# CHOREOGRAPHING SOCIAL JUSTICE: A STUDY OF DANCE CHOREOGRAPHERS COMMUNICATING SOCIAL CHANGE

by

CHELSEA MAGYAR

B.A., University of Colorado Boulder, 2019

A thesis submitted to the

Faculty of the Graduate School of the

University of Colorado in partial fulfillment

of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts

Department of Communication

2021

Committee Members:

Dr. Lawrence R. Frey (Committee Chair)

Dr. David Boromisza-Habashi

Donna Mejia

Dr. Beth Osnes

IRB Protocol # 20-0494

Magyar, Chelsea (M.A., Communication)

Choreographing social justice: A study of dance choreographers communicating social change

Thesis directed by Professor Lawrence R. Frey

## Abstract

Communication scholarship about social justice has grown rapidly in recent years, in large measure, because scholars have recognized the centrality of communication for engaging in collective action to confront the significant social injustices that too many people experience. One trajectory of that scholarship focuses on communicative practices that activist individuals, groups, organizations, and social movements engage in to promote social justice. In that trajectory, communicative practices used for promoting social justice in art, especially performance/theatre, have received attention; however, one artistic medium that has received almost no attention from the communication discipline, despite, historically, being used to engage in social justice activism, is dance. To address that gap, this study investigated choreographers' use of dance and dance-making in concert performances as a form of communication for promoting social justice. Fifteen professionals who choreograph social justice activism dance pieces were interviewed about their conceptualization of that form of dance and their communication with dancers, other collaborators, and audience members about social justice aspects of their dance pieces. The study found that most interviewees distinguished social justice dance from other forms of dance, in the context of concert dance, with regard to characteristics that included what the pieces were about (e.g., social justice issues), but that pieces without that focus qualified if, for instance, choreographers engaged in socially just processes and practices to develop their pieces. The study revealed how choreographers communicate with dancers, other collaborators, and audience members, during development,

performance, and post-performance phases of their work, about the social justice orientation of their dance pieces. The findings are discussed with regard to communication tensions that choreographers negotiate when making social justice activism dance pieces, with recommendations offered to aid their communication management of those tensions.

# Acknowledgments

This project would have failed if it were a solo endeavor, so I would like to express my gratitude and appreciation to the collaborators who made the work possible. Firstly, thank you to my advisor, Dr. Larry Frey, for all of the support and encouragement, hours spent editing drafts of this paper, and the generous energy and time you have invested in me and this project. Thank you also to my committee members, Dr. David Boromisza-Habashi, Donna Mejia, and Dr. Beth Osnes for their wisdom, advice, and support during my graduate career and in the cultivation of this thesis.

I also acknowledge the friends, family members, and colleagues who talked through ideas with me, helped me to overcome the challenges this study posed, and celebrated the joys it brought. Namely, thank you to Macy Conant, Colleen Campbell, Fr. Joe McLagan, Dr. Scott Powell, Keira Hook, Alexis Gurzick, and my parents, Kris and Stefan Magyar, who helped me to wrestle with what social justice means to me and in light of my faith. Thanks be to God for the tiny miracle of this thesis and for all the graces given to finish it.

Finally, thank you to the choreographers I consulted for this study for sharing your experiences, knowledge, and time. Thank you for the work you do and the inspiration you bring. Your resilience during the pandemic speaks volumes, and the connections, community, and hope you cultivate through movement and art make me believe that positive social change truly is possible.

CONTENTS

CHAPTERS

# TABLES

Table

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Although present throughout history, the events of 2020 have made particularly clear the need for *social justice*, "in which people have their human rights and freedoms respected, receive equitable treatment with regard to opportunities and resources, and are not discriminated against because of their class, gender, race, sexual orientation, and similar identity markers" (Frey & Blinne, 2017, p. 12). Among those events, the COVID-19 pandemic made visible the devastating consequences of longstanding race, class, and other identity-marker-based health and economic inequalities; as just one example, U.S. Black mortality rates for the virus are three times higher than for U.S. Whites (Pilkington, 2020; see also Recht & Szabo, 2020). A particularly significant event in the United States was George Floyd being killed by a police officer (as were Breonna Taylor, Tony McMade, Dion Johnson, and others), which awakened the world to the systemic racism experienced in a society that, after the election of U.S. President Barak Obama, many U.S. news commentators claimed was "post-racial" (see, e.g., Dawson & Bobo, 2009), with "a Black person killed by a police officer in America at the rate of more than one every other day" (Altman, 2020, para. 2). In response to Floyd's death, 25 million people in more than 2,000 U.S. towns in all 50 states (and in more than 60 countries) participated in public protests to support Black Lives Matter's social justice goal of eradicating systemic police violence directed against Black people (Buchanan et al., 2020). That activism was not an anomaly; today, more people than ever before are members of activist groups, organizations, and social movements (Funke & Wolfson, 2017), with a recent nationally representative survey finding that 85% of U.S. Americans had engaged in some form of activism in 2017 (Backslash, 2018).

Social justice activism is of particular importance to communication scholars, because, as Carragee and Frey (2012) explained, "activism, fundamentally, is a communication process and practice" (p. 22). Communication, thus, is both constitutive of and a practice used to engage in collective activism, with activist groups, organizations, and social movements created (and recreated) through their members' collective communicative practices (e.g., conducting public protests).

Although communication is central to creating/engaging in social justice activism, prior to Frey et al.'s (1996) articulation of a communication approach to social justice (see below), according to the Communication & Mass Media Complete (CMMC) database, "social justice" and "activism" each had appeared only once in the title of a communication journal article (respectively, Medhurst, 1988; Stine, 1992). In the 25 years since Frey et al.'s essay, substantial communication scholarship has been conducted about social justice activism, with a May 2021 CMMC search citing 1,910 scholarly, peer-reviewed, academic journal article abstracts that reference "social justice" and/or "activism." That critical mass of scholarship has resulted in social justice activism being institutionalized in the communication discipline as a distinct area of study, with, for instance, the National Communication Association (NCA) creating (in 2015) the Activism and Social Justice Division (ASJD; which, as of January 2020, is the 9th largest of NCA's 48 divisions), and the International Communication Association establishing (in 2017) the Activism, Communication, and Social Justice Interest Group.

