single way. Because the pedagogy of ballet has become the standard structure of dance classes, the “banking model” structure is often forced on other styles, even if originally the movement was taught in different ways. When considering that ballet pedagogy benefit from property ownership of Whiteness, other styles of dance must conform in order to have tenancy (Davis & Phillips-Fein, 2018). For dance styles like tap, jazz, and hip-hop, all originating in Black dance communities, applying ballet pedagogy diminishes the original movement and meanings (Davis & Phillips-Fein, 2018). Eurocentric pedagogy allows for a disconnect between the body and mind, which can lead to a lack of attention to the history as well as how the body experiences the movement (Green, 2010). Instead of dancers simply imitating movement and teachers being solely concerned with the physical appearance of the body, dancers and teachers need to consider approaching dance as a space that more than replicating lines in the body. Recognizing students as co-creators of movement and the experts on their bodies and what feels natural to their body can empower students (McCarthy-Brown, 2017). An experiential approach gives space for a dancer to not simply perfect movement, but also explore the meaning behind it (Mabingo, 2015). How dance classes are taught from childhood and reinforced in college dance programs becomes how graduates of these programs will continue to teach dance to the next generation of concert dance students, again reifying the cycle of normalizing Whiteness.

Racist Messages that Artists of Color Receive that they do not Belong

As shown above, there is an underrepresentation of dancers of color nationally and locally in ballet and contemporary dance. Bodies that fall outside the Whiteness norms of these concert dance forms are seen as inferior or exotic (Barr & Oliver, 2016; Davis, 2018; Davis & Phillips-Fein, 2018; Kerr-Berry, 2018). Some defend the perpetuation of prioritizing White

dancers in ballet because there are stereotypes that dancers of color are physically unable to execute the way White dancers can (Davis, 2018; Kerr-Berry, 2018; Sehra, 2020). Additionally, because symmetry is valued in ballet, the excuse that dancers of color will interrupt the symmetry of a predominantly White cast still permeates (Barr & Oliver, 2018; Kerr-Berry, 2018; Sehra, 2020). Concert dance is typically performed on a proscenium stage in a theater for an audience, where the performers can be framed because of the arch of the stage, and Black skin was viewed as inferior because it disrupted the White aesthetic on the stage (Kerr-Berry, 2018). Some dancers of color have even been told to lighten their skin with makeup to match the White dancers (Macdonald, 2019b). Dancers of color who do not have light skin have had to alter costumes, tights, and shoes to fit the racist dismissal of melanin because clothing was only made for White people (Marshall, 2018; Robinson, 2021). The perpetuation of Whiteness in ballet and contemporary dance is among the multiple factors, including lack of role models, costs associated with dance training and performing, challenges for funding, etc. (Barr & Oliver, 2018; Brown, 2018; Davis, 2018; McCarty-Brown, 2017) that impact the numbers of dancers and choreographers of color.

Dancers of color experience racist comments that suggest to them they do not belong in concert dance (Davis & Phillips-Fein, 2018). Sometimes this is cast as surprise that they move well and other times it is critique that a “brown, curvy, busty, muscular body” does not move well in ballet and modern (Davis & Phillips-Fein, 2018). Movers are socialized that they do not count as dancers until they are trained in modern and ballet (McCarthy-Brown, 2009). Dancers who bring in their identities feel rejected in dance spaces and experience microaggressions (Davis & Phillips-Fein, 2018; McCarthy-Brown, 2009). Racial microaggressions are subtle words, gestures, slights to people of color that reinforce racism and often happen on a daily basis;

constantly experiencing microaggressions can impact mental health and performance (Sue et al., 2007). Dancers of color also have to manage racist stereotypes in and outside of dance (Robinson, 2021). These stereotypes are painful and further work to push them out. Artists of color navigating racist dance spaces have to engage in additional emotional labor to navigate. They often end up managing their own pain and trauma while feeling like they have to maintain a level of professionalism (Mosley, 2020a; Robinson, 2021). This emotional labor of navigating racism can have physical and emotional impacts (Mosley, 2020a; Mosley, 2020b; Robinson, 2021). These are all examples of the ways artists of color experiences messages that they do not belong in contemporary dance.

Presence as Resistance

Artists of color are racialized because racism is everywhere. Having a presence in contemporary dance, whether they are dancing or choreographing, has an impact in shifting the normalization of Whiteness. Being a person of color in the U.S. means one is often considered “other,” which comes with pain and the challenge of navigating in order to survive (DeFrantz, 2016). As choreographers of color, assuming they are visibly people of color or known as people of color, perceptions and expectations based on their race will be placed upon them (Chatterjea, 2017; Gerdes, 2019). Dancers of color cannot separate themselves from their racial context and history (Candelario, 2019; Srinivasan, 2017). The choices choreographers, dancers, and directors make are the sum of their experiences. Additionally, media shapes how we make meaning of the world (Ono & Pham, 2009). In any visual art, “what we see is what we remember, what we do not see, the part that is edited out or simply not captured in media, does not become part of our memory” (Ono & Pham, 2009, p. 4). Seeing people of color have a presence in film or dance helps the audience and other artists remember that people of color can and should be in art.

When artists of color have a presence in contemporary dance, they make choices about how to navigate the racist systems. Dancers and choreographers of color sometimes choose to navigate the White dance world by focusing on having a presence rather than calling out the racism. Jeni LeGon was a lighter-skinned Black dancer and singer, who primarily did tap dancing starting in the 1930s through the time she died in 2012 (George-Graves, 2017). LeGon was also the first Black woman to sign a contract with Hollywood (George-Graves, 2017). There were moments in LeGon's life where, despite being very aware of inequities, she had to be strategic for self-preservation in order to continue dancing (George-Graves, 2017). There is an emotional labor that dancers and choreographers of color have to endure as they navigate the racism in the dance world. White supremacy is maintained when dancers of color are critiqued for challenging racism too blatantly and when they are critiqued for not challenging racism enough. Having a presence in dance has emotional impacts for artists of color as they choose how to navigate racist structures.

Choosing to be in contemporary dance, artists of color also choose how they respond to racial stereotypes. It is common for artists of color to internalize racism (Chung, 2019). For many choreographers of color, they make the choice to unlearn the internalized racism and White expectations in dance. Dancers and choreographers of color are socialized to believe that to prove their worth and be successful in dance, they must hide themselves and assimilate into White dance norms (Dixon-Gottschild, 2017). Although this racist expectation of assimilation is an unfair burden that comes with being a person of color in the U.S., as Dixon-Gottschild (2017) puts it, "Too frequently we fail to recognize our own personal ownership and inheritance of – and commitment to – racism and assume that racism is someone else's burden" (p. 90). Dixon-Gottschild writes of the internalized racism that people of color experience, and in this case,

internalize. Contemporary dancers receive White norming messages constantly throughout their dance education. Starting as a child, dancers are often taught to be the same and to look alike on stage so that the dance can be in sync with timing and movement. This can be internalized to tendencies towards movement types, spatial patterns, staging, and content. This internalization of White norms can also result in people of color internalizing racial histories and choosing to subconsciously play into the stereotypes. For example, when Asian dance companies market themselves in ways to capitalize, consciously or subconsciously, on their exoticism, this perpetuates the Orientalism permeates many Asian American experiences (Gerdes, 2019). Internalized racism happens so subtly that people of color might not even realize they have internalized White norms. When this painful process starts, artists of color have the agency to choose whether to continue to have a presence in contemporary dance to resist and how they want to navigate the racist systems (Dixon-Gottschild, 2017).

The presence of dancers and choreographers of color shifts how predominantly White audiences understand who dances. Dance is an opportunity for audience members to see connections between the movers, identify power dynamics, and consider how the choreographer views the world in this movement (Chatterjea, 2017). When it is common for predominantly White audiences to see a cast of primarily White dancers on stage, seeing a cast of primarily people of color can shift the audience's perception of dance. When the stage is filled with women of color moving in ways that showcase their strength and power, one of the messages that those who experience this dance, whether by dancing or witnessing, will take in is that women of color can be powerful and strong. When a Black woman tap dancer in the mid-1900s can tap better than White men and women, this Black woman threatens White superiority (George-Graves, 2017). That Black woman might not get as many chances to show that on stage

and in movies because her talent would threaten the maintenance of White supremacy. However, when audiences see a Black woman dancing on stage and in a movie, the audience remembers that Black women can also dance (George-Graves, 2017). When Asian American men demonstrate confidence and incredible hip hop moves, this reminds the audience that the stereotypes of meek, nerdy Asian men are an incomplete and/or false representation (Chung, 2019).

Dance as Counterstories

Choreographers of color can choose to tell stories that resonate with their lived experiences and connect to their activism. Dance stories told by choreographers of color challenge the racist notion that only White artists get to decide which stories matter (Chatterjea, 2017). Additionally, even having presence as a choreographer of color demonstrates a counterstory that they exist and are present. Because of the permanence of racism, choreographers of color choose their dance making what stories to center and whether they want to share stories from their community that are often untold. Choreographers of color can “perform corrective surgery on the historical record” (Dixon-Gottschild, 2017, p. 92). In addition to sharing accurate and authentic stories, choreographers of color can transform society by first understanding and humanizing the oppression and providing agency to those who have experienced oppression to heal (Bell, 2019). Choreographers of color resist the notion that choreographers create solely and primarily for the audience. For many artists of color, movement can be a way to process and reflect on experience where words can be insufficient. As was suggested with Pacific Northwest Ballet’s decision to change the Chinese Tea variation because of the caricature the movement suggested, dance can demonstrate a range of experiences beyond a single stereotyped story. Choreographers of color resist racist structures by challenging who has access and who is invited into their work as well as what stories they tell in their dances.

Opening access to artists of color challenges the notion that only White dance artists' voices matter and that only White dancers should be centered. Some choreographers of color resist standard concert dance production venues as the only locations for dance. Choreographers of color have the agency to resist racism in multiple ways.

Murphy (2017), a college dance professor, presents two examples of Indigenous choreographers resist racism in their choreography by bringing indigeneity into contemporary dance in different ways. Both Emily Johnson and Rulan Tangen/DANCING EARTH Indigenous Contemporary Dance Creations identify as Indigenous and as contemporary dancers. Johnson utilizes Indigenous ways of knowing in her dance processes, including connection and relationships, and an understanding of time and space as expanded and recurring (Murphy, 2017). Johnson brings in Indigenous ways of knowing by considering location and relationships when she is structuring performance within a community (Murphy, 2017). When setting up a performance that took place over multiple days, Johnson took the time to get to know audience members, incorporated service in the community, and connected themes in her movement to her peoples' history (Murphy, 2017). Johnson brought the audience into a space framed by Indigenous ways of connecting. Johnson resists White norms around time, place, and connection with the audience. Tangen incorporates Indigenous themes into her dances, exploring family histories and stories and creating movement that explores the relationships to the earth and each other (Murphy, 2017). Tangen also opens access in her dance work by involving solely Indigenous folks and even brings in multiple tribal influences, and Indigenous experts to share their knowledge (Murphy, 2017). Whereas Johnson provides a space for the audience to experience Indigenous ways of being, Tangen wants audiences to witness Indigenous dancers

sharing indigenous narratives, movement, and music. Johnson and Tangen demonstrate ways choreographers of color resist White dominance in contemporary dance.

Gerdes (2019), a college dance educator, presents two examples of Asian-born American choreographers, Shen Wei and Kun-Yang Lin, who challenge the master narratives by bringing in Asian influences into their choreography. Both choreographers have become successful internationally and bring in a number of Asian influences into their work, including Qi energy, calligraphy dances, and influences from traveling in Asia (Gerdes, 2019). When explaining the integration of Qi awareness, Shen encourages movement to come from breath and to have the mind and body connected (Gerdes, 2019). Shen's calligraphy dance is moving the body in a way that looks like calligraphy writing (Gerdes, 2019). Lin also uses the concept of this energy and life force in his movement explaining to his dancers that this awareness of the energy helps with exploring space, and his calligraphy dance is more abstract with bodies moving like ink on paper rather than to form characters (Gerdes, 2019). Both Shen and Lin bring influences of their Chinese culture into their choreography. Shen and Lin resist the racist expectations that only White dance forms are acceptable on stage and that only White choreographers exist. Shen and Lin's dances counter the content of what stories can be in the contemporary dance world by integrating multiple ways of moving, Chinese themes, and challenging who is creating work and dancing.

As CRT suggests, dancers and choreographers of color cannot escape how they are racialized, or the White supremacy maintained in contemporary dance through dance education and access to funding and opportunities to perform. Racism results in artists of color receiving messages constantly that they do not belong in contemporary dance. Because racist systems have excluded artists of color, dancers and choreographers having a presence in contemporary dance

resists the idea that all contemporary dancers are White. By choosing to continue creating dance, choreographers of color resist and disrupt racist master narratives by centering communities of color, opening access to more artists of color, and challenging racist limitations in what movement is valid. Their presence in contemporary dance and commitment to creating dance is an act of resistance to White supremacy.

Throughout the literature I examined, I found a lot of literature discussing racism in dance education, racist messages that artists of color receive, and how presence and counterstories are forms of resistance. The existing literature I found was primarily written as short biographic narratives (George-Graves, 2017; Gerdes, 2019; Murphy, 2017) rather than explicit research studies. There are some dancer artists of color sharing their stories and calling out racism in the dance community and more broadly in the U.S. through video interviews (Spectrum Dance Theater & PNB, 2020; Tirrell et al., 2020a; Tirrell et al., 2020b). However, I did not find research studies centering the first person lived experiences of contemporary choreographers of color.

Positionality

My experience of this this dissertation, including the literature review, interviewing participants, and identifying the findings, was shaped by my own lived experiences. I did not attempt to separate myself from this experience of research because I believed that to be impossible. To understand my lens in this dissertation, it is important to know more about my experience as a woman of color in the United States and as a dancer of color.

How I Have Been Racialized

I am an Asian American woman. Specifically, I am ethnically Chinese, with parents who are culturally Taiwanese and immigrated to the United States in the 1980s. When my parents

immigrated to the U.S., they arrived with very little money. However, by the time I was going to school, my parents had been able to navigate living in the United States sufficiently to be able to provide me and my brother with a middle-class, financially stable life. I was even able to attend private schools growing up. Although I grew up in the Bay Area, a liberal, secular, and racially and ethnically diverse area, because I attended predominantly White, private schools, I spent the majority of my time in spaces, outside of my family, that were predominantly White.

I associated some spaces as okay to be Chinese, and others as ones where I should try to fit in with my White friends. I went to Chinese school on Saturday mornings from when I was six; there I was fine to be Chinese. My mom's side of the family is all in California, so I regularly saw many cousins growing up. I was okay being Chinese with family. In my home, I regularly heard a mix of Chinese and English around family, even within the same sentence. I enjoyed eating rice at dinner every night. While this was my normal, I knew my White friends had a different experience. I wanted to hide how I was different, so I did not want to share about the Chinese influence in my home with my friends at school about. I felt like there were two parts of me – a Chinese side, and an “American” side. I associated “American” with Whiteness.

As many people of color, I grew up developing a lot of internalized oppression around being Asian American. I have always been concerned with wanting to feel like I belong. I did not want to be different. I did not want to have a last name that people could not say. I was sometimes embarrassed that my parents spoke English with an accent. I had friends who thought my Chinese lunches smelled gross, so I told my mom I did not want to bring Chinese food for lunch anymore. I knew I still loved all of the Chinese food I had at home and with my family, but I did not want to be the only person at school who had brought a thermos with beef noodle soup. When I was at school or with my friends, I did not want to be different. I became embarrassed by

the stereotypes of Asian people - quiet, passive, nerdy, socially awkward, always listening to their parents, unable to think for themselves. There were times growing up when I wanted to be White, because then I would be like my friends. In high school, I went from participating in my school's dragon boat team - a boat racing activity with long boats holding 20 paddlers that originated in China over 2000 years ago (Seattle Flying Dragon Boat Club, n.d.) - even being co-captain for a year to not being involved in the Asian Culture Club my senior year because I had friends who made fun of the advisor, an immigrant from Hong Kong with an accent. I was worried about being associated with someone my friends were laughing *at*.

I did not have the language to unpack my internalized oppression until I started my master's program at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio in 2009. In graduate school in Ohio, I started to learn about the experiences of Asian Americans in the United States. I had never taken Asian American studies in school, so I worked with my faculty advisor, who is Korean American, to develop an independent study looking at Asian Americans in education. I learned about the Model Minority Myth and how Asian Americans have been used as a wedge to maintain Whiteness as normal. The model minority myth sets up Asian Americans as the "model" for other groups of people of color to follow, and as a wedge to create additional tension amongst people of color. This master narrative of the model minority is used to "silence and contain" Asian Americans while it silences other people of color (Ngo & Lee, 2007). The model minority myth suggests a narrative around the unparalleled academic and occupational success that Asian Americans have and can achieve (Museus & Kiang, 2009).

At a university that was 80-85% White students and with only 2% of the student body identifying as Asian, I often felt I was the only Asian American student around campus. Feeling like I was constantly the only Asian American in my classes and in rooms, that instead of shame,

I felt anger. I realized I was socialized to believe I was less than and an “other.” I was socialized to believe that White was better and more beautiful. I was socialized to believe that being the “model minority” was a good thing, and not incredibly problematic. I was socialized to believe that “being American” meant being White. Once I gained the language to better articulate what I had experienced growing up and was continuing to experience, I started being mad. I was mad that I had not learned any history related to the exclusion and oppression of Asian Americans. I was mad, I felt silenced, and I was tired of not being proud of being a child of immigrants who worked damn hard to get here and provide for their family. Learning just how much internalized oppression I had (and am still working to unpack) was hard and painful, and also necessary to who I am. As an Asian American, I know my experiences are not like those of White people, and I also knew that the impacts of racism on my life are not as extreme or violent as they are on most Black, Latinx, and indigenous peoples. My proximity to Whiteness as an Asian American person impacts how I interact with White people and people of color.

My Experiences as a Dancer

Another aspect of my life experiences that is important to reflect on is my experience with dance. I have been dancing since I was six years old. After seeing a tap dance performance in a talent show when I was in kindergarten, I knew I wanted to learn tap. Through hard work of my parents, navigating racism, and benefiting from the model minority stereotype, I was able to afford dance lessons and the additional financial costs associated with dancing: driving to and from the dance studio four plus times a week, paying for costumes, attending performances, etc. My first dance studio was in the Bay Area and owned by a Filipina woman. By my second year at the studio, I was in both tap and ballet classes. To continue into the more advanced tap classes, ballet was required. I never felt like I was good at ballet. As a chubby kid my entire childhood

who did not have great turnout (outward rotation of the hips), ballet always felt a little foreign to me. My ballet teachers were mostly older, seemingly retired, Russian men and women who sternly scolded if you messed up – likely continuing the ways they were trained in ballet.

As generally the case at some point in every little girl's ballet life, I was no longer allowed to continue solely dancing in ballet flats – my dance teachers expected me to continue to pointe shoes. Pointe shoes have a hard box at the front end of the shoe to allow ballet dancers to dance on the tips of their toes, creating an image that the dancer is floating on air (PBT, n.d.). At my dance studio, girls who were starting pointe would have to take an intentional workshop over the summer to start to transition to pointe. Because of scheduling, I was unable to do the typical summer workshop, so I had to do an abbreviated one where I did not get the same scaffolding to start pointe.

Tap was always my favorite. I loved the rhythms and the chance to be loud. It was easy for me to pick up the intricate patterns and move my weight subconsciously to successfully do steps where you needed to get up into the air high enough for lift, but not so high that you are not still in contact with the floor for sound. I learned the names of steps but never the history of tap, which has origins in Black communities. I appreciated the rhythms but did not learn about nuances between tap styles that were associated with different communities of tappers.

My dance studio growing up was a competition studio. This meant we learned routines from the beginning of the year to go to competitions twice a year. We also did an annual version of *The Nutcracker* performed in December, and we had an annual recital in June. Some of the costumes were stereotypical in my studio's version of *The Nutcracker*; however, the movement and makeup were not caricatures. My studio also participated in competitions. Competitions were also exciting but scary. As a child I would have absolutely said I loved dance and that

competition was fun. I certainly enjoyed the community I was with in my dance classes, and did enjoy performing, but I never thought I was that good at it. When I first started dancing, I was the kid in the pieces who would be preoccupied with using my peripheral vision to see if the group were all dancing with the same timing. As a result, I often had to be reminded to smile (not grimace) when on stage. I did not have the natural confidence on stage that some of my friends had. I did not want to mess up and let the group or my teachers down.

At some point, probably by the time I was in middle school or high school, I did truly start to enjoy performing. I was still self-conscious about my body in costumes on stage and knew I was never going to be great at ballet, but I felt happy with dance. My high school had a distinct dance program, so I was able to take dance at school (and got out of physical education) and even had the chance to try choreographing. By high school, I had added jazz and modern, and knew that I was going to continue dancing in college. While I changed my major multiple times in college, the one thing that stayed consistent was that I knew I was going to do a modern dance minor. I did not dance during graduate school because Oxford, Ohio was too small of a town to have dance studios, and the university did not have a dance program to offer classes.

After graduate school, I moved to Seattle and found a wonderful dance studio in Green Lake. I started taking predominantly modern classes, with a handful of jazz and tap sprinkled in, and the occasional ballet. It was not until I was dancing as an adult in Seattle (post-graduate school) that I consciously started to pay attention to the racialized messages all around me. I noticed the racial and ethnic representation in the dance classes I was attending as well among the dancers I saw in shows. Reflecting on my entire dance education and training, I have almost always been in classes with predominantly White dancers and teachers. The Seattle contemporary dance community anecdotally is predominantly White. In contemporary dance

festivals with open auditions, there is often only one choreographer of color from among five to seven. In a dance audition of 40 people, there are likely only five dancers of color. After wondering for several years why I so rarely saw dancers of color in the primarily contemporary dance spaces I was in – whether in the studio, at auditions, or on stage, I realized I wanted to do something about it.

My Experiences as a Producer

In December 2016, a friend, and fellow dancer of color, and I founded and began producing the Tint Dance Festival, the only contemporary dance festival⁵ in Seattle that celebrates dancers and choreographers of color. The Tint Dance Festival seeks to raise the critical consciousness around racial and ethnic representation in the greater Seattle community so that artists and audiences will be inspired to dialogue about their own diverse experiences around identity. The festival is in its third year and provides an annual opportunity for dances and choreographers of color to connect and create work. It provides six to seven choreographers of color a chance to share their work and voices and for dancers of color to have space centering them. The Tint Dance Festival seeks to center the voices of solely choreographers of color with casts that are majority dancers of color. The festival has included a few different dance styles, including contemporary, jazz, tap, and hip hop. It focuses on increasing the representation of dancers and choreographers of color presenting dance in professional settings.

Another identity I hold is as a producer. As a producer, I can design systems and make the choices around who is included and excluded – choreographers, dancers, graphic designers, technical stage support (lighting designer, stage manager, house manager, etc.), videographer,

⁵ Many contemporary dance shows and festivals in Seattle primarily consist of contemporary dance pieces, with the occasional jazz, tap, or hip hop added in. I use concert dance and contemporary dance interchangeably in this paper to mean concert dance that is primarily contemporary dance but also inclusive of jazz, tap, and hip hop.

photographer, and general support. As a producer, I had the opportunity to make decisions about everything in the show, including the logistics as well as choices around the art. We had to decide how we would setup the audition process, how we would select choreographers, how we would setup the performances, what theater and in what neighborhood we would hold our performances, what we would set the ticket prices as, how, and where we would market, and so much more. As someone who was new to the producer role, I had never had to think about designing the systems and processes for a dance festival. I quickly learned, and have continued to reflect on, both the power and responsibility in these decisions.

This research project directly connects to my activism work in the Seattle dance community with the Tint Dance Festival. I have heard anecdotal stories from dancers and choreographers of color involved in the festival that a space with majority people of color is something they rarely, if ever, experience. I have heard about the level of comfort and authenticity choreographers feel they can bring to their work and the rehearsal space because of who is involved in the projects. I have heard from audience members who have attended the festival that the show is different from other contemporary dance shows they see in Seattle and that there is something powerful in seeing stories both by and of people of color. The Seattle contemporary dance community has been supportive of the Tint Dance Festival in its inaugural years. SeattleDances, a Seattle dance blog which focuses primarily on contemporary dance, has written that the festival is “helping to strengthen Seattle’s dance community by filling a vital missing piece” (Mulla-Carrillo, 2018) and that “by being inclusive of the rich ethnic histories encompasses by many dancers in our community, we can create a richer, more meaningful dance landscape in Seattle” (Best, 2018). Our goal is that Tint sustains this landscape.

Overall, as I continue to think about producing Tint as a form of my activism, I am constantly questioning whether the dance festival I am producing is impacting those I want to give space to. And I am reflecting on whether, given the context of racism in the U.S., and specifically in Seattle, we can produce dance without still causing harm. While I might be able to provide a space for choreographers of color to share their stories and experiences through my research project, and I might be able to provide a space for choreographers of color to share their stories and dance through Tint, racism is ever-present. As I think about my activism, I am constantly wondering what is enough? Is it enough to produce a festival to provide more opportunity for choreographers of color? What else do I need to be doing when I know that the dancers and choreographers of color involved in Tint are likely disproportionately impacted by COVID-19? After George Floyd's murder, when many arts organizations were starting to put out statements in support of Black lives, I wrote a statement for Tint. Although it felt somewhat performative, I felt it would be worse to be silent and to not be clear that Tint stands with the Black community. After we posted this statement, we got called out by a Black dance artist in the community asking what we were doing because the statement sounded just like what a white dance organization would put out. This had an impact on me, and I have been reflecting on me as an individual as well as my responsibility as a producer for a dance festival.

Even for the Tint Dance Festival, a festival that is trying to center dancers and choreographers of color, we have had to think about how we are complicit in white supremacy. In the last three years, almost half the dancers who come to our audition have identified as white. Out of the dancers who identify as people of color, the majority have identified as Asian American. Some of the Asian American dancers have identified as Asian American but not as people of color. We have primarily had dancers of color who are lighter-skinned. This year, we

selected two choreographers who have light skin and are white-passing. We got critique and skepticism when we announced the choreographers because of this. We are now choosing to question whether visible diversity from the dancers and choreographers of color needs to be a priority. We have also had primarily white audiences for the performances. What does it mean if we have a predominantly white audience who then have a white gaze on primarily dancers of color? Who is the festival for? Because dance is a performing art, it is impossible to not factor in who the audience is. We have also held the dance festival in Capitol Hill, a part of Seattle that is primarily white and has experienced a lot of gentrification. If we choose to hold the festival in a primarily white area of Seattle, we also have to ask who we are hoping will attend the performances.

