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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
IRVINE

kNOw | BODY'S
The Effects of Communication in Dance Pedagogy on Artistic Voice & Personal Identity

THESIS

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

in Dance

by

Krystal Matsuyama-Tsai

Thesis Committee:
Professor Jennifer Fisher, PhD, Chair
Assistant Professor Charlotte Griffin
Professor Molly Lynch

2020

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DEDICATION

to

my mother

for being my example of agency,

all the tremendous educators

who sense my quiet potential,

and to my father

for always believing that I alone, am enough.

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To my cohort — EVERYTHING'S MADE UP AND THE POINTS DON'T MATTER!
How I have loved laughing with each of you and learning how not to take ourselves so seriously during our short two-year journey together.

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

kNOw | BODY'S
The Effects of Communication in Dance Pedagogy
on Artistic Voice & Personal Identity

by

Krystal Matsuyama-Tsai

Master of Fine Arts in Dance

University of California, Irvine, 2020

Professor Jennifer Fisher, PhD, Chair

This ethnographic research study investigates how the dynamics of pedagogical communication in the studio influence the suppression and silencing of a dancer's identity and artistic voice. Through autoethnographic research methods interwoven with a literature review, observations in the dance studio, and seven collegiate dancer interviews, I question what occurs in the transactional learning space between teacher and student. Considering methods of best practice, I investigate my own artistic voice by embodying non-authoritarian ideals within a choreographic process ending in a thesis concert unexpectedly cancelled due to COVID-19. The stillness coerced by the pandemic divulges further aspects of my silenced voice and reveals a passion for art-making through digital film. In this self-study, I discover the importance of compassion, towards others and myself, and conclude that the process of creating art and discovering one's voice is deeply layered, multi-faceted, and continuously-evolving.

INTRODUCTION

"Oh you were just so quiet, Krystal," my mother responded when I asked what urged her to enroll me in my first dance class at Lauridsen Ballet Centre in Torrance, California. I was only a few years old and very shy before learning to engage with other young dancers as we pranced, twirled, and slid around in our pink tutus. I only came to understand later why my mother was proactive in challenging my timid nature—it was her fear of raising a daughter who passively conformed to the conventional unassuming Japanese girl. My mother, in stark contrast to this stereotype, innately possesses a spirited nature to be heard and seen. Growing up negotiating my grandfather's stubborn authoritarian ways of parenting, she was driven early to create a strong sense of herself. Introducing me to dance was her way of encouraging me to become the outgoing personality she so intuitively embodies. And I did learn a lot—how to dance, even how to succeed. Yet at some point, particularly when I faced many adversities throughout my professional dance career, I realized my voice had to some degree been silenced and that I had never truly grasped an authentic sense of myself.

Graduating with a BFA in Dance Performance from University of California, Irvine, I was primarily focused on the embodiment or doing of dance. Although UC Irvine is a renowned research institution, I never recognized the myriad of other ways there were to study and experience dance. Even being surrounded by prestigious dance faculty and talented friends who choreographed and explored their individual voices as artists, I always felt intimidation and fear about exercising my own freedom to do so. As I moved on from academia into pursuing work in both the professional commercial and concert dance industries, my ultimate vision of dance career success was rather narrow: I was either to perform with a contemporary repertory company touring the world or create choreographic works for well-known dance companies. The

latter option seemed impossible because dancing was the only activity I ever seriously engaged in. As author and journalist Suzanne Gordon shares in her novel *Off Balance: The Real World of Ballet*, dancers fear anything outside their usual practice due to their early specialization of constantly being "told where to be, what to do, and how to think" (14). As professor Jill Green breaks down Euro-centric styles of dance technique classes through a Foucauldian lens, she examines how dance education acts as a disciplinary power that trains students to be "docile" citizens in the dance world, which creates potential problematic standards affecting dancers' behavior and bodily being (Green "Foucault"). Along these same lines, since I had never been guided or told how to be otherwise, I defaulted to what I understood as safe and acceptable—following the direction and authority of the person at the front of the room.

It was not until my initial experiences in graduate school that I began to question my sense of self in relation to my experiences with dance culture. During a pedagogical workshop, a series of articles were shared, one being dance scholar Robin Lakes's "The Messages behind the Methods: The Authoritarian Pedagogical Legacy in Western Concert Dance Technique Training and Rehearsals." I found myself disturbed yet simultaneously intrigued to read the paradoxical nature of dance culture that I had submitted nearly my entire sense of identity and measure of self-worth to.

While reading through the article's initial statements comparing infamous choreographers to "demagogues" (Lakes 3) my memories immediately fled back to a moment during my time in New York, being called out by a co-director of a well-known contemporary company in the city. It was my first (and only) season as an apprentice, and I had stepped in last-minute for the company's season at The Joyce Theatre due to a health emergency with one of the company members. I was ecstatic to have the opportunity to perform with my dream company at a

renowned venue such as The Joyce. But after the first run-through during tech rehearsal, the co-director decided to shame me in front of the entire company over the god mic. For what I can only assume to be for his own reasons, there was a need to express how I was dragging the entire company down. He spoke with a condescending tone while highlighting that I was the mere apprentice who had to "step it up" in order to barely keep up with the world-class talent I was surrounded by. While I had previously experienced moments of embarrassment and adversity at my home studio in Southern California, I had never been called out to that extent of humiliation. After the debacle, I quickly paced to the dressing room to gather my belongings to get out of the theatre as soon as possible. The dancer I was replacing generously consoled me with encouraging words as I sobbed out of shame and embarrassment. As the season continued on, I quickly learned that the authoritarian methods of leadership that I experienced that evening were unfortunately commonplace for the company. While most of the dancers were unhappy with the ways the company was run, no one seriously considered expressing their frustrations directly with the artistic directors or administration. With few full-time positions available in the realm of American contemporary dance, I understood why they chose to stay silent, yet I couldn't help but feel a huge sense of betrayal from this art form that I intensely loved and sacrificed so much to.

Due to traditional top-down power dynamics between teachers and students (or in my case, between director and dancer) along with the nature of competition and unattainable perfectionist standards, the dance world is argued to be a "culture of risk" (McEwen & Young 156). As dance scholar Angela Pickard concludes in her study examining the formation of a ballet dancer's identity, "A…dancer's…body and *habitus* is produced and maintained through an embedded assumption that emotional and physical suffering, for the sake of ballet as art, is normalized and accepted social practice" (43). With artistic leaders normalizing such problematic

conditions and practices, as Lakes asserts, the cycle of authoritarian teaching and training practices inevitably continues (17).

Dancers clearly need resilience and confidence, faced with the odds of stress-inducing conditions and practices of the field. Part of a dancer's success depends on how they react to these challenges. As I reflect back on my upbringing and experiences within dance culture, I question why I hadn't noticed these problematic subcultural tendencies before. When and where did I start to learn and normalize these tendencies? How has this affected the silencing of my identity and voice as an artist, educator, leader? And is the current generation of artists aware of or do they question the impact of these traditions and cultural practices in relation to how they may shape their identities and voices as future artists, educators, and leaders?

When it comes to the models of leadership that are being exemplified in our polarized political climate today, I wonder how this point in time will affect future generations of citizens and how I can contribute to a better future. As an educator, I believe that dance education holds often-underestimated power to provoke innovative ways of thinking and researching, not only because it's creative by nature, but because it involves the practices of both cognitive and embodied intelligences. While I have felt silenced through my experiences within dance culture, I reflect back to my mother's initial reason for exposing me to this transformative art form. It drives me to conduct this research in dissecting the cultures of dance and education in order to come to a fuller understanding of how my personal voice as an artist was silenced. As I discover and consider my own voice through this research, I encourage and advocate for future generations of artist-leaders to mindfully do the same.

METHODS

After reading Lakes's "The Messages behind the Methods: The Authoritarian Pedagogical Legacy in Western Concert Dance Technique Training and Rehearsals," I set out to review literature from fields of dance, education, and sports psychology. Once having a general comprehension of literature that could inform the analysis of the culture and teaching practices present in the dance world, I planned to observe various dance classes to investigate the culture that I had been an insider to for so long but now from a researcher's perspective. Through these class observations the intention was to gain an understanding of the methods of pedagogical communication used across various genres of movement education, as well as begin developing a view of the dance classroom culture from the wider-scoped perspective of researcher. Classes observed during the 2019-2020 academic year, varying from ballet, modern, contemporary, choreography, Image Tech and Laban Movement Analysis. Once granted permission by each educator to research in their educational spaces, I began observing classes offered within University of California, Irvine's Dance Department and expanded to "chuthis. Perspectives," an educational program hosted by Las Vegas-based contemporary company called chuthis. (spelled with a lower case C and period at the end), that provides a platform to promote emerging and seasoned female dance educator voices. During these class observations, I gathered observations on the culture in the studio and the methods and manners in which the educator shared movement ideas and concepts with dance students.

Along with my observations, I was interested in conducting interviews with dancers and dance educators about their experience with pedagogical communication in dance training. The purpose of these conversations was to gather personal stories and experiences with pedagogical communication in the studio and see what themes would surface. I created a call for interview

research participants for undergraduate dance majors at UC Irvine on the UC Irvine Dance Majors Facebook page. The call asked for participants interested in sharing their perspectives and experiences with authority and power in the dance world as well as an opportunity to collaborate and perform in a choreographic concert. The prerequisites for the study were the interested participant was (1) at least eighteen years old, (2) a UC Irvine Dance Major, and (3) had at least five years of prior dance experience. The definition of "dance experience" was open to all styles and cultures of dance training. In order to participate, those interested contacted me by email and I provided them with further details about the scope of the research. From the themes that arose in the interviews, I drafted discussion topics, and planned to utilize the themes and discussions to inform a collaborative creative work.

Conducting interviews in lieu of a survey or questionnaire was imperative for this research because I was interested in studying the intimate nuance in each dancer's experience in the studio. When I am looking to further explore my voice as an artist and educator, I find I often look to the upcoming generations of artists. In the recent *On Being* podcast episode "The Evolutionary Power of Children and Teenagers," host Krista Tippett interviewed professor of psychology and affiliate professor of philosophy at UC Berkeley Alison Gopnik. Her research findings with children (Gopnik) aligned interestingly with my reasoning to conduct interviews with younger dance artists. As Tippet and Gopnik discuss in the interview, society is at a place in time where the voices of Generation Z (those born between the years of 1997 and 2012), also referred to as iGen (Twenge), are advantageously utilizing the ever-expanding communicative reach of social media and technology to amplify their voices in order to be heard by those in positions of legislative power. Though not the only one, a prime example of this in current media is 16-year-old Swedish climate change environmental activist Greta Thunberg (Alter). With such

young voices upstaging those traditionally in charge of setting societal standards, a distinct shift seems to be occurring in the sociopolitical culture of American democracy. As an educator, I was drawn to hear from the voices of those young budding artists who are now the direct receivers of pedagogical communication in the studio. Their individual perspectives and experiences inform my millennial perceptions of dance culture in ways I am either reminded of or freshly informed.

In response to the participant call, a total of nine UCI undergraduate dance majors expressed interest through email, from which I narrowed down to seven for ease of rehearsal scheduling. Once the email was received, I replied with Self-Determined IRB consent forms explaining the premises of the research including the interview and choreographic processes. Each participant was interviewed individually, with each lasting from thirty to just over sixty minutes. The interview questions (Appendix A), and a few follow-up questions, centered around the dancer's personal experiences with pedagogical communication in the dance studio and expanded into how the experiences affected the shaping of their identities.