The scholarly study of communication, social justice, and activism, according to NCA's (n.d.) ASJD is comprised of two trajectories. One trajectory, which traces back to rhetorical scholarship conducted about social movements during the 1960s and 1970s (e.g., civil rights movement), studies communicative practices engaged in by activist individuals, groups,

organizations, and/or social movements promoting social justice. Research conducted from that perspective describes, interprets, explains, sometimes (e.g., using rhetorical methods) critiques, and, in the case of applied communication research, offers recommendations to aid social justice activists' communicative practices.

In contrast to scholars studying others' communication (in this case, social justice activists), which Frey and Carragee (2007c) labeled "third-person-perspective research" (p. 6), communication scholars pursuing the second trajectory conduct "first-person-perspective research" (Frey & Carragee, 2007c, p. 6) about communication interventions that they, in collaboration with oppressed communities and/or allied activist groups and organizations, design, implement, and evaluate with regard to how successfully they accomplished their intended purpose of advancing those communities' and allies' social justice goals. That trajectory emerged from Frey et al.'s (1996) communication approach to social justice, which called for communication scholars to engage as allies with members of "society who are economically, socially, politically, and/or culturally underresourced" (p. 100), conducting activist research that "identifies and foregrounds the grammars that oppress or underwrite relationships of domination and then reconstructs those grammars" (p. 111). Frey and Carragee's (2007c) "communication activism for social justice research" perspective (communication activism research [CAR], for short) subsequently explicated how researchers can engage in that reconstruction process by using their communication knowledge and competencies to collaboratively create, facilitate, and study social justice communication interventions, with Frey and Carragee's (2007a, 2007b, 2012) edited books offering numerous examples of CAR studies, and Frey and Palmer (2014) explicating and showcasing case studies of teachers employing

communication activism pedagogy (CAP) to offer students opportunities to collaborate with and aid oppressed communities' and allied groups' social justice efforts.

In both trajectories of social justice activism communication scholarship, there has been a focus (conceptually and empirically), albeit relatively underdeveloped, on employing art (especially performance/theatre) as a form of communication to promote social justice (e.g., Afary, 2009; Alexander, 2010; Belcher & Haridakis, 2011; Billone, 2009; Conquergood, 1998; Cozen, 2013; Deal, 2014; De Laure & Fink, 2017; Dolan, 2001; Frey & Carragee, 2007b; Gilbert, 2014; Hartnett, 2011; Jones et al., 2010; M. B. Mills, 2015; Osnes & Bisping, 2014; Park-Fuller, 2003; Shailor, 2011, 2012, 2013; Singhal & Greiner, 2008; Welker, 2012). One artistic medium for promoting social justice that has not received much attention from communication scholars is dance, although some scholarship (in communication and other disciplines) has been conducted about dance's communicative capacities (e.g., Akinleye, 2013; Brabazon, 1997; Hamera, 2005; Hanna, 1979; Lindberg, 1987; MacLennan, 2011; Oseroff-Varnell, 1998; Peick, 2005; Rogers, 1998); dance as a communication medium for creating community (e.g., Chao, 2017; González, 2018; Langer, 2019; Lindberg, 1987; Niwenshuti, 2013; Roche, 2019); dance as a form of intergroup communication (Pines & Giles, 2017); and dance as a communicator of and place to negotiate history, gender, and culture (e.g., Hamera, 1994; Hansen, 2006; Pines & Giles, 2017). There also is a wealth of scholarship that has been conducted in numerous disciplines about social justice dance activism (e.g., Akas, 2018; Atlas, 2015; Burnard et al., 2018; Cantrick et al., 2018; Eales & Goodwin, 2015; Faulkner, 2008; Foellmer, 2016; Grau, 2007, 2013; Jackson & Phim, 2008; Kloetzel, 2019; D. Mills, in press; Mullis, 2016; Phillips-Fein, 2007; Prickett, 2013, 2016; Roberts, 2013; S. B. Shapiro, 2013, 2016; Somdahl-Sands, 2008; Vosen, 2019; Wilson & Moffett, 2017; Zervou, 2019), but a search

of databases found only two studies that have explicitly explored communication and social justice dance activism: Bhatia's (2019) study of communication accomplished through song and dance in social justice activism flash mobs in India, and Niwenshuti's (2013) study of Rwandan youth empowering themselves through dance to address intergenerational trauma.

The study that I conducted sought to address the lack of scholarship in the communication discipline (and others) about dance as a form of artistic communication for engaging in social justice activism. Specifically, I interviewed professionals who choreograph social justice dance pieces to ascertain their conceptualization of "social justice" dance pieces (in the context of concert dance) and their communication with dancers (e.g., about specific dance movements) and with audience members (e.g., through written and visual texts, such as performance titles, printed programs, verbal sound scores, and props and staging; and through conversations held after performances conclude), about social justice aspects of their dance pieces. Choreographers were interviewed, rather than, for instance, dancers or audience members who attend performances, because choreographers conceptualize/create and direct their social justice dance pieces. The following two research questions, thus, were posed:

RQ1: How do professional choreographers conceptualize "social justice activism dance" (in the context of concert dance)?

RQ2: What communication, if any, do professional choreographers engage in with dancers (and other collaborators) and with audience members about social justice aspects of their dance pieces?

In addition to contributing to scholars' understanding of the communicative power of dance, and concert dance, in particular, to promote social justice, this study also was intended to

serve an applied purpose. Specifically, based on the study's findings, recommendations were offered to aid social justice activist dance choreographers' communicative practices.

Before providing an overview of how the chapters of this thesis are organized to accomplish the goals that have been articulated here for the study, because my various identities and positionalities affected what I studied and how this thesis is written, I first offer the following statement.