I have been reflecting a lot on whether my positionality as a light-skinned, Chinese American woman co-producing a dance festival that purports to be for and about dancers and choreographers of color is the right thing to do. While I believe creating space for choreographers of color to share their work is crucial, is there a way for me to center a range of stories from choreographers of color without unintentional marginalization and tokenism? Does my positionality make me more complicit in centering Whiteness for contemporary dance in Seattle? Does my inclusion as an Asian American in the broader categorization of people of color dilute the voices who are being centered? What are the ways I need to reflect more deeply on the setup of Tint to actually decenter Whiteness? We have held the festival in a part of Seattle that is becoming increasingly gentrified and inaccessible financially. We have held our audition in Seattle, which is becoming less racially diverse as the gentrification continues. We have included White-passing people of color as choreographers. Does this increase the visible diversity on stage? Do we need to prioritize the visual diversity on stage? The three dancer

auditions we have held have all been just had slightly more than 50% dancers of color. And although we ensure each dance has at least 50% people of color, should the festival prioritize people of color even more? When most of the dancers of color who show up to the festival audition are Asian American, and some of those Asian American dancers do not identify as people of color, should they be cast? When most of the dancers of color, including people of color, who show up to the audition are lighter-skinned, what does that mean for the festival? Do I need to leverage my background as an educator more to incorporate opportunities for those involved in the Tint Dance Festival to have critical conversations around the perpetuation of whiteness in contemporary dance in Seattle?

There is a daunting amount of work I need to do as a person, dancer, and producer in the greater Seattle community. When I reflect on the added urgency created by the dual pandemics, I hope that this dissertation can be a small part of helping me to deepen my thinking about racism in the Seattle dance community. In my yearning for change, I need to remind myself that change is slow, and that critical race theory (CRT) posits that the institution of racism was perfectly designed to be almost impossible to change. While I cannot remove racism, my work is hopefully still an opportunity to center the voices and dances of choreographers of color. And hopefully this can be a small part of disrupting the insidious racism that is ever-present in contemporary dance in Seattle.

Research Question

Within the context of a racism in the U.S., and with the significant underrepresentation of choreographers of color, I want to better understand experiences. I hope to understand more about choreographers of colors' journey to contemporary dance, inspiration in choreography, understanding of their multiple identities, and how they see dance as an opportunity for

counterstories to disrupt racism. Context and place matters, and I am in Seattle and connected to the Seattle dance community. Seattle is in the Pacific Northwest, and so to broaden the context of my study, I want to know about the experiences of contemporary dance choreographers in the Pacific Northwest (PNW).

As the literature review demonstrated, I found essays detailing racism in contemporary dance; however, I did not find research studies centering the specific experiences of contemporary dance choreographers of color. Thus, I hope to begin to fill this literature gap with my dissertation. Specifically, my research question for this project is: what are the intersections of dance, identity, and resistance among contemporary dance choreographers of color in the PNW? I am additionally interested in ways choreographers of color resist racism in dance spaces and through choreography.

Methods

This section describes my research methods designed to expand access to choreographer of color experiences. First, I present the research design with the sampling strategy, participant recruitment process, protection of human subjects, data collection, and data processing. I then describe data analysis. Finally, I present the participants involved in the study with descriptive narratives.

Research Design

The object of this study was to understand the unique stories and experiences of contemporary dance choreographers of color in the PNW. I selected a qualitative approach utilizing a group interview followed by individual interviews to clarify lived racialized experiences of participants. The focus group provided a space for shared understanding, reflection, and community. The individual interviews provided an opportunity to dive deeper into

the individual participants' experiences with racism in dance spaces, how they think about resistance, and how they approach self-care and joy. Most participants attended both the focus group and then had a follow-up interview, so the individual interview served as additional space for participants to share reactions from the group interview. Such qualitative approaches are ideal to understand participants' experiences in a holistic way (Fraenkel et al., 2019).

Data Collection Strategy

Study participants were choreographers of color in the Pacific Northwest. The inclusion criteria for the sample were: person of color, identifies as a choreographer, identifies movement style as inclusive of contemporary dance, has created work in and around the PNW, or has plans to, and is physically located in the PNW. All participants were fluent in English. Each participant received a \$50 gift card as a thank you for their involvement for each interview (i.e., if a participant participated in the focus group and individual interview, they received \$100).

Participant Recruitment

The University of Washington Human Subjects Division reviewed my intended data collection procedures and determined my research did not need to Institutional Review Board approval as research. Purposive and snowball sampling methods were used to recruit 13 participants. Being cognizant of my connection to several choreographers of color through producing the Tint Dance Festival, I sent an e-mail to all choreographers who had previously been involved in the festival letting them know I was looking for participants for my research. I sent individual e-mail invitations (see Appendix A) to 20 individuals who I knew to identify as contemporary dance choreographers of color. I also e-mailed a regional dance blog and several dance centers, to see if they could share via their newsletters that I was seeking participants for my study. I also posted on Instagram and Facebook (see Appendix B). I was intentional with

selection of participants to ensure some diversity of race, gender, and experiences, with additional efforts to recruit potential participants who identify as Black. I also used word of mouth since I am connected to the community, to ask for recommendations of choreographers of color to invite. When I received a recommendation, if I had their e-mail address, I e-mailed them directly with an invitation. If I did not have their e-mail address, I sent a message on social media with an abbreviated message asking them to e-mail me if they were interested and wanted more information. If they e-mailed me interested, I then e-mailed them the invitation to participate in my study. When a potential participant contacted me interested in participating, if I did not know whether they met my inclusion criteria, I sent them an e-mail (see Appendix C) with a link to a screening form (see Appendix D). If I knew they met the inclusion criteria, I sent them an e-mail to confirm their participation (see Appendix E) that included a When2Meet link for them to provide their availability for the group and individual interview.

Protection of Human Subjects

It was paramount to me that I ensured participant protections. When confirming participation in the study, I e-mailed participants Informed Consent forms (see Appendix F) explaining confidentiality. I asked participants to e-mail me back with signed forms and offered to have 15-minute meetings via Zoom if participants had questions. No participant took me up on a meeting prior to signing the consent form. In the group interview (see Appendix G) and individual interviews (see Appendix H), I reminded participants that I would be using pseudonyms and would exclude names of organizations or specific individuals to protect their privacy. I saved notes, audio and videos recording of the interviews, and transcripts on my password protected laptop and, on a password protected cloud storage account as a backup that only I had access to. After I processed the interviews, drafted participant bios, and cleaned up

quotes, I e-mailed the participant bios and quotes to each participant. I asked them to e-mail back any edits they wanted to ensure I was representing them accurately. I reminded them I would be using pseudonyms in the dissertation that that confidentiality would be maintained for participants in all future presentations and publications.

Data Collection

All interviews were conducted over Zoom between October 2020 and November 2020, and 11 of 13 participants were able to attend the 90-minute group interview. I began the group interview introducing myself, reminding participants of my intentions with the research. After my introduction, participants then went around the virtual room introducing themselves with their name, pronoun, race/ethnicity, other salient identities, and a brief overview of their choreographic journey. I then asked participants to share their experiences with racism in the dance world in the PNW. That took up the remainder of the time in the group interview. Through the interview processes, choreographers had the chance to share some of their stories in a space that centered their lived experiences. At the end of the group interview, multiple participants expressed gratitude in having a space to connect and be with other choreographers of color from Seattle. They also asked for additional opportunities to connect and continue the conversation in the future.

Individual interviews ranged in between 60 and 90 minutes and were semi-structured to primarily follow the prepared individual interview protocol (see Appendix H). The two participants who were unable to attend the group interview provided more background context around their salient identities and choreographic journey. The interview protocol was designed to elicit stories and experiences from participants around their experiences with racism as people, dancers, and choreographers. The interviews had a flexible structure, and I followed up with

additional questions as they felt relevant and appropriate. For those who participated in the group interview, I asked if they had any reactions or additional thoughts following the group interview. I then focused on asking participants to share about their dance journey, additional experiences with racism, how they resist racism, and how they think about self-care, healing, and joy. At the end of the interviews, I asked participants if they had any additional thoughts they wanted to share. I then reminded them that I would be following up with the contents of the interviews so they could ensure I was representing them accurately.

Data Processing

Following the interviews, I had audio, video, and transcript files for all interviews. Because of the Zoom transcript functionality, I was able to start the transcription process with a version that was over 75% accurate transcripts, which I called transcript version one. Transcripts from Zoom included time stamps and whatever name each participant had while on the Zoom call. Even if a single person was speaking continuously for a few minutes, the Zoom transcription artificial intelligence created multiple separate entries for a single speaker in the transcript. I used the application, Visual Studio Code, and cleaned up the transcripts to that time stamps were removed and all the sentences for one speaker were in a single paragraph, which I called transcript version two. I then used a website, oTranscribe, and listened to the audio file and made corrections to the transcript. oTranscribe allows the user to play the audio file at various speeds and to start and pause the audio file with keyboard shortcuts rather than having to use the mouse. I called the transcripts after I made edits via oTranscribe to be version three. Although 75% of the transcripts from Zoom were accurate, I ensured the transcripts accurately reflected the interview and listened to each interview audio file in full. It took 2-4 hours to get to transcript version three for each interview.

Data Analysis Strategy

I used grounded theory (Frankel et al., 2019) to look for patterns across the data through coding. Through a CRT framing and a holistic coding approach, I initially identified the larger themes of racism and trauma, resistance, and healing. In this first level of coding, I went through each individual transcript to identify which sections fell under each theme. As I did this first level of coding, I began to write the participant bios from the information shared in the interviews. In my second round of processing, I cleaned up the transcripts to remove repeated words and filler words. I also added and corrected punctuation and capitalization. I then did another pass through each interview transcript to identify sub-themes. From there, I moved each participant's individual quotes to documents comprising all participants' content. I separated these documents by the four larger themes with sections for each sub-theme. Under each sub-theme I listed relevant quotes from all participants. I then read through the collected quotes under each sub-theme to ascertain if I had correctly categorized the quote under the appropriate sub-theme. I realized several the sub-themes were connected, so I combined the quotes under those into one sub-theme.

Participants

There were 13 choreographers of color who participated in the study. They self-identified as: Unangan/Aleut, of African descent, Black, Japanese/Filipina/White, second generation Filipino, Filipino American immigrant, Japanese/White, Filipina American, Tai Dam, Filipina/Cuban/Russian, Chicana/Chiricahuas/Cora, Mexican American, and Mexican. They all had previously, were currently, or had plans to choreograph and present their dance movement in the PNW. I had a prior connection to seven of the thirteen participants, who had been involved in the Tint Dance Festival in some capacity, either as a dancer or choreographer, and in some cases,

both. Of the remaining six choreographers involved in the study, I knew of, but was not connected to three prior to the study. The remaining three choreographers I learned of through other dancers in the community recommending I reach out to them. Four participants attended college to study dance in the PNW, while five spent some or all their childhoods in the PNW. Each of the participants has their own distinctive story. They have different paths to understanding their identity, different dance training journeys, and different inspirations for their movement style. Below I present biographic narratives of each of the 13 participants involved in the study.

Catalina

Catalina (she/her) identifies as Mexican. She was born in the U.S. but moved to Cabo, Mexico and spent her childhood there. As a child, she had access to traditional danza folklórica, salsa, and other Latin-inspired dances. She enjoyed them and participated in them, but they were not the dance forms that she was most attracted to. Her older sister took ballet lessons, so she wanted to as well. They convinced the ballet teacher to let her into classes at two years old. Ballet was the dance form Catalina first felt a spark with. She took a few jazz classes, but primarily did ballet. In school for various festivals, everyone in her class would do a little dance and it would be danza folklórica movement. In high school, Catalina started exploring some traditional modern in high school, primarily Graham technique. Catalina loves Graham movement - she feels it is “super sexy and so dramatic.” After being in Mexico for her childhood, Catalina and her family moved to Southern California before her junior year of high school.

Catalina’s mom worked for a Pacific Northwest-based company, so her family was always familiar with the Pacific Northwest (PNW) and would vacation there. When making

decisions about college, she was interested in attending college at a place where she could have a foot in the door in the dance community after graduating. She moved to the PNW to study dance in college at an arts college in the PNW. It was in college where she was first exposed to contemporary dance. She decided she did not want to be a professional ballerina, so focusing on contemporary dance would be the best option. In college she was exposed to a variety of dance forms, primarily ballet, modern, contemporary, lyrical, and jazz. While in college, she choreographed as a student. After finishing college, Catalina stayed in the area and choreographed for a couple different dance festivals. She has performed with a number of artists and festivals in the area. She is currently working as a teaching artist, choreographer, and arts administrator for a ballet company, theater company, and children's theater company.

Catalina often feels she is coming to conversations around racism in dance from a different space than other BIPOC dancers. She had access to traditional Mexican dance; however, she was more interested in learning ballet. For some of her BIPOC peers, they did not have the choice to explore their culture's traditional dances - the only option was to learn ballet or modern. When describing influences on her movement style, Catalina, however, referenced a Black male teacher who had danced with Dayton Contemporary Dance Theater. Her movement is influenced by him, and her movement "embod[ies] that love of classical lines but making them funky or making them fun." Her movement tends to be "line-y, pretty-y ... [and] a little weird sometimes." Her movement style is informed by the movement at family celebrations; however, Catalina does not identify her movement style as traditional Mexican dance nor jazz. Festivals and choreographers often would tell Catalina they wanted a jazzy piece based on her movement style. But that is not how she identifies her movement. The themes of her choreography range

from femininity, women's struggles, challenging expectations of women and movement. She considers herself a storyteller and prefers narrative to abstract.

Mika

Mika (she/her) identifies as Filipina, Cuban, and Russian. Her father is a Filipino immigrant to the U.S. and her mom is second generation Cuban and Russian, and Jewish. Mika has never felt like she belonged because she has never met another person besides her sister who is Filipina, Cuban, and Russian. She does not feel she can say she is Filipino because she does not speak Tagalog or Ilocano and she doesn't feel like she can say she is Cubana because she doesn't speak Spanish. She also does not feel like she can say she is Jewish because she was not raised Jewish. It was not until this past year at a conference on dance and higher education that she has started to feel like she has a place to speak from when talking about race and racism. People often cannot place what her race or ethnicity are, and sometimes she is seen as White-passing, and most times people have no idea.

Mika grew up in North Carolina and often went to Florida to visit family. She lived in New York for six years for college and then for a few years after. She did graduate school in California and then moved to the PNW where she taught for two years at an arts college and is now in her first year as an Artist in Residence at a large public university. When describing her choreographic process, Mika said, "I try to make it very inclusive. I ask for [the dancers] to come up with movement that feels natural to them. I try not to shift it at all ... I want it to be a process for them that includes their own voices." Mika identifies as a teacher first, a dancer/performer second, and as a choreographer third.

Elijah

Elijah (he/him) identifies as Tai Dam, Asian, queer, and gay. Elijah grew up in a small midwestern town, and most of his extended family still lives there. Growing up, his family was one of three Asian families in the town, and he often felt he was a “banana” - yellow on the outside, White on the inside growing up. His extended family would even tell him that they felt he was pretty much White. Elijah often felt like an outsider growing up.

Elijah’s parents immigrated to the United States. Elijah was the first generation born in the U.S. His family crossed the Mekong River to escape Laos into Thailand to get to the refugee camp before coming to the U.S. Growing up, his mom would tell Elijah that if his friends asked, he should just say that he was Laotian and that his family was from Laos. As a child he was confused because his mom would also tell him to speak Tai Dam. Eventually he realized that he was Tai Dam, but that his mom thought it would be simpler to his White friends if they thought he was Laotian since people were less familiar with Tai Dam. Elijah speaks English and some Tai Dam, and because of the similarities to Lao and Thai, he also understands some of those languages. In 2020, the Tai Dam celebrated the 45th anniversary of Tai Dam refugees coming to the U.S. In the last few years, the elders in the Tai Dam community have challenged Elijah’s generation that they do not know how to perform their cultural ceremonies, and that if they do not learn, those traditions will die with that generation. Elijah and his cousins are now starting to figure out how they can learn so they can continue those traditions.

Growing up in Iowa, his mom had Elijah dance in cultural celebrations. Other than that, Elijah first attributes his first experiences with dancing to show choir, with simple movements and lots of box steps. He went to a large public university in Iowa where he was exposed to more

dance and choreography when he joined the hip hop dance club. He enjoyed the musicality and precision of the movement. He was self-taught in dance through college.

After college, Elijah moved to the PNW. He started teaching hip hop classes at a studio in the area. At the studio where he was teaching, he got more exposure to jazz, contemporary, and ballet and was able to take some formal classes. Elijah started his own dance company in 2018. He approaches choreography differently for his students and his company. His student pieces are more focused on music and props. His work with his company focuses more on a celebration of cultures. The first piece he created with his company was a retelling of his family's immigration to the United States during the Vietnam War. He wanted to share more about the history of the Vietnam War as an immigrant coming into the U.S. He wanted to shed more light on the experiences of refugees. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Elijah and his company were working on a new work that was exploring his experience of doing the Camino de Santiago in Spain. The dancers were exploring the idea of both individual experiences within a shared experience and the sense of community that forms in a journey.

Elena

Elena (she/her) identifies as Chicana, Chiricahuas and Cora. Her father and most of her family are immigrants from Mexico. She grew up in Los Angeles, CA, but has lived in the PNW for about 10 years. While growing up, her Chicana identity was very salient. Her Native American identities were not salient, so she still has a hard time claiming those identities. Her parents worked incredibly hard to give their kids better lives and taught them that the American dream was possible for them.

Elena started dancing in choir. She loved singing and music and joined choir in middle school. In choir, while singing, she got to do small dance moves. She fell in love with dancing

and was always the student who danced full out and the choir teacher asked to pull back her movement. One day during choir while Elena was in 8th grade, she found out the woman who typically choreographed for the choir students quit. Elena's choir teacher was upset and worried there would not be movements for the choir students to do while singing. Elena volunteered to come up with the moves for the choir and the teacher said yes. Elena watched music videos from pop artists to come up with her moves. This was the beginning of Elena realizing she loved to come up with movement.

Elena's parents made sure she was educated, spoke English, and identified as American because they wanted to protect her from the discrimination they experienced. They only spoke English, never Spanish, to Elena and did not allow her to take bilingual classes. In their house, they listened to music and watched shows that they felt would allow their kids to be more American – not Mexican music or shows. For her entire life, Elena's parents have been supportive of anything she wanted to do, especially in dance. They encouraged her to do ballet and modern, because they felt those would help her be accepted as American. They discouraged her from learning folklorico and any other Mexican dance forms as Mexican dance styles wouldn't seem American. Her parents encouraged the things they felt would make their children successful and help them fit into American culture.

Elena's parents could not afford to pay for dance classes. However, her high school had a dance program, so she enrolled in that. She loved dancing and stuck with it. She auditioned for the dance team every year in high school and never got in. Despite the opposition she came up against, including that she was a larger dancer, Elena believed what her parents told her - that as an American, she could do anything.

Elena went to community college for six years, and trained in dance there, before eventually transferring to a four-year college for dance. She auditioned for many dance programs but did not get into them. However, one of the directors of the dance program at her community college called the dance director of an arts college in the PNW and convinced them to accept her on a probation status. While Elena did not have the required technique training to get into the college, her choreography was promising enough to get in on the probationary status. While at this arts college, Elena was one of very few dancers of color in the program and she regularly felt like she did not fit in with the other students and that many of the faculty did not want her there.

After she graduated from college, she decided to stay in the area, despite missing her family. She felt she already knew the dance community in the area a little bit, and that it would be easier to do the work she wanted to do, rather than trying to make it in LA, where work was Hollywood or commercial dance styles. Elena is currently a choreographer, dancer, and teaching artist. She leads the dance department at a private middle and high school and teaches adult classes at a studio in the area.

Elena was also featured by a local PNW show where they featured Latinx artists in the Northwest. The episode won a Northwest Emmy and was shown at a Latino Film Festival. After this, a travel blog reached out to feature her. She is currently working on a piece about the first-generation American experience with a cast of primarily women of color. Most of Elena's work is connected to her Mexican identity and the music often has Spanish lyrics.

Maya

Maya (they/she⁶) identifies as a queer, Filipina American (FilAm) woman. They were raised by their Filipina mom in the Bay Area. Maya moves through life with White-passing

⁶ Maya's preference for their pronouns in this project are to use either she or they for a section but to alternate between the two in different sections.

fluidity; however, they strongly identify with their FilAm culture. Growing up, she went to a strict ballet school that was a feeder school into a prominent ballet company. The curriculum at the school included ballet, modern, hip hop, and some other styles. They trained there through 8th grade. Maya transferred to another dance school after being told in 8th grade that with her body type, she would never be a soloist, only a duet dancer. The second dance school they trained at still had ballet, but the school's technique was less regimented. Both schools performed *The Nutcracker* annually, so she was in *The Nutcracker* for a least 10 years. As one of the few, if not only Asian American dancer in their studio, they were cast in the Chinese variation most years. In *The Nutcracker* productions she was in, the costumes and dances were primarily caricature, but that was never discussed.

In addition to their training at various dance studios, their aunt, their Tita, would bring together a group of girls to learn Filipino folk dancing. She would perform at various gatherings and events at museums. They did that for about five years. In addition to dance, Maya also participated in lots of sports and in community musical theater growing up. Musical theater was another opportunity for Maya to dance.

Maya went to a college on the East Coast. It was not an option for her to go to school for dance. They were expected to study something very academic. Maya still spent most of her time in college dancing. While in college, they were involved in a contemporary dance group that verged on competition style dance. She was also involved with a hip hop group on campus. This dance group was where Maya found community. While on the East Coast, they were also involved in a another hip hop group as well.

After moving to the PNW, Maya started dancing with a range of different companies and artists. She also participated in a number of dance festivals in the area both as a dancer and

choreographer. After a few years of short-term projects, they started joining more long-term projects. She does movement design for several theaters in the area that are of professional caliber but are not the largest nor most established theaters in the area. They also teach dance to high schoolers. Maya has been in the PNW for 10 years and has recently become a full-time freelance artist.

When Maya described her movement influences, she said, “I’m influenced probably the most by the people that I am directly around. I kind of just take a general idea of things and absorb it, and it comes out in various ways.” They continued, describing their current choreographic explorations saying, “What I’m really interested in right now is the embodiment and storytelling in how to be honest and make deep connections with people using your body. And sometimes that looks like spectacle and sometimes that looks like an Instagram post.” Maya spoke of her interest in connecting dance and theater driven by the ability for theater to speak directly and the beauty of dance to be poetic and ephemeral. She found herself frustrated in dance spaces where not using words permitted choreographers to be indirect and almost lazy with what their points were. Maya felt movement design for theater allowed them to balance both interests.

Kiaria

Kiaria (she/her) identifies as Japanese and White. Kiaria grew up in rural area on the East Coast, where she was mostly surrounded by White peers growing up. She primarily did ballet from ages five to fourteen. Growing up, she did The Nutcracker every year. Later in childhood she started doing some modern dance. When she started modern, she suddenly felt she could be expressive with her dancing. Some of her dance teachers growing up were extremely strict about ballet form, and judged anyone wanting to focus on modern, saying that dancers could do

modern later on in life, but they had a limited time frame in which they could really do ballet.

Kiaria ended up focusing on modern, but also did some hip hop during this time.

All of her classmates growing up were predominantly White, as was most of this rural city on the East Coast. As a result, Kiaria had little experience with Japanese cultural dances. Despite that, in 5th grade, her teacher was doing a cultural dance unit, and despite making it clear to her teacher that she did not know any Japanese dance, her teacher put her in the front of the class when they performed a Japanese dance, simply because she was the one Japanese student in the class.

Kiaria attended a small liberal arts college on the East Coast and majored in dance and Asian studies. While her college was not very racially and ethnically diverse, it was more so compared to her childhood. Her college dance program valued modern and ballet. She choreographed during college. In college, Kiaria randomly signed up for a class about intergroup relations and quickly realized she did not feel like she fit into that class. At this point in Kiaria's identity development, she did yet identify as a person of color. It was not until after college, when Kiaria moved to the PNW to work at a non-profit, that she started to identify as a person of color. After college, Kiaria was interested in being in a place where she could have a job at a non-profit and still be involved in the dance community, but where she would not have to pick between the two. At the non-profit where she works, Kiaria is a program manager and co-chairs the diversity and racial equity committee. In the PNW, she has danced with several different artists and festivals, including the recent works of another study participant, Adeline, with exclusively Asian American women artists. She shared a piece in a festival comprised of choreographers of color, which was later honored as an area favorite the next year, so she was

able to present that piece again. Kiaria is primarily interested in the intersections of dance and the human experience.

Aki

Aki (he/him, they/them⁷) identifies as is a queer, Filipino-American immigrant. His/their parents are a nurse and a truck driver. His/their parents immigrated to Hawaii and then moved to the PNW. He/they learned Filipino folk dance as a child in the Philippines. After immigrating to the United States, he/they started taking ballet when he was 16 years old at a ballet studio in the PNW. Growing up in the U.S., Aki felt that he/they adopted “American” culture and is on a constant journey to unearth his/their Filipino culture and identity.

Aki went to an elite arts college on the East Coast where he/they completed his/their BFA in dance. He/they continued living on the East Coast after finishing college and performed in several venues, including on and off-Broadway and with a number of dance companies. He/they has choreographed for several dance companies across the country, primarily ballet-focused companies. He/they identifies as bi-coastal as he/they spends his/their time on both coasts. He/they started his/their own project-based dance company in 2010.

Around 2014, while on the East Coast, Aki felt like his/their understanding of his/their identity was shifting. At this point, he/they began hanging out with more Filipinos in area and started reconnecting with his/their Filipino culture in more intentional ways. His/their Filipino community inspired him/them to look deeper within his/their culture and he/they started to intentionally explore more about Filipino history. He/they began to intentionally express his/their Filipino-ness in his/their day-to-day as well as in his/their dance work. Aki talked about his/their shift in collaborating with artists and companies of color. He/they specifically talked about

⁷ Aki’s preference for his/their pronouns in this project are to use he/they or him/them throughout.

his/their recent experience with a Latinx ballet company. He/they are also started to explore the intersections of his own culture and identity. Aki recently became just the second Artistic Director of the ballet studio he/they went to as a child. Since he/they began there, Aki has been intentionally reflecting on how he/they can create an inclusive community at the studio and ensure that he/they intentionally celebrating multiple cultures and challenging the norms.

June

June (she/her) identifies as queer, second generation, Filipino, woman, femme, able-bodied. She was born and raised in the PNW. Growing up, she trained at multiple pre-professional youth dance programs. June's love and commitment to dance started young. Starting around when she was 10 years old, June would change into her dance clothes after school, take an hour-long bus to dance class. After dance class, she would sit in the hallway at the studio and do her homework for a few hours until her parents were able to pick her up after they got off work. Emblematic of her hustle, after taking class almost every day during the week, and with only a couple of sets of tights and leotards, June washed her dance clothes daily.