I also interviewed two dance educators. In the beginning stages of my research, I was curious about comparing and contrasting perceptions and perspectives of educators and dancers in the studio, but as I began interviewing the dancers, my interest evolved into a narrowed focus on their personal stories and experiences. As fascinating as the interviews with the two dance educators were, I instead decided to use their extensive knowledge as educators as advice for myself as I ventured on this research journey.

To further explore and understand aspects of the dancers' personal experiences in relation to the formation of their identities, I engaged in a collaborative choreographic process with them. Through reflection, discussion prompts (see Appendix B), and embodiment, we communally unpacked, questioned, and analyzed our personal experiences to inform a choreographic concert

entitled *kNOw | BODY'S: processing perceptions*. The thesis concert was scheduled to premiere on April 10th and 11th, 2020 in the Experimental Media Performance Lab at University of California, Irvine, yet was cancelled due to the events surrounding COVID-19.

The COVID-19 pandemic was pivotal within my journey of discovering where my artistic voice truly lies. With the cancellation of gatherings worldwide, an unexpected contemplative space provoked me to further question my motivations for embarking on this research. The weighted pause revealed not only deeper-seeded layers of my silenced perfectionism and shame but unveiled buried passions of cultivating my creative voice through new mediums, inspiring personal expression through experimentation with digital film. The process of discovering my voice pre and post a global pandemic is an adventure filled with twists and turns, filled with valuable lessons that I might not have discovered otherwise. I wonder if this journey of unearthing is what my mother always intended for me.

CHAPTER 1: TRANSACTIONAL SPACES IN DANCE EDUCATION

"Culture encompasses many things, some of which are more important for teachers to know than others because they have direct implications for teaching and learning."

— Geneva Gay
"Preparing for Culturally Responsive Teaching"

My interest in pedagogical communication led me to analyze dance culture and how it might possibly bring a dancer to feel invisible and silenced. I immediately dove into my research by reviewing the literature on dance and education practices while reflecting on my own experiences with pedagogical communication in the studio. As I began to notice, dissect, and question the environment I had claimed as my second home for over three decades, I focused on the relationship between the educator and student. My research question became: What was being passed down through the experiences of this relationship? How does the literature report on these experiences? And as Lakes asked: When dance is taught, what other messages might be passed through the methods and circumstances of communication? Because the majority of my training and experience has occurred in North America, my descriptions and analyses reflect the characteristics, traditions, and practices of dance training common to Western theatrical dance culture.

Investigating Systemic Traditions: Literature Review & Personal Accounts

In the classroom, a dynamic is immediately established between the dancer and dance educator (or choreographer) through the tradition of the teacher-student relationship. In America, the historical model of education is one that exists hierarchically (Hagood 21), the teacher is perceived as the all-knowing guru, and the student as the submissive ball of wax or empty vessel

to be either molded or filled with knowledge (Lakes 9, Stinson). Within this top-down relationship, the student assumes little to no personal agency and the educator holds a privileged power that can lead to a student's demure submission. This power dynamic tends to lean towards various forms of oppression, a ripe breeding ground for an authoritarian class environment. Lakes defines an "authoritarian personality structure" as one that involves a "low opinion of human nature, punitiveness, fatalism, contempt for the weak, cynicism, aggression, an ironic submission to authority, intolerance for ambiguity and projection, [and] ascribing to another person['s] attitudes present in oneself" (4). The dominant party has a drive to control the "weak" by the means necessary to sustain and maintain power. As manipulative motivations oppress those considered "lesser than," voices of subsequent generations are continually diminished and silenced.

The ballet and modern dance worlds are no strangers to the history of authoritarian teaching and training practices. Lakes reveals a dark side of the Western concert dance world through sharing dancers' personal experiences with many of the ballet and modern dance "greats" such as Martha Graham, Jerome Robbins, Viola Farber, Anna Sokolow, Antony Tudor, and Merce Cunningham. In these stories, dancers are verbally and physically abused, and the cultural mentality of guru worship shines through the choreographers' behaviors towards their students or professional dancers. The formidable images of those considered legends demonstrate the danger of authoritarian teaching methods amongst some of the highly esteemed. Though Lakes reveals how the methods are outdated and more importantly injurious, it seems there are still glimpses of its presence in current dance culture. In December 2019, *The New York Times* published an article on the removal of Vienna Ballet Academy's director due to the lack of action taken to address multiple abusive practices reported earlier in 2019 that occurred at the

historic training school (Marshall). The initial first-hand accounts were released by Austrian news magazine *Falter*'s Podcast Radio (Klenk) and then spread to various other news sources (Henley, "Top Vienna ballet"), eventually leading to the Austrian government's decisive action to relieve former prima ballerina Simona Noja-Nebyla of her director duties. Through the reports it is clear that the academy has been more focused on the preservation of the similar if not identical traditional "19th-century" methods (Young, Sandford) that Lakes addresses in her seminal article from 2005.

With the historical examples from Lakes and more current example of Vienna revealing the authoritarian legacy amongst highly-considered figures within the concert dance world, I began looking for additional stories and/or conversations surrounding the topic of pedagogical communicative practices in populations outside of the most prestigious companies and institutions. I wondered, was this a topic still of concern for those dancers aspiring to work professionally? In my search, I found a few stories in *Dance Major Journal*, a journal edited by professor and dance scholar Jennifer Fisher that hosts a range of writings primarily from the UC Irvine dance community focusing on dance topics that keep the dance major reader in mind. Bravely sharing his own struggles with anxiety, UC Irvine undergraduate dance major João Ducci shares his desires for educators to consider students' mental health in hopes of improving the conversation around mental health in the dance world (Ducci). Carrie Cox, a recent graduate from the program, also shares her struggles with perfectionism through her challenges with body image that have innately influenced her confidence (Cox). Both dance majors courageously call on dance educators to expand their sensibilities surrounding the idea of what it means to care for their students. I wonder how many dance educators today actively take the time to prioritize the consideration of a rising artists' thoughts and feelings.

As Lakes states, an irony exists in an art form such as dance, which embodies ideals of freedom and democracy in choreographic work yet continues to succumb to authoritarian methods (3). In her investigation of the authoritarian pedagogical legacy, she unravels eleven ideologies contemplating why such practices continue to transfer generationally (Lakes). For example, the culturally derived metaphors that have been created perceiving students as "empty vessels" to be filled or "balls of wax" to be molded come from 17th-century educational ideas that knowledge was something predetermined (Lakes 9), and a guru-worship mentality inherited from religious ideas instilled the power dynamic of the teacher or choreographer as "infallible, all-knowing and all-seeing" (Lakes 10). As I reflect on the multiple stories shared in her seminal article and those relating to more current events, the main issue seems to be the hesitance or inability of dance educators to think without their egos and move beyond the traditional and the known. By calling attention to highly-regarded names in ballet and modern worlds, and sharing stories from dancers in both professional and pre-professional realms, Lakes reveals authoritarian methods beyond the discussion of dance style, prestige, or level of proficiency; it is an issue concerning the mindsets and perceptions surrounding pedagogical communication in the studio.

Focusing on the nature of authority in the early 80s ballet world, author Suzanne Gordon writes how, "abuses of power are institutionalized" (111) due to the "unending child" psychology the culture encourages (109). Gordon comments on the way such power structures manipulate the ballet dancer:

> From the very moment they enter the career of ballet, dancers are programmed in diffidence. For ballet is more than art, more than business; it's a closed world where those in authority have almost total control over every aspect of the dancer's life. Behind the intricate and beautiful choreography we see on stage is an even more forceful yet subtle choreography of power. (15)

Gordon's display of the subtle and often imperceptible ways ballet culture shapes power dynamics resonated with my dance experiences, because it wasn't until either my body or spirit was broken that I realized how much I relinquished to the demands of educators and choreographers over the years. The hierarchical model was something I never considered potentially injurious because I passively accepted my job description as the obedient dancer that was to be quiet, listen, and conform. As former Graham Company dancer Lyndon Branaugh, states, "I don't blame the parties involved as much as I think that's how [the training] functioned and I allowed myself to be a part of that functioning" (Buckroyd 81). The systemic hierarchical tradition seems to cultivate not only a student that remains silent and conforms but also one that believes that the archaic system's problematic way(s) of operating is their own fault.

As dance scholar Susan Leigh Foster states in describing the dancer's conformity to structures in ballet culture: "From the teachers *unchallenged* authority, students assimilate the system of values and *internalize* the impulse to evaluate and rank their own and others' performances" (243). In her essay, "Dancing Bodies," she provides various definitions of "bodies" that explain how this evaluation and comparison exists in dance, particularly in the experience of the ideal, perceived, and demonstrative bodies, as the dancer exhaustively compares their own body to an external source rather than exploring one internally. The presence of mirrors incorporated in the training heightens this superficial mindset (Foster 240). This external comparison is ongoing because the definitions of each "body" shifts as the dancer advances in their training (Foster 239). Given these constructs widespread across dance culture, it's easy to see why an investment in my artistic individuality never felt prioritized or encouraged. While my mother's intention was to use dance as a medium for exploring my sense of agency and voice, the literature allowed me to notice how the cultural power dynamics

potentially conditioned me to obey and submit, subtly leading to the silencing of not only my voice, but an inferior sense of self-worth.

While comparing discoveries in the literature to my personal experiences in the studio, I found solace in the stories and evidence revealed. There was a sense of reassurance that I am not alone, that others have persevered beyond or are working through similar adversities. As I recognized the power structures prevailing in dance culture and how they conceivably shape the dancer's way of being, I began to ask myself how and why dancers might *allow* their personal and artistic voices to be continually silenced, perpetuating hierarchical constructs. In the realm of the creative arts where everything is subject to interpretation, why do dancers seem to conform to injurious and systemic traditions? In what ways have such traditional constructs influenced the dancer's mindset? These questions led me to further literature enquiry, considering the ways a dancer's psychology might be influenced by their experiences in the studio.

Development during Développé: Psychological Effects of Dance Culture

While Lakes' makes a strong case for why authoritarian pedagogical practices in the dance world exist and implies that action should be taken to eliminate old-school traditions, she never deems such approaches ineffective. Many of my colleagues and friends as well as the undergraduates I interviewed have at least one if not multiple stories that involve some form of physical or verbal abuse in the studio (further explained in chapter 2). While many of them wouldn't look back on those memories fondly, some attribute aspects of their success to their abusive teacher experiences. Unfortunately, the truth seems that both authoritarian and non-authoritarian pedagogical methods work to obtain desired results; however, there is evidence that

the former tends to induce stress and psychological trauma, having detrimental short- and long-term effects on a person's overall health and well-being.

With the various pressures and demands surrounding the body and its performance (Berardi 6), it should not come as a surprise that psychological distress is prevalent amongst the dancer population. Because dance relies on the presence of a physical body, a dancer's self-concept and self-worth is often fused (and confused) with the body's ability to execute and perform. These abilities are typically measured against unattainable ideals, which often leads many dancers to have a perfectionistic mindset. The topic of perfectionism appears often in connection to damaging psychological effects across the literature.

The Psychology of Perfectionism in Sport, Dance, and Exercise is a volume that includes essays on the subject of perfectionism in relation to athletes, dancers, and other movement populations. With writings from various researchers, it is split into four main sections: perfectionism as a concept, models and approaches of perfectionism, applied issues and practitioner perspectives, and reflections and future directions (Hill). In the section covering models and approaches, psychologists Thomas Curran and Paul Appleton explain an overview of prior researched models of perfectionism and put into perspective the origins of it in the sport, dance, and exercise environment (Hill 57). In my own moments getting lost within perfectionist thoughts, I often believed it was solely because of my dance training. However, this chapter reveals and discusses perfectionism in an interestingly complex manner. The image below concisely displays perfectionism as more than simply an attitude encouraged through the training practices in athletics or dance, but rather an intricate mindset informed by various aspects of learned behavior.