## Researcher Positionality Statement

> In shaping a masterpiece, the artist not only summons his work into being, but also in some way reveals his own personality by means of it.
>
> —John Paul II, 1999 (para. 9)

Choices that researchers make, from what they study, to how they conduct their research, to where and with whom they share their research findings, reveal, among other things, some of their personal goals and values. For instance, my choice to study communicative practices engaged in by social justice activist dance choreographers reflects my desire to see societies achieve social justice. Although I share that desire with many other (communication) scholars who study and seek to promote social justice, my positionality with regard to social justice is somewhat unique. Specifically, as explained below, my view of social justice is shaped by my identities as a Roman Catholic; as a young, White, cis-gender heterosexual, lower middle-class woman participating in higher education; and as a dancer engaged in social justice activism choreography.

First, as a devout Catholic, my understanding of social justice is reflected in Catholic Social Teaching principles that aim "to examine and formulate the social implications of Christian faith, to survey and analyze the complex reality of human social existence in light of

the Gospel, determining the compatibility of social ideas and movements with authentic human good" (Brugger, 2004, p. 183; see also U.S. Catholic Conference, 1998). Although that view aligns with many issues that people who are not Catholic see as being "social justice issues," there are some causes and agendas that others may view as being about social justice that the Catholic Church does not condone or view in that light. Although to preserve the academic integrity of this thesis such causes and agendas are included when relevant, their inclusion does not mean that I condone or view them as being about social justice.

Second, I asked the choreographers interviewed for some demographic information, including their age, race, ethnicity, gender, and any other identities they wanted to share, as well as whether and how these identities influenced their work (see Appendix A). Just as interviewees' demographics and identities have influenced their social justice activism dance (hereafter, SJA dance) choreography, my demographics and identities influenced my research study. As a 23-year-old woman who never really has questioned her gender or heterosexuality; has a stable income and, when needed, financial support from family; and who is writing a thesis to obtain a master's degree from an esteemed university, I write from a place of privilege. That privilege allowed me to make connections that led to recruiting choreographers to interview for this study, to access several databases to find the scholarship cited in this thesis, and to work with committee members representing two academic departments who helped to flesh out my ideas. Although my privilege afforded access to people, resources, and information, it also likely limited the study in some ways; for instance, there are experiences that interviewees described that I may not be able to understand and capture fully. To offset whatever biases, blind spots, and limitations may have accrued, I acknowledge upfront my identities and positionalities.

Third, although my identities and views of what constitute social justice issues may differ from those I interviewed, we share a common identity as dancers and, in particular, dancers who engage in social justice activism choreography. I have both choreographed and performed in dance pieces addressing social justice issues. As one example, in 2019, I choreographed and performed in *Equipment for Living: An Artistic Exploration of School Shootings*, a dance installation piece that addressed empathy fatigue and the normalization of gun violence in response to media portrayals of school shootings (see Magyar, 2019). As a dancer who has choreographed social justice activism pieces, as well as other dance pieces, and who has danced in pieces that others have choreographed, I have an insider's perspective of SJA dance choreographers' work, including their communication in which they engage with collaborators and audience members about the social justice aspects of their dance pieces. My positionality as a dancer, thus, helped me to connect with interviewees and to understand (better than I would if I was an outsider) their answers to questions that I asked about their choreographic and performance communication. On the other hand, my similarities with interviewees sometimes led me to take for granted the choreographic and performance information that they shared, potentially preventing me from exploring lines of inquiry that I might have pursued if I was an outsider to the world of dance and dance choreography. Hence, my identities as a dancer and choreographer, in addition to my demographic characteristics and Catholic identity, influenced this research study in both enabling and constraining ways.

## Overview of the Thesis

This thesis is comprised of five chapters. This chapter introduced the scholarly study of communication and social justice activism, identified the lack of scholarship conducted about dance as a form of activist communication for promoting social justice, explained the general

purposes of and procedures used to conduct this study, and foregrounded my identities and positionalities as a researcher studying social justice dance. Chapter 2 reviews scholarly literature regarding the conceptualization, history, and study of SJA dance. Chapter 3 explains the methods that were used to conduct this study and how the data that were obtained were analyzed. Chapter 4 explicates the findings of this research, focusing on how choreographers interviewed conceptualized the meaning of "SJA dance" and communicated about their social justice dance pieces with dancers, other collaborators, and audiences. Chapter 5 discusses the study's findings with respect to what other scholars have found and the study's contributions to scholarship about dance as a form of activist communication for promoting social justice, identifies potential limitations of the study, and offers suggestions for future communication research about SJA dance.

# CHAPTER 2

# LITERATURE REVIEW

To explore communicative practices that choreographers engage in when using dance as a form of social justice activism, this section reviews scholarship exploring social justice activism (SJA) dance and communicative practices involved in this type of dance. The section starts by conceptualizing the genre of social justice dance and reviewing its history.

## Dance and Social Justice Activism

> Within the vast cultural panorama of each nation, artists have their unique place. Obedient to their inspiration in creating works both worthwhile and beautiful, they not only enrich the cultural heritage of each nation and of all humanity, but they also render an exceptional social service in favor of the common good.
>
> —John Paul II, 1999 (para. 14)

### Conceptualizations of "Social Justice Activism Dance"

According to Phillips-Fein (2007), "Dance has existed in every culture throughout history, and has served social, religious/spiritual, and artistic functions. In many ways, dance maintains the status quo" (p. 419). Although dance maintains the status quo through communicating cultural and social mores (e.g., gender roles, modes of worship, and what is considered to be "virtuosic"), dance also can be employed to shift the status quo. As Phillips-Fein explained, "When used intentionally, dance is a powerful tool for asking questions about the world, connecting people, reflecting and discussing political viewpoints, and awakening personal change. Dance is literally the movement of social movements, the embodiment of change and transformation" (pp. 420–421). Faulkner (2008) supported that duality of dance, saying that "as members of society, artists have historically served a dualistic purpose—to reflect the ideologies

of the world in which they live, and to challenge those ideologies" (p. 90). As artists, dancers support the status quo when they reflect, through performance and choreography, dominant ideologies of cultures to which they belong; they challenge the status quo by using movement to raise awareness of and question/contest dominant ideologies (Phillip-Fein). This is not an either–or dichotomy, however, as, simultaneously, dance can challenge and maintain the status quo.