June went to a large public university in the PNW for her undergraduate degree where she studied dance. While in college, she co-founded a collective of dance artists who identify as queer, people of color, femmes, women, and trans. She has danced with several artists in the PNW and has shown work in many festivals in the area. June toured with a dance company for a couple of years. She has also presented work at block parties and dance events in the area. She has also been on grant panels and hiring committees for dance-focused arts organizations.

Nora

Nora (she/her) identities as Unangan or Aleut. Nora grew up in the PNW. She is Aleut on her father's side and German and Irish on her mom's side. Nora's paternal grandmother was

evacuated from the Aleutian/Unangan Islands during WWII to Alaska. Through her grandmother, Nora and her family always had their Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) cards; however, Aleut culture was not regularly talked about when she was growing up. For much of Nora's life, her grandmother did not tell stories of her childhood or about the Aleut community. Her grandmother had been taught to be embarrassed about being native and did not encourage her children to learn about the culture. Her grandmother only spoke Russian or English to her father and his siblings when they were growing up, rather than the Aleut language.

Nora started dancing at the YMCA, where classes were basically free. She was then able to find some other local studios where she started dancing modern and ballet. At one studio, Nora encountered a teacher who was incredibly supportive and helped guide her as a young person in dance and becoming herself. She eventually attended college in Utah where she got a scholarship from the Aleut Tribe to study dance. A traditional Aleut mask maker left money with the tribe to support Aleut children's education, which resulted in the scholarship that Nora received. Receiving the scholarship sparked Nora curiosity about Aleut culture and the life of this Aleut mask maker. She started learning about the different kinds of art that were common in Aleut culture: masks, visors, baidarkas, kayaks, clothing, and more.

During college, Nora trained in modern dance and in the vein of Martha Graham technique. Nora did not have much exposure to Inuit dance until after college. She had previously learned as much as she could online. She had minimal exposure to Inuit dance before going to Alaska, primarily through the jingle dance, which is a dance First Nations women will often do at pow wows. Nora has always loved jingle dance, so she had learned some of the steps; however, jingle dance is not an Inuit dance.

After college, Nora had the opportunity to work with a native healer in Alaska. While in Alaska, she tried to learn as much as she could about Inuit dancing. Most of the dancing was done at ceremonies, so she attended many of those to learn the dances. Many of the Inuit dances are focused on community at ceremonies, so it is common for people to dance. She got connected to some Aleut dancers while in Alaska; however, much Aleut dancing is a lost art because of the cultural genocide and diminished Aleut ancestry. With Nora's curiosity about her Aleut culture, her family has been open to learning together about their ancestry and the culture.

Nora remained in Utah for a few years following college. She continued to explore movement and dance film projects. In her choreography, Nora started to explore the integration of some Aleut movement with modern movement. She had mixed reception and constantly came up against external expectations for her movement. As a mixed-race woman, she also experienced the tension from others who did not readily believe she was Aleut.

After college, Nora moved back to the PNW and started incorporating some Inuit dancing into her movement. At an event that happened at a Duwamish longhouse, she met an indigenous dance artist. Seeing this artist's movement, Nora started to recognize for herself that it was possible to find community and be accepted with the movement she wanted to do and create. While she did not take any sacred dances, she realized that some Inuit movement felt very natural in her body. She also started to be inspired by concepts that are important to both her life and Aleut culture. Some of the themes for the pieces Nora choreographs include identity loss, depression, and women in society. She has danced with several dance artists in the PNW.

Kayla

Kayla (she/her) identifies as a queer, Black/African American woman. She was born in Philadelphia and moved around a bit growing up because her father was in the Navy. She started

dancing when she was three years old and loved it. After Philadelphia, Kayla's family moved to Virginia, before moving again, this time to the PNW. Around the age of 13, Kayla started dancing consistently. She was taking ballet multiple times a week, and a little hip hop as well. Kayla's mom focused on ballet, believing if Kayla wanted to have a career in dance, that it would likely be in ballet since it held more prestige. Kayla thus had to take ballet to take her hip hop and jazz classes.

Growing up, Kayla was typically quiet and appeared shy in public and loud at home. She is from a family of six. She was always observing. She loved dance, but never really felt she fit in. She grew up in predominantly white spaces. At home, her parents educated her and her siblings about what the world was like and the racism to expect. After high school, Kayla went to an arts college for one year. She ended up leaving after one year because it was too expensive. She then transferred to a large public university where she could study science, specifically biology and physiology, while also dancing. She spent a lot of time in the dance department during college. College was challenging because she was commuting to school for the duration, and she also had to work throughout college to help pay for school. Throughout her dance training, Kayla has always felt like there were not very many people who look like her.

After graduating from college, Kayla taught dance classes in the area. She also joined a dance company for a few seasons. The small company had several dancers of color, which enhanced her experience. She choreographed a few pieces for the company during her time there. Right around the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Kayla separated from the company to work more independently. Kayla is currently exploring dance film. She is interested in working with people digitally and figuring out a way to make that interesting. In her teaching and work cultivating other people as dancers, she encourages dancers to be curious and to figure out what

things they, as individuals, find interesting about dance. A lot of her recent inspiration for movement has been from music, speeches, spoken word, and movies. While she wants to be in community with Black dancers, she also wants to be in community with dancers who share a range of her intersecting identities, specifically Black, queer, women.

Sebastian

Sebastian (he/him/they/them⁸) identifies as a queer, Mexican American man. He/they grew up in Southern California. His/their mom is from the Southern part of Mexico, Merida, Yucatan. Sebastian started dancing baile folklórico, Mexican folk dance, at a local community center when he/they were four years old. His/their two older sisters took classes there and Sebastian often sat outside waiting for his/their sisters to finish dancing. He/they got curious about the big folklórico skirts and wanted to be a part of that. Although younger than the other students, the director of the community center let him/them take classes. In his/their first class, Sebastian put on his/their botas, his/their boots, the teacher showed a few moves, and it felt completely natural. He/they were happy, and it felt right. Growing up, he/they were involved in several folklórico dance companies.

It was not until he/they got to a university in California for college, that Sebastian became engulfed in modern dance. Sebastian told his/their mom he/they were majoring in psychology, when, he/they were studying dance. He/they did not tell her the truth until he/they were graduating that it was with a dance major. She was mostly concerned about him/them pursuing dance as a career because her context of dance was baile folklórico, which was not generally something people got paid to do. However, once she saw Sebastian's involvement in dance and his/their teaching, she quickly became a cheerleader.

⁸ Sebastian's preference for his/their pronouns in this project are to use he/they or him/them throughout.

While in college, by being involved in the dance community, Sebastian found other Mexican Americans to be in community with and had the chance to explore what it meant for him/them to be queer. In his/their senior year, Sebastian had a male professor whose work dealt with queerness. It was the first time Sebastian started asking about how queerness is in conversation with Mexican identity. In grad school for his/their research, Sebastian identified his/their movement and technique style. Sebastian described, “[this style] is a hybrid form of folklórico and contemporary movement with these themes around Mexicanidad ... [this style] is actually this Mayan dish where the pork is actually marinated in lots of different ingredients over time to make it super juicy, succulent, and whatnot. And so, use that as a metaphor. This technique has these different ingredients to make it what it is. Sometimes you can add more salt or sometimes you take out more salt and you put more pepper or more orange juice or whatnot. So I think of it in terms of how each work is always completely different, but living in the same realm of this idea of this technique.”

Sebastian then went on to complete an MFA in dance. During this time, he/they collaborated with three other Mexican American dancers in graduate school with him/them to create a dance collective focused on their experiences as first-generation Mexican Americans. The collective explores their constantly changing stories of their Mexicanidad. In addition to performing, the collective also curates work and hosts space for artists of color to share their work. The collective is based out of Los Angeles, CA. Sebastian is currently on the dance faculty at an arts college in the PNW. He/they has not yet presented work in the area; however, he/they are currently working with some students on a project. He/they identifies as an activist, educator, and choreographer.

Adeline

Adeline (she/her) is from the PNW and identifies as Japanese, Filipina, and White. She started her training in ballet and primarily did ballet through middle school. She then began dancing at another studio in the area where she was exposed to some classical modern styles like Jose Limón and Martha Graham technique. The studio had a teen dance company which Adeline was involved with from 8th grade through high school. This studio brought in choreographers from across the country to work with this dance company, including Cabbie Mitchell III and Wade Madsen, both well-known choreographers. She typically spent 20 hours a week dancing throughout her childhood and adolescence.

Adeline attended a large public university in the PNW and got a degree in journalism. Although she considered the conservatory route, she realized that she did not necessarily have to major in it, she just needed to continue dancing. She ended up with a dance minor. She ultimately decided to major in journalism because she realized she already had a foundation and skills in dance, and she wanted to build those in another area.

After completing college, she danced with a company that was located far enough away that she needed to commute to reach it. She danced with this company for a year. Being a part of this company helped her realize that she could create her own group to be a part of and dance with rather than waiting around for someone to hire her. She collaborated with some of her friends from childhood to create their own company. This company was a dance collective that prioritized community and included a variety of dance styles. They choreographed themselves as well as bringing in both established and newer choreographers from across the area to choreograph. She was involved with this company for six years.

Towards the end of her time with this company, Adeline choreographed a piece which centers narratives about the World War II incarceration of Japanese Americans. The title of the piece was a phrase Japanese Americans often said when forced to leave their homes to go into the internment camps. The phrase essentially meant, “oh well, there isn’t anything to do.” Adeline titled the piece with this phrase as sort of a defiant thing. She described, it was like saying “goodbye to this sort of passive attitude and hello to, ‘no, you may not treat us that way.’” The work is multi-disciplinary and involves speaking, dancing, and Tyco drumming. Because of the specific historic stories included in the piece, Adeline felt she needed to involve only Asian dancers. However, most of the dancers in the company she was involved with identified as White dancers, so after creating this dance, she realized she would need to move on to create the works she wanted to. The work grew from there, however, and Adeline received funding from both the Japanese American Citizens League and a city arts organization to continue developing it and touring it in several schools.

While continuing to tour her work centering Japanese American internment camp experiences in schools, Adeline started working on a piece about Asian American matriarchy with an all Asian American woman cast paying homage to female ancestors and grandmas, aunties, and sisters. Adeline is interested in exploring Asian American stories with Asian American performers from a range of ethnic, age, and dance training backgrounds.

Adeline also works full-time for an opera organization doing PR, social media, and programming. She has been able to apply her activism work within the opera as well as in her dance work. When Adeline talked about choreographing, she said, “I just want to tell stories, and I just happen to have dance training. I don't know how to sing or compose songs. I don't know how to like paint. Dance just happens to be something I've done all my life and it's the medium I

have.” Adeline speaks similarly to why a lot of her movement is inspired by ballet, saying, “It's not even like, ‘oh, I really want to do [ballet as my] movement style.’ It's just sort of like, ‘I want to tell a story and here's what I have at my disposal.’ This is how my body knows how to move because this is how it was trained.”

Alexis

Alexis (she/her) is a dancer and choreographer originally born in Lubbock, TX and raised between Texas and Florida. She identifies as being of African descent. She started dancing at 12 years old with ballet but learned a variety of styles through childhood. Growing up, she was one of only a few Black kids in her dance classes and often felt separate from the other dancers. Throughout middle school, she often felt her body was not the right aesthetic and that unlike the White-identifying dancers in her classes, she was unable to pretend to fit in, even if she had wanted to.

She attended a prestigious performing arts school in Jacksonville where she got to the highest level of dance training at the school. Her high school had two tracks - ballet and modern. Dancers pursued one or the other and did not have the option to do both. High school was a challenging time. Her nickname growing up was “White girl” because she was often trying to mimic the White-identified dancers around her. She also had a particular ballet teacher who made cruel comments to dancers about their bodies and focused on thinness rather than ability or talent. Despite some hard times in dance growing up, in Jacksonville, she did join an all-Black dance troupe that helped her continue to love dance despite the challenging context in her high school.

Alexis then earned her BFA in dance at a private university in Texas. She had a similarly challenging experience with dance during college where she continued to be one of few Black

dancers in the program. She was exposed to Graham technique, which she loved, until a dance teacher criticized her and other dancers for their food choices and repeatedly made comments about their bodies, prioritizing thinness over ability. Despite being in a dance program in college, Alexis did not feel like she was setup to succeed having never learned the business and financial components of dancing and sustaining a dance artist life.

After college, Alexis continued living in Texas for a year, working multiple jobs and barely making ends meet. Eventually, she and a friend decided to move to New York. With \$500 saved and two suitcases, Alexis moved to New York and found an affordable apartment in Bushwick. The first six or eight months that she lived in New York were some of the hardest in her life. She did not have a job and did not have any money. Her family did not have the means to support her in any way, so she was on her own. She ate solely rice most days. She ended up getting a job canvassing in the snow to make some money. Living in New York shaped her hustle mentality.

Eventually she was hired with a dance company that promotes the spectrum of African diaspora experiences. She danced with them for two years, and it was during this time that she started training in the Horton technique. Dancing with this company was the first time she was in a space with all Black dancers who were excellent at multiple forms of movement - ballet, Horton, African dance, and others. During this time, Alexis also danced with a dance/theater company known for athletic movement and dramatic forms of physical expression. As Alexis danced with these two companies, her body changed muscularly to meet the physicality of these two companies and the types of movement she was interested in changed.

While in New York, Alexis auditioned multiple times for a choreographer whose prestigious company is based in the PNW. Dancing with this choreographer in this company was

the dream job for her. After auditioning for the third time, Alexis got hired for one project, to play the female lead when the company did their version of a well-known musical. After this first project, Alexis was hired on as a full company member. She continued dancing with this company, including in musical collaborations with a local musical organization. Although this dance company was comprised of solo artists who came together as group, by the time Alexis left, she was truly a solo artist and had leadership in the organization. During the end of her time at this company, she was running the youth academy dance program and even recreated the framework for how the program operates.

Alexis left and created her own company. The first piece she created was a piece exploring Blackness and the n word. She presented the work initially in the PNW. In 2018, she won the prestigious New England Foundation for the Arts (NEFA) National Dance Project Production Grant, which supports artists in touring new dance work across the U.S. After winning this award, Alexis then toured the work for two years, premiering it at Tina Knowles' Theater, Where Art Can Occur (WACO) Theater Center in Los Angeles.

Alexis has recently launched a project celebrating Black femmes through a global curatorial program developing with artists globally (West Africa, Germany, South Africa, U.S.) through an experimental art space in the PNW. This project comprises a range of multi-disciplinary artists from across the globe to reimagine joy and rest and redefine emotional and physical labor from a radical and Black femme intersectional lens. Alexis is also the co-founder and COO of a non-profit founded with her husband that works to improve the lives of African people globally.

Although Alexis continues to reside in the PNW, she has largely distanced herself from the dance community in the area. She is interested in creating work that speaks to all of her life

experiences, and she is interested in creating work for her family and communities that centers the critical and challenging questions that impact the lives of her family and community. When talking about her movement, Alexis said, “When people think of dancers and they think of choreographers, it's not just the movement that I present to you. It's literally every experience that I've had in my life that comes out through my body and why the movement looks the way that it does.” When describing some of the themes she is interested in exploring, Alexis said, “I'm really thinking about these toxic ways in which we exist in the world. How can those be topics of conversation? How can those exist in the body and us say it through dance? How can we use that to provoke conversations and transcend spaces that we're in? ... I'm doing it because I'm thinking about all of the things that I carry in my body, passed down from my ancestors, that live in me.”

Table 1

Participant Information (in brief)

Pseudonym	Pronouns	Race/Ethnicity	Brief Description
Alexis	she/her	of African descent	Born and raised in Texas and Florida, moved to New York to dance professionally before moving to the PNW to dance for a well-known company, doing her own work exploring Blackness and community
Adeline	she/her	Japanese, Filipina, White	Grew up in PNW, studied Journalism in college while dancing, created a work about the experience of Japanese Americans who were interned
Nora	she/her	Unangan/Aleut	Grew up PNW, studied dance in college in Utah, moved back to PNW, interested in finding ways to make show Indigenous art is present art

Kayla	she/her	Black	Born in Philadelphia, moved to PNW, went to two colleges in the PNW to study dance, interested in the intersectionality of Black experiences
June	she/her	2nd generation Filipino	Born and raised in PNW, grew up training at prestigious pre-professional youth dance programs in PNW, studied dance in college, has been on grant panels
Aki	he/him, they/them	Filipino American immigrant	Grew up in PNW, moved to New York to study dance in college, bicoastal, currently directs a ballet studio
Kiaria	she/her	Japanese and White	Grew up in New York, moved to PNW to dance and work at a non-profit, interested in creating work about relationships and the human experience
Maya	they/she	Filipina American (FilAm)	Grew up in the Bay Area, moved to PNW from Boston, moves with White-passing fluidity, movement designer in theater
Elena	she/her	Chicana, Chiricahuas, Cora	Grew up in LA, moved to PNW to study dance in college, currently working on a project exploring first generation American experience with a cast of primarily women of color
Sebastian	he/him, they/them	Mexican American	Grew up in Southern California, created his own movement style that is a hybrid of contemporary and folklorico, moved to PNW to teach dance at arts college
Elijah	he/him	Tai Dam	Grew up in Iowa, moved to PNW, most recent work focused on his families' experience as Southeast Asian refugees coming to the U.S.
Mika	she/her	Filipina, Cuban, Russian	Grew up in North Carolina, studied dance in college in New York, moved to PNW to teach dance, thinking a lot about the responsibility of faculty in dance programs
Catalina	she/her	Mexican	Grew up in Mexico, moved to PNW to study dance in college, works as a teaching artist for multiple arts organizations

Findings

Each of the 13 participants involved in this study have distinctive journeys with their multiple identities, their experiences with racism in and outside of dance, and how they think about what to do about and in spite of the pain they have experienced. The pain and trauma of existing and navigating as people of color in the U.S. was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting economic and social impacts. Multiple participants throughout the interviews remarked that having a space to share some of their experiences with racism was needed, primed them to reflect more on their experiences, and renewed their desire to have an impact in their communities. The findings of this study revealed that choreographers of color experienced racism in significant ways, primarily through isolation and tokenism in the dance community in the PNW. Despite the many traumatic experiences, participants were driven to continue their art and change the narrative for dancers and choreographers of color. Four major themes emerged throughout the interviews showcasing some of participants' collective experiences and responses to racism in the PNW. These four themes were isolation due to racism, tokenism from racism, choreographers' internal commitment to choreography, and choreographers' resistance of racism by changing the narrative. Within the theme of isolation, I found five subthemes: being the only one, only White dance styles/training are valid, dealing with stereotypes, internalized racism, and burden to represent. Within the theme of tokenism, I found four subthemes: barriers to accessing opportunities, more expectations for artists of color, exploiting presence, and racist expectations for the types of stories. Within the theme of internal commitment, I found four subthemes: learning to unlearn, necessary resiliency, prioritizing self-care and joy, and choosing to navigate. Within the theme of changing the narrative, I found five subthemes: calling out racism, opening access, creating safe spaces, challenging racist

perceptions of dance style validity, and telling stories connected with their activism. Below participants clarify each of these four larger themes and related subthemes.

Isolation

There were several ways participants experienced isolation in dance spaces. Choreographers shared stories of the multiple ways they felt isolated in Whiteness dominated dance spaces. Participants were often the only person of color and received messages that only White dance styles and training were valid. Participants navigated stereotypes and felt they had to prove they were people of color. Several participants also shared how they internalized Whiteness specifically regarding body image. Participants also felt a burden represent as people of color. Participants experienced isolation due to racism in multiple ways.

Being the Only One

Participants shared how they were always the only person of color or one of few in dance spaces. Most of participants reflected that most of their dance experiences had been in predominantly White contexts. This was true when these dance artists were dancers and choreographers. When talking about her experiences as a child, Kayla reflected:

Growing up I craved seeing people that looked like me in professional spaces. Growing up I just never saw too many Black choreographers ... You can count on one hand in [the PNW] how many Black or Black female choreographers there are really out there doing work ... [I was always] longing to see myself in all these other spaces, but then always being a little disappointed.

Kayla felt alone without seeing many Black artists represented. Kayla continued, “There's just something that's really interesting about constantly being othered. Even if you get used to it ... Just what it does to who you are because you just never see yourself anywhere.” The constant

isolation was something that Kayla got used to because she had to. However, being the only dancer of color left Kayla wondering if she belonged in the dance spaces. Alexis had a similar childhood experience as Kayla and shared about her experience with a primarily Black dance company after she moved to New York, “I had never been in spaces where there were only Black dancers. And Black dancers who could do ballet, who could do Horton, who could do African-like literally everything.” Alexis was also isolated in her dance spaces growing up and in college. In the rare experiences she had with other Black dancers, they were not versatile in multiple styles. Until this experience in New York, Alexis had not seen examples of excellent, multitalented Black contemporary dancers.

Catalina and Elena experienced isolation when wanting to work with solely dancers of color or specifically Mexican American dancers respectively but were unable to do that in the PNW. Catalina shared:

I did a dance about this pull and tug relationship of borderline culture ... You're not from there, you're from this very narrow space in the middle. I found it very hard to find dancers that were safe or appropriate to explore these things with. And so that was very discouraging.

Catalina had hoped to work with an ensemble of dancers of color who could understand that space of being in the middle and not quite belonging on either side. It was hard for Catalina to find these dancers when she was casting for the piece because the majority of the dancers she encountered were White and she did not feel it would be safe to explore the idea of belonging with White dancers. Working with a cast of dancers who do not have personal experiences with the theme and are predominately White was isolating for Catalina. Elena is currently working on a dance project exploring the first-generation immigrant experience. She had hoped to work with

all Mexican American dancers. She said, “I had a dream about having an all-Mexican American cast, but it’s hard to find that. I think there’s plenty of Mexican American dancers in Seattle, but not quite as many who do contemporary dance.” For both Catalina and Elena, being a choreographer of color in the PNW has meant being in a dance environment with primarily White dancers and being unable to cast dancers that aligned with their vision.

Only White Dance Styles/Training Are Valid

As both Alexis and Elena alluded to, another way participants have experienced isolation in the PNW has been through the dominance of White dance forms. The dance forms that are seen as valid and prestigious are ballet and modern. Elena mentioned that there were certainly many Mexican American dancers in the PNW; however, there are not that many who are trained in contemporary dance. Elena grew up getting messages from her parents that the best ways to be American and succeed were to focus on what they perceived to be “American” things. This meant not doing folklorico or other Mexican dance styles. She then continued to get messages from her formal dance training spaces about not doing hip hop, commercial, and street styles. If she wanted to be a serious dancer, she got the message that she needed to do ballet and modern.

Nora shared about dancers reacting in racist ways when she choreographed movement that infused Inuit and contemporary dance. Nora described the experience saying:

The [lack of] respect from dancers when I am choreographing something that isn’t necessarily anything that they’ve learned in classes or in their studies ... it kind of felt weird choreographing a certain movement on them because they may have looked down on it because it wasn’t what they studied. I fused the Inuit in with contemporary so it’s not completely out of their wheelhouse. And one dancer in particular was not respectful really at all about it. And I had a hard time. She was the only White person I casted in this

particular dance and that really put a weird feel on it for me. And then I started feeling self-conscious about my movement.

Nora did not get the respect that she expected to receive as the choreographer. The White dancer's disrespect reinforced to Nora that her fusion of Inuit and contemporary movement was not perceived to be valid in this dance space.

Sebastian felt isolated when teaching his/their movement style that is a hybrid of contemporary and folklorico. In college dance programs, there is often a live accompanist for the dance classes. While the musicians might be trained in multiple instruments, Sebastian found that he/they had to be selective in which movement he/they did which days corresponding to whether the accompanist was there and planning to play the piano. Sebastian said, "it's also been really interesting to also work with a musician, teaching them [my style]. Because sometimes having a piano in the room with [folklorico] footwork does not work at all." Sebastian had to adjust lesson plans for classes with a live accompanist. The expectation in college dance programs is that an accompanist will be able to play music that goes with the curriculum. And the curriculum is expected to be ballet or modern. The racist norms in college dance accompaniment isolates faculty of color.

A few of participants have internalized that ballet and modern are more valid dance forms through their training. When Kiaria reflected on her college dance experience and the curriculum, she remarked:

There was a clear devaluation to anything that wasn't modern or ballet which definitely got into my head. I didn't even think as to why classical Indian dancing was like two credits and modern dance was four. Or why we were never encouraged to take any of those ... [she internalized it to herself] It was just like, I guess if you want to stay in

shape and you don't want to take an academic class, take these other cultural dances ... ballet is so codified and there's like so many levels to like work through and same with modern. The cultural dances don't have that ... I guess that makes sense based on the structure I'm seeing and didn't think at that time to really question it.

Kiaria internalized the values that the racist college curriculum prescribed. When dancing in an all-Asian American piece that incorporated drums and various Asian cultures, Kiaria reflected, “that's kind of the first time that I allowed myself to be open to that and cut through the colonization.” She had to unpack for herself why she felt herself judging this dance experience differently than other dance work she had been a part of. Kiaria’s recognition of how she internalized what dance was valid required the vulnerability to see that her previous way of making meaning of dance was racist.

Aki had similar experiences disparaging on the different energy levels and less specific shapes and lines of Filipino folk dancers. Aki learned which forms to value from his/their formal ballet training. Maya also struggled with this internalization. She described:

In choreographing, trying to bring a cast together and then finding all of us fighting the internal racism that we all have in our bodies about what movement is allowed and what bodies and how much of my body is allowed into the space. And even in a space that I'm trying to, as a choreographer, construct where we get to move, the way we want to move, but [I'm] watching myself and watching all of us, be like, “ah, but there's only the one way that looks good.”

Despite Maya wanting to resist the ways Whiteness has permeated their ideas of what movement is valid and looks good, they have to be constantly aware of their thoughts. For Maya and Aki, it

is not enough to just create movement, they are doing the extra work of challenging how they have internalized the validity of White movement.

Elijah has struggled with feeling like his style of contemporary dance is acceptable in the PNW dance community. Because of his initially self-taught training, starting in hip hop, his movement style is different from the standard contemporary in Seattle. He talked about the imposter syndrome he feels in the dance community saying:

Oh yeah imposter syndrome. I do have problems with that quite a bit ... With the ballet scene in the very Eurocentric ballet world, everything's clean cut ... [but] I enjoy celebrating each individual artist's style and I love to show that off in the pieces ... I think the imposter syndrome, also comes with the fact that a lot of folks in the community are trained dancers and I am a self taughter ... to be on the same level as them is a little intimidating ... I always have to remind myself it's art form, it's different. We all have different aspects of it.

Elijah has sometimes felt he needed to adjust his movement to fit in with expectations. He talked about, “adjusting your movement to fit into that pigeonhole.” He gave an example with one festival in the PNW saying, “I got into the contemporary ballet program. And I was like, ‘I better start putting a bunch of ballet to make it fit into this program.’ And it turned out I was the most ballet of the whole program.” Although ballet is not his typical or preferred movement style, Elijah felt pressure to conform to the styles he felt are valued in the dance community to be accepted by the White dominated dance community.