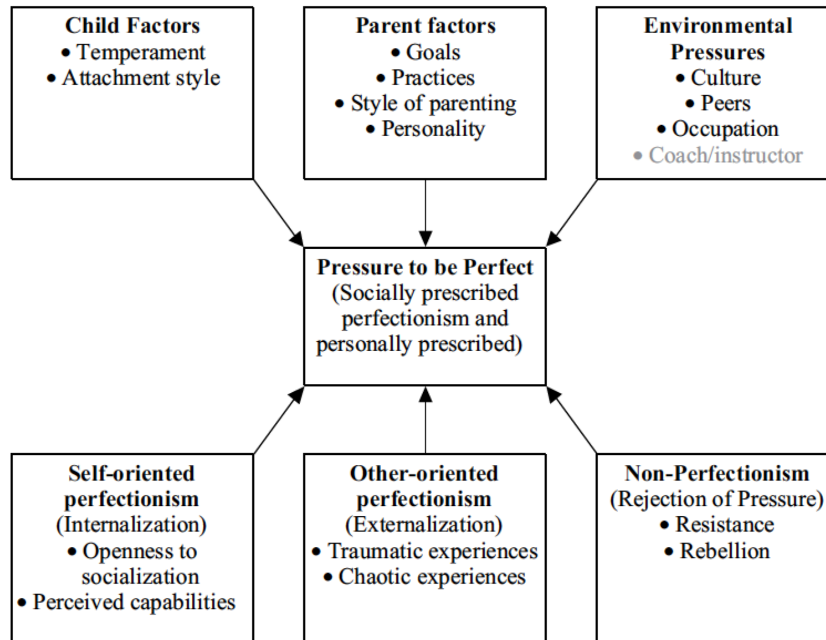

FIGURE 3.1 Model of the development of perfectionism. Adapted from "Perfectionism in children and their parents: A developmental analysis", by G. L. Flett, P. L. Hewitt, J. M. Oliver, and S. Macdonald's (2002), In G. L. Flett & P. L. Hewitt (Eds.), *Perfectionism: Theory, Research, and Treatment* (pp. 89–132). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. Copyright 2002 by American Psychological Association.

Source: Hill, A., ed. *The Psychology of Perfectionism in Sport, Dance, and Exercise* (59)

As shown in the lighter text underneath the "Environmental Pressures" box, "Coach/Instructor" is only one small piece of unraveling the perfectionism puzzle. In the middle and bottom three boxes, various types of perfectionism are briefly described. In chapter eight, sport psychologist researcher Sanna Nordin-Bates and Frank Abrahamsen analyze a case study of a retired dancer who identifies as a perfectionist (Hill 222). Within the analysis, they utilize previous definitions of three types of perfectionism created by Hewitt & Flett, also referenced in Curran and Appleton's overview. The definitions of self-oriented perfectionism (SOP), other oriented perfectionism (OOP), and socially-prescribed perfectionism (SPP) are broken down in the following table:

Types of Perfectionism (Hewitt & Flett)

Perfectionism Type	Standard	Criticism
Self Oriented Perfectionism (SOP)	High personal standards	Harsh criticism towards self
Other Oriented Perfectionism (OOP)	High personal standards	Harsh criticism towards others
Social Prescribed Perfectionism (SPP)	Perception of high standards set by others	Will be criticized if standards not met

Adapted from source: "Perfectionism in Dance: A case example and applied considerations" (226)

Finding and dissecting these three different definitions of perfectionism helped me realize how nuanced and complex the psychology of it was. By separating perfectionism into categories of influence, I began dissecting where my own perfectionistic tendencies stemmed from. Did I only learn my tendencies from dance culture? When or how had I possibly been influenced by other environments and experiences in my life?

In the second section of the book, multiple researchers explore other models of perfectionism such as a dividing perfectionism into perfectionist strivings and concerns (Jowett, et. al), a tripartite model, dividing perfectionism into three categories of healthy, unhealthy, and non-perfectionist (Gotwals), and a 2x2 model, looking at different subtypes of perfectionism into four categories: non-perfectionist, pure Personal Standards Perfectionist (PSP), pure Evaluative Concerns Perfectionist (ECP), and mixed perfectionist (Gaudreau). From this select overview alone, the complexity of perfectionism is evident. While perfectionism and its various models can be discussed at length, it is crucial to ask where and how it breeds specifically in dance culture in order to further understand how it possibly contributes to the silencing of a dancer's voice.

In a 2014 study conducted by Cal State University of Northridge professor Paula Thomson, collaborating researcher S. Victoria Jaque, and kinesiologist Jacqueline Eusanio, in

comparison to non-dancers, the predominant factor in dancers' perfectionism in relation to self-concept was their internalized shame (Eusanio et al.). In a recent episode of *DanceWell Podcast*, host and physical therapist Marissa Schaeffer interviewed Thomson on the topic of shame in dancers ("Episode 56: Shame"). Jaque and Thomson are specialists in the field of psychophysiology, the scientific study of the psyche in relation to the body, centering their work on stresses within movement populations such as dancers, athletes, and those with functional movement disorders. In the podcast, Schaeffer and Thomson discussed various aspects of their research—one study which I discovered early on in my research and was later featured in the February 2019 issue of *Dance Magazine* (Watson). In this study, Thomson and Jaque evaluated the relationship of shame, trauma, and dissociation between elite dancers and athletes ("Exposing Shame"). A significant finding revealed the dancer participants to have a higher prevalence of dissociation and shame related to their self-concept compared to that of athletes (Thomson & Jaque). This finding fascinated me because I found it resonated with my feelings of shame as a dancer. While I never asked myself or took the time to consider where my feelings of shame stemmed from, discovering data such as the findings from Thomson and Jaque's study drew me to investigate my experiences of shame further.

As I continued exploring and unpacking my own silence and internalized shame, I was fascinated by the wealth of research on shame and how relevant it was to dance culture. In her interview with Schaeffer on *DanceWell*, Thomson describes shame as one of the "self-conscious emotions," defining it as the belief leading to the feeling that one is *innately* flawed ("Episode 56: Shame"). She defines the feeling of shame separate from that of guilt, explaining how guilt differs because it involves feeling flawed due to committing a *wrong action*. Author, professor, and shame researcher Brené Brown defines shame as "the intensely painful feeling or experience

of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging" (69). Going even further than Thomson, Brown explains how feelings of embarrassment and humiliation also differ from that of shame (71). Brown suggests embarrassment is the least threatening because when we experience it, "we don't feel alone" (74). Through referencing the words of American psychiatrist Donald Klein, Brown argues and explains that feeling shame is more dangerous than these other emotions because the victim believes they are *deserving* of their shame (qtd. in Brown 73, Klein 117). Because shame holds its power in silence, often one's shame is rarely ever recognized or heard, potentially leading the victim to feel like they don't belong.

In a study prior to comparing the prevalence of dissociation in athletes to dancers, Thomson and colleagues compared dissociative experiences of dancers to rhythmic gymnasts (Thomson et al.). The study revealed elite dancers having a significantly greater sense of not belonging to their own bodies. This finding aligns interestingly with Brown's definition of shame in relation to the concept of being worthy of belonging. With the body's immanent presence in dance, is it possibly more difficult for the dancer to feel worthy of belonging because their identity is so often dominated by the body and its abilities?

With the link between shame and perfectionism in the psychology literature, I started to assess how shame and perfectionism are possibly exacerbated by the culture of teaching and learning in dance. For one thing, children are often taught dance at an early age, so it may significantly influence the years of crucial development. With movement classes abounding for aspiring dancers from ages two and up, students globally are able to explore creative movement ideas and concepts, while also being introduced to new interactions with models of authority outside those of their immediate family. These new relationships can be potentially exciting for a student if taught sensitively, but if training is delivered through traumatizing authoritarian

methods, these experiences may have long-lasting injurious psychological effects. According to the research of American psychologist and neuropsychologist Allan Schore, the "negative effects of shame are *most pronounced* during childhood when the emerging self is actively being defined" (qtd. in Thomson & Jaque 440). In addition, "[e]ven milder forms of emotional maltreatment have been related to shame-based experiences" (Thomson & Jaque 440).

In my decade of teaching students ages 2 to college-age, I never received training in any aspect of safe teaching practices pertaining to child development. Having taught at various studios in Southern California and having known many other teachers, I found that it is not common practice for dance educators to possess this knowledge. It is encouraging to see the culture shifting slowly with organizations such as National Dance Educators Organization (NDEO) providing programs and curriculum that set standards for dance in early childhood ("Standards for Dance"), yet it is still uncommon within the general practice of private dance studios where many children start their training. While I assume that the intention of these educators and studios is not to induce harm, by teaching young bodies without sound knowledge of basic child developmental patterns, they risk injury, potentially perpetuating traumatic aspects of the authoritarian tradition. As Lakes points out—there are messages being transmitted in the dance studio that go far beyond those pertaining to actual dancing.

It is apparent that the conversation about the psychological effects of training in relation to shaping a dancer's identity is one that leaders continually facilitate in order to help develop healthier training practices. Growing up as a dancer I remember often experiencing internalized conflict because my body would not execute what it was asked to do, and I didn't have the space to fully process my feelings because I was immediately instructed to continue performing. I wonder if all the years of silencing those feelings led to the suppression of my voice. When I

discovered the literature on shame and perfectionism, I felt years of brewing in silence begin to unravel. Discovering that victims of shame believe they are *deserving* of it perhaps allows me to see why my voice has been silenced for so long. I found empowerment in the new knowledge I had obtained related to the psychology behind my feelings and how dance culture might have influenced the suppression and silencing of them. By seeing that such conditions existed in the literature, my experiences felt validated and more widely understood. With a fuller and sometimes overwhelming understanding of how intricate the psyche can be, in some ways it is a relief to know that these psychological effects are complex and multi-layered. Understanding a sliver of the mind's complexity through the literature has allowed me to act with more compassion towards myself as I continue to process my history surrounding perfectionism and shame.

Moving Beyond Injurious Tradition

The rise in awareness of the authoritarian legacy of dance teaching practices has led many scholars and pedagogues to take on the responsibility to help undo and move beyond such damaging practices. For example, former London Contemporary Dance School student counsellor and psychotherapist Julia Buckroyd wrote *The Student Dancer: Emotional Aspects of the Teaching and Learning of* Dance, a book providing a breadth of research gathered from psychoanalysts, educators, and students, exhibiting the undeniable connection between mind and body and its intersection with dance education culture. By making this information accessible to researchers, administrators, educators, and dancers, Buckroyd displays her advocacy for healthier dance education practices from top to bottom. In addition, in the *International Association for Dance Medicine and Science* (IADMS) *Bulletin for Teachers*, researchers have written articles

discussing the benefits of dance teachers learning about positive psychology (Nordin and McGill). In her article "Journey Toward a Feminist Pedagogy of Dance," dance scholar Susan Stinson imagines a dance education environment that encompasses a student's entire being in order to fuel their agency, focusing on "both liberation and caring…empowerment and relationship" (139). Educator and researcher Gretchen Alterowitz offers a similar approach while focusing specifically on the context of ballet ("Toward a Feminist"). Other writing tracks developing trends and challenges to consider as dance education moves through the 21st century. In their literature review, researchers Ann Sööt and Ele Viskus cover topics such as the holistic model of dance teacher education, co-operation between different art forms, self-regulation and reflection in learning, technology and mass media's role, gender and sexuality, multiculturalism, and more. In conclusion, they state that the role of the 21st-century dance educator is "not merely the teaching of dance steps but rather a conscious guidance in a world of different possibilities with the skills of teaching how to dance" (Sööt and Viskus 298).