Just as "activism, fundamentally, is a communication process and practice" (Carragee & Frey, 2012, p. 22), dance for social justice activism is a communication process and practice. Dance can be thought of in terms of two metaphors that Potter (1996) used to conceptualize language: as a mirror and as a construction yard. As mirrors, dance and language both reflect how things are; as construction yards, language and dance "construct the world, or at least versions of the world . . . . These descriptions and accounts are *themselves* constructed. Construction here suggests the possibility of assembly, manufacture, the prospect of different structures as an end point" (Potter, pp. 97, 98).

Dance and language, however, is not a clean comparison, as Potter (1996) focused on descriptive aspects of language, which dance embodies more abstractly. Popa Blanariu (2015) argued that dance lacks "the conceptual precision of the verbal . . . [yet] a series of dances/choreographic figures have precisely the function of communicating a certain message to the recipient" (p. 3). Similarly, Bannerman (2004) claimed that although dance shares some similarities with language (e.g., vocabulary, syntax, semanticity, and speech acts), dance is not a language. Thus, although dance may differ in important ways from verbal language, it still communicates in ways that reflect ideas (e.g., as a mirror) and build versions of the world (e.g., as a construction yard).

These metaphors also can be applied to dance both reflecting the status quo (e.g., as mirrors), and challenging it by creating new idea structures (e.g., with creative actions that stem from the construction yard metaphor). Through constructing worlds for audiences and performers to interact in through dance, choreographers communicate messages that have the potential to (re)construct the status quo. Choreographers and their collaborators who create dance pieces about social justice do so through their communicative practices to engage in activism, with those pieces communicating their reflections and constructions of how the world is and/or could be in the future.

Although, potentially, upholding the status quo could be a form of activism, typically, dance choreographers with a social justice activism agenda seek to change unjust aspects of the status quo. As Faulkner (2008) explained:

> "Activism" implies organized involvement within a community of individuals to affect change. . . . While all art is not focused on such ideals, I believe it is possible to define certain works as activist according to the principles of organized community involvement and the desire to effect change. (p. 90)

Hence, dance for social justice activism involves organized choreography (which could include structured improvisation), community involvement, and intentions to challenge the status quo and promote just change.

Dance is a particularly effective medium for challenging unjust status quo conditions and promoting social change because of its ability to invoke *kinesthetic empath*y, "a physical response experienced internally, or physiologically, imposed on or elicited from viewers, due to external stimuli" (Gerry, 2018, p. 7; see also Reason & Reynolds, 2010). Mullis (2016) argued

for the kinesthetic power of dance used in the portrayal of social injustice and the advocacy for human rights:

> Concert dance uniquely uses the body to convey the manner in which political injustice can be physically enacted, whether by direct physical assault, restricting or forcing action, or by invading bodily privacy. . . A broad spectrum of choreographic techniques can be used to represent physical and psychological suffering characteristic of human rights abuse and they encourage reflection on political implications of the relationship between dance, the body, and personal autonomy. (p. 221)

To advocate for change, historically, choreographers engaged in SJA dance, in a concert setting, have employed the political implications between dance and the body and personal autonomy to which Mullis (2016) referred. A brief review of some of these choreographers is given in the following section, with a focus on U.S. choreographers and dance movements.

**A Brief History of Social Justice Activism Dance**

Many choreographers have used dance to challenge unjust status quo conditions and promote social change. As S. B. Shapiro (2016) explained:

> This kind of aesthetic action has been cultivated throughout history in different cultures as an avenue of jolting us out of our everydayness, as a process of opening spaces for us to examine what have been designated as socially acceptable ways of being, as a catalyst for challenging labels and restrictions, and as an experience that sensually educates us to think beyond and imagine what is not yet. It is at times called activist art, offering a counter discourse to the official one. (p. 19)

Phillips-Fein (2007) located this counter-discourse in recent history, arguing that "in addition to the inherent ways dance contributes to activism, in the 20th and 21st century, choreographers

have used dance as a vehicle for making political statements and asking questions about the world" (p. 419). This thesis focuses on concert and community dance, admittedly, from a Eurocentric lens; however, it should be noted that long before concert dance, vernacular dances, such as the Sioux Ghost Dance, were a form of SJA dance (see Karlson, 2004). Phillips-Fein and the remaining researchers addressed in this section largely focus on social justice dance in the context of U.S. concert dance; however, SJA dance happens all over the world, with a variety of expressions and manifestations. The focus on U.S. concert and community dance is an entry point into the discussion of socially engaged dance that this study participates in rather than a comprehensive representation of SJA dance.

In the United States, social justice activism has played a significant role in the history of modern dance. According to Wilson and Moffett (2017), "Modern dance has a documented history of dancers and choreographers actively engaging with the social and political climate of their time" (p. 137). Sherrod (1998) located this engagement in the development stages of concert dance, as early as the 1920s, when Black concert dance addressed social, political, and economic experiences (see also Roberts, 2013). Those concert dances included work by Katherine Dunham and Pearl Primus, whom E. Martin (2017) credited with helping to "create the foundation for this medium of dance for social change by connecting cultural and movement research to human rights" (p. 17). According to Wilson and Moffett, "Both Dunham and Primus combined aesthetic forms of dance, dialogue, social content, embodied research, and pedagogy to create dances that challenged the social injustices of racial segregation on Black lives in America during the 1940s" (p. 137).

Foulkes (2002) documented modern dancers in the 1930s advocating for social change to fight for improved workers' rights and racial equality. In conversation with Foulkes, Wilson and

Moffett (2017) described how these "American revolutionary modern dancers choreographed dances that ranged from social commentary to outright embodied social activism" (p. 137). Gerry (2018) noted that those dancers used their work for "expression and political recruitment through agitation propaganda (agitprop), revolutionary dance, mass dance/mass action, and activist dance" (p. 8).