Dealing with Stereotypes

Participants also experienced isolation due to stereotypes and microaggressions. The stereotypes made it hard for participants to feel safe bringing in their culture and identity to

dance spaces. Alexis talked about an experience where a White instructor played music with the n word in their class but did nothing to check in with her, as the one Black dancer in the class.

This teacher seemed to not even recognize or care that a Black dancer would be impacted by the n word. Catalina also shared feeling unsafe in classes due to stereotypes. She shared an example where a dance teacher used coded language and asked Catalina to be “be more spicy and fiery like [she] knew how to,” because the teacher was stereotyping her as a Mexican woman.

Sebastian had a similar experience to Catalina with Mexican stereotypes:

We were dancing through the dance, and we were doing it and [the choreographer] pulls me to the side ... And he was just like, “is there a way you can just turn off your Latin sexiness for a bit?” And I was like, “I don't even know what that means. Okay.” I don't even know what I was trying when I was doing it. I was just trying to be stoic. And then he was just like, “Actually, no. Just put it back. Bring back the Latin sexy thing.”

This choreographer assumed that Sebastian was bringing an unnecessary “Latin sexy thing” likely because the choreographer was applying a racist stereotype to Sebastian. Kayla shared that she had heard parents of dancers and studio directors stereotype hip hop dance to be associated with gangsters, bad attitudes, and troublemakers in front of her. The comments were never directed at her; however, Kayla felt the parents and studio directors made the comments in front of her because they associated hip hop with a Black teacher. Adeline also shared that she has felt unsafe in dance spaces. Adeline said:

All these friends who I had from ballet or dance would occasionally say things or do things that were in the microaggression territory. And being the one non-White person, it never felt like a safe place for me to be fully myself. Just not letting myself hang out in all the ways that I would with people from my community.

Although she felt her White dance friends were not intending to be disrespectful, she did not feel she could respond because she was the only person of color and felt very alone. In dance spaces, Adeline had to worry about whether dance spaces would feel safe or whether she would experience a microaggression. Alexis, Catalina, Sebastian, Kayla, and Adeline had to deal with these stereotypes where they were trying to learn or work.

Nora also expressed that she has encountered dance spaces that did not feel safe. She shared an experience where a dancer was blatant in disrespecting her Aleut culture and specially her name. Nora explained that in her culture, Native names are sacred and not often shared. Nora continued, “I did have an experience where one time I did share my Aleut name. And then somebody who wasn’t Native said, ‘that sounds like cheese.’ And I was like, ‘oh, I’m never going to do that again.’” Not knowing anything about Nora’s culture nor taking the time to learn, this dancer stereotyped what a Native name might sound like and then laughed. Despite Nora wanting to be open and vulnerable with the dancers in her piece, this dancer was racist and mocked her name. Not fitting the racist stereotypes of what an Indigenous person looks like, Nora reflected that she sometimes navigates spaces where people assume because of her skin tones that she is White. Nora does not feel comfortable bringing her Aleut culture into predominantly White dance spaces. She said, “I don’t share my Native name. I don’t share any of my language. And I try to suck it up and just do my best and be how they need me to be - be like everyone else, essentially.” Nora often chooses not to share her identity because she does not want to deal with the racist reactions that she has encountered. Elena also experienced unsafe dance spaces. She shared:

All of my life I’ve had to leave my identity at the door. And I could never say, “oh, as a Mexican American or as someone who comes from Native American culture, this bothers

me or that doesn't sit right with me.” You just shut that off and you're like, “I'm a nobody dancer now, just a generic body in here.”

Elena cannot bring her culture, and thus she could not bring her full self, into most dance spaces because of racism in the dance community.

Another way that some of participants experienced stereotypes was through White people and people of color feeling like they did not fit the visual stereotypes of people of color and feeling like they had to prove they did identify as people of color. Racism has led to assumptions about what different groups of people of color should look like and some of participants do not fit those assumptions. For Maya and Nora, because race is often associated with skin tone, they were sometimes able to navigate spaces with White-passing privilege. Racism led to people not assuming nor believing they were people of color. Nora shared a reflection she had after an audition process for a festival centering choreographers of color. For this audition, the dancers were able to identify which pieces, and thus which choreographers, they were interested in being considered for. At the audition, the choreographers shared a little about their intended work and their identities. Nora shared:

I noticed that not a lot of the POC dancers checked my name to work with me [for this festival]. And a lot of the dancers that I had already worked with did, but they were not necessarily POC. And they were people that did know my lineage and everything. I'm pretty sure that was because of how I present myself. And that just comes from a lack of knowledge of Aleut history and [and the challenges with] how Natives are presented within media and everything ... It's hard to feel like I have to prove myself all the time when I go into [the dance community]. Within Native community I am so accepted, and I am understood, and I am respected. And then I go to try to express it through, what I find

healing, which is dance. And to have to feel like I have to prove myself to everyone. And the pain of not really feeling accepted, not at home.

In a festival supposedly centering choreographers of color, the dancers wanted to work with choreographers who fit their stereotypes of people of color. Racism led these dancers, both White and people of color, subconsciously believing Nora was less of a person of color. Nora is isolated even in dance spaces that are supposed to be for her. In contrast, Nora feels fully accepted when she is in space with solely Native folks.

For Maya, there is a dissonance in her internal experience as a multiracial Filipina American (FilAm) and how racism has socialized people to see multiracial, light-skinned people. They shared their experience growing up in the Bay Area raised by their Filipina mom saying:

I'm White-passing, but I grew up only raised by my mom, who is a Filipino immigrant. So other than the very, very big fact that I am white-skinned and perceived as White in a lot of spaces, my internal experience of growing up and being in my home was culturally Filipino. There's a huge dissonance that is specifically different from just being White-passing, multiracial White-passing, first generation.

Maya does not always fit the racist stereotypes of what people of color look like. Because of racism, Maya chooses to be as aware of the way people perceive her racial identity as her own internal understandings of her identity. They elaborated saying:

Sometimes I feel self-conscious about how and when I wield my full race. Because sometimes it's clear and no one questions it. But other times I'm like, "Will I harm someone if they don't know that I'm not just White? Will it harm someone if they think that my voice is appropriative or I'm coming from an insensitive place?"

Maya is aware that her positionality matters when speaking; however, due to how race is perceived and constructed, it is not always clear to people who do not know her, that she identifies as FilAm. In addition to dealing with stereotypes of them, Maya also has to navigate how peoples' perceptions of them might lead to different impacts on those other people. All of the multiple added layers of perception and impacts due to racialization are a lot to manage. Maya continued, "In all of my identities, I live in between and never actually fall into a single identity fully. It's very isolating." Despite this isolation, Maya did own that because of her white skin, "I often get to move through spaces with White-passing fluidity. So the way that racism directly affects me is not often as direct. I think I often benefit from being othered because I'm not fully othered. I'm passable other." Racism occurs in multiple ways, and results in the perception that there is a spectrum of how much one can be othered and impacted by racism. Not easily fitting within the stereotypes of what people of color should be like comes with the emotional labor of managing the perceptions from all people and unintended harm to other people of color.

Elena has also experienced the pain resulting in feeling like she needs to prove her Native American identity. Elena shared, "It's really hard for me to claim that [part of my identity]. I'm learning how to do that ... It's hard to find [Native community] and also hard not feeling like you're [Native American] enough to dive in." There are racist expectations about when one is allowed to claim an identity. Racism causes Elena to question whether she is Native American enough to say that she is Native American. Sebastian experienced similar pain because of his/their skin tone. He/they said, "being a light skin Mexicano, you've always felt that you're never actually Mexican. You're never really Mexican enough because you don't look it. And then people get so surprised that you can speak Spanish." These racist stereotypes of how dark

Mexican men's skin should be have caused Sebastian to feel moments of insecurity in his/their identity. Mika has also experienced the pain from not fitting into racist stereotypes. Mika has never met another dancer or choreographer who is Cuban, Filipina, and Russian. She shared:

While I'm a lot of things, I don't feel like I really belong to any one group. And I feel like the conversation about race has always been like, "if you are not really this thing, how can you talk about it?" ... I've never belonged, ever in my life ... This year has been a very huge turn for me and how I feel about race and how I'm able to speak about it.

Because I think I never felt like I had a place to speak from because I wasn't Black and I wasn't living the African American experience. But I also wasn't an immigrant. I wasn't coming from Cuba or the Philippines. That's what my parents and my grandparents did.

Racist stereotypes have caused Mika for most of her life to question who she belongs with and whether she gets a voice in talking about racism. Navigating all of these racist stereotypes have caused pain and isolation for participants.

Internalized Racism

Another way some of participants experienced isolation was through internalizing racism and White dominance regarding their body image in dance. In these White dance forms of ballet and contemporary, the ideal body type was that of a ballerina – thin, small breasts, and the capacity for extreme external rotation of the legs, which requires a specific body structure. Maya reflected on the “ideal” dancing body, noting:

A certain size being the only size that is able to dance and the way that that intersects [necessary physicality]. You have to be facile in order to be a mover. You have to not only have been trained through this Eurocentric technique, you also have to be muscular

and thin and able to jump really high and put your leg in the air. And that's the only type of body that we will allow into dance spaces.

The racism in dance transcended what forms were acceptable into what bodies should look like to dance. Several participants shared that their bodies did not fit this ideal and expressed the pain and shame they experienced as a result. Alexis shared, “Being in a space with predominantly White-identifying students ... I was constantly questioning myself. Like, ‘my butt's too big, my legs are too big, my feet don't look like this, I don't have long hair.’” It was racism that led to Alexis doing these comparisons. Kayla shared a similar sentiment and felt her body was different from her predominantly White peers. She shared feelings of hopelessness knowing that she would never be able to look like that ideal. Her feelings were a result of the racist expectations and an internalization of these racist ideals around body types.

Adeline and Elena shared feelings of embarrassment in dance spaces when they did not fit the ideal body. Adeline remembered being told, “‘you're Asian so you have flat feet. You don't have the right type of feet.’” This racist stereotype about Asian feet being flat and thus unable to dance correctly was another way to exclude Adeline from contemporary dance. And because she was chubbier and the one person of color, she was typically the base in any partnering or lifting. Adeline said, “I would usually pick people up. I was never the pretty girl.” In ballet, where Whiteness and the gender binary are valued, men are typically the dancers who are the base and lift women, spotlighting women dancers as beautiful and graceful. Because of racism, Adeline was not supposed to be the one spotlighted. Elena also experienced being designated as the base from a young age. When reflecting on her childhood, Elena said:

I think one thing that I felt was a curse for me as a child ... is that because I was a larger dancer, I was always made a base or a lifter. And it was traumatic for me in high school.

There was one particular moment where a choreographer paired male/female duets. And all the males are lifting the females. But the person I was paired with - there was no way he was going to lift me. He was small and I was big. So it was not going to happen. So [the choreographer] made me lift the male and that was so traumatic for me.

Elena's pain from her childhood experiences were due to the internalized racist expectations that she had of how dance bodies should be. These racist ideals further the White dominance in dance and are another way participants experience isolation.

Nora also experienced the pain from wanting to have this ideal thin, White body, but not having it. She realized that as Aleut woman, she had striven for the body of those that had colonized her ancestors. Nora reflected on the messages she got to be more like Europeans while growing up. She talked about:

The embarrassment of being - and this comes from my grandma - always putting on sunscreen and hearing, "oh, we don't go in the sun too long." The embarrassment of being tan at all was also prevalent in my family. I never digested that because that was just like, "oh, you're just taking care of yourself. You're just being conscious about how you look."

Because of colonization and racism, Nora's ancestors had internalized the desire to be like the White colonizers to survive. Internalizing that racism was encouraged by her family to ensure their continued survival. As she has learned more about her Aleut culture, Nora realized that the required diet for this ideal, White body, contrasted with the Aleut populations' traditional diet. She shared:

Aleut and Eskimo lineage in general are thicker built. And on top of it we live off of meats and fats and stuff and our bodies have never really digested wheat. And now

[wheat is] just super prevalent in our diet. And that's normal in today's diet and it doesn't sit well with anyone of Aleut or Athabaskan lineage.

The food that Aleut peoples were forced to eat when first Russian, and later United States, colonizers came onto and claimed their land, was vastly different than the food they had traditionally eaten. Nora expressed a lot of pain from realizing that even today, dancers of Aleut descent still strive to have the bodies of their colonizers. Navigating both the internalized racism of what the ideal dance body should be and the realization that this internalization was a survival mechanism has caused Nora a relentless pain. Realizing she had sought and idealized the body of her peoples' oppressors traumatized Nora.

Burden to Represent

In addition to the ways participants had experienced internalizing the Whiteness of the ideal dance body, they also shared the burden they felt to represent and speak up in their dance spaces. June remarked that racism is not talked about in the dance community unless the dance festival is about people of color or unless she is in a workshop about dance and systemic racism. Most dance spaces in the area are White-dominated spaces. Because of racist systems that reduce the likelihood for a White person to bring up issues of racism, participants felt the burden to bring up issues and represent. Elena shared an example of the burden she felt saying:

As a person of color, you have to do more. And even when you do more, it's still not enough. And at the same time, you're the only person of color person in a show. You're the only representation. I feel like when I enter a space as the only person of color, one of just a couple, I don't have an option to not say something, to not use that platform to say something about what's going on in the world or society or at that particular space even. So, there's a certain obligation ... But I do know that it's stifling for some POCs.

Elena's obligation to challenge racism sometimes makes her physically ill. She spoke of writing an article for her community that gave tangible examples of how racism shows up in the dance world, and then being physically ill for a few weeks because of that stress. By choosing to speak up, Elena has to deal with the emotional labor of her stress as well as the physical impacts. Maya also had to navigate the emotional impacts of choosing whether to speak up. She shared an example of an experience doing movement design for a theater. For this production, Maya had to be the person, "to decide whether things are right or wrong ... There were moments where I had to be like, 'that's wrong. This thing that you're asking us to do is now wrong.'" Maya had to reflect on, "is this wrong enough that I'm going to throw my flag, of which I only have like three yellow flags before I'm angry or picky or judgy or, you know, telling everyone they're racist." Due to racism, Maya had to navigate whether they had the social capital to speak up or whether they had already used their limited number of challenges. Either way, Maya had the added emotional labor of that burden of whether to resist the racism or not.

Kayla felt the tension of that responsibility to represent and knowing that not everyone will understand or appreciate her choreography. She also talked about the vulnerability knowing that her choreography is a product of her lived experiences. The racism in the dance community results in a choreographer of color feeling the responsibility to represent even knowing that speaking up could have future consequences for access to opportunities. Catalina also feels a responsibility to voice issues around equity in her arts administrator and teaching artist roles. As one of few teaching artists who go into schools, Catalina is always cognizant of her Mexican identity when teaching children. She has even had managers inform her when she is the only teaching artist of color, recognizing that it is a lot of responsibility to be a teaching artist of color, especially in classrooms with children of color. Kayla and Catalina can never ignore that they

might be the only person of color to be in a space and feel a burden to represent and speak up. Racism results in this extra burden on choreographers of color.

There were many ways that racism caused participants to experience isolation in the dance community. Being the only person of color led to feelings of pain and not feeling a sense of belonging. That was further exacerbated by the racist messages participants received that only White dance styles were valid. In addition, the racist stereotypes participants had to navigate while being in dance spaces caused more pain. Participants often internalized and experienced shame and embarrassment of their bodies. The choreographers' felt a burden to represent and speak up that had physical and emotional impacts. All of these are examples of the ways the participants experienced isolation because of racism in the dance community.

Tokenism

In addition to the ways racism caused them to experience isolation, participants also experienced tokenism in dance spaces. Participants shared examples of the racism they experienced trying to access funding and opportunities to sharing their work. Choreographers shared the racist expectations that asked artists of color to do more than their White peers and dictated what their dances should be about. Participants shared about the pain when White artists exploited their presence. These are examples of the ways participants experienced tokenism in contemporary dance.

Barriers to Accessing Opportunities

Participants talked about the barriers to presenting work as choreographers of color in the PNW. Before even considering the barriers for choreographers of color, June talked about some of the barriers for people of color to become dancers. With the intersections between race and socioeconomic status, many dancers of color struggle with the financial barriers to being a

dancer and aspiring artist. Switching to the barriers for choreographers of color, June said, “It is rare for us to even be artists because the path is so difficult. There are so many barriers ... to get to this level of being choreographers ... you sacrifice so much to get to this place.” The ways racism has impacted people of color’s ability to access and generate wealth has had generations of impact on earning potential and additional money for dance training. June shared that for many choreographers of color, there are not as many family financial resources and they end up needing to put their own money into producing their work.

In addition to the cost to do formal dance training, the cost to produce a dance work adds up quickly. Some of the costs include rehearsal space, dancer stipends, theater rental, technical support, costumes, marketing. For choreographers of color to present work, they need the financial resources. One of the external funding sources for artists are grants. Elena talked about the challenges she has encountered applying for funding:

A lot of my work, almost all of my work, probably 90% of it, is about something really directly tied to my Mexican American culture. And so the titles are always in Spanish and sometimes the music has Spanish lyrics, or there is Spanish poetry in it or things like that. And when a [White] grantor is trying to figure out if people can connect to the work and if it's worthy of giving a grant to, but they can't connect to it, they're not going to give it a grant if they can't connect to it. That does a huge disservice because not everything is for White people.

June’s experiences being involved on panels to select grant recipients as well as on a selection committee to select the leadership for arts organizations in the PNW reinforce the racist experiences Elena has had with grants. June shared that only recently have women of color held leadership roles or been asked to serve on grant panels. Anytime June has been on a panel, she

was one of maybe two people of color. And the ultimate decision maker has always been a White woman. June described, “[This area’s] dance scene hopped onto that when diversity, equity, and inclusion was trending. When they had to write Black Lives Matter or they were going to be called out publicly on social media.” In her experience on grant panels, June shared that there is space for one or two choreographers of color. And grantors lump anyone who is not White together into one category regardless of the artist’s race/ethnicity or what type of work/style they do. The grant panels tend to preference what is already common in the PNW dance scene, thus what is primarily presented by White choreographers. Additionally, June shared that grant panels preferred more education and often preferred male artists. June said that often the choreographers of color selected to receive grants were lighter-skinned and/or White-passing. All the personal experiences June has had from behind the scenes of grant panels demonstrates the racism involved in grant funding.

June also shared an experience where she applied to present work at a festival and did not get selected. She asked for feedback from the adjudicators. June said, “the feedback to me felt really racist. The feedback was that my work wasn’t edgy enough - that it was focused too much on the audience and wanting to engage with the audience members that come from my community.” The producers of the festival told June they already had an audience they catered to, and that her work would not engage the existing audience. This venue typically has White audience members. June’s piece did not get selected because the adjudicator had racist perceptions that her work would not appeal to their White audience. The racist response continued by tokenizing June and asking her and another person of color to present a piece and talk about race. June expressed her frustration with all of the racist barriers to funding and opportunities that choreographers of color in the area experience. She said:

There's a lot of reasons why I was over it in the dance world in [the PNW]. Because I kept running into the same problems. And it doesn't matter how many times I present work. And if I build an organization. And if you know most of those people. I teach all over. It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter if I have a seat at the table. It doesn't matter who the fuck I am. My perspective is so different ... [artists of colors'] decision is never the one that is taken ... in the end it's always the White person's choice.

June continued to experience racism directly and she saw the ways the systems and processes continued to perpetuate racism. She felt there continued to be a cycle that prevented many choreographers of color from having access because of this White dominance.

More Expectations for Artists of Color

Another barrier for participants in sharing their work and another example of the way racism impacts choreographers of color is the higher caliber dance expectation that is placed on artists of color that does not exist in the same way for White artists. Alexis shared that while she was trying to get into a prestigious PNW dance company, she felt the artistic director was harder on her than other dancers. When she asked him why, he responded, ““You're coming out to [the PNW], a predominantly White area. If I'm bringing out a Black dancer, she has to be one of the best.”” Alexis shared another example of the differences in caliber for what is considered art for artists of color compared to White artists:

This happened in [in the PNW] earlier on doing the [BLM] protest when a Caucasian woman, or maybe she was mixed but passing, sat on the ground and opened her legs up for two police officers [calling it art and protest] ... And I think about the amount of bullshit that [White] artists are able to get away with and the racism that exists inside of that. I mentioned I created a work [exploring Blackness and the n word]. The amount of

pushback that I've gotten around wanting to have that conversation, ensuring that no one was able to censor my work. But knowing that on the other side, there's a touring [White] artist going around opening their legs and showing their full-fledged vagina with not necessarily any context or any reason why.

Alexis had to fight to ensure she could present her work in a way that felt right to her; whereas she witnessed no attempt to censor a White artist. These different expectations for White artists and artists of color are the result of racism.

The different standards and expectations for work was something Catalina also noticed. Catalina shared, "I've seen a lot of [White] creators and choreographers that keep showing very similar stuff that is not a development of an idea. This dance titled cat and this is dance titled dog. And they look the same." White choreographers in the PNW do not have to be creative with their work and ideas. White dance forms and what White performers are creating is valued as sophisticated art regardless of what the artists do. These different expectations for artists of color are an example of the how racism shows up for choreographers of color. Elena was also frustrated by the racism in the dance community in the PNW. She shared:

The thing that sticks out the most, particularly here in [the PNW], is that White folks don't have to do as much it seems when they enter spaces. And I don't know what their processes are like. They might have super long, really intelligent and intellectual processes. But when they're showing up in the space with their completed work, it's always very minimal, very noodley dancing. Lots of improv, drone music, very minimal stuff. Just what we have to show up with as people of color in the space—the amount of work or the product that we produce has to be so much more and so much better and encompass so much complexity in order for us to even be allowed into that space. And I

think that's been the biggest hindrance for me. It takes a lot more tears and a lot more heartache and a lot more time and energy to get my foot in the door to get noticed, than I think for some of my White counterparts.

Elena was frustrated by the racism she experienced with more expectations for artists of color. Artists of color not only need to put in the time and energy to create their work, but they also experience emotional labor from the racist expectations. Elena gave an example of when she experienced different expectations for White artists compared to her and two dancers of color:

Everybody in the show was White and every piece was so abstract and so performance art than dance. And one woman literally lied on the floor for 20 minutes. 20 minutes just on the floor and didn't move. And she just had a fan blowing on a plant and the plant was dancing. The audience just sat there, watching her be still for 20 minutes. And I had two awesome dancers, who are both people of color. One African American trans woman and an Indonesian American woman. And they were beautiful and they danced together, I think, really powerfully. There was a lot of lifting. They were huffing and puffing at the end of the piece because they had danced so hard. And the director [said to them], "I just want more from you. I just want more." What more could [the director] want? They couldn't even breathe at the end of this piece. At the same time, [the director] said to the other person, "You have a really original idea. Do you know how rare it is to have an original idea?"

This director treated Elena and this White artist differently because of racism and the inherent belief that White is better. Not only did Elena and the dancers have to work incredibly hard to prepare for this show, Elena and the dancers also had to deal with criticism steeped in a racist double standard.

Exploiting Presence

Participants also shared stories of how White dance producers have exploited their presence. Despite the barriers to entry, when participants did have the chance to share their work, they noticed they were often the only artist of color. Catalina found that there were festivals that claimed they wanted artists from diverse backgrounds. She would apply to the festival and then not get selected or only be asked to present in a space separate from the mainstage. This disconnect is due to the racist ways dance organizations only want to claim to support people of color for their image but without actual centering.

Elijah has known dancers of color who have been tokenized and hired because of their racial background. He has even wondered for himself whether he has been selected primarily because he is an Asian American man. He expressed disappointment with the tokenism that exists because the racism often means only one person of color will get access to an opportunity. Organizations can pat themselves on the back and say they have an artist of color, even when the organization is exploiting and isolating the people of color. Elena also shared that she has questioned whether she got things because she is a woman of color. She acknowledged that things might be changing slowly in the dance community as organizations claim they want to diversify. But in the few occasions where she has received a grant for a project, her imposter syndrome kicks in and she wonders if she got the grant solely because of her race and ethnicity. Due to systemic racism, artists of color cannot remove the question of whether they were selected as a token. Artists of color have to manage extra doubts and frustration because of racist systems.

Maya shared an experience where she was doing movement design for a play with some Asian themes and was set in China. They shared:

There've been instances where I noticed that I get asked to participate in a project to give the project permission to move forward ... I choreographed [this play] ... I am Filipino American and my training doesn't know the style of movement that I was asked to do, but they couldn't have a White person do it.

This play required movement design inspired by classical Chinese movement. Maya does not have any training in classical Chinese movement. However, because Maya is FilAm and both Chinese and Filipino people are Asian, the leadership in the play could justify moving forward. The leadership making the decision to move forward disregarding whether there was authenticity in the training or ethnic background is an example of racist decision making. Maya was the token Asian person.

Alexis and Kiaria have also both experienced being tokenized and then exploited as dancers of color. Alexis shared an experience where she was asked to do a performance for a dance festival. By the time Alexis moved to the PNW, she had performed with multiple well-known dance companies and at this time Alexis was dancing with a prominent company in the PNW. She was not an unknown dance artist trying to get exposure. She was offered a set amount of money, to which she agreed. The producer then called her back closer to the performance date saying the festival could no longer pay her that agreed upon stipend and then asked if she would be willing to perform for free. She was asked to dance in the festival because of her strong reputation in the dance community. But the producer of this festival thought he could ask her to perform for free because of racism. Choreographers of color are asked to volunteer their time without compensation too often. Alexis said, "As a Black dance artist I'm oftentimes just really trying to figure out how not to feel exploited." Racism has resulted in artists of color being asked to do work without compensation.

As shared in Karia's participant profile, one of her teachers growing up tokenized Karia as a child when she was put in the front of her class for a Japanese cultural dance performance because she was the only Japanese child in the class. Later as an adult in the PNW, she had an experience working with a White choreographer who tried to exploit her Japanese heritage.

Karia described:

I was working with a White choreographer in [the PNW], who is no longer in [the PNW] and burned a lot of her relationships through being very racist. But there were two experiences ... one which she asked us to all write letters to our POC relatives. And when I read my letter she told me that I wrote it wrong, and she rewrote it for me and said I didn't dig deep enough into my own culture. And then the second was she [had us] write out a random list of Japanese words ... And then she asked me to read them out loud and she recorded them on her phone ... then she worked with her White music producer to create a soundtrack that was literally me just saying the words, slowed down, so they weren't even pronounced correctly anymore. And then she asked me to create a piece based on clouds because that's how she imagined my Japanese culture to manifest itself. This choreographer tokenized, exploited, and objectified Karia and felt it was okay because of racist perceptions of artists of color. Artists of color choosing to navigate racist dance structures know they might experience exploitation due to the permeation of racism.