In addition to articles geared towards educators, researchers have also focused on advising the dancer. Former New York City Ballet dancer turned performance psychologist Linda Hamilton wrote several books with wellness for the dance performer at the fore. Covering topics from mind, body, and nutrition (*The Dancer's Way)*, practical strategies to help with emotions (*Advice for Dancers)*, and performance psychology (*The Person Behind the Mask)*, Hamilton provides tips and survival strategies for the dancer. The 2019 book, *Psychology for Dancers: Theory and Practice to Fulfill Your Potential*, focuses on psychological concepts, applying them to a dance-specific context in a clear and accessible way (Schofield & Start). Schofield and Start present an update to Buckroyd's work, providing materials further empowering dancers to learn and apply these theories to their artistic practice.

As I sifted through the plethora of literature covering more progressive dance education approaches and mindsets, I was excited to discover and explore what approaches aligned with my own voice as an artist educator. The following highlighted research from educational explorations, investigation of learning environment, and pedagogical definitions helped me find more clarity within my own voice as an artist, educator, and leader.

To understand reasonings for various styles of pedagogical communication, I began to explore "motivational climates" (Miulli & Nordin-Bates) and their potential effect on dancers. In their four studies looking at motivational climates, dance scholars and researchers Michelle Miulli and Sanna M. Nordin-Bates define a motivational climate for dancers as "the psychological atmosphere in which they are training, rehearsing and performing" (5). Through their review of published studies, they categorize two types of climates of motivation: task-involving and ego-involving (Miulli & Nordin-Bates 5). A task-involving climate includes qualities such as encouraging self-improvement, supporting all students, conveying that mistakes help dancers learn, an environment that encourages dancing and learning with peers, and rewarding effort (Miulli & Nordin-Bates 5). An ego-involving climate includes encouraging being the best, comparison and competition with peers, supporting star students, conveying that mistakes are not acceptable, and rewarding success (Miulli & Nordin-Bates 5). In one of their case studies, they found ego-involving motivational climates to promote unhealthy perfectionistic tendencies (Miulli & Nordin-Bates 6). This finding relates to the cases of powerful choreographers abusing their power Lakes describes in her critique of authoritarian methods.

While not specifically geared towards dance education, a significant educational source that was recommended to me by colleague Brandi Kelley was the book *Mindset: The New*

Psychology of Success: How We Can Learn to Fulfill Our Potential, written by Stanford University psychologist and researcher Carol S. Dweck. Through her fascination in her early studies on failure, Dweck began to discover two main mindsets that relate to the way people cope with failure (3). Her research led her to delineate between two mindsets — fixed and growth. Explaining these mindsets as belief systems, Dweck provides various cases exemplifying how these mindsets possess the power to shift our potential. The traits of each mindset are divided below for comparison and clarity:

Traits of the Mindsets (Dweck)

Fixed Mindset	Growth Mindset
Potential is innate / fixed	Potential is unknown / can be cultivated
Binary thinking (right or wrong)	Contextual thinking
Success as priority	Learning as priority
"Failure" defines identity	"Failure" is an experience to be learned from
Hesitancy to expose deficiencies — "non-learners"	Acceptance of deficiencies — asks how can we learn to strengthen this weakness?
Admires effortless achievement	Admires effort, because effort ignites ability and turns it into achievement

Adapted from source: *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*

When it came to the qualities of the "fixed mindset," I could see how these underlying factors related to perfectionism and my own experiences with it. Laying out these differences of these mindsets, I gained another educating tool to use within the classroom, especially when it comes to helping dancers recognize their beliefs about their own potential.

When first introduced to the work of pedagogue and professor Edward C. Warburton, I found the way he incorporated his own experience into his research refreshing. Through his early struggles as an educator, he discovered the need for defining the differences between "content knowledge" and "pedagogical knowledge" (8). In the dance world, content knowledge would

equal information pertaining to technique, steps, and repertory, whereas pedagogical knowledge would be the communicative methods used to deliver that information. He argues that for effective teaching and learning, a sound educator uses both content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge within their education practice (Warburton 8). These two larger categories were informative for me to consider as I started to dissect how and why certain types of "pedagogical knowledge" worked or didn't work in the studio.

The use of feedback in the studio has consistently been a particularly controversial topic for me because I understand the negative impact it can have on a dancer's self-esteem yet simultaneously recognize its necessity in order for a dancer to progress. Because I was never trained on how to constructively provide feedback or consider different ways in which to communicate information to a dancer, I found educator Elizabeth Gibbon's breakdown of feedback informative and useful. She defines feedback as "the information, judgement, or correction given to a student about his or her performance of a task" (Gibbons 38). She puts the methods of feedback into three main categories: verbal (language use), kinesthetic (tactile), and visual (demonstrating) (Gibbons 40). She further divides the categories into "forms of feedback." These four forms are value (offers judgment), corrective (identifies and corrects errors), neutral (descriptive and factual), and ambiguous (vague and imprecise) (Gibbons 40). When it comes to the field of dance education, where standards are often unregulated and teaching methods often aren't taught, discovering such definitions allows me to perceive and develop my current and future pedagogical choices with more awareness, clarity, and intention. The hope is, when miscommunication arises and emotions run high, these definitions can assist in understanding the different learning personalities in the studio, and provide the knowledge to supply alternate

feedback possibilities to help maintain focus on the work and avoid hurting or putting the dancer down in any way.

Prior to my entrance into graduate school, I would occasionally look at dance education articles searching for some sort of guidance to help my education practice. One of the articles that I stumbled on was that of artist-scholar Adesola Akinleye and dance scholar Rose Payne titled, “Transactional Space: Feedback, Critical Thinking and Learning Dance Technique.” Exploring the attitudes surrounding feedback from both the teacher and learner perspectives. Akinleye and Payne conclude that feedback is a “bidirectional transaction” that occurs from teacher to learner and vice versa versus a one-directional dead-end conversation (147). An example of this “bidirectional transaction” could be a teacher listening to and considering a student’s recommendation or discovery from a certain exercise. But in the dance world, historically in ballet but also in other forms, a dancer is often taught to listen and execute, not to delay class by talking or asking questions.

The idea of the bidirectional transactional space between the teacher and student was one that resonated with my beliefs for a more progressive education. How did I view this space? What happened in this space? What was the potential of a more dynamic transactional space? And how could I help cultivate an environment that encourages a learning space of this nature? Did I fully understand how to run a class or rehearsal without imposing will, the method I was most familiar with? How did a transaction work in the middle of barre or my own choreographic process? While I had gained new insight and information from the literature presented above, I wanted to get a closer look from my own perspective in the classroom, and seeing what dancers’ personal experiences were through individual interviews.

CHAPTER 2: REFLECTING ON DANCE COMMUNICATION PRACTICES

"To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin."

— bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*

While the literature provided me with broader understanding of authoritarian pedagogical legacy's roots, how this might affect a dancers' psychology, and a sense of what other researchers have done to counter this legacy, I felt there was only so much that I could gather from texts and research studies. With some of the research revealing personal experiences in the classroom, I was curious to know what I might discover through my own observations.

Observations in the Studio

The following observations were distilled to connect with some of the literature presented in Chapter One. While I observed classes in multiple dance styles, I focused on the observations in ballet and modern techniques because they were the most relevant to my training history and related to findings in the literature. Maintaining objectivity while conducting fieldwork can prove challenging, especially when the field of research has been a significant part of one's life. While there are comparisons stating the interactions between student and teacher in ballet and modern techniques, these observations are not meant to represent all ballet and modern teaching styles at University of California, Irvine or elsewhere. Instead, the observations I highlight serve as pedagogical considerations and gentle reminders to myself as I am on this journey to discovering my personal voice as an artist and educator. In other words, as I observed I asked myself, in what ways does tradition still pervade the culture of teaching and learning in dance? And in what ways has the culture progressed?

OBSERVATION THEME 1: WEIGHTED WORDS

A notable method of pedagogical communication in the studio is administered through language. Through listening for the choice and repetition of certain words, I considered the possible underlying messages conveyed. Within the ballet classes observed, I noticed that the word "don't" was used more often than its opposition "do." I found this potentially misleading, because it tends to bring more focus to what the dancer is incorrectly executing rather than what they could be focusing on to find an experience that feels right for them. I wondered if the use of "don't" might promote binary thinking—an either/or approach, which has been shown to be a symptom of the fixed mindset. In other words, a fixed mindset would produce the feedback, "You're not executing the step correctly," whereas a comment rooted in a growth mindset would be, "Here's an approach that may help you further discover that step you're working on." When negative and positive results are the main focus, feedback veers toward a binary of "right and wrong," and this binary thinking might work against training a dancer mindset that produces individual creativity and artistry that lead to the development of one's voice.

An additional example of language choice that I questioned was the frequency with which the ballet teacher used the words "I" and "me." By using phrases such as "show *me*" and "*I* need you to," there was an emphasis on a demand to perform for the teacher versus for the student discovering an experience for themselves. Through centralizing the attention on "showing" the teacher, the dancer may begin to lean more towards external validation than discovering their own sense of value internally. I am curious if the language behind these requests creates a motivational climate for the dancer that feels more product-driven than process-driven. While there is a certain amount of external direction that needs to occur during

dance training in order to progress, how necessary it is for the teacher to incorporate language that focuses on the "I" or "me"? Does this language possibly deter the dancer from a more intuitive learning experience that would allow space for deeper embodied connection to their training?

Another observation of this external comparison occurred in a class that I happened to be taking. Towards the end of class, the teacher wanted to make a comment on the performance quality of the students' turns and used the example of performing for an audience. In the example, the professor stated, "I want you to think about how you would act as if you were the only one on stage…performing with everyone watching you…I'm sure you wouldn't crumble out of your turns…." While these words were delivered in a very gentle manner and seemed well-intentioned, I questioned the scenario in which the teacher placed the students. Yes, many if not most dancers train to perform. But like in the earlier example with the use of the word "don't," I question if focusing on "*not* crumbling" out of turns is the most helpful. My initial response to this comment was, but what happens if I *do* crumble out of the turn? Another consideration—by stating "I'm sure you wouldn't…" the teacher builds a scenario where the student is not permitted to fail. Through using such examples in the learning environment, the teacher potentially brings the student's focus to highlight "failing" or "succeeding," which is a focal trait of the fixed mindset. While I understood what the teacher was trying to communicate to the class, my researcher mind wondered if the other dancers felt the way I did. Was "not crumbling out" of the turn the only feedback to focus on? It seemed to me that through the negative suggestion of failing in front of others that the professor ran out of other "pedagogical content" or feedback methods to communicate how the dancers could improve their turns. While I am sure my perceptions could be interpreted as hyper-sensitive, I think it's valuable for dance

educators to question the tools they implement in the studio which directly influence the learning conditions in the studio.