The leftist dance movement was rooted in New York City, and included choreographers and groups, such as Edith Segal, who founded the Red Dancers; Workers 9 Dance League; and the New Dance Group (Prickett, 2013). Gerry (2018) argued that "the collective voice that was shared was clear as these dancemakers incorporated movement vocabularies inspired by work and the laboring class, and presented suppressed or invisible stories, creating visibility and awareness, using the concert stage" (p. 9).

The trend of social justice activism in modern dance continued to develop into the 21st century, with works such as William Forsythe's *Human Writes*, an installation that reflected the history of human rights, which premiered in Zurich, Switzerland in 2005 (Mullis, 2016). SJA dance also has flourished among contemporary modern dance artists and their companies, such as Urban Bush Women, Compagnie JANT-BI, Spectrum Dance Theater, Jane Comfort and Company, and the Ananya Dance Theatre (Gottschild, 2008).

Within and outside the genre of modern dance, Black people and people of color have been foundational contributors to SJA dance. Dunham, Primus, and many of the other artists involved in social justice activism modern dance were Black. Roberts (2013), analyzing hip-hop dance (see also DeFrantz, 2004), argued that "the performing Black and Brown dancing body has historically been an agent of social change, producing knowledge based on individual and

collective lived realities of domination, marginalization, and misrepresentations" (p. 7; see also DeFrantz, 2004; Fine et al., 2004; Roberts, 2005, 2011).

In their anthology of articles addressing dance, human rights, and social justice, Jackson and Phim (2008a) included work by choreographers who used modern and other dance styles to address human rights themes and to advocate for social justice around the world. Additionally, their anthology showcased scholarship about SJA dance experiences. Empirical studies that have explored specific social justice dance pieces, such as the case studies in Jackson and Phim's book, are reviewed in the following section.

### *Choreographing Social Justice Activism*

SJA dance began to gain traction in the United States, at least in concert dance, in the 1920s (Sherrod, 1998), but scholarship about such dance did not flourish until the early 1990s (Jackson & Phim, 2008b). Jackson and Phim (2008b) listed publications that "investigated the relationship of dance to forces of power" (p. xix), which included *Choreographing Difference: The Body and Identity in Contemporary Dance* (Albright, 1997), *Samba: Resistance in Motion* (Browning, 1995), *Butting Out: Reading Resistive Choreographies through Works by Jawole Willa Jo Zollar and Chandralekha* (Chatterjea, 2004), *Dancing with Many Drums: Excavations in African American Dance* (DeFrantz, 2002), *Dancing Desires: Choreographing Sexualities on and off the Stage* (Desmond, 2001), *The Black Dancing Body: A Geography from Coon to Cool* (Gottschild, 2003), *Stepping Left: Dance and Politics in New York City, 1928–1942* (Graff, 1997), and *Tango: The Art History of Love* (Thompson, 2005).

Jackson and Phim's (2008a) edited book *Dance, Human Rights, and Social Justice: Dignity in Motion* included authors who explored the relationship of dance to forces of power

through the lens of social justice activism. Jackson and Phim's (2008b) book contained four parts:

> 1) Regulation and exploitation of dance activity and dancers by governments and other groups with authority, as well as abusive treatment of dancers within the dance profession; 2) choreography involving human rights as a central theme; 3) the engagement of dance as a means of healing victims of trauma, societal exclusion, and human rights abuses; and 4) broad-scale social/political movements and smaller-scale local practices in which dance plays a powerful role in providing people agency in fighting oppression. Each section contains a grouping of scholarly articles along with personal testimonials, carefully chosen to mine the richness of the given topic. (p. xxii)

All four areas offered insight for studying communicative practices of choreographers engaged in social justice activism, but the section about choreography involving human rights is most relevant to the proposed study.

The proposed study is most similar to the case studies of choreography addressing social justice issues conducted by scholars in Jackson and Phim's (2008a) edited book. Some of those scholars wrote about their work and experiences (Acogny, 2008; Aldor, 2008; Chatterjea, 2008; Lemon, 2008; Ponifasio, 2008; S. C. Shapiro, 2008); others, in line with the proposed study, explored specific choreographers and their choreography (Martínez, 2008; Murgiyanto, 2008; Olsson, 2008). Olsson (2008) explored protest ballets performed in Sweden, focusing on Birgit Cullberg and Mats Ek, whose choreography included themes of antiwar, anti-oppression, and fighting for human rights. Martínez (2008) explored work of the Mexico-based company Barro Rojo Arte Escénico, which had a history of performing choreography about human rights abuses in Latin America. Murgiyanto (2008) investigated Indonesian choreographer Sardona W.

Kusumo's relationships with Indigenous people suffering from destruction of their ecosystem by foreign logging companies. Although those authors did not explain their research methods in much detail, writing, instead, reflective essays, their investigations of choreographers and choreography engaging with social justice issues provided information about methods that choreographers employ to promote social change through dance, which relates to this study.

Other scholars who have explored the work of dance choreographers engaged in social justice activism, include, for example, Akas (2018), who analyzed Arinze Akaji's *The Drums of Danger* through the lens of corporate social responsibility theory, arguing that dance can contribute to advocacy for change and should be appreciated for its ability to emancipate, empower, and interrogate. Akas focused on SJA dance in Nigeria, where *The Drums of Danger* was performed, stressing that "dance ceases to be solely an entertaining tool; rather it is used to raise a lot of rhetorical questions on Nigerian economy. It awakens the people's consciousness and suggests ways for survival" (p. 516).