Racist Expectations for the Types of Stories

In addition to tokenizing choreographers of color, producers and adjudicators have expectations for what types of stories choreographers of color should be creating. In many cases, the desire from primarily White producers is that the work should be about racial stereotypes. Alexis said, "there are just a lot of restrictions within the presenting organizations here around

their expectations around Black and Brown bodies ... [there are] expectations that come along with what my Black body is supposed to look like on stage and the kind of work I'm supposed to do." The racist expectations of what Alexis should create a dance about led to a narrow range of stories Alexis could tell if she wanted access to White-led organizations to present her work. These racist expectations were stifling her creativity.

Catalina also received messages of what stories she had to create about to present her work while in college. She had wanted to present a piece that was fun and cute that was not connected to her Mexican culture, and it was rejected. Then for her senior capstone project, she utilized "weird quirky and kind of broken lines of ballet ... exploring women and the taking care of hair and the community building of doing each other's hair ... and called it something in Spanish" and her faculty members loved it. The different reactions to these distinctly different stories she wanted to tell were examples of the racist expectations on choreographers of color. To navigate the racism, Catalina she realized that if she presented stories that were within the racist expectations, her choreography would be received most positively. Catalina continued:

[Many times] I've been asked to come and create work, and then I get there and they want me to talk about my immigrant experience. And I'm like, "I was born here, and then I didn't live here. And then I did." That is my experience. That's pretty boring. But if you want me to make a dance about that I'll make a dance about that.

Catalina chose how she wanted to navigate.

Kiaria also felt restrained by the racist expectations but chose more often not to present her work rather than feel limited in what she could create. Kiara said:

I felt like all the applications that I had seen were about exploiting my culture or were so specific about that needing to be a part of the pieces. And that's just not the way that my

mind creatively works. I am Japanese and embody a lot of the cultural values and things that I learned from my mom, but I don't think of Japanese dancing when I think of what kind of dancing I want to make. And I don't want other people to tell me that that's what I should be thinking ... I feel that's a ridiculous thing to ask of me.

Kiaria wanted to resist these racist expectations for her stories; however, that also meant there were fewer festivals she felt she could gain access. Resisting the exploitation was worth reduced opportunities for Kiaria. Kayla also felt stifled by the expectations of what she should be choreographing about. She shared:

I think racism is such a heavy topic and discrimination is such a heavy topic. And I commend anybody who's able to kind of take it on and give their take ... And sometimes I feel like it's what's expected of me - to make things that are centered about that ... And because of the way I look there are certain expectations. Especially with what's going on now [with Black Lives Matter]. I think everybody's wanting me to comment on this, that, and the other.

Kayla did not want the unfair pressure of creating work about racism or discrimination. It is unfair for White producers to expect that Black people should be the only ones telling stories about racism and that racism is the only story Black people would want to tell.

While many participants felt stifled by the expectations of creating work that had to be connected to their race or ethnicity, Alexis shared a contrasting thought about being asked to create work ignoring her race. She said, "Occasionally people have asked me do I choreograph other stuff besides things around my Blackness. And I'm like, 'so you want me to ignore what I look like? You want me to ignore who I am?'" It is racist to believe it is possible for a person of color to remove the experiences they have had because of racism. Being race-neutral is racist

coded language for White. Instead of producers asking choreographers of color to create work only about their race, artists of color are asked instead to pretend they are race-less. These racist expectations of what stories they should tell and wanting them to remove their identities are further examples of the ways choreographers of color experience tokenism. Choreographers of color do not have the luxury of being individuals with their own ideas if they want to navigate the racist dance community and present their work. Choreographers of color are forced to choose whether to resist the racism or fit within the narrow boundaries that ascribe to Whiteness in order to gain access. Participants had to deal with the added emotional labor and trauma of exploitation and unfair standards when they choose to engage in the White-dominated community.

Internal Commitment

Another theme that came out when participants described their dance experiences in the PNW was their internal commitment to continuing to be choreographers of color. To survive the racist dance community, there were internal ways these participants had to navigate. These choreographers of color were aware that they would continue to experience racism, and they made the choice to continue honing their craft and resisting racism. To choose to resist, participants shared examples of the ways they navigated so that they could continue dancing and creating. Participants became aware of the patterns they experienced and recognized that those patterns were the result of a racist system and racist actions and beliefs from individuals. With this awareness participants learned to unlearn the messages that they did not belong in the dance community. Participants figured out their own ways to be resilient and continue to move forward and realized they had to prioritize their self-care and ensure they were able to find joy in dance and with their communities. These are examples of how participants demonstrated their internal commitment to continuing to be choreographers of color in the PNW.

Learning to Unlearn

Participants shared stories of their process of learning to unlearn the racist ways they had been socialized in the U.S. as humans as well as dancers and choreographers. A few participants shared their reflections on the complications of unpacking how they have been racialized when the racism is embedded so deeply. June shared her thoughts about choreographers of color and their journey in unpacking their racialization saying:

Everyone has their own personal journey with racism. And then you add that layer of racism in dance and then you add that layer of racism as a choreographer. There's a lot of layers. I feel like you have to interrogate all of them: you with your family, you with your friends, you by yourself, the way that you talk to yourself, the way you interact with people, how you interact with people in the dance space, how you've interacted with choreographers, how you've interacted with your dancers. You have to interrogate all of those things. And a lot of times, specifically in dance, we don't interrogate it because we're operating in a system that is predominantly, specifically in the performing arts space, predominantly White. I realized that a lot of folks are still tapping into the personal and how that relates to the way they show up in dance spaces.

The journey to unlearn is complicated because of how insidious racism is. Racism is designed such that the easiest path and choice is not to question whether one's experiences are impacted by racism, but to rather to believe that one's experience is distinctive. Unlearning takes work and processing of pain to continue to resist the racist narratives that are easier to internalize.

For Adeline, she shared that some of her unlearning has been through learning about the way systems work and how they impact art. Because of her work in opera, she has been able to learn about the ways opera and dance have operated under racism. She shared:

To work in opera and do community education stuff you learn a lot about how patriarchy and imperialism and Eurocentrism has functioned in art forms and are what we do as dancers ... So it's been really interesting for me to learn more about those things or even the theme of Orientalism and The Nutcracker. That's problematic. Where did these things come from? I really learned about how this whole art of Orientalism is you know what European people created so they could fantasize about faraway lands and it was exotic and kind of sensual to them.

Learning the language to point to imperialism and Eurocentrism was a way in for Adeline to challenge the narratives she had previously learned were normal. By learning about Orientalism, she could see how parts of The Nutcracker, specifically the Chinese variation, are problematic in their depictions. By starting with specific examples of White dominance in art, Adeline started to interrogate those different layers that June spoke of. Whereas Adeline started dismantling by learning the language of racism, Aki's journey is very personal. Aki reflected:

That got me thinking, "how has racism impacted you in the dance world?" And I have to be honest with you, I don't have a clear answer as I sort of audit my experiences. I'm unearthing the memories and [asking myself], "was that racism? Was that microaggression? How did they talk to me? How did I apply for that grant? How did that play out for that opportunity? Was that communication or opportunity equitable to someone like me?"

Aki was intellectually aware that racism happens in the dance community while also not being able to clearly identify how he/they might have experienced it personally. Aki and Adeline both recognize that racism impacts communities of color, and they approach their unlearning from different angles.

For Elena the process to learn to unlearn started when she moved to the PNW, where she was suddenly confronted with very obvious racism that was not possible for her to believe could be normal. She reflected on the differences between Southern California and the PNW:

Being in California and being surrounded, Southern California specifically, is basically Mexico. It's all brown folks. You're surrounded by the culture all the time. Because I was surrounded by the culture, all the time, I did not value it or take it seriously. I tried to distance myself from it. That was my hope and my goal, to get as far away from it as possible. And going to [college in the PNW] and realizing, "I'm the only brown person in this class - in my ballet class." I was the only person of color in there, and I didn't even realize it until like halfway through ... I think I just realized, "oh, I actually do value my Mexican American culture." And I did not think about all the ways that it actually has influenced me. So had I not [been in the PNW], I would probably still be in a place of trying to resist my own identity. Or maybe eventually I would have appreciated it. But I definitely would have not been where I am now and realizing not only do I value it for myself, but it's something of value to share with others.

For Elena, isolation started her unlearning journey. The pain forced her to confront her experiences. And Elena chose to recognize and unlearn as she also chose to continue to be in the dance community and resist the racism that was trying to tell her she did not belong. June also experienced pain as part of her unlearning. June reflected, "A lot of my learning, specifically in the dance space, has been getting hurt. And then telling people about it and talking about it. And then learning from it ... How do we prevent more artists of color from getting hurt?" Racism is painful. Isolation and tokenism are painful. For some choreographers of color, the path to unlearning unfortunately starts because of the pain. For June, after experiencing the pain, she

stayed connected to the dance community so she could share her experiences with others to hopefully prevent them from having to experience the pain. Elena and June both chose to resist by continuing to be in a racist dance community.

For Nora, her unlearning also came with the pain of learning more about the history of her Aleut culture. When she started to interrogate her internalized racism in striving for this thin, White body, she realized how deeply rooted that internalized racism was for her and her family. She shared:

I think what came out was more like, “oh, we're trying to look like them [when she referenced her challenges with body image].” And I think it comes more from the history of Native culture is that we were forced to live like the settlers. And I think that just strikes this huge painful streak in me. Seeing my ancestors in photos that my grandma has shown me where they're trying to look as European as possible and just hearing my grandma's stories about how they were so embarrassed to be Native. That some people wouldn't even really talk to their parents after they went to boarding school because it was so embarrassing for them.

Nora realized that for many Native peoples, including others in her family, there was a deep yearning for Whiteness because of colonization and trying to survive. Nora's journey to unlearn her internalized racism was connected to her journey in learning about her Aleut culture and the generations of pain that resulted from the colonization of her ancestors. Her connections to her culture have opened her eyes to ways to understand her body that align with her history. She shared, “[The Aleut nutritionist] goes around to Aleut tribes to educate on what we used to eat, what we're eating now, and trying to help them adjust their diets accordingly and to be healthier

with their body and their mind.” Despite the pain of recognizing the generations of pain and internalized racism, Nora is unlearning by connecting deeply with her cultural roots.

In addition to unlearning the ways they experienced racism as individuals, several participants also talked of learning to unlearn the ways in which organizations perpetuated racism. In two examples Maya and Alexis shared, White organizations supported artists of color because not doing so would negatively impact the organizations’ image. Alexis shared an experience where a White-led dance organization partnered with a Black-led organization to present a show. After that one-time partnership, the White-led organization was able to apply and receive grants that were for organizations focused on diversity. Alexis said, “They fit into a bucket with a lot of other organizations who feed off of and are essentially parasites for the Black and Brown community in a lot of ways - monetizing our emotional and physical labor.” In White dominant culture, White-led organizations can convince themselves they are selflessly supporting communities of color; however, Alexis precisely named that they are exploiting the Black and Brown communities for their own, greater benefit. Maya also recognized the pattern of behavior for White organizations in summer 2020 after the reaffirmed urgency with the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement after the multiple public killings of Black people earlier in the year. She said:

That first wave of all of the theater companies and ballet companies and stuff being like, “Black Lives Matter.” Then also, here's for no reason at all, this Black soloist we have in our company, doing something amazing. I still want them to get resources and I want that person to be upheld. And I want the kid to see that so that the cycle starts making more opportunities for people of color. But that is a power play from White institutions that are actively continuing to oppress.

With the publicity of BLM over the summer, to maintain their image and not be perceived as racist, organizations had to state they cared about Black lives. These racist organizations publicly stated their support and then tokenized and exploited their Black dancers. Racism has led to the tension that Maya noted of wanting Black dancers to be in the spotlight because they are excellent and to provide role models to young dancers of color while wanting the actions of the White organizations to be recognized as a manifestation of racism.

Another facet that participants learned to unlearn was that effective resistance and mutual liberation required communities of color to work together rather than stand alone or step back.

June shared:

In order for Black artists to be liberated, we, my community, and I'm going to identify as the Asian community, also needs to be liberated in order for Black artists to be liberated. I need to be liberated. You need to be liberated. If Black artists are to be liberated we can't not show up to ourselves in all of this ... Non-Black artists might feel the urge to step back right now and let Black artists make all of the decisions. And certainly, if a Black trans woman's needs are met, everyone else's will be as well. But in order for another woman of color to show up for a Black woman, she also needs to be fully liberated. And in order for the Black woman to be fully liberated, all women of color need to be as well.

June's unlearning of the messages and norms that keep people of color separate is a part of her internal resistance. The different experiences of racism by different communities of color make racism harder to pinpoint. White supremacy pits people of color against each other so it is hard for communities of color to hold the multiple ideas that one can liberate multiple communities of color and liberate one's own community. There is a fixed resources mentality that perpetuates a

separation and competition between communities of color that only serves to perpetuate racism. Adeline recognized that different racial groups experience racism differently and there were different ways to work towards mutual liberation. She reflected:

A lot of Asian American folks, especially in [the PNW], have this kind of proximity to Whiteness. And we do have this privilege and a lot of the time people see us as safe. And it's that whole model minority thing. I am not going to be a safe space for you. I'm going to continue to prioritize my own love and liberation and self-care, which is prioritizing my black and brown siblings. And thinking about it in terms being these people who are sort of deemed as safe, we can infiltrate a lot of these spaces.

Adeline had to unlearn her racialization as an Asian American fitting the model minority stereotype that is seen as safe for White people. By unlearning this stereotype and dominant narrative, she could resist how the model minority stereotype tries to pit Asian people against other people of color. Participants shared their various ways of learning to unlearn racism, how organizations perpetuate racism, and how mutual liberation is crucial.

Necessary Resiliency

In addition to gaining awareness of the ways they were socialized and then committing to unlearning that, participants also shared their resiliency as choreographers of color in the PNW. The frequent and regular experiences of isolation and tokenism were traumatic; however, participants were committed to their art and chose to continue to dance and create. Part of participants internal resistance was through their resiliency.

Kayla spoke of all choreographers of color making the choice to continue creating within societal contexts of racism. She shared:

There's this common thread about this idea of [Whiteness] and how [all choreographers of color have] had to kind of come to terms with that in themselves. These are my beliefs. This is how I want to move through the world. This is how I want to make art. I believe in what I'm doing. I have a whole group of people who believe in what I'm doing. And I think it can be great. Perhaps it really is an illusion that we have to make that fit within this world. It's sad that it is a common struggle. [All artists of color] kind of have their sort of coming-of-age moment where they experienced that and kind of get over that and just like do what's right for them. Create the things that are important to them.

Choreographers of color have to be resilient in order to create because of the racism they will certainly encounter. That resiliency can come from a strong sense of self, commitment to doing art, and having a supportive community. Another component of resiliency is recognizing what feels authentic within the realities of having to navigate racist systems. Kayla shared more about how she navigates. She said, "in an effort to move forward with our own lives and with our work as artists, we just blocked out or forgot about [the racism]. Just so we could keep moving." Navigating the racism sometimes requires compartmentalizing in order focus mental energy on dance rather than trauma. Kayla shared more about how she is resilient:

Being accepted I think would be validating. But I don't think I'm in a space where I even want to seek that validation anymore ... I feel like I've waited my whole life to see people that look like me. And I just don't want to wait for that anymore. So I'd rather just be that person for other people.

Another component of Kayla's resiliency is an internal shift from wanting external validation in a racist dance community. This shift reflects Kayla's commitment to giving back to her community through representing in her art. Kayla continued, "I'm going to go out and create

something because clearly there's a need for other people to see this dance ... Clearly there's a need to have representation.” Kayla’s resiliency is connected to her commitment to dance as well as to changing the dance community for artists of color in the future.

Another way that resiliency shows up for participants is by actively choosing to resist internalized racism. Adeline talked of making the choice to focus on self-love instead of letting the internalized racism continue. She shared:

I think a lot of the self-love journey that BIPOC go on- it’s been decolonizing my ideas. I remember when I was like, “this is my first position and this is what my body can do. It can still do ballet, it’s just in a different way.” Even if my legs look like this, and I’m thicker around the middle. Learning to really love and embrace my roundness and my Japanese Filipina-ness has been a bit of a journey.

Adeline is resisting the racist narratives that tell her that she does not belong in the contemporary dance world. Instead, Adeline is choosing to make her own meaning of her dancing body. In her commitment to continue as a choreographer in the PNW, a part of the required resiliency is to love herself and know that she is a dancer and choreographer. Alexis also experiences that love of herself and her culture. She shared, “I say this about my Blackness, I think it’s magic. I think we’re alchemists and we’re able to really literally take our experiences and the shitty experiences that we have and make fucking magic and gold out of it.” To continue as a choreographer, Alexis has reframed for herself what her Blackness means to her and her craft. She takes the pain she has experienced and redirects that as inspiration for her art so that she can continue to make meaning. Alexis continued saying:

There’s just a passive nature about how [the PNW] operates ... not necessarily saying those racist trigger words, but we all know what it means. We all know exactly how to

interpret those things. And so I've had those kinds of experiences. And nothing necessarily overtly racist, if you will. But maybe I have. Shit I live in this body. So I've just learned how to digest that shit and keep it moving or not digest it, throw that shit up and keep it moving.

Adeline, Alexis, and Kayla all shared examples of the ways they have been resilient after choosing to continue being choreographers. There are different paths to being resilient. All have developed a strong sense of who they are and their commitment to dance and create. Sometimes resiliency shows up as compartmentalizing, sometimes as focusing on their community, and sometimes reframing the narratives. Despite the racism that told them they did not belong and might be exploited should they continue to dance; they made the choice to resist and assert their own counterstories.

Prioritizing Self-Care and Joy

Another part of how these choreographers have demonstrated their internal commitment to carrying on is through their prioritization of their self-care and joy. A significant way participants talked about their self-care was by setting boundaries and being able to say no. Sebastian had very tangible ways he/they set boundaries with teaching. He/they described, “I think something that I've done this year that I've never done is five o'clock is my cut off. I won't answer emails. I won't do anything ... Not being apologetic.” Setting these boundaries with his/their teaching responsibilities was a way for Sebastian to ensure he/they would have the energy to care for multiple parts of his/their life. June also shared a new resolve to set boundaries for herself saying:

As I've gotten older it's been easier for me to really be like, "yeah, that's not for me" and, "yes, this is for me." To really choose what I want to put myself in and what I don't. So that's been a tool that I've been using to take care of myself. Saying no, a lot.

By choosing only the projects and responsibilities that bring her joy, June drives where her energy will be spent, knowing that any dance project will require emotional labor. June is committed to dance and needs to do what is necessary for her self-care. For Alexis, some of the boundaries she has set are with how she talks to herself when moving. She described:

When I'm working out I'm thinking, how am I talking to myself? Am I encouraging myself? Because that's actually the opposite of what I trained myself to do over 34 years. I've constantly said to myself, "You're not good enough. You need to work harder." That's how I talk to myself. And that's not healing at all. That's actually doing the opposite. So yeah, I think it's those daily affirmations that are super important for me.

Alexis reframes her self-talk to resist the internalized racism. Dancers are attuned to their physical bodies, but they also need to listen to their spirits to continue to be in a toxic and racist dance world.

Mika and Adeline shared that they think of self-care in terms of not doing and resting.

Adeline reflected:

I think when you go to create as an artist it should come from your spirit and not from a place of pressure or a need to be doing something. But just from your heart and from your spirit. That only comes from having a full cup. I think that just loving ourselves as we are and resting and taking all the time we need—I think that those things are so revolutionary and really important for self-care ... Just thinking about what medicine it is to rest and to

not be worried about creating anything ... I think there's something really revolutionary about letting it all hang out and not putting that pressure on yourself.

Mika shared how thinking about animals helped her to take a moment to reflect on her life in simpler ways:

I think animals just really make me simplify. To look at am I meeting all the basic needs? Am I sleeping? Am I eating good food? Am I taking a moment to just rest and not do? ... [During the pandemic] it would be replacing doing with other doing. And I needed to not do. It was more figuring out, "okay, maybe I don't need to take a yoga class, maybe I just need to sit on my porch and just like look out for 20 minutes and just chill out." I don't need to read a book. I don't need to listen to music. I don't need to be journaling. I can just sit.

Mika prioritizes her self-care as a way of resisting racism. By taking care of herself, she can find energy and that internal will to continue resisting racism.

In addition to the boundaries that the choreographers prioritized for their emotional and mental self-care, finding sources of joy was also important for their self-care. Many participants specifically called out that although dance can be work for them if they are full-time artists, dance is also a significant source of joy and healing. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, many of participants shared that they had limited in-person dance time and that was a struggle. Mika shared that she was missing her in-person dance community due the pandemic. She said:

I'm really missing dance community ... Just as my own personal practice I would take Open Class every Saturday at [a studio] just for myself. Just to be in the space and have someone else tell me what to do. I'm missing my dancing/performing part of my identity a lot. Because even as a random, ambiguously ethnic person with no hair, I could identify

myself within that structure of [dance and performing] community and it was cool, I was accepted.

With most of her energy in dance spent on teaching, Mika prioritized taking dance class and being with other dancers. Dance and the community that comes along with dance bring Mika joy. And with the pandemic, she has not been able to tap into that community or performance in the same ways. Kiaria prioritized creative time because her full-time job is not as a dance artist. She said, “[The choreographic process is] so nice during this time, because it's such a different part of my brain. Storyboarding out stuff and drawing diagrams that are dance related and have nothing to do with work has been fairly therapeutic.” Being creative with movement is an outlet for Kiaria because dance is quite different from her day job. And with the additional stress of working at a non-profit navigating the pandemic, she often forgets that prioritizing self-care is a form of resistance. For Nora, she said, “I think that movement has always been my way of healing.” Dance was important for participants to prioritize their self-care and joy as ways to resist and heal from some of the trauma of the racism they experience. Kayla echoed something similar saying, “Dance is also self-care for me too. Dancing makes me happy.” For Nora and Kayla, movement is joy.

Another source of joy for the choreographers was their communities. Participants found joy being with their communities, oftentimes their cultural communities and often dance communities. Elena also shared a strong sense that dancing with community is key to her self-care. She shared:

[As dancers] being in a space with other people is our joy. People asked me all the time, “what do you do for fun?” I'm like, “what do you mean? I dance, obviously” ... that's my therapy in a sense - being in the studio.

With her ongoing commitment to being a choreographer, Elena chooses the joy and self-care of dancing with community. Unsurprisingly for many of participants, dance is a huge part of how they find joy. While there is pain in being a dancer and choreographer because of the racism they experience, there is still also joy. Sebastian also identifies dance communities that brought him/them joy: other choreographers of color in the PNW, students of color he/they gets to work with in rehearsal spaces, and his/their dance collective based in LA. Sebastian chooses joy when he/they finds intentional dance communities that he/they feels safe in and can find joy. Maya shared, “The thing that I miss the most of rehearsals right now is that they were the container that I created to make sure that I was always around humans - co-engaging in a thing and creating culture and relationship.” For Maya, their dance communities are intentionally created spaces where their relationships are. Being with dancers brings her joy and are a way for her to be in community with others. Similarly, June also found joy through close relationships outside of her family that came about through intentional dance spaces. She shared:

I have a really strong group of people that I trust. I realize that yes, I'm a dancer. And yes, I love moving in my body. And this is how I express myself. But a lot of it was the people. I think I found some really good people to share my life with. And I think that what refuels me to show up and want to do this, even if it's been harmful or hurtful, is the people that I've collaborated with and artists I've been able to work with and also grow up with and build my life with.

June has found community with dancers who understand her multiple identities. For her to continue to resist in the dance community, June has crafted the intentional communities that support, inspire, and bring her joy. In making time for these communities, she ensures she has the emotional support and energy to continue to resist.

For many of participants, the community that supported them and gave them joy was their family. Catalina shared, “I call my mom a lot just to speak Spanish. Speaking Spanish brings me a lot of joy.” Catalina’s relationship with her mom brings her comfort and a reprieve from the racism she experiences in the dance world. Kiaria shared something similar saying, “Being with a person in my bubble. Talking to my family.” People in her bubble and her family know her and she can be fully herself with them. Aki’s Filipino American community brings joy and inspires resistance. He/they shared:

I started hanging out more with more FilAms in New York and that just reminded me of the life and the energy and experiences that we share. And that's my support system and that is my family ... My FilAm friends inspired me to look deeper into my community and to myself.

Aki’s FilAm community grounds, supports, and inspires. Mika also shared the importance of finding time to connect with people who have known her a long time. She said it was helpful:

Seeing yourself through other people's eyes that know you so well ... You feel a different way when you settle into talking with your siblings or talking with your friend you've known since you were four or something. That to me is so much self-care because the walls can come down and your armor can come off. And you don't have to explain everything and you can be loud and no one's gonna tell you you're getting fired up.

For Catalina, Kiaria, Aki, and Mika, prioritizing time to connect with their trusted community was a key way for them to take care of themselves and find joy in the midst of resisting as choreographers. Participants prioritized finding spaces where they could be fully themselves without having to expend energy in navigating racist systems and worry about racist interactions.

Participants were able to let down their guard to recharge before they chose to step back into dance spaces to resist.

Nora shared that her Aleut community and learning about her Aleut cultures brings her joy. A way that Nora feels joy is by sharing updates about her life and art with the Aleut corporation and with her family. As Nora continues to learn about her Aleut culture, she loves to share it with her family. Nora's grandmother has also opened up more about her experiences as a child and wants to share more. Her grandmother shows Nora pictures of the Unangan Island where she grew up. Nora even got an Aleut cookbook and her family talks about the latest dish they made. By learning about her Aleut culture and sharing what she is learning with her family, she feels connected to her culture. Community and culture were important for participants as a source of joy to continue to choose to be choreographers in the PNW knowing they would experience racism.

Choosing to Navigate

Another important factor for participants' internal commitment to their art was choosing to navigate the predominantly White dance spaces. Participants had an awareness of the pain and trauma they experienced due to the racism in dance spaces and were still driven to choreograph. Participants chose to navigate within the racist systems. Catalina shared the tension of being tokenized but still wanting an opportunity. She said:

It's that balance of, I know I'm being tokenized, but I'm going to take that opportunity versus ... no, this is me being tokenized, I'm not going to take this [and instead] try and turn it into a learning opportunity for them. But that's also just a lot of work that I'm not being compensated for ... I'm very much of a person of, like, I want to earn it ... But at that point, I was like, fuck it, I'm gonna take this opportunity.

Catalina made the choice to navigate the emotional trauma of being tokenized in a White-dominated space to take the opportunity to present her dance. When choosing to navigate, choreographers of color are making the choice that navigating racism as they create and present their work will be a reality. Choreographers of color decide their art matters the most despite the emotional labor that will result. Catalina made the choice knowing that due to racism, she would not know if the producers of the show wanted her work because of the dance or because the producers wanted to tokenize and exploit her. Alexis had similar thoughts about navigating as an artist of color. She shared:

In terms of someone who may be Black or Brown getting a job because they're simply Black and Brown. Honestly, I think Whiteness is oftentimes put on a pedestal, even though it's mediocre. "So, so what?" is my response to that kind of experience. I think that oftentimes we, as Black and Brown people, get pushed to the side and our voices get muted.