In contrast to some of the ballet classes, I noticed how the language choice differed in my modern class observations. When providing feedback before a second round of a combination in center, the professor commented, "I really appreciated the care you were using with the placement. Now try…(*initially intended movement concept*)." Instead of emphasizing the correctness of the exercise, the professor acknowledged what was seen, expressed gratitude for it, then repeated the exercise's initial focus for the students try in the second round. In this communication, there was a feeling of humility that was conveyed by the teacher. Instead of obsessing over a "right" or "wrong" way to do the exercise, the teacher used the opportunity to acknowledge what was happening in the room and clarified their originally intended focus after the first round. Connecting to what I knew from the literature about motivational climates, I found this teacher's particular climate as "task-involving" because effort was rewarded over success.

During a break in modern class, one of the students approached the professor with a question about how to execute a push-up. The dialogue proceeded as so:

Dancer: Do you prefer (describing two different types of push-ups)

Professor: Do you mind showing me what you mean?

Dancer demonstrates

Professor: So for you the difference is (description a) & (description b)?

Dancer: No, I guess what I'm asking is it (description c) or (description d)?

Professor: Well, what do you think would be best for you?

In the exchange between the professor and student, I found it powerful to see the student start the conversation looking for a right or wrong answer to their question, and how the professor shifted the entire perspective of the conversation by responding with a question. By asking this simple question, the professor created a space that centered around the student's needs, which allowed the student to decide what was best for themself. This was a live, in-studio working example of feedback and critical thinking in a "bidirectional" transactional space noted by Akinleye and Payne.

In addition to the above examples of language choice, other requests by the modern professor were shaped by language centralizing the dancer such as "when *you're* ready," "finding *your own* space," and "if that was helpful for *you*." This focus provided freedom for the dancer to make choices of their own while moving through class. In comparison to the externally focused language of the ballet classes, the language choice in modern allowed for a more internal experience for the dancers, creating a noticeable shift in the tone of the learning environment. Students seemed more inclined to explore their own experience within the exercises because they were allowed to. In this motivational climate they seemed less focused on achieving the step perfectly and more on their personal discoveries within it—what I perceived to be the growth mindset in action. Through these observations, the teacher's language choice created a space where the dancer had freedom of choice in their education, an environment it seems sound for educators to provide, in all forms of study.

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OBSERVATION THEME 2: MESSAGES MINUS WORDS

Another significant way of communicating in the studio are non-verbal methods. These may include body language, physical touch, facial expressions, and vocal expressions such as a

breathy sigh or a thoughtful "hmm." Specifically in dance, I wonder if dancers are hyper-sensitive to non-verbal forms of communication, because the nature of dance is specializing in communicating through the non-verbal medium of the physical body. The following observations focus on the potential messages transferred through non-verbal methods of communication.

With dance being the art of communicating with the body, the use of physical demonstration in the studio is common practice. In my observations, this was used as one of the main sources of non-verbal communication in both ballet and modern, with more frequency use from ballet professors. Each ballet combination at barre and center was demonstrated either by the teacher or a particular student. While the use of demonstration is a valuable tool, I wonder how conscious the decision to use it is within a teaching practice. Do teachers use demonstration because it's the best way to convey a concept? Or just because it's easier than articulating movement verbally? In some parts of my observations in ballet, I wasn't sure how effective demonstration was for the students. Considering all the students were dance majors and were technically beyond foundational ballet technique, how much of this demonstration was actually helping the students understand movement concepts on a deeper level? With the teacher constantly demonstrating, students seemed to take focus away from their own bodies, leaving some to appear less attentive and even disengaged. Were they possibly intimidated by the professionalism of the educator? Do they compare and give up looking like the demonstrative bodies that typically lean towards specific ideals? Or were they actually inspired and just appeared disengaged? While the dancers generally appeared to understand the provided material, I wondered what other methods could have provided a more engaging and embodied learning experience.

In addition to the teacher's demonstration, another observation was the favoring of certain students and body types during class. While I don't know how conscious or unconscious this behavior was, there were certain moments when I tallied the number of times a professor called on a specific student because I wasn't sure if I was just imagining the favoritism. Along with favoring certain students, a preference for certain body types to demonstrate in class seemed evident. The typical "chosen one" was always a girl, medium height, and proportionately skinny. As an observer, my mind immediately went to thoughts like, "Oh, this is what is considered acceptable" and, "In order to execute the step in the way the teacher is desiring, my body needs to look like that." Reflecting back on Foster's various definitions of bodies, by using this "demonstrative body" the educator perpetuates a preference for the idea of the "ideal body" to their students.

In contrast to this, the modern classes rarely, if ever, used demonstration as a method to convey movement concepts and ideas. Most all communication was conducted verbally, allowing the dancer to experience the essence of the movement internally instead of having to relate to a body external of their own. While there were moments later in class where the dancer would relate to bodies external to theirs, it was only after they each had established an internal experience within their embodied practice. When students eventually worked in pairs, the professor fostered discussion between the dancers and then stated, "I'd love to know some things you're working on." Through this verbal feedback, the professor created a transactional space that was "bidirectional" between teacher and student as well as what I would define as "multi-directional" between teacher, student, and other students.

Moving forward to the use of touch within the dance studio, I start with Elizabeth Gibbon's definition of feedback, as a method of tactile or kinesthetic. While this method of

feedback can be effective and when used well can be very helpful in the progression of one's dance training, there are moments when it might be sending a message of power rather than useful feedback. There was one particular incident that stunned me during my ballet class observations. During adagio at barre, a student was mid-développé when the professor walked up, slapped their thigh, and proceeded walking through the rest of the class as the combination was performed. The focus emphasized by the professor at this point in class was "get on that standing leg." The student barely responded to the thigh slap, simply proceeding to execute the combination as taught. While the thigh smack did not seem to catch the student by surprise, I couldn't help but revisit the stories of physical abuse in the studio that Robin Lakes shared through her research. The stories Lakes shared ranged from students reacting in fear from the physical abuse but also reacting with gratification from the attention. Since the student didn't appear to be offended by the thigh slap, I wondered if they felt the latter.

While I didn't observe any tactile cueing in the modern classes I sat in on, I recall an experience I had with one of the same observed modern professors in a past class. One of the objectives in that particular class was understanding the floating sensation of the pelvis when performing an inversion. As an exercise in providing feedback through touch, the professor had the students work in pairs to provide tactile feedback in order to further assist each other in exploring more float and lightness in the pelvis. Before engaging in the touch demonstration with one student, the professor asked for consent. Then, through a combination of demonstration and verbal instruction, the teacher explicitly taught the class how to provide tactile feedback to directly inform the loft in the pelvis. As the class progressed to across the floor exercises, the practice of inversions continued also. There was a moment at the end of one of the exercises when I decided to take extra time to reestablish the the lifted sensation in the pelvis in my own

body. Noticing that I was having a difficult time finding the sensation, the instructor came over and asked if I would like some assistance in finding this feeling in my body once again, to which I responded yes. Because the initial partner feedback exercise had set up a clarity behind the specific use of touch in the inversion practice, I felt more comfortable with the tactile feedback the professor offered. The instructor's clear communication prior to providing or receiving touch, then instructions to other students about how to offer tactile feedback, facilitated the exercise, making the use of touch clear as an aid to the movement.

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While I tried my best to observe with an objective researcher's lens, a significant limitation to these observations could have been exposure to many of these educators prior to this research. Knowing how they taught could have influenced what I chose to focus on in the studio and decided to take note of. Balancing this insider-outsider perspective felt like a game of tug-of-war between two perceptions of normal. On one end, the interactions I observed in both ballet and modern felt "normal," because I've experienced various teaching styles and approaches through my own training in the studio. On the other end, I questioned if this culturally accepted "normal" was ethical. But with this tension between the insider and outsider experience, I developed a wider understanding of how an outsider might perceive certain exchanges between dance educator and student. Even with the progress the field of dance education has made in the past several decades towards healthier teaching practices, how can dance educators continue to develop their awareness around their communication practices in the studio? With each new generation of artists, in what ways can educators challenge their personal habits and biases to consider not only varying personalities, but diverse populations they meet in the studio? By taking a step back to notice and dissect what messages might be communicated

through words or lack thereof, I discovered a deeper awareness to factors that could affect a student's learning experience. With an understanding of what exists in the dance education and psychological literature, it was enlightening to see how these theories were applied or not applied in the studio.

The next step in the research was talking to student dancers about their personal experiences with pedagogical communication in the studio. By conducting individual interviews with these dancers, I hoped to discover and further understand the ways in which the nature of pedagogical communication informs a dancer's identity and voice from a more personal perspective.

Interviews: Retrospection as Introspection

I hesitated to dissect the dancers' interviews for a long time due to the sheer volume of experiences each so bravely shared. Because I understood the amount of courage it took to confront my own struggles of feeling silenced and shamed, I felt a responsibility to do their stories justice. My procrastination stemmed from a fear of misinterpreting their stories, with the risk of misrepresenting their most authentic selves. I came to notice my own ego and perfectionist tendencies in this aspect of the research and eventually recognized that these interviews I conducted were tiny glimpses into who they were as human beings—that the entirety of their identities are undeniably influenced by more than the scope of this research. Originally in my perfectionist mind I imagined I would help unpack all the bits and pieces of each participants' stories and flawlessly help them come to understand the unfortunate truths of the dance world to find peace with in themselves. I now recognize that this type of work takes a

lifetime. Ultimately I decided to focus the dancers' responses on themes that were most predominant and which also resonated with my own experiences with shame and perfectionism.

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INTERVIEW THEME 1: MIXED MESSAGES

In the interviews with the cast of seven dancers, a common experience for them turned out to be mixed messages from their dance teachers early on in their training. One account was more recent. It was astonishing to hear that certain traditions still existed even in the 21st-century dance world and fascinating to notice the dancers' responses as they shared some of their experiences. Out of respect for the dancers and what they have bravely shared through my interviews with them, I have decided to keep their names and certain identifiers anonymous.

Dancer 6 reflected on her early experience with an educator who trained her when she was 10 years old. She remembered a time when the teacher screamed at her and hit her with a stick, then proceeded to make her run around the studio for the remaining twenty minutes of her private lesson—she vaguely recalls it was because she fell out of a pirouette. As she thought about her experience, Dancer 6 introspectively asked, "Is it [because] she cared? Or was it because she was a terrible person?" (Dancer 6). As she continued to reflect, she mentioned a heartbreaking thought that often swept through her mind—"Maybe this is just how [the dance world] is?"

Dancer 2 shared a story from her middle-school training that exemplified another scenario conveying how mixed messages are communicated in the studio:

> *Dancer 2:* So, sometimes [the teacher] would…say… "Does anyone have questions…?" And we'd be [quiet] like…we don't know what we don't know? And then they would [say], "Ok, if you don't have questions, that means you know it all!"

KM: I see…and that was something they said verbatim?

Dancer 2: Yeah. I'm not sure how serious it was supposed to be taken but we took it really seriously. So we'd be like "Okay…" and then we'd ask questions. And [then] they'd be like "Were you looking?"

After she shared this experience, she repeated again that she didn't know if the teacher's remarks were supposed to be taken seriously. After I asked a few more clarifying questions, she stated,

> So I guess anything we do is the wrong answer. And tied to that is like (big sigh) "I'm not working hard enough." And that stays with you for awhile, even after that. Even though you were confused at the time. Or I was confused at the time. And like [once I got to] high school, I was like, "I'm not going to ask any questions because I should know it already."

So not only was Dancer 2 confused through the teacher's conflicting comments, but through the mixed messaging, she internalized a prolonged self-deprecation and fear to fully engage in the classroom in her future learning experiences.