Prickett (2016) also addressed survival by exploring the choreographic agency and creative strategies employed by Joanna Haigood and the Zaccho Dance Theatre, Amie S. Dowling and Justin Forbord, and Kyle Abraham and Abraham.In.Motion, all of whom made pieces about issues, such as social injustice, mass incarceration, and racial disparities in the criminal justice system. Using R. Martin's (1995) explorations of dance and politics, which "offer analytical paradigms for revealing the political resonances of a production" (Prickett, 2016, p. 54), Prickett investigated strategies that choreographers used to show the narratives of survival of people experiencing the aforementioned social justice issues, as well as methods that choreographers used to encourage audience members' action beyond their pieces. In tandem with

R. Martin, Prickett argued that choreographers' pieces political power rested in their ability to initiate a response of mobilization to the production:

> Although they cannot effect change directly, the dances illuminate different ways of thinking about mass incarceration, the death penalty, and race relations. Martin's work helps reveal how political mobilization can inspire social mobilization to occur beyond the artistic practice. (p. 54)

Gerry (2018) explored the type of audience mobilization in response to SJA dance that R. Martin (1995) and Prickett (2016) described. Gerry investigated ways in which two California SJA dance projects, CONTRA-TIEMPO's *Agua Furiosa* and Dowling and Forbord's (2013) dance film *Well Contested Sites*, influenced social change. Using ethnographic methods, Gerry found that the modes of composition and performance could lead to "activated audiences" who "may continue the transmission of the artists' message through reproduction" (p. 1). Gerry documented and diagrammed the contrasting ways that CONTRA-TIEMPO and Dowling and Forbord spread their social justice messages, with CONTRA-TIEMPO drawing on community-based methods and Dowling and Forbord working through virtual spaces. As Gerry argued:

> Common to both is the feature that the artists/activists invite others to use art as a tool for social justice and change . . . What they do is accessible, learnable, teachable and not outside of the everyday person's capabilities. The ability to reproduce practices provides the conditions for ideological spread; the cracking or splintering of an oppressive or unjust system. (pp. 24–25)

Hence, the success of SJA dance can be located in its ability to transmit messages to audiences who reproduce them and start to work toward social change. The case studies in Gerry's research offered models for this process of activating audiences, with choreographers drawing on

kinesthetic and discursive practices to advocate for social justice. Although audience members' responses to social justice dance performances are beyond the scope of the proposed study, research on audience mobilization, such as Gerry's and Prickett's observational studies, help lay the foundation for exploring SJA dance choreographers' communicative practices, especially with audiences.

A number of other scholars have explored the impacts of the production and performance of SJA dance pieces and larger projects. For instance, Burnard et al. (2018) conducted a phenomenological study of *Melting Ice*, a dance performance intended to raise awareness of and encourage appropriate responses to climate change. Burnard et al. conducted in-depth interviews with participants, recorded in vivo observations of *Melting Ice* as they watched a recording of the piece, and included choreographer Birgitte Bauer-Nilsen's choreographic journal of the research behind and creation of *Melting Ice*. Data acquired through those methods led Burnard et al. to argue that "choreographic practices hold knowledge and implement communication at a preverbal, unconscious level, thereby creating connections to worlds that are unavailable to sight alone, this through physicalized provocations and active audience response-ability" (p. 141). Although communication was not the focal point of Burnard et al.'s study, they touched on communication that takes place between choreographers and audiences, and between choreographers and their dancers, stating that their "collaboration leads to the development of further understanding between cultures in artistic and social aspects of climate change—in large part through harmonic movement patterning and melding of backgrounds" (p. 129). *Melting Ice*'s combination of Greenlanders' and Scandinavians' intercultural perspectives on climate change enabled a cultural shift towards water sustainability and water equity, moving beyond a scientific paradigm to engage "the performing body in the context of a form of communal

expression" (Burnard et al., p. 121). Burnard et al., thus, showed the importance of communication among choreographers, dancers, and audiences in achieving a "communal expression" that results in social justice efforts. Beyond activating the audience, dancers involved in social justice dance can be influenced by choreographers' visions in ways that lead to successful activism. Hence, the proposed study investigates SJA dance choreographers' communicative practices with both collaborators (e.g., dancers) and with audiences.

Kloetzel (2019) highlighted the importance of dialogue in social justice activism choreography in exploring a 2-year site-adaptive dance project that Kloetzel created, called *Rooms*. Kloetzel investigated the iterative process of performing the piece in multiple places with different dancers and audiences, to understand how "site dance practice may further public discourse around pressing issues, via the careful honing of methodological process" (p. 7). Kloetzel's findings highlighted that communicative practices abound in both the performance of a piece and its creation process, explaining:

> To realize the aims of advancing political discourse, site dance methodologies must work to: empower participants through constructive mechanisms/processes; foster inclusion of diverse publics in both creation and presentation stages of a work; and locate such projects in accessible public civic spaces historically associated with assembly. (p. 7)

Kloetzel's (2019) emphasis on the need for diverse voices in SJA dance echoed Burnard et al.'s (2018) argument that "intercultural collaboration is an invaluable factor in the artistic process because the different cultures each have their bodily, musical, and visual expressions. This manifests itself in corporeality, movements, sounds, and materials" (p. 129). A communication approach to social justice dance is valuable in the exploration of intercultural collaboration in SJA dance because it can unpack cultural nuances that emerge in communicative

practices, such as corporeal, movement, sound, and material choices/decision making. Attending to these practices in research can advance political discourse and encourage audiences to reproduce social justice messages by explicating methodologies, such as intercultural collaboration (Burnard et al.), and using constructive mechanisms to engage participants in activism (Kloetzel).

Kloetzel's (2019) main findings showed what was necessary to successfully advance political discourse through dance; however, to find those best practices, Kloetzel first experienced failed iterations of performing *Rooms* and had to find ways to adapt. For example, in one performance, Kloetzel and cast members encountered "an almost overly receptive audience," but later, they encountered audiences who were "much less on the same wavelength" (p. 15). In response to the latter audience, Kloetzel created new movement scores and texts and worked with professionals who had more dance experience than previous performers, "to give much more consideration to foreground/background presentation strategies and to thematic development through improvisational scores" (p. 16). Those with whom Kloetzel worked, thus, changed the communication that took place.

Studies on SJA dance have documented communication phenomena, such as the development of a piece in conjunction with dancers affecting the choreography and performance processes, but, generally, those phenomena have not been explored from a communication perspective. Practices are documented and considered for their effectiveness, but a communication perspective could help to investigate why and how these practices work, by labeling them as "communication" and looking at repercussions of interactions, such as choreographers communicating about foreground and background with dancers, and what choreographers want the fruits of these interactions to convey to an audience.