Choosing to navigate racist systems meant dealing with the emotional impacts of knowing there are more expectations for artists of color than their White peers. This choice also comes with the risk of racist people and spaces attempting to silence one's voice and choosing how to respond. It is not fair that choreographers of color experience emotional labor when they choose to navigate racist structures; however, creating art is the priority. There are emotional impacts for choreographers of color when they choose to navigate. June shared some of her thoughts on those impacts:

For a long time, dancing for other people and being able to sacrifice a little bit of myself, you know of, being in all-White spaces was great for me because it paid my bills and I

got to be a dancer. And these people understood. We all could be together because and understand each other because we loved this art form. And that was enough for me.

Navigation for participants comes with more pain and trauma. There is not only the work and energy in creating, trying to gain access, and then presenting. There is also more energy and pain and loss that comes with this internal commitment to choreograph. Moreover, artists of color have the added tension of knowing spaces are trying to exclude them, but still also finding joy in dance. Navigating that tension is painful.

Maya shared another aspect of navigation that choreographers of color encounter. Maya had an experience where she took an opportunity doing movement design for a play set in China although she did not feel she could be as authentic as would be ideal. Maya said:

Logistically I needed the money and wanted to do the show because I thought the show [had potential]. I was trying to reframe it for myself as what I'm exploring is the Asian American themes within this show and therefore, what I can offer is to do my research and ... movement design the show.

Maya chose to navigate the tension of needing an income as an artist and not being the most appropriate person to do movement design for the show. The show wanted an Asian-identified movement designer, and if she did not take the job, someone else might have who was even less appropriate for the show. With the awareness that Maya did not have prior expertise and training for this job, Maya chose to navigate this situation believing she was likely a better option than a movement designer who might not navigate the complexity as respectfully as possible. Maya also had to navigate bringing in dancers for the show. When talking to the two Asian American dancers who were both not Chinese who Maya recruited to be involved in the show, Maya said to the dancers:

None of us are the appropriate Asian races to be fully representative. But the way I'm doing this is that we're doing the show in America as Asian Americans, for which the racial conversation is relevant, is one that we can relate to. And therefore, we can respectfully take on these roles.

In choosing to navigate, Maya reframed for herself and for her dancers a way to feel okay enough about being involved in this show. With restricted access to opportunities and the knowledge that spaces will be racist, artists of color choose to navigate spaces that do not always feel good. There are emotional impacts for the artists because they know the context is not good and that the choreographers have to find ways to survive and make a living. The choreographers must determine their own boundaries around what feels right and what feels wrong when they choose to navigate racist dance spaces. Participants had to decide what is within their sphere of influence and what is outside of that and what are they willing to engage with. This is all additional emotional labor that the choreographers take on when they choose to navigate.

June shared another example of the additional emotional labor that choreographers of color do not have a choice to take on when they navigate. She talked about the tension of wanting people of color to boycott White organizations but also wanting young artists of color to seek opportunities and find joy in some of the white organizations. With most arts venues and organizations lead by White folks, boycotting those organizations would mean artists of color would not have any spaces to perform. June felt asking artists of color to boycott White organizations would not be fair as the result would be preventing artists of color from trying to go after resources and opportunities, even with the potential for hurt. She said:

I think it's important for us to tear down and boycott and call out these [White] systems.

Yes. There was also a lot of joy that these spaces brought me as a young person. Can it be

better? Yes. But I don't want these organizations to fall completely because a lot of these spaces made me who I am today and gave me opportunities that I didn't even know were possible for people like me. And now I see more people of color in these spaces. And now I see more festivals that have more than one person of color in the lineup.

Choosing to navigate can mean managing the emotions of continuing to be in a White-dominated system that wants to exclude because there is not an alternative. Navigating can also mean supporting racist organizations and encouraging other artists of color to also navigate those systems. Navigating might also mean hoping for small changes and slow progress despite recognizing that that is perpetuating racist systems that will hurt future artists of color. Choosing to navigate racist dance communities and systems is not an easy choice to make; however, these choreographers make the choice to navigate. By navigating, participants are demonstrating their commitment to their art and to resisting the racism that tries to erase and silence them completely. Some of the complexity of racism is the multiple tensions that people of color have to navigate and that there is no easy choice.

These are all examples of the ways participants demonstrated their internal commitment to being choreographers in the PNW. Despite the pain from the isolation and tokenism they experience, participants made the choice to continue to pursue their art. Participants learned to unlearn the messages about not belonging in the dance community. Participants then resisted those internally and recognized how White norms intended to exclude. With the unlearning, participants found ways to be resilient, driven by their love of dance and strong sense of self. Participants found ways to manage that felt authentic and prioritized their own self-care and joy. And ultimately participants continued to choreograph and chose to navigate these racist systems and situations knowing they would encounter more pain and emotional labor.

Changing the Narrative

In addition to the internal commitment participants demonstrated to continue as choreographers, they also resisted externally to disrupt the racism in the dance community. Participants shared several the ways they were working to change the narrative in the dance community. The ways progress from speaking up and calling out racism, opening access to more artists of color, creating intentional and safe spaces, and finally by challenging racist perceptions of styles and racist expectations for what stories artists of color tell. These are all examples of the ways participants are resisting externally to challenge the Whiteness in the dance community to change the narrative for artists of color in the PNW.

Calling out Racism

Participants shared that calling out racism and advocating for themselves was an important part of their experience as choreographers of color in the PNW. Recognizing and reflecting on the racism they experienced and witnessed was insufficient, participants also wanted to challenge the White dominance. Catalina shared an example where she spoke up to challenge intended tokenism of her by an arts organization. An organization asked to share a video she recorded in Spanish for a teaching artist lesson plan because it was Hispanic heritage month. Catalina challenged the organization to consider whether it had ever showcased other Spanish-speaking members of the organization and whether they had done outreach to Spanish-speaking communities. Catalina wanted to change the norm for this organization thinking it was okay to tokenize a person of color. There are risks associated with speaking up including losing social capital and retaliation; however, Catalina's commitment to resisting racism took precedence. Adeline shared a similar example of speaking up at the opera when the opera staff

were insensitive about creating the set for a show that took place in China. She described the situation:

I, as an Asian American person, can look at that at the set designs and be like ... “well, that's a Japanese Kimono, but a Chinese dragon. And this looks like a Chinese restaurant from the 1960s” ... It'd be one thing if they had someone brought in a Chinese designer and were like, “let's make this look like authentic Imperial China.” But no, there's Japanese stuff here, Chinese stuff here, and it looks terrible. And it looks very appropriative.

As the Asian American staff member at the opera, Adeline felt the burden to speak up and decided that challenging this racism was important. Due to racism, as an Asian American, the opera leadership were more likely to believe Adeline's critique about how the set design was looking. Adeline chose to call out the racism despite the unfair burden that she felt.

Nora shared that she calls out racism through educating about the untaught experiences of Native communities. Nora said: “Educating everyone on the hardships of what other communities have been through, especially Native communities—because no one's educated on that really. That's the biggest thing—educating people on native history. And who else is going to?” Erasing the experiences of Native American history is a way to maintain White supremacy and perpetuate specific racist narratives. Nora continued:

I don't know if now is the right time to try to educate. I definitely feel like that's the only way—it is letting people know. And who else is going to be able to do it in the dance world other than me? I studied dance. I'm just going to try my best to share the experiences through my art and dance is my language.

Nora is uncertain about where and when to call out the racism and erasure of Indigenous peoples' stories; however, she is committed to resisting and educating through her voice and movement. Racism has diminished Nora's own understanding of her history and culture. Listening to oral stories from the elders in Nora's community gave her the opportunity to learn. She shared:

Listening to elders is a huge way of resisting. Just hearing their stories of going to boarding school and the things they've had to go through. It's been really insightful. And then you see a beautiful, loving human that has gone through such horrible, horrible things alive and sharing their stories. That's a huge way of resisting and being an advocate. And also sharing their stories and their views is a way of resisting. And they say every time during our pow wows, "just living, right now, you being here and trying to learn is a form of resisting."

White publishers of school textbooks regulate curriculum in schools and normalize White dominant messages in the texts. Nora has learned from her elders about the ways Native history was erased. She has gained a broader understanding of Native experiences that challenge the dominant narratives she learned in school. She calls out the racism by sharing narratives that encourage a range of experiences of Native peoples.

Catalina called out racism by codeswitching and navigating the racist stereotypes ascribed to her as a woman of color. She shared:

In this climate where so many of my white people are so terrified [of being accused of being racist], I just really feel like I've infiltrated it. And I still do a lot of code switching or the masking of words ... [instead of being very direct or arguing] my personality [in these organizations] is, "I'm nice, I'm learning, I'm curious, I'm questioning" ... So then

we can then infiltrate programming and get programming that is diverse and representative of our true community onto our stages.

Catalina navigated the racist stereotypes to gain the social capital to call out the racism in softer ways to advocate for change. Mika also navigated for changes by calling out racism within her role as an educator. Mika felt a responsibility to support the students of color who wanted to become dance artists. Within her sphere of influence as someone who can influence curriculum, Mika called out the racism that dancers of color experience to advocate for additions to the curriculum to prepare students of color to navigate the racism they will encounter. Mika and Maya reflected on the ways to call out racism in kind ways. Maya said:

It's so much to ask people to just arrive woke. It's so much to ask people to overhaul their entire belief system. And I just wonder about how to do that kindly for people ... Where's the space for growth? What does that look like? And can art be used as a tool for that?

Calling out racism has impacts for artists of color, but also impacts to White folks being called out. When calling out racism, choreographers of color navigate the pain of that racism, the burden to challenge, and the emotions of the person they are calling out. While nice to consider those participants are calling out, this is an extra burden on participants on top of experiencing racism. Mika also pondered how to call out racism kindly and how not to perpetuate a culture of calling out and discounting someone. Mika recognizes that to change the overall culture, people of color and White folks all have to engage and cancel culture might hinder that.

Alexis shared examples of the way calls out racism in order to advocate for herself. As mentioned earlier, Alexis had a hard time with not feeling exploited as a Black artist. Self-advocacy is ingrained in Alexis so she does not have to feel exploited nor fear an experience will cause her harm. Alexis consistently calls out racism and self-advocates. She described:

It was how I learned how to say “no.” And no to really anything that comes in my sphere that is harmful. I'm saying no, and I'm calling it out. I can't be quiet about it anymore.

And that's kind of my natural place to be. I'm more one of those people who likes to ruminate and sit in it for a while before I talk about it because I don't like to respond emotionally. But at this point in my life, I just can't anymore. I have to speak to it.

Alexis is committed to her art and to changing the narrative and calling out racism. Alexis also self-advocates through calling out exploitation. Through support from her husband and manager, Alexis recognizes her worth and what she deserves for compensation. She shared how she calls out exploitative contracts:

I think it shows up in economics. And in my response to setting a rate and never going below that and saying no to a job. I turned down so many jobs because they come to me and I literally can't do that without feeling it's exploited.

Alexis calls out contracts that are racist and attempting to exploit her and her art. Alexis reflected on the ways racism shows up in compensation and made the choice to resist.

Opening Access

Participants are also trying to change the narrative in the contemporary dance community by opening access. Participants experienced the barriers to accessing dance spaces and performance opportunities and as a result want to open access to other artists of color. In a piece for a White-led organization in the PNW, Catalina decided to include solely Latinx women who spoke Spanish—the cultural backgrounds of the dancers were more important than training. One of the dancers had some movement experience, but no formal contemporary training. One was trained in burlesque dancing. When she presented the piece, Catalina had to step in as one of the dancers was no longer available. Catalina had just had surgery, so her own movement abilities

were limited. She had to get creative with her choreography. Catalina prioritized increasing access for Latinx women. In a racist dance community where artists of color typically experience isolation, Cataline wanted to change the narrative. Elena has also prioritized opening access to artists of color. She shared:

In my work for the last few years, I've had predominantly POC casts. I often will cast like one or two White folks in my pieces, depending on how large the cast is but never more than that. And I'm dedicated to continuing to do that.

It was important to Elena to work with a diverse group of dancers, not primarily White dancers. Elena resists the dominant narratives where dancers of color are isolated and instead changes the narrative to open access to more dancers of color.

Maya shared an experience where she choreographed for a festival in the PNW and decided she wanted to intentionally open access to a different group of dancers than her norm. Maya said, "When I did [that festival], I was like, 'I actually think that it would be a refreshing change for me to work only with Asian artists.' So I cast me and four of my friends." Maya made the intentional choice to work with Asian dancers for this piece. Maya resisted repeating the patterns she had previously taken in order to open access to dancers of color. Adeline also prioritized working with Asian American performers to tell stories about Asian American experiences. She shared:

I am really interested in working with people who are just comfortable giving a monologue or are interested in moving but they're not refined movers necessarily. So what I think about my work is it's almost like collaging in a way. I think of it as performance art ... And the tools that I use to do that are my ballet training, my skills as a writer, and whatever my dancers and community bring to the table ... I just happened to

be a classical dancer who has a journalism degree. And I'm just using everything I have at my disposal ... I think in a way the work that I'm doing is resisting racism as a choreographer. It's definitely resisting a lot of the ideas about ballet where only certain types of bodies with only certain types of virtuosity or only certain types of fitness or whatever can perform.

Aware of the dominant narratives, Adeline resists through opening access to movers with a range of training, experiences, and bodies.

Mika also reflected on the power and responsibility that her positionality as a faculty member teaching and choreographing in a college setting could have in opening access:

Being in a full-time faculty position in a higher ed institution that has been very predominantly White for a really long time ... I am in a position of power right now to cast people of color, to instruct with my body that is not White and that is not a ballet body.

To resist racism in ways that feel authentic to her, Mika reflected on what her spheres of influence are and how she can resist. She challenges who can teach dance, who can learn dance, and who should be cast in college dance settings. Mika resists the racist ideas of who should be allowed to learn dance by approaching her teaching to open access for all bodies. She described:

I also teach from a very inclusive point of view that dance is for all. And I teach from like an anatomically biomechanic place of, it's for your structure. I teach from a somatic standpoint, which is like sensing from your first person lived experience. And I think just accessing the form from those different lenses is giving them the agency, the empowerment, the freedom to make their own choices about what it is and what they do.

She teaches her classes so all students regardless of their identities and bodies can enjoy ballet for what it is and can feel empowered to dance. Mika resists the racist norms that only certain bodies can do ballet. In her choreographer role, for a faculty-choreographed show at the college she teaches at, she wanted to be intentional about opening access in her piece. She shared:

I tried to cast as many students of color in my piece that I'm choreographing right now.

There's not that many. But I'm trying, and I will feature them because the time is now ...

The stories that we're telling right now whether it's narrative form and choreography, or just by who we're demonstrating through, who we're showing. It speaks volumes and I'm very aware of that and I'm not taking it lightly.

Within her sphere of control, Mika was able to open access to a variety of dancers. Mika believes opening access is both including more dancers of color and spotlighting them.

Similarly, Kiaria talked of both opening access and highlighting dancers of color. She shared an experience from when she was choreographing for a festival that centered dancers of color and prioritized having most of the dancers be people of color in each piece. She talked about opening space by making choices around who is centered in work if there are dancers of all races. She shared:

The fact that I was able to center BIPOC bodies and experiences was so amazing to me

... it was pretty powerful going into the space of the first rehearsal and looking at the

White people and saying, "I'm not centering you in this. I am happy to have you here.

And I did choose for you to be here, but this is all going to be centered around the BIPOC bodies in this room." And I've never been able to say that, and I'm going to try to say that in my workspaces now. But that was super powerful.

Kiaria made the choice to spotlight the dancers of color in this piece. Spotlighting dancers of color was a newer way Kiaria resisted White dominance in the dance community. Kiaria also shared that she wanted to open more access to a variety of movers. She reflected:

I feel like a lot of the time what is important in my dance isn't so much of dancey part of it. It is the connections, and it is the quirky moments. Or it is the slightly more emotional moments. And the dancing is the conduit for those instead of the opposite. And so, I think in that way it literally can be anyone. I feel like that opens it up to any experience, any type of technique. Which is my goal. And I think I can lean more into that.

Kiaria knows she can resist her previous internalization of what technique and training are important.

In addition to opening opportunities through casting, a number of participants also talked about opening up access to artists of color of different mediums. In creating dance work, a major component is music choices. In addition to certain movement styles being seen as more valid in White dominant spaces, there are also racist expectations around music choices. Mika chose to open access to musicians of color by challenging what types of music should and could be used in concert dance settings. She said:

I don't want to hear Philip Glass again. You know, it's beautiful. And it's been done. How are we going to push forward? How are we going to open up the platform for something else? [If someone asserts] "that's not music for dance." Why not? I know it might sound more pop or commercial but who cares? We have to progress and if we keep doing the same thing over and over again, there's never going to be room for anybody else to get in ... [for the piece I'm choreographing] I chose this artist—she's young, she's probably [the students' age], like 20 something. She grew up in Philly and Atlanta. She's,

I think, half Nigerian and half African American. And she sings, she raps, she plays the piano, she plays the guitar. And yeah, it's got a base, but it's also got different polyrhythms. And it's poppy, to an extent ... It's one of those things where I'm also having all this dialogue in the back of my head that I'm like, "it's a pop song, it's got lyrics, it's got a baseline." It's hard to break out of that - to not feel judged.

Music that is pop or commercial is often viewed as less sophisticated for professional concert dance. Mika is challenging what music is acceptable. Mika intentionally selected music from an artist of color. Resisting might have consequences; however, open access is critical to Mika.

Adeline also challenged music expectations through intentional collaboration with artists of color using different instruments. In a recent piece about the Japanese internment, Adeline included Tyco drumming. She said, "the Tyco drumming—That's not something I know how to do, but that's something that folks who I'm in community with in the Japanese American community know." Knowing that Tyco drumming is important in Japanese culture, Adeline wanted to open access by including Tyco drummers. She challenged who gets to create music and what kind of music should be included in dance. Elijah also collaborated with Southeast Asian artists to open access for musicians and costumers for the piece he did about Southeast Asian refugees. For the music, Elijah used songs recorded by Tai Dam elders as well as an interview with his uncle speaking in Tai Dam and his mom translating the interview into English. He also connected with a local costumer who is Vietnamese and has a similar family history. The costumer was able to get fabric from Vietnam on a trip and then created costumes that were similar to traditional Tai Dam clothes. For Elijah, it was important to bring in collaborators who had a shared history and understanding of the piece he was working on. Opening access to these

artists challenged the racist norms of what music and costumes should be like and allowed Elijah to be more authentic.

Nora shared similar experiences of collaborating in multiple ways with Aleut artists. For a dance she was choreographing before COVID, Nora collaborated with several Aleut musicians and costumers. Her uncle made the drum for the live music and her cousin was going to play it during the performances. Nora also worked with an Aleut fashion designer to create her costumes. The fashion designer makes clothes for multiple tribes and creates designs for the Aleut Corporation to raise money for missing and murdered Indigenous women. Nora had talked with the producers of this festival to have the Aleut fashion designer showcase her work in the lobby of the theater at the performance. Nora collaborates with folks in the Aleut community because she wants to ensure authenticity, open access to different communities, and wants to showcase her Aleut heritage. Nora challenged who could create and perform music in contemporary dance and what costumes were acceptable. Elena also wanted to open access to an artist of color when she had to transform her current project from a live performance to a dance film due to the pandemic. She shared:

I asked [this woman], who was already dancing in the work and is also a filmmaker, if she'd be on board [to film the work] because I really wanted a person of color, even more so, a woman of color. And then she's also Mexican American. And so I thought that all of those things made it so she was an obvious choice for that. Because I think she just will have a special kind of care that comes with being a part of- being in the project and also identifying in the same way as I do.

Just as there are barriers to entry for dancers of color, there are barriers to entry for filmmakers of color. Elena challenged that by opening access for this Mexican American woman. Elena had

confidence that a Mexican American filmmaker would treat the filming of her piece more respectfully than a White filmmaker with no connection to the content.

Participants also opened access by changing the narrative on who the audience should be. Sebastian shared, “I think I’m really passionate about who am I performing my work to. And why am I performing my work for this community?” Producers sometimes only consider the audience as people who will buy tickets and fill the seats in a theater. Sebastian instead is intentionally thinking about who his/their work is intended to be for. Elijah shifted how he thought about his audience for the dance centering the experience of Southeast Asian refugees after the first showing. Initially Elijah focused on bringing anyone into the theater to see the show. Recently, he has continued to develop the work and wants to bring the piece to audiences outside of the PNW. Elijah hopes to tour the piece in Iowa to pay respect to his family as well as share the piece in other Texas and Chicago where there are Southeast Asian refugee communities. He wants these Southeast Asian communities to see that their stories are important and worth sharing. Elijah wants to open access to his work specifically to the Southeast Asian refugee community, a group that is not typically the audience for contemporary dance shows. Opening access to his work challenges who the audience for contemporary dance should be.

Adeline also shared her thoughts about who her dance is for. She said, “I feel what I do is very accessible. It’s meant to be for a broad audience. I’m not really into doing super abstract stuff. I’m really interested in telling emotionally, impactful stories.” She’s intentional with wanting to open her dance work to a broad audience. She continued:

I feel like my work is almost more even geared towards them [cultural space]. A lot of the stuff that I’ve done has been at [an Asian American museum]. Before COVID, I was actually supposed to do something in the Japanese garden. And we’ve performed at the

Cherry Blossom Festival. It's like I bring a little bit of [the PNW] modern dance world to these Asian cultural events ... When my work is presented in that context, it's bringing some of [the PNW] dance world to those community festivals. And when I perform in the more [PNW] dance world it's bringing some of my Asian American identity and community to the modern dance world.

Adeline challenges where dance is performed and who the audience can be. Rather than appealing to the predominantly White audiences that tend to frequent concert dance spaces in the PNW, Adeline wants Asian American communities to have access to her works that are telling Asian American stories. Adeline opens access and brings her dance to Asian American centered spaces and does not expect Asian American communities to come to traditional concert dance spaces. Alexis is also intentional about opening access to her community. She shared:

I am much more interested in [presenting work to] family and communities that never access art. And I'm saying that because it has more to do with the conversations I'm interested in. I'm not interested in presenting work that's abstract. I like to do work that's very clear. I like to put things plainly. There are just so many historical conversations that need to be subverted in a lot of ways. And also there needs to be several insertion points into the topic of conversation. No knock on ... all those other people who fit into the category of abstraction. There's just almost an eliteism that comes along with that. And that's not my community.

Alexis creates work about and for Black communities, so it is critical that Black communities have access to her dances.

Participants shared a variety of ways they are opening access to contemporary dance. Participants resist the racist norms that exclude communities of color from dancing,

choreographing, composing, accompanying, and witnessing dance. In their commitment to being choreographers, participants are also dedicated to resisting the racism they experience and witness. Some of the primary ways choreographers resist is through opening access to those involved in their works and considering who they want their audience to be.

Creating Safe Spaces

Another way participants are changing the racist narratives in contemporary dance are through creating intentional spaces that feel safe for, and ideally center, artists of color.

Participants experienced the pain associated with isolation and racism and resisted by creating spaces where artists of color could feel safe and not exploited. Choreographers of color want to create spaces where dancers of color feel a sense of belonging and can bring their full selves to the dance spaces. Nora reflected on why intentional spaces with other artists of color feel safe:

It definitely feels different. It feels more accepted and understanding because it's similar ... I really think that as far as the difference [compared to predominantly White dance spaces], it's more real. I feel more relaxed in [a cast with BIPOC dancers]. I feel more accepted. And I feel like we all are on the same page with things.

Spaces with artists of color are safer because there is comfort in knowing that there are shared experiences with isolation and tokenism. Participants created inclusive spaces to ensure the artists of color feel a sense of belonging and safety in bringing their identities into the space. Participants created spaces so artist of color could worry less about the trauma and emotional labor. Kayla's believed intentional and safe spaces recognized that there is not a single Black artist experience or story. Kayla shared:

I love Black people. And I want to work with Black women. But it's not enough to just be Black ... I feel like there's a need for a wider spectrum of what it means to be Black, or

what it means to be queer, what it means to be a woman. Because there are people who get lost in the cracks.

Kayla wanted spaces that honor all of her identities and challenged the stereotypes about Black woman. In the space she facilitates, Kayla acknowledges multiple identities to model that the dancers can bring in their full, complex selves.

Aki's primary locus of control is within the studio that he/they directs. At the studio, Aki looks at how to decolonize the dance curriculum which prioritizes ballet. Aki has changed the symbols and messages that are physically at the school to make it clear the space is an inclusive one for different races and sexual orientations. He/they are trying to make it clear that within the community at this studio, dancers and teachers can bring their identities into the space. Aki role models bringing in his/their Filipino culture. For the studio's annual Nutcracker production in December 2020, Aki used a Filipino puddle for the star for the Christmas tree topper and invited a Filipina drag queen in the local community to play the Mother Ginger character. Aki uses symbols to demonstrate that the studio is a place that is safe for people of all backgrounds. These symbols signify that everyone is welcome and included. Sebastian and Catalina also found ways to incorporate their culture into dance spaces. Sebastian and Catalina have used Spanish in rehearsals and classrooms for comfort and to make it clear Spanish is welcome in the studio. Sebastian said, "I teach in Spanish more than I teach in English. I think I do that also just to provide comfort for myself because my mind works actually speaking Spanish first then translating in English." Rather than accommodating racist norms in dance spaces that dictate always using English, Sebastian resists and sometimes teaches in Spanish. Similarly, Catalina led some of the rehearsals in Spanish to create a unique rehearsal space that centered their Spanish-speaking culture in her piece with all Latinx women who spoke Spanish. While it became a

harder endeavor than she had intended, Catalina wanted to create a space where Spanish was welcome. Language is such a big part of culture that accepting multiple languages in the space is a symbol that multiple cultures are also welcome.

Elena also facilitates inclusive dance spaces during her rehearsal processes to ensure that dancers of color feel they can bring all their identities into the space. Elena described how she initiates her rehearsal process:

There's a lot of conversation that happens in my rehearsals and surrounding identity. Day one is when we introduce ourselves with name, pronouns, and cultural/racial identity. And we talk right off, before we move. We talk about what that means, how we enter a space, what parts of ourselves we feel we want to bring into the space, what parts of ourselves we have to leave behind, and things like that. And then the work begins ... I try to make space for everyone in that way, particularly around identity.

Elena challenges the racist idea that dancers should not bring their identities into the space by proactively asking dancers to share their identities in the dance studio. She is changing the narrative of how a rehearsal process should operate. Instead of compartmentalized bodies that dance, Elena invites dancers to be fully human and themselves. Elena also intentionally creates a space that is safe to experience and process. She shared about her rehearsal process:

So I ask them a lot of questions and try to get in deep a little bit. "What has been hard for you? What is that thing that we need to work out in this process—like let go of, or just start the journey of letting go of?" So I will prod my dancers a little bit trying to get them to that point. "And then that moment where you felt horrible or that moment where you felt weak or that moment when someone didn't listen to you. Now we're gonna be in that

moment and we're gonna conquer it.” I think all of that stuff kind of plays into my work and influences what I make.