While most of the interviewees had danced since their childhood, there was one dancer who began their training just upon entry into UCI's Dance program. This was Dancer 3. When I first discovered they were interested in the project I was excited to see what refreshing insight they might present having a fresher experience with the dance world. When I asked Dancer 3 how their interactions with dance educators might have altered the way they think and feel about themself, they talked about a recent experience in the studio and how the educator's persona differed from technique class in comparison to rehearsal. According to Dancer 3's experiences, the teacher's technique class persona would often seem tense and stern, but when in rehearsal Dancer 3 felt the teacher had a more inviting and caring personality. When following up with Dancer 3 about their experience, I asked if the differing personalities were confusing, which they hesitated to decide. Instead, they responded with, "…[S]ome…may find [the different personalities as] the same personality because they constantly [receive] attention [from the

teacher]....But as a person who doesn't receive that constant attention...I noticed [a difference]" (Dancer 3). While the dancer didn't necessarily find the teacher's varying personas confusing or possibly concerning, I found their answer to my follow-up question interesting and saddening. Their response was initially interesting because I expected them to agree with my own perceptions of finding the teacher's differing personas confusing. At the same time, I found their response concerning because I could see how they were beginning to notice some of the more unfortunate traditions embedded in dance culture that begin to affect a dancer's psyche—some of the pervasive traditions that eventually affected perceptions of my own identity.

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INTERVIEW THEME 2: BEING TOUGH

A common narrative that I heard throughout my training was, "you have to be tough" to make it as a dancer, or in order to be in the field you have to build a "thick skin." While I can understand why dance educators relay this belief to protect their students, there may be a tendency to convey the wrong message, particularly when the definition of "tough" is pushed to its limits. In my interview with Dancer 2, this "thick skin" narrative was pervasive, once again, in her middle school dance training. Remembering a time when her classmate broke down in ballet class after dancing on stress fractures for weeks, she recalled her teacher's consoling words—"Oh it's OK, you've held on for this long...you're so stoic...the dance world values that" (Dancer 2). Dancer 2 stated that at the time she remembers thinking, "Oh that's cool...I have to be stoic and show no pain" (Dancer 2). While praising a "tough" mentality was possibly well-intentioned, sending the message that the dancer has to push their physical body to the point of breaking is a far cry from teaching survival and longevity in the dance world. Dancer 2's classmate didn't speak up about the pain caused by the stress fractures earlier because of this

“being tough” mentality cultivated by the teacher. So this “tough” mentality not only encouraged potential injuries mentally and emotionally, it also caused physical repercussions as well.

This silencing nature of the being “tough” mentality showed up in a more nonchalant way with my interview with Dancer 1. Being a more soft-spoken individual, when I asked her how she responded to harsh teacher feedback, she said, “I just had to brush it off…[I] just had to listen as much as possible, and take [what the teacher had to say] into consideration” (Dancer 1). When I followed-up with Dancer 1, I asked if she actually did just “brush it off” like she said in her interview. She responded by stating that the mentality “in a way developed my thick skin… sometimes it broke me down more than motivate me to continue.” She further clarified that her “brush it off” reaction to critical teacher feedback was heavily tied to her struggles with body image at the time—a story all too familiar in the dancer experience. At the end of our conversation she stated, “I don’t think I brushed it off where I totally ignored it from my consciousness, but in the present situation you kinda have to deal with it and take it like it was…‘constructive [criticism]’ I guess.”

In stark contrast to Dancer 1’s more subdued response were those that I received from my interview with Dancer 7. While reflecting on the ways that she responds to teacher feedback Dancer 7 stated, “I built a thick skin growing up” and, “I’d rather have a harsh critique than nothing at all” (Dancer 7). She mentioned she is highly competitive and has been ever since she can remember. Dancer 4 also interpreted any criticism as attention. She stated there have been many instances recently where she’s found herself missing being “pushed to the max” like she had been in her competition dance training (Dancer 4). When Dancer 4 reflected on how she responded to teacher feedback in the studio, she remembers one of her teachers using severe profanity and telling the group that they were all “terrible dancers.” Later in the interview, when

I asked her which teacher she admired most, she referred back to this same teacher because of the level of intensity the teacher brought to the studio's training.

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INTERVIEW THEME 3: BEING SEEN

Another theme that was prominent across the interviews was the theme of "being seen." This theme I find particularly interesting for dancers because the art form is innately visual by nature. So often young dancers are taught to "stand out" in order to be perceived as valuable to the dance world. However, when one is in a room full of other dancing bodies, it's remarkable how quickly you begin to feel invisible. The idea of "being seen" in this section leans towards the definition of being seen for who the dancers were as individually as human beings versus solely what their bodies were told to execute.

While reflecting on a time when a ballet teacher once slapped her knee and broke a pointe shoe in front of her to make a statement in front of the entire class, Dancer 1 remembers the humiliation she felt in front of the rest of the class. Amidst her expressing her embarrassment, she states, "I was trying so hard for her to like me." Hearing that, my heart sank as I was reminded of my own desires training as a young dancer, just wanting the teacher to notice my dancing and hopefully like what they see.

In my interviews with Dancers 5 and 6, the theme of being seen came up in more paradoxical ways. When asked about how she viewed the dance educator's role in the shaping of her identity, Dancer 5 explained how she often seeks validation from her instructors in class, yet "get[s] really awkward when people single [her] out" (Dancer 5). As Dancer 6 reflected on her first traumatic dance experiences shared earlier in this chapter, she began to draw connections between those experiences to her conflicting desire to be seen. When looking back on these

memories, she shared feelings of distress over her early training because she notices how the insecurities tend to even influence her ability to seize certain opportunities that would allow her to be seen at UCI. When she sees her friends going after the opportunities they want she often finds herself hesitating to take the risk and then asking, “Why don’t I have that in me?” She further expressed that, while she never feels comfortable dancing onstage alone because of her fear of being seen she simultaneously truly wants to be seen. I found it fascinating how Dancer 6’s experiences and feelings fit into the neuropsychology research noting the pervasiveness of emotional trauma during the childhood formative years (Thomson & Jaque 440). I empathized with memories of feeling paralyzed by fear because they reminded me of my own conflicting struggles between my thoughts and actions.

In both Dancer 5 and 6’s interviews, this conflicted feeling of wanting to be seen yet unseen was an interestingly familiar feeling from my past. While I don’t know if this is what they were thinking and/or feeling, I wondered if these conflicting desires were subconscious defense mechanisms placed to protect themselves from truly being seen completely—from their most loved parts to their least. I couldn’t help but wonder if their experiences were related to the perfectionism common in the dance world.

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INTERVIEW THEME 4: NEVER ENOUGH

In my interviews with all seven participants, the theme of “never enough” was the most pervasive throughout their stories. Whether on the topic of body type, look, talent, or work ethic, this feeling of scarcity nested itself deeply in the minds of these young artists. As shared in the previous three themes, many of the dancers had at least one if not several negative experiences in the studio. Because the themes tend to overlap within the stories, I felt that reiterating stories for

this section might be redundant. Instead, I thought a list of their “never enough” themes would prove more clear and powerful, and also provide a dedicated space for these bits of their silenced voices.

never **tall** enough.

never **thin** enough.

never **toned** enough.

never **skinny** enough.

never **long** enough.

never **arched** enough.

never **curvy** enough.

never **proportioned** enough.

never **flexible** enough.

never **working** enough.

never **doing** enough.

never **strong** enough.

never **tough** enough.

never **stoic** enough.

never **worth** enough.

never **white** enough.

never **submissive** enough.

never **pretty** enough.

never **talented** enough.

never **quick** enough.

never **smart** enough.

never **clean** enough**.**

never **going to be** enough.

never **perfect** enough.

never **good** enough.

In the gathering of these themes, great heartbreak was again brought to surface for me, but through the shared feelings of "never enough," I also found myself comforted in the collective ways we related to this theme. The process of interviewing each of these dancers uncovered many experiences in the studio that were expected, surprising, nostalgic, informative, and upsetting. No matter how I prepared myself to find stories of unhealthy communication through the interviews, hearing them straight from the dancers never made them any less troubling. As I listened to each dancer, many divulged after the interview the was finished that it felt therapeutic to reflect and talk through their past experiences in the studio. I was fascinated with the experiences and stories they shared through the interviews and curious to continue reflecting with them as we moved into our creative process in the studio.

CHAPTER 3: REVEALING VOICE(S) THROUGH CHOREOGRAPHIC PROCESS, CONNECTION, AND COVID-19

"...dance education has become less an escape from the world than a laboratory for understanding it and understanding myself…My goal…[is] for each of us [student and teacher] to engage in *ongoing* reflection about what we believe and why…"

—Susan Stinson
"Journey Toward a Feminist Pedagogy of Dance"

Once the observations and interviews were completed and analyzed for common themes, I started to face what I had been afraid to do for my entire dance career: cultivate my own artistic voice. Through the "never enough" theme shared in the dancers' stories, I saw an opportunity to begin shaping my own voice through bringing out theirs. In the creative process, I wanted the dancers to discover comfortability in embracing their own personal voices and stories. Within the prevailing themes of "never enough" and "being seen," there existed an interesting paradox between the immense desire to be accepted yet doubting that could ever possibly be achieved. During the choreographic process, the dancers and I decided to meet weekly for four hours each creative session, which allowed for moments of sharing, discussion, and further processing of personal experiences through embodiment in various forms.

Choreographic Process: Embodying Non-Authoritarian Ideals

Since I had very little experience choreographing prior to this research, moving into the choreographic aspect of the research process was very challenging and at times burdensome because of my perfectionist tendencies. But with the knowledge I had gained from my research, I was determined to investigate my own practice of non-authoritarian ideals in order to help shift the dance world closer to an authoritarian-free culture. I was also curious to lean into my own

feelings of “never enough” to explore what my artistic voice could be. In true perfectionistic fashion, I created a plan prior to each rehearsal with a structure that I believed would set me up for success. The main trajectory through each rehearsal process was to allow a space for the dancers to process their own challenges with their “never enough” stories and any other insecurities that surfaced, create material for these stories to be heard, and through their processing, I would journey through a process of my own insecurities with my artistic voice.

At the first rehearsal, I sat down with the dancers and thanked them for their contributions through their interviews, following-up with sharing my own feelings of “never enough.” I explained to them the plan I had for the choreographic aspect of the project and how it related to my continuous feelings of shame and perfectionism. Through the process I craved a space that encouraged the dancers to reflect on their feelings of “less than” and lean into questioning and processing them. What insecurities lived in their mindset? Where did these insecurities stem from? How could embodiment aid in processing feelings of insecurity? And how could I possibly bring them from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset?

In order to remind the dancers of the mindset related to the context of the research, I first had them each listen to their individual interviews that occurred several weeks prior. I invited them to write any thoughts or feelings they had while listening to their interviews and once finished, asked them, if they felt comfortable, to share those thoughts with the group. The intention behind the exercise was to reflect on their own perspectives and experiences to reveal how dance culture has influenced aspects of their identity. By nurturing this space in a group setting, I hoped the dancers would become more informed about their own tendencies and also begin to recognize others’ experiences as well.

After the dancers reviewed their interviews, I asked them each to come up with a word that would complete the statement "never _________ enough." While I had previously created my own "never enough" phrases from their interviews, this task was about them finding empowerment through self-processing. Once they decided on a word, each dancer wrote in their word on a large Post-It between the words "never" and "enough." After this, we posted our "never enough" phrases on the wall together and sat to reflect. This exercise became a processing ritual at the beginning of each rehearsal. I would write the words "never" and "enough," and they would fill in their word or words from their feelings of scarcity from the week prior.