A communication perspective can also add to dance studies that have investigated effective choreographic and performance strategies for engaging audiences, as well as studies of failed attempts to produce social justice activism through dance. For example, Zervou (2019) studied ethics and aesthetics involved in performances and methodologies used to create performances about refugees in Greece, finding that many performances perpetuated hierarchical inequalities and led to an "othering" presentation of immigrants and refugees. Zervou found that some aspects of the SJA dance pieces were troubling for participants and for audiences. A communication perspective could have added another layer to that analysis of hierarchies at play between choreographers and dancers who are refugees, as well as the "othering" choreographic choices that did not lead necessarily to successful responses by audience members. Investigating communicative practices at play in SJA dance choreography, thus, is useful for advancing success and addressing failure. The proposed study aims to further SJA dance research by applying a communication perspective to practices that have been acknowledged but that have not been explored by researchers as a form of communication. The following section reviews research that has applied a communication lens to SJA dance, on which this study builds.

## Communication and Social Justice Activism Dance

The Urban Bush Women (UBW) dance company, founded and led by Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, recognized the value of investigating communicative practices involved with social justice dance activism. The company worked with Atlas (2005) to create a case study of its Hair Parties project about natural African American hair, which exemplified UBW's commitment to using art as social change and viewing dance as "a celebration, a solution, and a necessity" (p. 1). The case study of the Hair Parties project combined ethnographic experience with interview data and artefactual data, such as written work and video documentaries made about the company and

the project, to investigate dialogic processes that the company aimed to facilitate through Hair Parties, as well as meaning-making that took place inside the company. Similar to Kloetzel (2019), UBW documented what worked effectively and what did not, and took an iterative approach to maximizing the dialogue about African American hair, even hiring dialogue consultants to advance the aims of the SJA dance process. Similar to Atlas, the proposed study aims to document communicative practices at work in multiple social justice activism pieces/projects to enable choreographers to better achieve their intended social justice purposes and outcomes through their artistic work. As Atlas and UBW recognized, communicative practices, such as dialogue, that take place among choreographers, dancers, and audiences are crucial in advancing the aims of SJA dance.

Niwenshuti (2013) also recognized the power of communication in SJA dance endeavors; in this case, using dance to address intergenerational trauma resulting from national and regional wars, violence and human-rights abuses, and the 1994 genocide in Rwanda and the Great Lakes Region of Africa. Niwenshuti worked with Dr. Jean Damascène Ndayambaje, who "found a 'psychological' origin to the genocide apart from the commonly known political, socio-economic, ideological, and historical issues" (p. 29), to study dance as a communicative tool with which to intervene in patterns of intergenerational trauma. Employing interview methods, which involved improvisational dance, and observation of participants' dance rehearsals and performances, Niwenshuti, in collaboration with Ndayambaje, found that

> According to their [participants'] testimonies, our tests, observations, and discussions with their teachers, relatives, and friends, we realized that this environment created by art helped them to cope positively with difficult emotions arising from the traumatic space they were living in during and after the genocide. (p. 34)

Niwenshuti (2013) argued that "dances help children to communicate, express themselves, particularly conflicting feelings, and how their dance group provided a space for verbal and non-verbal dialogue in relation to those conflicting and traumatizing emotions" (p. 30), finding that including dance in individual and group interviews resulted in participants' "tendency to speak more, to express deeper feelings, and they often added more information, which they seemed to hide or were not comfortable about communicating in previous interviews" (p. 33).

The children who participated in the dancing also influenced others in their communities, with Niwenshuti (2013) documenting stories of their experiences affecting their parents. For instance, as a participant shared, "My mother doesn't stop me anymore to play with kids whose parents are accused of genocide. She saw us dancing together. She heard us talking about peace and our history" (p. 35). Hence, studying social justice dance from a communication perspective sheds light on the affordances of dance to open up dialogue for those who participate in dance and the communities they belong to.

Besides Niwenshuti's (2013) study, Bhatia's (2019) study of song and dance-based flash mobs in India exemplified communication research that attended to both dance and social justice activism. Bhatia investigated communicative practices that flash mob organizers and their collaborators engaged in to create new and better interactions and to advocate for activist causes. Bhatia's interviews of 20 participants revealed the democratic nature of flash mobs and the inclusion of Bollywood song and dance that made the artist activists' flash mobs effective, because the communication involved in egalitarian organizing and dance with a common reference point created "a common performative site that can be used to mobilize people" (p. 483). The use of popular Bollywood music allowed flash mob organizers to send political

messages by drawing on an artistic reference audience members were already familiar with. For example, as a participant in Bhatia's study explained:

> Bollywood songs are rich in meaning; you will find a song for every issue and occasion . . . to stage every situation. For instance, when we wanted to discuss the issue of starvation caused by inflation and the every rising prices of everyday food items such as "dal" (lentils), rice, and onions, we chose the song "Mehngai Dayian" (Inflation—the Witch) from the movie *Peepli Live*. This movie discusses the dire condition in which poor farmers of India live—they grow food for the country and have nothing to eat themselves. When we used this song, we were able to establish the context for our performance because most of them had seen the movie, heard the song, and understood the lyrics. (p. 493)

Participants further encouraged activism with new dance movements to familiar songs, such as "Mehngai Dayian," which had different choreography in Bollywood film, and with the location of the flash mob. Messages were shown to be transmitted beyond live audiences through flash mob videos that reached an online audience. In Bhatia's study, SJA dance efforts also affected collaborators, as they allowed people who shared similar civic aspirations to connect. The communication practices involved in flash mobs, such as egalitarian organizing structures among collaborators, providing space for collaborators to connect, communicating with audience members through the use of common reference points, such as Bollywood songs, and extending performance communication to other audiences via online platforms, helped make those flash mobs effective. In this study, communication practices involved in concert and community dance were considered.