Elena wants rehearsal experiences to serve the dancers and be a safe space for them to process. As mentioned earlier, Elena primarily works with artists of color. She recognizes that these dancers of color might have experiences they are processing, unpacking, and need to heal from. Elena facilitates space that center both movement and the lived experience of the dancers. She creates these spaces, so they are safe for these artists of colors to bring their identities and vulnerability. Maya is also intentional about building safe rehearsal spaces. Maya said:

Naming that I am the person that can make those choices and can actually be changing practice or establishing from the beginning of a process that like the things that I value ... At the beginning of the rehearsal process I'm going to give the spiels that I always give. And one of them includes that I encourage us to be challenged, and I don't want us to ever be in pain. And if we're ever in pain, we can always find an artistic solution around that.

Based on her positionality as the choreographer, Maya makes the choice to facilitate an open space where the dancers can be honest about their experiences. Maya resists resist the racist norms of prioritizing the product over the process.

Sebastian also facilitated spaces to ensure that dancers would be open about their experiences. Sebastian about his/their experience working with some college first-year students of color:

It's been really a fruitful experience to see them work and to see them begin to think about how race and gender and sexuality come into play in terms of how their bodies are represented ... maybe I can interest [them] to challenge the way that you're thinking

about movement at a younger age and to just come into the space just to play. Just to see what happens rather than always feeling that there has to be a product ... So there's this nice exchange that happened. It's not hierarchical. I facilitate some of the things. But it's also giving them a platform where their voices can be heard and their ideas can be heard and there can be conversation.

Sebastian created an intentional space that challenged the idea of the teacher as the primary authority and encouraged dancers to bring their voices and ideas to the dance studio. Instead of solely focusing on production of movement, Sebastian facilitated a space where the dancers can reflect on their identities and they might be tokenized. Sebastian facilitates a community with the dancers where he/they can de-emphasize the role of choreographer. Adeline also facilitated intentional space in her rehearsals to help the dancers become more aware of racialization. She shared:

I think that's another thing that's so meaningful for me about my work. A lot of the time it's young Asian American bun heads, and they have not really been radicalized until working with me. We do a lot of thinking and talking in the rehearsal room. And I think that it's helped a lot of, especially the younger dancers I've worked with or even some of the older women I've worked with too, who maybe came of age in a more conservative area. I think it's helped them be a little bit more radical about taking up space as Asian women.

Adeline encourages the dancers to be vulnerable and think about how they can challenge the stereotypes placed on them as Asian American women who are quiet and not making waves. She facilitates a space that resists racism and empowers these dancers to think about their activism. The dance space is more than just about movement. It is a safe space for the dancers to be

vulnerable and reflect on their lived experiences. Adeline changes the narrative of where activism can happen and encourages these Asian American women to challenge stereotypes.

In addition to intentional spaces in the dance studio, Alexis and Sebastian are opening access and then creating safe spaces for artists of color by curating festivals and producing shows. As curators of festivals and seasons, Alexis and Sebastian selected which artists got to perform. Sebastian's collective curated a show and selected solely artists of color. He/they described:

What we do is we invite different artists from multiple backgrounds, not just dance.

Mural makers or photography and singers to have a two-night event in Los Angeles. It's a moment where we can allow artists of color who maybe sometimes are not allowed access to certain concert stages because it doesn't look a certain way or because it's not technical or contemporary enough or it's too traditional maybe or artists who maybe are wanting to practice in those realms.

Sebastian's collective opened access to these artists of color and challenged who should perform. Sebastian's collective chose to produce a festival centering artists of color because the collective felt it would be a safer space for these artists. Sebastian continued, saying:

It's creating spaces or curating your own festivals, where you can allow Black and Brown bodies to enter those spaces and represent themselves in terms of how they want to represent themselves and not have expectations of what type of works they're going to produce.

When artists of color create their own space that is outside of White structures, that created space is safer for artists of color to bring their identities and reduces the navigation of racism.

Sebastian's collective resists racism by creating their own space where they decide the norms.

Alexis also curated a season for a theater this year. In this season, Alexis selected Black, femme artists from around the world. In facilitating the space, Alexis described:

I've had to deal with that a lot—ensuring that people feel represented. And I still don't feel like I walked away with feeling like everyone felt represented in terms of the people that were chosen. I think it's the balance right. My ultimate goal with presenting choreographers and just creators in general is to give them the things that I would want, specifically thinking about liberation and freedom ... I do want [the artists] to feel like this platform provides solace and comfort and also where you can expand and grow.

Alexis wanted to create an intentional and safe space for these artists of color to reduce the racism artists of color typically experience in White-led spaces. She opened this space to Black, femme dance artists and created a space that would be safe for them. Alexis changed the narrative around who got to be artists and the experience Black femmes have with a theater.

Participants prioritized creating intentional and safe spaces for dancers of color in these examples. Choreographers of color encouraged the dancers to bring their identities and lived experiences into the space and provided a safe environment to be vulnerable and process racism. Participants resisted by creating new spaces where artists of color could be whole and reduce the chances of racist experiences. Choreographers of color felt it was important to create safe and intentional dance experiences in the studio as well as festivals centering artists of color.

Challenging Racist Perceptions of Dance Style Validity

Another way that participants are changing the narrative was by challenging the racist perceptions of what styles of dance were seen as valid through teaching and choreography. Mika and Elena challenge what dance forms are valid in their teaching. Mika teaches dance classes at a college in the PNW and shared about her approach to teaching:

I teach ballet, but I'm also teaching jazz ... And I'm making sure that I teach it from a historical context. And I make sure that we're having these discussions and we're talking about Congo Square and slavery from the beginning because that's where jazz came from ... It's my turn to demonstrate there is jazz and ballet. If I hadn't found Balanchine, which is completely rooted in jazz, I would have quit ballet. That's what kept me going. It was the rhythm. It was the pelvic movement. It was the off-center. It was using what I had to make it work.

Mika's resists the racist norming that only certain dance styles are valid. She brings in the historical context to help her students understand the important influences between styles. She changes the narrative so dancers value multiple styles and the ways the styles impact movement. Elena also provides historical context about different dance forms as she teaches. She shared:

I do my best to give my students as many experiences as possible. For example, if we do hip hop, we talk about where it comes from and who the people are that it comes from and why it's significant. How we can honor it by participating in it and not appropriating it and things like that. And then I try to be also honest in that I'm learning for myself too because my dance education was not that way at all. What I was taught about jazz is that it was a branch off of ballet ... So as I'm teaching my students, I'm relearning it and trying to reframe it for myself.

By incorporating a variety of dance styles in her classes and then treating them all with respect, Elena challenges the racist limitations around which styles of dance are valid. Elena also resists by encouraging her students to think about their own approach to respecting different styles. She teaches them to consider that all dance comes from people and that needs to be acknowledged

and credited. She also demonstrates her own vulnerability with the students to encourage learning as a process and not an end point.

Participants also challenged these racist perceptions about validity of movement through their choreography. Adeline reflected on what movement she wanted to include in her dances:

I also think that there's something to remember when we talk about classical art forms we usually are referring to European classical art forms. We don't always need those classical traditions. We have things like hip hop or Tyco drumming or various cultures have their own classics and that's great.

She resists the Eurocentrism in contemporary dance through her choreography and collaborations. Nora challenges in a similar way by bringing in Native movement into her work. She resists the idea that contemporary dance can be only one way. She shared:

Most of my choreography hasn't been a huge blend [of contemporary and Inuit movement] ... And then I moved more into the fusion of Inuit dancing ... And once I started choreographing like that I felt like, "oh wow, this is so natural in my body and it's so much fun to do. And it's hard, and it's exciting. And it feels normal for me."

Nora honors what is authentic to her own body and uses that in her choreography. She broadens what can be considered contemporary dance. Participants challenged the racism in the contemporary dance community that dictates which styles of dance are valid through their teaching and choreography.

Telling Stories Connected with their Activism

Participants are also changing the narrative by resisting racist expectations for their movement. Participants connect their dance stories and their activism in numerous ways. Participants challenge stereotypes, use their dance to process experiences with racism, and

showcase the vast range of experiences people of color have. While there were a variety of ideas participants had for their choreography, they were consistently frustrated that there were racist expectations for stories to tell. Participants resisted the racist expectations by creating dances that told stories that ran the gamut and were often their creative response to racism. Participants challenged what kinds of stories could be told in contemporary dance and found creativity that felt right.

Kiaria and Kayla create work that challenge what stories people of color can tell. Kiaria resists the racist expectations for her movement by creating dances that transcend race. Kiaria shared:

Continuing to center these very human universal moments, whether it's about grief or happiness or just platonic or romantic relationships or blurring the lines between those two ... that is transcendent of age, gender, race and all of that. Institutional racism is still real so it's not like it erases any of that. And that's not my goal. Transcending and not having to use dance as a specific tool to point out racism is how I tend to make work.

Kiara resists racism by creating work to demonstrate that people of color are more complex than solely their race. She also challenges the idea that people of color are only interested in creating stories that are specifically about their race. Kayla challenged what stories Black women can tell.

Despite feeling expectation to create work about racism and discrimination, Kayla said:

I think my way of almost commenting on it sometimes, or me kind of saying my piece about it, is me talking about the other things that make me human. I'm also a woman. I'm also queer. I'm a daughter. And a sister. I'm a cousin. Sometimes I don't want to do what's expected of me.

Kayla resists the racism that only shows one universal Black woman. Kayla challenges the idea that she must compartmentalize all the facets of her identity in order to survive in the racist dance world. Kayla wants the understanding of what Black people in the U.S. experience to be varied beyond stereotypes. She shared:

There's this expectation that I need to create work centered around slavery ... we're so sick of seeing trailers for movies about slavery and this whole idea around Black trauma in the United States ... And I love that people are highlighting artists of color ... But I think what's often forgotten is that we're also humans. We love. We experience sadness outside of things that have to do with race.

The racist expectation that Black artists should create work about slavery and Black trauma reinforces the trauma of enslavement. Expecting Black artists to relive ancestral pain for the education of non-Black people reinforces racism. Kayla's point here is that people are more than the oppression they have faced.

Nora resists racism in her dances by telling stories that challenge stereotypes and generalizations about her Aleut culture. She also seeks to deepen the understanding of the varied ways Native communities exist and to challenge the racist depictions that restrict the understandings of Native culture. Nora shared that identity loss inspires some of her movement:

I feel like it's been a lot of about identity loss, when I was struggling within a Christian community [in college] and figuring out who I was with all these expectations and not feeling like I'm completely myself. And then also dealing with learning about the history of my ancestors losing their culture in so many brutal ways. It kind of just came to a point where I just related with it so much in my personal life and also lineage. And then recently I've tried to look into what can we do to make a community or what can I do to

focus on the biggest aspects of Aleut [life], like sustenance as the ocean ... So style-wise and inspiration-wise, I think it would be going off of what I read and can relate to personally about Aleut culture and in my life.

Exploring that loss is important to Nora when she thinks about her work as an Aleut woman who did not get to know her culture until after childhood due to racism in education and coping and survival mechanisms of her family. Nora is currently processing the racism she and her family have experienced through a lens of loss and desire to investigate what is meaningful to her as an Aleut woman. She resists the erasure of her culture through dance. Nora continued, sharing:

I'm still fighting against the whole idea of what people believe Natives should look like and what they believe from a John Wayne movie that Natives should be like. So just fighting against that ideal. Trying to prove myself is hard when I'm just being me. I am Native and just creating. And I am being who I am. So I don't need to prove it, but it feels like that ... My whole goal is to present Native art as present and current and Avant Garde and have it seen as valid art and not just an old Native dance we're doing for show. We're not seen. We're not *that* anymore. We're still here. We're still creating. We're still Indigenous and we can create fine art and it can be seen as fine art. So that's my biggest push.

Nora resists the stereotypes of Native communities and the erasure from colonization in her dances. Nora is driven to change the narrative around what people understand to be current Native art.

Elijah also created work to share a story about his family that is largely unknown. Elijah's company recently performed about the immigration of his Tai Dam family from Southeast Asia coming to the U.S. as refugees. Asian American history is largely not taught in

school curriculums and Asian Americans are all combined to reinforce racism and the model minority myth. Sharing his family's story was important to Elijah. He shared:

I wanted to do a bit of education about my cultural background and open the eyes of people that had not heard that history of the Vietnam War as an immigrant coming in. We hear about World War II and internment camps. We don't really hear about refugee situations.

Publishers often exclude experiences of communities of color from history books. Elijah resists this by telling his family's story. He challenges what stories are important to learn about. He shared the reactions of audience members after the performances saying:

They had no idea of that aspect of immigration and refugees, escapees. They had no idea about my culture and the micro-cultures in Southeast Asia—that they were not all just one. They knew of Hmong, Vietnamese, Thai, Lao. But there's also these little micro-cultures.

Elijah will not let his family's story be forgotten. Creating this dance was a reminder to Elijah as well as his audience that stories of Southeast Asian Americans are important and deserve a space to be told. He also reminds his family that their story matters.

Alexis choreographs for her community and her dances reflect the lived experiences that are salient for Black communities. Alexis described:

I think about this in terms of how I'm choreographing and/or creating work. It goes out and in. It's me, it's my family, it's my community. And then it's the audience. And so in creating the work and then also thinking about what that looks like as the work is performed, it comes back to me. So thinking about that is super critical to really developing work that is centered around thought-provoking conversations and things that

happened inside of our communities and within our families ... I'm really thinking about these toxic ways in which we exist in the world. How can those be topics of conversation? How can those exist in the body and us say it through dance? How can we use that to provoke conversations and transcend spaces that we're in? ... I'm doing it because I'm thinking about all of the things that I carry in my body, passed down from my ancestors, that live in me.

Alexis tells stories that honor the racism and trauma that she, her community, and her ancestors have experienced. Alexis centers Blackness and resists racist narratives that exploit Black pain from a White gaze. Her work is deeply personal and a starting point for conversations in Black communities to process their experiences. The stories are not just about her lived experiences but also the histories of her ancestors. She described a piece she is currently working on:

I'm working on another piece [about holding sadness] and what that means to hold on to that as a Black woman. And thinking about what that means for my elders who have persevered. I call it self-suffocation as a means of survival. What does that look like inside of my body? How do I collect these stories? How do I share these stories?

Through this piece, Alexis resists stereotypes about Black women by recognizing the legacy of Black women surviving. Alexis complicates the ways Black women are perceived and provides a wider range of experiences to consider.

Adeline is interested in stories that honor her experiences as an Asian American woman and provide an opening to explore activism. She reflected on her choreographic process:

I think it's just a sort of natural evolution of never really feeling fully realized in a lot of these dance spaces and not really feeling like this work I'm doing speaks to me or people from my community. I was just kind of craving to do work that was a bit more

meaningful to me ... I think it was just kind of a gradual buildup of my own activism and journey as an Asian American woman.

Adeline's dance work is not solely about a fleeting moment of movement. Her art is meant to elicit change from the dancers and the audience. She resists the racist stereotypes of Asian Americans. She asks the audience to not just be passive observers, but active participants as they contemplate their own activism. She challenges whose stories are centered in dance work and creates dances that appeal to her community. When talking about performing her piece on the Japanese internment in schools, Adeline said:

I am trying to share about the incarceration experience. But I also just really want to help the students start thinking about what the relevance is in their own lives and how they see it applying to the country and the world that they live in.

Adeline uses her dance as a conversation starter to think about past injustices and where the history of internment is still relevant today. Adeline wants her dance work to spark reflection and action to mobilize more people to resist racism.

Sebastian also resists by challenging stereotypes and the idea that a universal story exists. He/they shared:

When I create work I think it's important to situate that I always say this is my experience as a Mexicano, not that this is what Mexican is. My perspective is very different [than other Mexicans] because my family's from the south [of Mexico]. And the way that we talk and the way we do things, even the food is completely different. And that is something I always grew up with knowing that my Mexicanidad was completely different from all of my other friends.

Sebastian resists racism by challenging that a master narrative exists. Sebastian does not claim that his/their Mexican American story is universal. Sebastian's activism is connected to choreography. Sebastian reflected on how artists of color are perceived when performing:

I always like to say that a body of color is actually always in activism or always in protest. There's never a moment I think you're not in that, especially when you're performing. And I say that because we already imprint certain ideas or expectations of what this body should do [when we're seen]. So when I create a work I'm always already relating activism within that. When I think about [my movement style], it takes shape in this way to talk about the stories or the methods that our bodies are always enduring constantly, no matter what your position.

Sebastian believes the audience cannot separate a dancer from the body the dancer inhabits nor ignore a dancer's skin color or any other visual cues about the dancer's identity. With racism being everywhere, an audience cannot ignore preconceptions they have about people of color. Sebastian acknowledges this and intentionally connects his/their dance work to activism.

Sebastian described the type of dance work his/their collective does:

"[The collective] always has the theme of witty comedy. This idea of how do we use stereotypes that are put on to us as Mexicanos and how do we regurgitate that back to the audience [as commentary] ... And so we play on that type of humor ... knowing that, "wow this is very problematic at the same time" ... Something that we're always really hinting at is also what's happening in politics and society.

Sebastian's collective tells stories to subvert the racist stereotypes of Mexican Americans. The collective resists the racist narratives by satirizing the stereotypes and demonstrates activism by telling stories that relate to current events. Sebastian described a recent piece from the collective:

The last work that we did really was commenting on the whole idea of Trump and kids getting separated by their families and incarcerated. We did a site-specific work where we changed the bike rack into this idea of the cage. We used actual news anchors and the conversations that were happening through the White House about why these things were happening supposedly, as the sound score. And we had the audience being invited to be inside that cage with us while we were moving around. We really like to present things and themes like that as well that are really hard hitting while also trying to calm it down a bit with this idea of witty comedy and then political activism.

Sebastian's collective use their dance work to bring attention to current events that are impacting the Latinx and Mexican community. The collective is creative in their movement design to engage and encourage the audience to reflect on the current events that inspired the dance. The collective uses their performances as a platform to challenge the racism by centering experiences that have real-life consequences and by asking the audience not to be a passive observer to what is happening right now. The collective communicates their values through movement.

Elena challenges the racist assumptions about people of color in her dances. When reflecting on her choreography, she shared:

All of my work is influenced by my identity ... I think I always felt like even if it wasn't intentionally said to me or clearly said, I felt that that there was this implicit idea that like I was supposed to be submissive to White people or White culture - that that was the right way to be. And I'm trying to, through my work, show that we [as people of color] have our own voice, and we don't have to be submissive or weak ... My ultimate goal or I guess niche in choreography is making the people who are in the work feel powerful or look powerful. And sometimes there's vulnerability and pain and hardship in that, but it

ends with power all the time ... Because [people of color] are so often portrayed as other things, as either the submissive victim or as the criminal or whatever else.

Elena resists racist stereotypes about people of color and resists White supremacy. She resists by empowering the dancers of color to change their own narrative by critiquing stereotypes. She asks the dancers to realize their power on stage and beyond. She continued explaining:

Resistance is a part of that power—not having to submit to the images that people want to put on me or the stereotypes or the expectations or any of that stuff. That it is a form of resistance in a way and also a form of discovering my own power and ability.

Elena choreographs work that resists the internalized racism that dancers of color experience and empowers the dancers to challenge racism. Elena explained her inspiration for her most recent project where she is exploring the first-generation American experience with a cast of primarily women of color:

[It] is about the first-generation American experience, like the American dream ... When I was thinking about my own identity and stuff and thinking about how I wish I knew what Mexico is like ... I was thinking about how I can't just go over there and visit like I could go to Portland and visit. But I can't just go over to Mexico and visit. So that border is a separation between my family and myself. And it's also a separation of my ancestry and myself and my culture and myself. It's just like a literal separation. And then I thought about how that border also comes with me wherever I go. It's not even just the Mexican American border, but that border kind of lives within me ... Because I didn't grow up with Mexican American cultures or language around me. I can speak Spanish enough to have a bad conversation, but I can't engage and indulge in Mexican culture. So when I go there

I'm not [Mexican] enough either. And so it's this border—almost like I'm the border. I'm in this in between space where I'm not fully here and I'm not fully there.

Elena's dance centers her lived experience and the pain of feeling like she does not ever fully belong. She brings attention to the racism that people of color experience as they yearn for the American dream and the potential pain and disconnect from their cultural identity. Elena asks the dancers and the audience to engage with the stories to reflect on the pain of living in the U.S. for people of color. Her dances are healing for her and for the dancers of color who leave her work realizing their power and ability to enact change.

Participants are resisting racism in the dance world in the PNW and trying to change the narrative in multiple ways. Participants are committed to improving their communities despite the racism they experience. Within their spheres of influence, participants call out racism to advocate for themselves and to challenge racist stereotypes. Participants resist the isolation and tokenism by opening access to more artists of color and to movers with a variety of training. Participants intentionally facilitate safer spaces where dancers of color can bring their identities and have less fear of dealing with the emotional trauma of racism. Some of these choreographers also challenge racist perceptions of what types of movements are valid and dance stories they can tell. Participants use their choreography to challenge stereotypes about people of color, to encourage activism and engagement, and to showcase people of color as individuals.

Summary

These 13 choreographers of color had distinctive journeys in the PNW and yet all demonstrated their vulnerability in sharing the multitude of experiences with racism. The four themes I identified were isolation, tokenism, participants' internal commitment to dance, and participants' drive to change the narrative. Participants were regularly isolated and did not see

role models or peers who shared identities in spaces as dancers and choreographers. Participants had a hard time finding dancers for their projects who had personal connections to the stories they wanted to tell. Participants received these messages through racist responses to choreography that infused multiple styles that were not solely contemporary or ballet and even had to adjust how they taught classes because accompanists were not trained to support their movement. Participants shared many stories of having to deal with racist stereotypes from dance instructors, choreographers, and peers. Participants constantly had to deal with racism and the emotional impacts of being the only person of color. Participants shared the pain of not being able to bring in their full selves and identities into dance spaces because they feared the heightened racism they would experience. Participants remarked on the embarrassment and shame they felt because of internalized racism and not fitting the racist ideal body type. The isolation that these participations articulated was due to various ways that racism shows up in the contemporary dance world. Navigating the isolation of a racist dance world led to pain and extra emotional labor for these participants.

Participants further expressed the ways they experience racism by sharing about the barriers to accessing opportunities to present their work and the tokenism and exploitation being artists of color. Participants spoke of the racist expectations funders and producers of shows have that primarily exclude artists of color. White grant organizations and adjudicators spoke of wanting to open access and yet only intended to fund or select a single artist of color. Participants navigated the barriers to access and then the tokenism if they were selected. Racist producers exploited participants and did not compensate them for their time and work. Participants experienced the pain and trauma of White choreographers exploiting their heritage and distorting their language to create sound scores. Participants experienced racist expectations

for what types of stories they should be telling in their dances. Participants did not have the option to create the art they wanted without also managing racism at every turn.

Even with the unceasing racism they experienced as choreographers of color in the PNW, participants were driven to keep creating. Participants demonstrated their internal commitment to their art by finding ways to resist and navigate the racism. Participants had ongoing journeys to unlearn their racialization broadly and in the dance world. The unlearning came on an individual level as well as on an institutional and organizational level. Participants recognized the ways organizations perpetuated racism and tokenism even as they claimed to support artists of color. Despite the pain in this unlearning, participants also demonstrated their tremendous resiliency. Participants were resilient through a strong sense of self, community support, and that devotion to their craft. Participants prioritized self-care and joy. Participants recognized the importance of having communities where they could be authentic have moments of reprieve from the emotional toll of always navigating racism. Participants chose to navigate these racist dance spaces and systems even with the trauma and pain. This choice to continue to choreograph although it came with the reality of having to navigate racism was participants' ultimate showing of just how significant their internal commitment is.

With this internal drive to carry on their art, participants shared a multitude of the ways they are working to change the narrative and disrupt the racism in the dance community. Participants spoke out about the narratives that silenced and tokenized their communities. Participants opened access by casting movers with a range of training, identities, and body types and collaborating with artists of color from multiple mediums. Participants intentionally created safe spaces to center dancers and choreographers of color. Participants produced and centered artists of color to provide a safer space to show their work. Participants challenged the racist

expectations of what stories they could tell and by connecting their dance work with their activism. Participants highlighted the range of experiences of people of color, shared untold stories of their communities, and challenged racist stereotypes. Participants used their choreography to change the narrative for artists of color and provide a space to heal and resist.

These 13 humans have experienced so much pain and trauma as they pursue their passion of creating dances in the PNW. Participants choose to do more work to gain access to racist systems that are designed to tokenize and exploit them. Participants decide to be more resilient to manage the isolation and stereotypes that come with being a choreographer of color. These choreographers choose to expend more emotional labor simply to navigate the racist systems and spaces they do not have a choice to come across. And despite all the racism participants face, their internal commitment to their craft is incredibly strong. These choreographers have unpacked their experiences with racism in dance spaces and have found ways to be resilient. And these choreographers still find joy in dancing, creating, and with their communities. All this extra work participants do daily is not fair and results from the racism that permeates the contemporary dance world and targets who they are, how they move, the types of stories they want to tell, whether they are ethnic enough, whether their body is enough, and their very existence in dance. And these participants have demonstrated that they have hope for what can be for themselves and their communities. These choreographers continue to create towards changing the narrative for themselves and for future artists of color. By being who they are in these racist dance spaces and systems, these incredible humans resist.

Discussion

Dancers and choreographers of color are underrepresented nationally in the U.S. and specifically in the Pacific Northwest (PNW). In addition to the importance of having role models

in dance for young artists of color, it is beautiful to have art that tells stories from a variety of perspectives and that center multiple experiences and identities. The dance community is greater because of a diverse range of styles, content, choreographers, and performers. However, from the literature and anecdotal stories I have heard as a dancer of color myself, racism, in a variety of forms, is making it harder for choreographers of color to navigate and thrive in the contemporary dance community. Due to racism, academic institutions and arts organizations that aim to protect Whiteness do not consider anecdotal experiences formal research; thus, there are not many formal, academic research studies that center the experiences of choreographers of color. The primary academic scholarship that is available in peer-reviewed journals examines the ways Whiteness is reinforced in college dance curriculum. Most of the scholarship is explication of what is happening and not yet centering individual stories of the artists of color. Racist and elitism have led to only certain forms of storytelling to be considered academic and rigorous that come in the form of research conducted through academia. This is another way the stories of choreographers of color are excluded and relegated to one person's experience with racism rather than a systemic understanding of how racism impacts all artists of color. In this dissertation, to navigate racist and elitist structures, I sought to understand through formal research: what are the intersections of dance, identity, and resistance among contemporary dance choreographers of color in the PNW?