Dancers reflecting on "never enough" task in rehearsal
February 16, 2020

"never _________ enough" words
March 8, 2020

The intention behind the “never enough” task was to bring the insecurities into a tangible reality to help process them more fully. When posting their words up together during the first rehearsal, I asked them how it felt to write it down and then put it up on the wall. Bravely one of the dancers expressed that initially it felt scary to write her word out, but putting it up on the wall with everyone else made her feel as if she wasn’t alone.

At this point in the rehearsal I would typically ask if anyone felt comfortable enough to elaborate on their chosen word, but I was often met with an eerie silence. The silence was oddly familiar, because I had not only witnessed similar behavior during my class observations, but I also experienced it many times during my dance training. Throughout most of the rehearsals, I briskly shifted into the next part of rehearsal because I did not want to force anyone to speak against their own will. While that aspect of rehearsal did not go as I imagined, I moved along steadily, guiding the dancers through an opening warm-up practice to stimulate a fuller sense of their presence into the rehearsal space.

To warm-up the dancers in a way that was aligned with non-authoritarian ideals, I gently directed them through a sequence that intended to bring their perceptions into an expansive sense of self in relation to their space, breath, and bodies. During this time, I could feel a sense of ease floating over the space as each dancer seemingly became more present in their body and experiences. Once they felt they were warm enough to start moving into choreographic ideas, I had them move through an improvisational exercise created by contemporary director and choreographer Peter Chu called “Fitting In/Fitting Out” (Appendix C). In this exercise the dancer is guided to grapple with embodying the concepts of “Fitting In” and “Fitting Out” in relation to their environment. The emphasis in the exercise is on the connection and disconnection from the space and/or bodies external of you. What does “fitting in” mean to you? What about “fitting

out”? Do these phrases stir up any emotions for you? How do you relate to your environment while embodying these concepts and feelings? Once the dancers explored this improvisational exercise in relation to the space I would shift the exercise to move across the floor, and began directing them to explore “Fitting In/Fitting Out” with each other. One person would move through the space, find a shape, then the next person would begin “fitting in” with the first dancer’s shape. I felt this exercise was particularly interesting with the group of dancers I had because most were not well-acquainted prior to this creative process. Noticing the choices of how close or far, fast or slow, they would each connect and disconnect from each other was something I only became aware of as I connected to them more through the process.

Dancers in rehearsal exploring “Fitting In/Fitting Out” exercise

In my initial plans, I desired to somehow implement the exercises that I had the dancers explore in rehearsals into the choreographic aspect of the work. In reality, the process did not take that trajectory. I surprisingly found myself working in a somewhat authoritative mode, where each part of rehearsal and the work felt clearly directed by me. As I reflected after each rehearsal, I

was consistently frustrated by my desire to control every aspect. While I believe I communicated my desires in a gentle way, I often felt unsure where the line was drawn between the definitions of authoritarian and non-authoritarian. I went into the process desiring to incorporate the dancers' stories in a way that felt honest and true to them, yet I felt by having such a tight grasp on the way their stories were being shaped, I was manipulating their voices. I often asked myself, in doing so, was I embodying the very ideals I wanted to stay away from?

In order to gain a more informed sense of who the dancers each were, I closed each rehearsal with a reflective discussion. Wavering between the macro and the micro, the discussions revealed the dancers' perceptions and practices related to the topics of authority, power, community, motivation, being seen, being heard, and self-care. As the discussions progressed throughout the process, the desire to be heard and seen for who they truly were became of more importance. In response to one of my discussion questions of "What does being seen look like to you?" one of the dancers shared their thoughts on an experience they had in ballet class. This is a paraphrase of what the dancer shared: At the beginning of class, the professor asked how everyone was doing, to which this dancer responded with "it's been hard." The professor responded by asking if their body was still okay for dancing. This response discouraged the dancer, because it displayed both a certain lack of listening from the professor and a limited consideration of what encompassed health and wellness.

To practice having a more empathetic ear and allowing their mental wellness to be cared for in conjunction with their physical wellness, I began to provide the dancers with weekly thoughts to consider and/or reflect on as they moved through their week in between our rehearsals (Appendix B). At the beginning of each week I would text the dancers with a prompt to consider as they moved through their daily classes, such as noticing their mindset while in

class and if they happened to be in a negative mindset, what were they doing to possibly shift to a more useful one? The focus was on their dance technique classes, but the exercise could be applied outside of dance as well. I asked them to bring their discoveries to share at the following rehearsal.

As we progressed through the rehearsal process integrating these prompts into our practice, there seemed to be a shift in morale amongst the dancers. Many reported they felt more empowered in their classes by having an internal motivation and some were even pleasantly surprised when they received attention from certain professors who normally paid them none. Of course, even in a small group of seven, not all were on the same page, but even those that had more negative experiences demonstrated a heightened ability to separate the experience from their perception of self in order to begin shifting their internal narratives. Our discussions surrounding their new awarenesses inspired a refreshing and expansive sense of my own empowerment and capabilities as a dancer, educator, and human. My initial instinct of looking towards younger generations for inspiration and guidance was unfolding serendipitously through the involvement of their voices in this process.

As I felt the dancers growing and learning, my ideas for the choreographic work began to expand. I decided the working title for the piece would be *kNOw | BODY'S: processing perceptions,* which was a triple play on words—conveying feelings of being unheard and unseen, discovering further knowledge about one's various bodies, and finally possessing one's self and body. I decided to separate the piece into seven sections that would acknowledge the different bodies that came to the fore in my research—ideal, psychological, perceived, demonstrative, communal, and personal. The intention through the work was to take the audience on a journey

through the psyche of a dancer and the rollercoaster of emotions that arise through their experiences.

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While you may have a particular image envisioning what you long for your artistic voice or project to be, there are certain aspects that will always surprise you and/or remind you of your limits. Particularly within dance, there are always interesting limitations because you are dealing with human beings that come from a range of backgrounds and experiences. In my case, with the focus on shame, perfectionism, and other insecurities—I realize I expected a certain level of vulnerability from the dancers that wasn't always met. When I first desired to use dancers for interviews and then choreography, I assumed they would all be open because of the premises of the project. Because of how open about sharing I was, I failed to recognize that all of them might not be. While all of the participants were quite vulnerable and open about their experiences during the interviews, once we started to move in the studio, I was often met with energy that was tentative and reserved. At first, I thought it was possibly an overall uncomfortable feeling amongst the group since they weren't the closest of colleagues, but I assumed they would become more comfortable and vulnerable over time. However, as the weeks progressed, I was still met with substantial hesitation. Whether I simply asked if they needed to see certain choreography again or how they felt about a certain idea, I was met with a deafening silence.

Finally, in one of our final rehearsals, I confronted them—asking why they couldn't or wouldn't respond. Was it because they didn't have an answer? Was it because they were afraid? Was it because they were still processing what I asked? I tried to offer as many options as possible since I know how difficult it can be to speak up as a dancer. Eventually a few of them said that it was because they didn't want to disagree with anyone else's feelings. In this moment I

found it ironic that in a project that was specifically focused on trying to empower the dancer's voice, the opposite was surfacing in their behaviors.

While it was upsetting not to have my expectations met, leading me to feel periods of frustration and anger throughout the process, I often wondered, could these feelings be what led teachers or choreographers to demonstrate authoritarian practices in the studio? As I reflected after each rehearsal, I often faced mixed feelings of shame and frustration—knowing that this was not the way I imagined my creative process to be, yet the work needed to keep moving forward. As the show dates neared, my feelings of anxiety grew. Personal feelings of "never enough" seemed to pervade the process even as the work neared completion. Could it be that my perfectionistic expectations were not met by the dancers because of the motivational climate I set for them? Or was I not providing clear communicative feedback for them to understand what I was trying to convey? While my initial idea and intention was to discover my own artistic voice through shaping theirs, my perfectionism seemed to be backfiring three-fold—on myself, the creative process, and the work.

A Global Pause: COVID-19

COVID-19 was declared a national emergency in the United States on March 13, 2020, a few weeks prior to the scheduled premiere for my thesis choreographic work. With institutions and organizations worldwide cancelling events involving social gatherings, a sudden halt was brought upon a vast majority of citizens' lives as they knew them. All concerts and events at the UC Irvine Claire Trevor School of the Arts were cancelled until further notice, which included all dance shows hosted by the Dance Department. I observed my colleagues' devastation upon

receiving the news. All of the time researching over the past several years spent in preparation for our thesis concerts in the following month now seemed like a waste. How was this fair?

While I shared similar feelings of grief that my colleagues felt in response to the concert cancellations, I mostly felt an odd sense of relief. I didn't notice this until a few weeks into the crisis, but once I did, I asked myself why I felt this way. Amidst this "global pause," as modern Professor Charlotte Griffin poetically stated on our last day in the studio, certain questions and feelings arose that I might not have asked or encountered otherwise. What were my true motives and reasons for creating and researching this work? Was a live choreographic performance an essential aspect of my research? In my life, I have noticed how life-changing events are often necessary in order for me to face the deepest parts of myself, and the events surrounding the public health emergency of COVID-19 were no exception.

After a few days of reflection, I came to realize that I chose to choreograph a live concert because I felt the need to prove my worth to the dance world. Because being a choreographer is what had been done before me and is typically the model for "success," I fell once again into a motivation that was external to what I felt resonated with my own inner truth and desire. While I was convincing myself that I had a voice in choreography and that it was what I wanted to do, in reality I was working under a fixed mindset, entrenched in the same perfectionistic spiral that the dance world had encouraged in the past—trying to fit into an ideal mold set before me. While it felt ridiculous coming to what I felt was a rather obvious understanding of my motives, this newfound awareness released me from the expectations that I had pressured myself to live within. The surfacing of these emotions helped me realize my excitement and buried passion for creating work through digital mediums. In some ways I felt guilty, experiencing a breakthrough during the health crisis because of the innate privilege it relied on. While many were busy saving

lives or dealing with more drastic limitations, it was one of the first times I felt at peace with myself. In certain ways, I feel as if I began where I started—recognizing my own feelings and wanting to unravel them through the process of art-making, but this time I felt more authentically connected with my sense of self. So as I leaned once more into my feelings surrounding my silenced voice, I began again.

Begin Again: Processing My Own Perfectionism

Up until the events surrounding COVID-19, I was focused on how to help those around me process their own insecurities, thinking that it would help me feel better about my own. But as I moved through the process, I found myself having the same thoughts I had prior to my research journey—constantly questioning if what I was doing was enough, comparing my work to what everyone else around me was creating, convincing myself that what they were making was better, creating personal standards based on what others had created, and the list could go on. The pandemic made me realize that I hadn't taken the necessary time to process my own feelings of insecurity before bringing others into the creative process. While in the back of my mind I knew processing my insecurities was necessary in order for the creative environment to flourish, it was this part of the process that I paid the least amount of attention to. Due to this lack of self-investment and reflection, the work that I desired to create fell short of what I imagined it to be—one that resonated with deep connection, honesty, and integrity.

With the physical distancing measures enforced during COVID-19, many suddenly had additional time and space in their schedules. In the extra time, I began to observe and note the behaviors of the dance world through various social media platforms. Many dancers jumped to training online, educators offering classes in virtual spaces, and some choreographers even

hosted virtual dance concerts. Overnight there was an outpour of resources that dancers never had before. From local dance educators to professionals of world-renowned dance companies, the entire dance industry seemingly became accessible overnight. In this astounding shift, I could feel my insecurities creeping in again, defaulting to thinking about how to present myself perfectly in this new context the entire world was suddenly forced into. My thoughts and feelings were jumbled and scattered—from wanting to help those in need, to thinking about how to get involved with the social media hype, but then questioning if this was what I really wanted—I quickly became overwhelmed, eventually arriving at a paralyzing stillness.

In the stillness, I wound up listening to a recent interview with author Elizabeth Gilbert addressing feelings of overwhelming anxiety during the pandemic. While she touched on many valuable points, I found her statements surrounding empathy and compassion particularly striking. Expressing deep concern over what she calls "empathetic overload," Gilbert suggested that in the context of COVID-19, compassion might be of better service than empathy. Demonstrating the differences between the two, she defines compassion as "I'm not actually suffering right now, you are, I see your suffering, and I want to help you" and empathy as "You're suffering, and now I'm suffering because you're suffering" ("It's OK to feel"). In explaining the differences between these feelings, she asserts that because compassion possesses a certain distancing from another's suffering, it provides a larger capacity for one to offer assistance to another in times of need.

As I reflected on Gilbert's words, I came to a shocking realization of the roadblocks in my research and creative process—in the desire to help the dancers process their feelings of insecurity, I was hyper-focused on *empathizing* with them rather than feeling compassion for them. Believing that empathy was better than compassion because I thought empathy would

provoke a deeper connection, through empathetic overload I actually ended up suffering *with* the dancers instead of helping them. In this realization, I also noticed how my desire to help was deeply tied to my own insecurities nestled under the facade of perfectionism—through my desperate yearning to help the dancers, I thought that I would be perceived as "perfect" and then finally my voice would be heard and seen. My entire life I thought that being generous was always the answer—to figure out all the means necessary to give back to others—but what I failed to consider was how to give back to myself. While unpacking my perfectionism is a small issue compared to the needs of a global health crisis, Gilbert's words helped me realize that I needed to use the time and space to reflect on my own needs and desires. In this time I sat in a lot of stillness, continuing to process the grief surrounding my insecurities. The stillness provided me with transformative insight, realizing how much courage it takes to sit with yourself. While it is anything but easy, it is imperative in order to begin moving forward in a way that feels deeply connected to yourself and your voice. The longer I sat with my grief, the more I was able to come to a space of acceptance. This processing of my perfectionism unexpectedly awakened a buried interest to create work through virtual mediums. As I became excited and inspired by new possibilities, ideas for projects started to flow, and I began experimenting with creative processes that felt truer to the methods and approaches that I desired to create work within.

in(still) and *kin/tsugi* series*: Creative Spaces That Feel Like Home*

With the physical distancing measures enforced during COVID-19, I was heavily limited to what I could create and execute with other dancers. Due to the disarray and anxiety surrounding the pandemic, I braced myself for the possibility of my dancers no longer wanting to participate further in the project. One of them did end up opting out due to mental health

concerns, which I completely understood and respected. The remaining six committed to an additional few weeks on this research journey with me, and I felt extremely lucky to have their continued company.

Along with being inspired by the space for stillness, I still wanted to create something based on the "never enough" theme that had come up during my research with the dancers. Since I wasn't sure how clearly they remembered their contributions to the "never _________ enough" Post-Its from our final rehearsals, I sent photos of them all to the cast along with additional instructions for recording themselves on video. They were each instructed to choose three of their personal "never _________ enough" words, and process them following directions involving movement and stillness. The task for the video recording was to find a space outside, place the camera on the ground in a fixed position, and in one-minute intervals, record themselves in three to five facings of stillness and in three to five movement improvisations.

Within the newly enforced remote conditions, there was a sense of letting go in the directive process that I had to accept and interestingly, it felt right to me. I wondered if during my first choreographic process, I hadn't yet sat with myself enough to trust my dancers with more creative freedom and input. Maybe because I didn't trust myself, I projected that insecurity onto them. Whatever the case, it was invigorating to provide a few simple guidelines to the dancers, then set them free to explore. In this approach I could allow them the freedom to express and process what they wanted through movement, and through digital film editing, I could subtly shape what they created.

In addition to beginning the creative process of *in*(still) with my dancers, I was also inspired to expand on a work-in-progress that I created in collaboration with my colleague and friend Waeli Wang. Initially performed at the end of my first year in graduate school, the work

was entitled *kin/tsugi,* and was a solo that incorporated movement and projection based on the theme of brokenness. By definition, kintsugi is the Japanese practice of reassembling broken pottery with gold lacquer. This act of reassembly encapsulates another concept popular in Japanese culture called wabi-sabi, or the perspective that accepts the impermanent and imperfect nature of living. Through the act of kintsugi, a beauty is celebrated in the areas where the pottery was broken. Philosophically this art represents the concept of accepting brokenness and repair as part of an object's history rather than something to conceal. I felt that the philosophy of kintsugi resonated with my past dance experiences and my acceptance of them; at first I felt broken but eventually saw that beauty could be found in the way all the pieces could come together again. In addition, knowing this idea stemmed from my Japanese heritage revealed another development in my artistic voice. While the majority of this research centers around my feelings of silence informed by my experiences in dance, through continuing to create art, I notice other pieces of my identity begin to surface.

I initially asked Waeli to help me with the digital film recordings for projection during the first iteration of the work and she has since asked if I would want to explore other possibilities for the work with her. Currently we are in a collaborative process of creating a *kin/tsugi* film series—a project that explores how the theme of brokenness can be conveyed through digital editing, manipulating the original recorded video footage in experimental ways accompanied by varying mediums of sound and music.

Both of these processes feel like what I have imagined my creative environments to be — collaborative, open, curious, generous, respectful, and kind. Maybe it's because I have learned to let go, or maybe it's because I have had space to process, but I think this is what I imagine a

“transactional space” to be. While I don’t yet fully understand why and how, what I do know is that these spaces feel like home.

CONCLUSION

Through this research, I have discovered the value in shifting my focus from a fixed mindset of "success" to a growth mindset of "learning." In this spirit, what I have learned is that the process of "discovering your voice" takes time, is constantly shifting, and is never really finished. And while the process may not be perfect, that's okay. The unexpected surprises of this research helped me think and discover myself in ways my perfectionistic personality would have never allowed for. Reviewing the related literature, observing classes, interviewing dancers, embarking on a choreographic process, and reflecting on my own tendencies in the studio have allowed me to consider the power of my own voice, especially as an artist and educator in service to others.

Through it all, I realized that knowledge is enlightening and empowering for the dancer—I discovered new concepts within the literature and through my observations learned how to begin applying some of those concepts in my own practice as an educator. By conducting my dancer interviews I learned that authoritarian teaching practices unfortunately still remain and that there's still more work to do to in order for these traditions to cease. I realized that being non-authoritarian is harder than it looks, and that I had some further reflecting and unpacking to do as an artist and human. The challenging experiences that surfaced in the studio drove my desire to reflect on the methods in which educators and leaders communicate and pass on the legacy of teaching and learning. Through my reflections I made useful discoveries about my sense of self related to my deeply entrenched perfectionism and shame—how it can be countered yet surfaces nonetheless. Reflecting also helped me understand that I'm not alone in my experience, as part of my feelings were influenced by my dance culture upbringing.

Possibly the most profound lesson I learned through the events of COVID-19 was discovering that I am enough, knowing that whatever artistic desire needs to surface will reveal itself, and even then, the journey of "discovering your voice" continues to reveal more than you thought was possible. As I reflect back to my mom's first instinct to enroll me in my first dance class at Lauridsen Dance Center in Torrance, California, to provide me with a platform to discover my sense of agency and voice, I not only feel a boundless sense of gratitude, but I think I am just beginning to understand the full extent of what she truly intended for me.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW INSTRUMENT

Can you please state your name, your year, and how you identify yourself as a dancer?

When I mention the teacher-student or choreographer-dancer relationship, what are some initial thoughts that come to mind?

How do you tend to respond to teacher (or choreographer) feedback?

Can you think of times when this has made a difference for you?

Can you describe the kind of teacher you have most admired or learned a lot from?

What was it about them or what they did that you think left this impression on you?

How do you relate to this idea of there being an ideal body for dance?

Can you think of an experiences when you've related (or not) to this ideal?

Have your interaction with your dance instructors altered the way you dance or how you think about yourself?

How do you know when you've done well in class?

Do or did you ever think your educators were like parental figures in any way?

Was your family supportive of your endeavors in dance?

What are your thoughts on the dancer's responsibility in the studio?

What are your thoughts on the teacher's responsibility in the studio?

APPENDIX B

DISCUSSION/REFLECTION PROMPTS

1 - Recognizing thoughts
In one of your technique classes, try noticing your mental state in class — are you dragging your feet? Are you excited? Are you interested? Write some thoughts down & come to rehearsal next week with some experiences to discuss.

2 - Recognizing actions
Now that you're practicing your awareness, also note if you're actually DOING anything about the mindset if it isn't a helpful one. What are the ways in which you can try to help yourself instead of wallowing in misery? (Though sometimes this is fine)

3 - Reflecting on values
Keeping your mental/emotional states in mind when you're in class, start to ask yourself what your values are. For me right now, I value relationships, connections, honesty, humor, curiosity, and family. Begin to gather your list this week, and we'll discuss this coming Sunday.

4 - Aligning values and actions
Continuing on with noticing mindset and actions and how these align or not with your values. How do we cultivate an awareness of our thinking and emotional bodies in order to become more aligned with the most intuitive parts of ourselves?

APPENDIX C

FITTING IN/FITTING OUT IMPROVISATIONAL EXERCISE

Created & Written by Peter Chu

Director of Las Vegas-based contemporary dance company, chuthis.

I feel it is my responsibility as a director, creator, and educator to encourage creative environments and processes that provide space to calmly connect with others when perspectives and ideas shift. I find creating space and time to cultivate this awareness helps nurture an individual's tranquil awareness and sets the tone of how to effectively communicate. At this juncture in my career, building a sense of community, establishing an internal rhythm that awakens the essence of why we move, and discovering communal dances that have united people during times of hardship is my focus. The potential of human connectivity during a creative process and class is something I value and do not take for granted.

I recognize the next generation needs more tools to become effective and efficient leaders. I have, therefore, created a few dance-making exercises that place emphasis on compassion and understanding. One of these exercises is called, *"Fitting In/Fitting Out."*

Fitting In/Fitting Out uses the chuthis. core values (clear, calm, compassionate, consistent, curious) as a guide for communication and works well for all ages and levels. What I love most about movement is its ability to help guide people in resolving internal conflicts.

When *Fitting In*, I ask the dancers to take a moment to look, listen, and sense an object, or a person, before implementing their physical body around the object. I find this approach helps nurture compassion and empathy before reacting to any given situation.

Fitting Out has the same approach. It is an exercise to peacefully let go of an idea—to "let it die naturally," if you will. Again, the intention is to help build compassion and resolve conflict through the power of touch, fostering the practice of clear & healthy physical communication.

The concept of *Fitting In/Fitting Out* guides us to take action with a peaceful heart and healthy intention all the while searching for balance and understanding. Through the integration of cognitive and embodied practices, this exercise strives to build awareness and develop courage through the art of listening.

APPENDIX D

THESIS REHEARSAL & FILM ARCHIVAL VIDEO ACCESS

To request access to video footage of rehearsals for *kNOw | BODY's: processing perceptions* or *kin/tsugi* film series, contact Krystal Matsuyama-Tsai at krystal.matsuyama@gmail.com.