In this study, 13 choreographers of color in the PNW shared their experiences with racism in dance and how they resist it. Through their stories, four themes emerged that highlight the pain and trauma participants experienced in the forms of isolation and tokenism, their internal commitment to creating art, and the ways they are actively working to change the narrative to resist racism in the contemporary dance world. Participants demonstrated their

vulnerability, their resilience, and the creative ways they are resisting the racism they experience in hopes of a less racist and traumatic world for themselves and their communities.

As a light-skinned Asian American dancer, producer, educator, and activist, I heard pain and racism and could not help but reflect on my own in the dance community. I heard their experiences of isolation and remembered the times I have felt excluded because I have experienced racism against my identities. Participants talked about the pain of navigating stereotypes, and I thought about constantly having to fight against the model minority myth. I listened to stories of tokenism in the dance world, and I reflected on my own experiences being tokenized in work spaces and even among friends. As participants shared the intensity of their drive to continue creating dance despite the racism and pain, I thought about what I was committed to in my own journey to resist racism. As participants shared the stories of resiliency, prioritizing self-care, finding joy, and how they navigate, I pondered how those same things show up for me. Participants talked about the ways they are changing the narrative in the dance community, and I reflected on how I am trying to change the narrative in my own sphere of influence. Specifically, within the intersections of my dancer, producer, and activist of color identities, I think about the impacts the stories from these 13 humans will have on my work moving forward. As a producer of a dance festival centering dancers and choreographers of color, I intend to open access to artists of color to be in a safe space where they will hopefully have to navigate less racism. I am wrestling with how my dance festival intends to center artists of color but is likely still reinforcing racism. I wonder about the ways my festival is centering Whiteness due to the ways I have internalized racism in dance spaces. It is important to me that the festival I produce is working towards changing the racist narratives in contemporary dance. It

makes sense as a starting point for me to consider the specific ways participants are changing the narrative and to reflect on how I might be able to resist in similar ways with my dance festival.

For these 13 participants, their identities as choreographers of color were embedded in their commitment to resist racism and how they approached their dance making within a racist dance system. In this section, I connect the findings back to the literature review and apply a CRT framing. I then lay out implications and recommendations for future research from the study.

Connecting the Findings to CRT

As mentioned in the theoretical framework section, the four tenets of CRT that I am prioritizing in this study are the permanence of racism, Whiteness as property, interest convergence, and counterstories. Utilizing this framework helps to unpack my research question: what are the intersections of dance, identity, and resistance among contemporary dance choreographers of color in the PNW?

I utilized a CRT lens to frame the findings from participants' individual narratives to better understand how racism has impacted the contemporary dance world. Participants experience isolation and tokenism due to the permanence of racism and Whiteness as property. Participants remarked about the motivation for White-led organizations to support artists of color and these are examples of interest convergence. And these participants creating art while changing racist narratives in contemporary dance are counterstories that challenge the master narratives in the dance world.

Permanence of Racism and Whiteness as Property

Within participants' stories about the isolation and tokenism they experienced, the two CRT tenets of the permanence of racism and Whiteness as property are helpful to unpack these

racist experiences. In CRT, the permanence of racism suggests that racism is a permanent facet of our society and is and always will be present in relationships and institutions (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Zamudio et al., 2011). Participants experienced racism in the dance world as dancers and choreographers of color. In CRT, Whiteness as property reinforces White supremacy and protects White people and their assets, while harming people of color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Zamudio et al., 2011). Racist dance systems exclude people of color and reinforce White supremacy. Participants experienced isolation through being the only one, only White dance styles and training being valid, dealing with stereotypes, internalizing racism, and feeling a burden to represent. The multiple ways participants experienced isolation are examples of the permanence of racism and Whiteness as property. Participants experienced tokenism through barriers to accessing opportunities, more expectations for artists of color, racist expectations for types of stories, and exploiting presence. Each of the subthemes within tokenism are also examples of the ways participants experienced racism in contemporary dance and that systems in contemporary dance protect Whiteness. Racist dance structures protect White artists and Whiteness by creating barriers for artists of color to access funding and opportunities to present work. Each of the subthemes within tokenism that capture the pain and exploitation participants experience further demonstrate to choreographers of color that they do not belong in the contemporary dance world.

Utilizing CRT to frame the experiences of participants demonstrates how insidious racism is in contemporary dance and how racism is designed to exclude these artists of color. At every moment in White-dominated dance spaces, choreographers of color receive messages that they are less than, they are not White, and they do not belong. Having to navigate that repeated pain and trauma with peers, instructors, choreographers, producers, grantors, and even within

oneself, makes it easy to want to find ways to exit that deluge of racism. The time and energy alone to be a choreographer is a lot and the path is hard. The extra emotional labor and trauma that artists of color endure when they choose to continue creating in a racist system that communicates that they do not belong is immeasurable. All the ways that Whiteness shows up as property in the dance world are designed to exclude and continually push out choreographers of color.

Interest Convergence

Interest convergence is another important CRT tenet to assist in understanding the racism participants experienced. Interest convergence suggests that progress for people of color will only occur when there is equal or greater advantage to White people (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Zamudio et al., 2011). In most cases, White dominant systems exclude choreographers of color from opportunities. On the rare occasions grantors or producers allow choreographers of color access, it is because of interest convergence. Funding organizations, which are predominantly White-led, and producing organizations, also predominantly White-led, need to demonstrate they support artists of color because being aligned with racism is bad for their image. By tokenizing a small number of artists of color and granting them opportunities, these organizations can protect their image and still reinforce that most artists of color should not be allowed access. These funding and producing organizations have complete control over which artists of color are allowable, which stories they are telling are not too controversial, and which artists of color might appeal to their regular, White art patrons. As the adjudicators, they have the power to control which narratives benefit Whiteness.

Participants also shared another example of interest convergence by White-led companies and organizations suddenly wanting to spotlight artists of color, and specifically Black artists

after the renewed urgency of Black Lives Matter in 2020. These organizations had not done anything previously to highlight their artists of color. However, because these racist organizations were concerned about their image and being labeled racist, they quickly spotlighted a small number of Black dancers. These organizations did not act and speak up for Black lives because it was a part of the fabric of their organizational culture. The organizations claimed to celebrate dancers of color, but only out of self-interest. And in doing this, these organizations tokenized these artists of color. Interest convergence results in benefit for White people and only incremental changes that generally do not have significant impacts in the lives of artists of color.

Counterstories

Counterstories are critical to understanding the experiences of these participants as a tool to disrupt racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Zamudio et al., 2011). One of the primary ways Whiteness is maintained is through master narratives that assert what is normal. Counterstories told by marginalized communities retell these narratives centering people of color and are an opportunity for people of color to find voice and share their realities (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Zamudio et al., 2011). Participants shared the ways they have demonstrated their internal commitment to continuing to choreograph and the ways they are trying to change the racist narratives. Participants chose to resist by challenging the White dominant narratives that they have been socialized with in contemporary dance. Participants chose not to believe and continue to perpetuate and exist in the master narratives about how, what, and who the contemporary dance world in the PNW is. Participants live counterstories as they internally commit to choreographing, and then they share counterstories as they resist the racist narratives they have experienced. In their resistance, participants have found their voice, as Knaus (2011) describes.

These choreographers reflect on their experiences and the way racism impacts their lives.

Participants make choices around how to respond to racism. And as dancers and choreographers, although they shared their voice verbally in this study, they often transfer their reflection and response into movement.

Participants' internal commitment to remaining choreographers aligns with their internalization of counterstories. Every message these choreographers received in the dance world told them they did not belong, did not move, or look the way they should, and that they stop dancing and creating. These choreographers started to disrupt the internalized racism and realized they are the authors of their own stories (Dixon-Gottschild, 2017). Participants resisted this master narrative by committing to going forward. Participants dealt with the pain of unlearning racist messages and stereotypes and recognized being a person of color comes with pain and navigating to survive (DeFrantz, 2016). Participants recognized they could not separate themselves from their racial context and history and that there will always be racist stereotypes placed upon them (Candelario, 2019; Chatterjea, 2017; Gerdes, 2018; Srinivasan, 2017). Participants figured out how to continue to be resilient knowing the racism would never stop. The counterstories participants internalized were that their art matters and they belong in the contemporary dance world. Participants chose to survive and thrive in the dance world despite the racism and prioritized their own self-care and finding joy.

These participants make the choice daily to resist by continuing to dance and choreograph in this racist dance world. These choreographers were changing the master narrative for themselves and artists of color in the future. Instead of the master narrative ascribing that artists of color do not belong, participants resisted that by opening access to other artists of color and creating intentional and safe spaces. Instead of having to request entrance into White-led

festivals and productions, they created their own spaces centering artists of color to present their dances. They challenged the narrative that only White people produce festivals and that artists of color can only present their work in White-led spaces. Participants recognized their spheres of influence and found their voice to resist in those spaces. Participants presented counterstories of how to teach movement by ensuring the movement was not taught without historical context (Mabingo, 2015) and naming when appropriation happened (DeFrantz, 2016; DeFrantz, 2017). Participants offered counterstories by creating their own movement styles that were hybrids of contemporary dance and their cultural styles and movements.

And finally, these participants advanced counterstories by connecting the stories they told in their dances to their activism. Participants recognized that having a presence is a form of activism. Participants believed that they could be worthy and successful in dance without hiding their identities and assimilating into White dance norms (Dixon-Gottschild, 2017). Participants did not allow themselves to be limited in what they choreographed based on the racist expectations placed on them by adjudicators and funders. Participants recognized their voices mattered and that the stories they wanted to tell were important. Participants believed in themselves, in their communities, and in the power of their dance to change the world. Through these counterstories, participants showcased the power of their voices through dance to disrupt racism and change narratives. These choreographers are powerful, resilient, and beautiful. These participants committed to a better and less racist world and recognize that movement is their gift. These choreographers speak their truth and work towards change through their dance.

Implications

Critical race theory (CRT) states that racism is permanent, Whiteness has property rights, and interest convergence protects Whiteness and White people (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017;

Zamudio et al., 2011). It also asserts that counterstories are a tool that can be used to disrupt racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Zamudio et al., 2011). These 13 participants are examples of the vulnerability, strength, resiliency, and commitment to resist racism of choreographers of color in the PNW. I am a dancer and producer in the PNW. The stories these choreographers shared not only resonate with me as an artist of color, these stories of pain and resiliency also are an opportunity for me to reflect on how I continue to share some of these stories in the hopes of changing contemporary dance in the PNW. I continue to reflect on the implications from the findings of my research and consider how folks I am in community with, who also want to support and center dance artists of color, might take away some learnings from this research. I encourage folks in the dance community committed to reducing racism in contemporary dance in the PNW to reflect on these findings, interrogate the systems, institutions, and actions that perpetuate Whiteness, and then find the appropriate sphere of influence to have an impact.

Dance artists of color in the PNW are my peers and community. Through this research, I had the opportunity to be in community with a group of strong and resilient artists in a group setting as well as one-on-one. Participants reminded me how important finding communities where I can be fully myself is. During a pandemic where the government asks individuals to isolate and be separate, it is even more important that artists of color, myself included, make time and space for community. Participants prioritized their self-care and finding joy. Prioritizing space to find community and space to heal from systemic racism is so important and needed right now. As a dancer of color and educator with training in facilitation, what is most important to me coming out of this research is the reminder that community is so important for healing. Healing and joy are crucial to the resilience the internal commitment participants shared.

This research was a reminder to me that because of the permanence of racism, one dissertation cannot magically change that contemporary dance structures are racist. However, from stories participants shared, I can also remind myself that despite feeling isolation and tokenism in contemporary dance spaces, I am committed to challenging racism within my spheres of influence. There will be times when I am the only person of color in dance spaces. I will have to manage stereotypes. I will need to continue to dismantle my internalized racism. And I will likely always feel a burden to represent. However, I know I have started my journey to learn to unlearn. I am resilient. I make the choice to navigate. And I will prioritize my self-care and joy. I can reflect on my boundaries and what feels too harmful to engage with. I can find movement that makes my body feel good. I will only take classes from dance teachers who recognize my identities and celebrate them. I can seek out choreographers who challenge stereotypes and want to empower me as a woman of color in movement. I can call out racism and think about how I can open access to artists of color. I can interrogate my perceptions of what styles of dance are valid and can pause and recognize when I might have internalized racism and judgement. I can support artists of color creating work connected with their activism by donating to their projects knowing there are additional barriers to funding. I can attend dance shows produced and choreographed by artists of color.

In my role as producer of the Tint Dance Festival, I can consider how the festival can be more specific about our mission and vision and who we hope to open access to. As a consumer of dance, I can reflect on which dance companies and artists I support. I can consider the experience for artists of color when I see only one dancer or one choreographer. I can choose to attend shows of producers and theaters who appear to recognize the impacts of tokenizing artists of color and are not concerned primarily with their image. I can support organizations that are

actively changing structures to celebrate artists of color without protecting Whiteness first. As a soon to be doctor and member of the PNW dance community, I can share continue to share my research and findings. I can find accessible ways to share some of the insights from participants. I can facilitate opportunities for learning and reflection. I can consider how our mutual liberation is all connected and that I need to continue to seek my own liberation as an Asian American woman and dancer as I work towards the liberation of all people of color. As a dancer, educator, producer, and audience member in the PNW, I have choices. My choices reflect my values. And I value disrupting racism and seeking our mutual liberation.

Recommendations for Research

I have several suggestions for future research to continue to learn more of the stories of artists of color. There are incredible artists of color taking it upon themselves to tell their stories and challenge the racism in the contemporary dance world. Especially after the renewed urgency of Black Lives Matter in 2020, there are artists of color sharing their stories and calling out racism in the dance community and more broadly in the U.S. (Spectrum Dance Theater & PNB, 2020; Tirrell et al., 2020a; Tirrell et al., 2020b). Through navigation in a doctoral program, I hope to situate this research as relevant content that White-dominated organizations and systems who want formal evidence of racism can use to initiate a self-interrogation of the ways they uphold White supremacy.

There are many additional opportunities for further research in both academic and community contexts. This study is a starting point. In both academic and community-based research, documentation will be important to continue to build new scholarship that seeks to understand the stories of dance artists. Additional ideas for research include:

- Additional platforms and opportunities for artists of color to share stories and experiences

- Disaggregated experiences of different racial groups of choreographers of color and unpacking different diaspora racialization experiences
- Research that intentionally looks at the intersectionality of identities among artists of color
- Looking more deeply at activism and dance making
- Exploring the complications of colorism in performing arts
- Broadening the participant sample geographically and specifically to look at different experiences in more racially diverse areas of the U.S.
- Broadening the participant sample to include a larger or different range of dance styles
- Focusing specifically on artists of color (dancers, actors, choreographers) in theater
- Experiences of choreographers who have created a distinctive movement style infusing cultural movement
- Experiences of artists of color who direct companies, produce shows, or solely create space centering artists of color
- Exploring the experiences of artists of color with various generation statuses

Conclusion

Before I started this research project, I had experienced racism in dance and heard stories about experiences with racism from choreographers and dancers of color. I had started my journey to unlearn the ways I had been socialized and racialized as an Asian American woman. I had begun to reflect on what my sphere of influence could be in the Seattle dance community. And as a result, I had co-founded a dance festival centering dancers and choreographers of color. With my experiences in dance and managing a variety of projects in my professional life, I knew producing a festival was something I had the power to do. Although I have taken dance

composition classes and enjoy the required bouts of improvisation in my dance classes, I am not a dance maker. I have the skillset to be a dance producer. And I have work to do to interrogate with new ideas from participants about the ways my dance festival is still reinforcing Whiteness. I need to reflect on the ways to increase representation and open access for artists of color to ensure that I do not tokenize nor cause more harm and trauma through perpetuating racist systems and norms. This research is for my dance community. There is a palpable desire to repair harm caused by racism and to authentically celebrate artists of color. I hope this project continues a conversation that has already started so that this beautiful community of artists of color I am a part of can thrive and love and create joy.

I am an educator and prefer to educate in informal contexts. I believe in education through conversation, reflection, and facilitation. I value narratives and connection and know that I am changed when I hear someone's story. I believe art holds immense value and possibility in deepening our understanding of our self, our relationships with others, and who we are in the world. I know the value of creativity and multiple forms of expression. I trust in the power of our voices and in our words and in the ability of our bodies to communicate in ways that transcend a verbal language. I am realistic that racism is permanent, and that Whiteness will continue to be dominant. And I have hope that we have the agency to make change and that it is possible to disrupt racism through telling our stories, in our ways, and one day in our spaces.

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Appendix A. Participant Recruitment E-mail**Participant Recruitment E-mail Template**

Dear Greater Seattle Dance Community of Color,

Some of you might know me through dancing in the community or through the Tint Dance Festival. If you do not already know me, hello!

I am writing today to invite you to participate in my research study, as a part of my Dissertation in Practice through the University of Washington Tacoma. The goal of my research is to explore the experiences with racism among contemporary dance choreographers of color in the greater Seattle community.

Participation in this research study is entirely voluntary. Participants in this study will identify:

1. As Black, Indigenous, Person of Color (BIPOC)
2. As a choreographer
3. Their movement style as inclusive of contemporary dance
4. As someone who has created dance or has plans to create dance in Seattle
5. As someone located in the great Seattle area

If involved in the study, participants will be asked to participate in one 90 minute focus group interview and/or one individual interview. All interviews will be held virtually via Zoom. Interviews will be held in September or October 2020. Participants will receive \$50 for each interview they participate in.

If you are interested in participating in this research study, please e-mail me at huangsa@uw.edu, my student e-mail address, and I will give you the next steps.

If you know of others who meet my study criteria, please feel free to pass along this information to them or feel free to direct them to me.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to me with any questions.

Thank you,
Sue Ann Huang

University of Washington Tacoma
Doctoral Student Researcher

Appendix B. Social Media Recruitment

Social Media Recruitment



INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH STUDY

DO YOU IDENTIFY...

- as Black, Indigenous, Person of Color (BIPOC)
- as a choreographer
- your movement style as inclusive of contemporary dance
- as someone who has created dance or has plans to create dance in Seattle
- as located in the greater Seattle area

Participants will be asked to participate in a 90 minute focus group interview and a 90 minute individual interview (all held via Zoom). Interviews will be held in September or October 2020. Participants will receive \$50 for each interview.

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences with racism among contemporary dance choreographers of color in Seattle

For more info, contact Sue Ann Huang at huangsa@uw.edu



**INVITATION TO
PARTICIPATE IN
RESEARCH
STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences with racism among contemporary dance choreographers of color in Seattle

DO YOU IDENTIFY...

- as Black, Indigenous, Person of Color (BIPOC)
- as a choreographer
- your movement style as inclusive of contemporary dance
- as someone who has created dance or has plans to create dance in Seattle
- as located in the greater Seattle area

Participants will be asked to participate in a 90 minute focus group interview and a 90 minute individual interview (all held via Zoom).

Interviews will be held in September or October 2020. Participants will receive \$50 for each interview.

This study will be conducted with IRB approval through the University of Washington as part of a Dissertation in Practice.

**For more info, contact
Sue Ann Huang at huangsa@uw.edu**

Appendix C. E-mail with Participant Screening Form

E-mail with Participant Screening Form

Hi [Potential Participant Name],

Thank you for your interest in my research study! If you can complete this form to gather some basic info, I'll be able to then determine next steps.

Please don't hesitate to let me know if you have any questions.

Thanks,
Sue Ann

Appendix D. Participant Screening Form**Participant Screening Form**

7/23/2020

Choreographer of Color Research Study Interest Form

Choreographer of Color Research Study Interest Form

I am writing today to invite you to participate in my research study, as a part of my Dissertation in Practice through the University of Washington Tacoma. The goal of my research is to understand deeply some of the unique stories and experiences (specifically with racism) of a number of contemporary dance choreographers of color in the greater Seattle community.

Participation in this research study is entirely voluntary. Participants in this study will identify:

1. As Black, Indigenous, Person of Color (BIPOC)
2. As a choreographer
3. Their movement style as inclusive of contemporary dance
4. As someone who has created dance or has plans to create dance in Seattle
5. As someone located in the great Seattle area

If involved in the study, participants will be asked to participate in one 90 minute focus group interview and/or one individual interview. All interviews will be held virtually via Zoom. Interviews will be held in September or October 2020. Participants will receive \$50 for each interview they participate in.

For additional questions, please contact Sue Ann Huang at huangsa@uw.edu.

1. First Name

2. Last Name

3. Preferred Name

4. Pronouns

7/23/2020

Choreographer of Color Research Study Interest Form

5. Age

6. E-mail

7. Cell Phone

8. Preferred Method of Contact (check all)

Check all that apply.☐ Email☐ PhoneOther: ☐

9. Do you identify as BIPOC?

Mark only one oval.☐ Yes☐ No

10. Salient identities

7/23/2020

Choreographer of Color Research Study Interest Form

11. Race and/or Ethnicity

12. Gender

13. Do you identify as a choreographer?

Mark only one oval.☐ Yes☐ No

14. Do you identify your movement style as inclusive of contemporary dance?

Mark only one oval.☐ Yes☐ No

15. Please describe your movement style

7/23/2020

Choreographer of Color Research Study Interest Form

16. What is your experience with creating dance in Seattle?

Check all that apply.

- ☐ I have created dance in Seattle previously
☐ I am currently creating dance in Seattle
☐ I intent to create dance in Seattle in the future

Other: ☐ _____

17. Do you live in the greater Seattle area?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Other: _____

18. Which part of the greater Seattle area do you live in?

19. Which languages are you comfortable communicating in?

20. Do you have access to doing interviews virtually? (these will likely happen in September/October 2020)

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Other: _____

7/23/2020

Choreographer of Color Research Study Interest Form

21. Please describe any previous experience/connection to the Tint Dance Festival (the researcher is hoping to have some participants with Tint connections and some without)

22. Do you consent to sharing your demographic information with the researcher (Sue Ann) for purposes of selecting participants for the study?

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Other: _____

23. If you consent to the above question, please type your name to sign accepting.

24. Please provide any additional questions you have for the researcher (Sue Ann):

This content is neither created nor endorsed by Google.

Appendix E. E-mail to Confirm Participation**E-mail to Confirm Participation, Provide Informed Consent, and Request Interview Availability**

Hi [Potential Participant Name],

Thank you for your interest in participating in my research. I'm super excited to have you involved in my study!

Here are the next steps for the study:

1. Please see the attached Informed Consent form that I'll need you to sign and return to me. Please let me know if you have any questions about it and/or if you want to schedule a 15 minute session to talk more about the Informed Consent.
2. Please fill out your availability from now through early November. I'll look at this to schedule both the group interview and individual interview.
3. Please let me know your cell phone number and any preferences around communication (e-mail, text, etc.)

Please don't hesitate to reach out with any additional questions.

Thanks,
Sue Ann

Appendix F. Informed Consent Form**Informed Consent Form****UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON
CONSENT FORM****Exploring the Experiences with Racism of Choreographers of Color in Seattle**

Researcher: Sue Ann Huang, University of Washington Tacoma, EdD Student,
huangsa@uw.edu, (415) 706-0548

I am asking you to be in a research study. This form gives you information to help you decide whether or not to be in the study. Being in the study is voluntary. Please read this carefully. You may ask any questions about the study. Then you can decide whether or not you want to be in the study.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The object of this study is to understand deeply the unique stories and experiences of a few contemporary dance choreographers of color in Seattle. Within the racialized context of Seattle, there are few choreographers of color in general. The objective will be to explore the experiences of racism for these choreographers and learn about how they think about creating movement.

STUDY PROCEDURES

Being involved in this study involves one 90 minute focus group interview and one 90 minute individual interview. If participants are unable to attend the group interview, they are able to participate solely in an individual interview. All interviews will be held virtually (Zoom) and then transcribed. All interviews will be conversations about experiences with racism in the Seattle area as choreographers with movement inclusive of contemporary dance.

RISKS, STRESS, OR DISCOMFORT

Participation in this study might cause added distress or triggers concerning previous and current experiences with racism. The researcher will provide opportunities for additional follow-up as needed.

BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

Involvement in this study will hopefully result in a space to share your personal experiences and story with both the group of additional participants as well as individually with the researcher. This will be an opportunity for your story and narrative to be centered.

This study will hopefully provide a space to deepen the understanding of the experiences of choreographers of color in the greater Seattle area. There will hopefully be identified ways to transform the Seattle dance community to be more inclusive and racially just.

CONFIDENTIALITY OF RESEARCH INFORMATION

I will keep a link between your information and the study data indefinitely. This is because I might want to use the data from this study in the future if I do additional studies. All of the

information you provide will be confidential. You will be given transcripts to all interviews and will have the opportunity to correct the information.

OTHER INFORMATION

You may refuse to participate and you are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

As a thank you for being in the study, you will be given a \$50 gift card for each interview you participate in (with a possible total of \$100 for involvement in the group interview and an individual interview). You will receive each gift card within a week of the interview. You will be asked to choose from among several gift card options.

RESEARCH-RELATED INJURY

If you have questions later about this study, or if you feel that you have been harmed by participating in this study, you can contact the researcher listed at the top of this form. If you have your questions about your rights as a research participant, you can call the UW Human Subjects Division at (206) 543-0098.

Participant's statement

This study has been explained to me. I volunteer to take part in this research. I have had a chance to ask questions. If I have questions later about the research, or if I have been harmed by participating in this study, I can contact the researcher listed on the first page of this consent form. If I have questions about my rights as a research subject, I can call the Human Subjects Division at (206) 543-0098 or call collect at (206) 221-5940. I will receive a copy of this consent form.

Printed name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

Appendix G. Group Interview Protocol

Group Interview Protocol

This focus group interview protocol was based on the following Research Question:

What is intersection of dance, identity, and resistance for contemporary dance choreographers of color in the PNW?

(1) Demographic information

- Name
- Pronouns
- Racial/ethnic identity
- Other salient identities they are willing to share
- Brief summary of your choreographic experience, focused on PNW

(2) Experience as a choreographer of color in PNW

- What are the ways you've experienced racism in the dance world in the PNW, focused on role as a choreographer?
- How do you resist racism?*
- How does your dance/choreography resist and challenge racism?*
- What do we, as the dance community in the PNW, need to do to address these racisms?*

*Intended to ask but did not have time

Appendix H. Individual Interview Protocol

Individual Interview Protocol

This individual interview protocol was based on the following Research Question:

What is intersection of dance, identity, and resistance for contemporary dance choreographers of color in the PNW?

(1) Demographic information

- Name
- Pronouns
- Racial/ethnic identity
- Other salient identities they are willing to share
- Brief summary of your choreographic experience, focused on PNW

(2) Dance background information

- Can you share more about your dance journey?
- How would you define/identify your movement style? Please share any specific influences on your movement?

(3) Experience with racism as a choreographer of color in PNW

- (if they are participated in group interview) Do you have any reactions or anything else you want to share following the group interview?
- How have you experienced racism in the dance world, focused on PNW?
- What are ways you resist racism, focused on dance and choreography?
- What are ways you think about self-care, joy, and healing?