By exploring the communicative practices of professionals who choreograph SJA dance pieces, this study sought to add to the scholarly literature reviewed above about SJA dance in the communication discipline, as well as contribute a communication perspective to research in other disciplines conducted about SJA dance. Additionally, because this study is intended to serve choreographers in their social justice efforts, a key objective is to use the study's findings to offer recommendations to aid their communicative practices in choreographing SJA dance. The following chapter explains the methods that were employed to conduct the study and to obtain findings for practical and theoretical application.

# CHAPTER 3

# RESEARCH METHODS

To explore communicative practices of professionals who choreograph social justice dance performances, this study employed the interview method. The following sections describe the interviewee selection process, how interviews were conducted, and how data collected from interviews were analyzed. This study received approval from the Institutional Review Board at the University of Colorado Boulder and received funding from the University of Colorado Boulder Communication Department.

## Interviewees

To identify potential interviewees for this study, I conducted an Internet search and consulted members of my personal dance network (developed from having both choreographed and performed in dance pieces, and from completing an undergraduate minor in dance at the University of Colorado Boulder) to compile a list of professionals who had choreographed at least one social justice dance performance. I employed two criteria for including potential interviewees on that list. First, they had to be identified (by themselves and/or others, such as in [auto]biographical information) as a professional dance choreographer. Second, they had to have choreographed (whether improvisational or choreographically set by only them or in collaboration with others) performed (whether solo or in collaboration with others) at least one "social justice" dance piece. Dance pieces were labeled that way if any information obtained about them (e.g., promotional material and review articles) mentioned social justice; in all other cases, I categorized potential interviewees as involved in such dance pieces if, in any way (e.g., their topical focus), they resonated with Frey et al.'s (1996) social justice sensibility: "(1) foregrounds ethical concerns; (2) commits to structural analyses of ethical problems; (3) adopts

an activist orientation; and (4) seeks identification with others" (p. 111). That social justice sensibility proved to be a useful guide for identifying professional dancers engaged in social justice activism (SJA).

In addition to those criteria, I sought to include on the list of potential interviewees choreographers who varied in identity markers (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity, and age), as well as in the social justice topics of dances that they choreographed; although everyone on that list lives currently in the United States (most in Colorado, but some in other states, including California, New York, and Texas). The final list was comprised of 75 potential interviewees.

After submitting the proposed methods to and obtaining approval from the University of Colorado Boulder's Institutional Review Board, I began emailing recruitment letters (see Appendix B) to potential interviewees on the list until I made contact with at least 15 individuals who met my inclusion criteria. To be interviewed, participants had to grant permission for their name to be used in the MA thesis and in any other written reports of the study, because dance performances that they had choreographed would be discussed in the interviews conducted with them and, undoubtedly, would be referenced in my written reports; hence, I could not assure them that their identity (and their statements) would be kept anonymous or confidential.

## Procedures

In-depth interviews were conducted with 15 participants to understand communicative practices associated with choreographers' promotion of social justice through dance performances. Interviews were conducted via Zoom and recorded, with interviewees' permission, lasting between 22 and 55 minutes. The recordings were then transcribed, resulting in 152 single-spaced pages of interview data. Participants were each compensated $25 for their

participation, paid with funding from the University of Colorado Boulder's Department of Communication.

In terms of demographics, interviewees were between the ages of 28 and 63, with two not disclosing their age. Nine self-identified as women, five as men, and one as both a woman and as gender queer. Seven self-identified as White, Caucasian, and/or of European descent; four as African American or Black; two as Latinx, Latin American, and/or Chicano; one as Asian and Korean American, and one as Filipino American. Additionally, three self-identified as having Indigenous roots (Aztec and Aboriginal Indians, Sakha, and "from indigenous people"); two self-identified as Jewish and one as Christian; seven self-identified as queer or having queer sensibilities, two as gay, two as heterosexual, and two as having invisible identities; one self-identified as Finnish and another as Colombian; one as a first-generation immigrant and another as a second-generation immigrant; and one as middle class and another as low income. Some interviewees pointed out the complexity and, in some cases, restrictive nature of such identity categories. Interviewees' identities in relation to their SJA dance work is discussed in Chapter 4.

A semistructured interview protocol (see Appendix A) was employed to "listen, reflect, adapt to ever□changing circumstances, and cede control of the discussion to the interviewee . . . [and] allow for more emic, emergent understandings to blossom" (Tracy, 2020, p. 157). Interview questions focused on choreographers' use of dance choreography to engage in SJA. Questions explored, among other things, participants' goals for social justice dance performances that they have choreographed (with a particular focus on one of their dance pieces); whether and how social justice aspects of those performances affect their choreographic choices; any communication that they have with dancers and collaborators about social justice aspects of those performances; any use of supporting elements (e.g. props, staging, lighting, online

platforms, etc.) to communicate social justice messages; and how, ideally, choreographers want audience members to respond to their social justice dance performances (e.g., actions audience members are being encouraged to take).

Interviewees signed consent forms before interviews began, with all of them granting verbal consent to record the interview. The first set of questions obtained background information about interviewees with regard to demographics (e.g., age, race, ethnicity, and gender) and their dance work (e.g., how long had they been a professional choreographer, how many dance pieces had they created, and how many of their pieces did they consider to be social justice oriented).

The second set of questions asked about interviewees' SJA dance choreography, with a particular focus on one of their pieces, although they also were given the option of discussing other pieces that they had choreographed, regardless of whether they constituted SJA work. The dance pieces that interviewees chose to discuss, when those pieces premiered, and their subject matter are outlined in Table 1. Questions asked about choreographers' social justice dance choreography included whether and how their dance pieces connected to social justice; whether they always had focused on social justice or, if not, how that became the focus of their work; and what, if any, differences they saw between SJA and other types of dance.

The third set of questions asked about whether and how their SJA dance pieces affected interviewees' choice of and communication with dancers and others with whom they collaborate (e.g., production crew and contributing artists). For instance, choreographers were asked whether, during rehearsals, they talked with dancers about social justice messages that choreographers were trying to send through specific dance movements.

**Table 1**

*Choreographers Interviewed and their Social Justice Dance Pieces*

| **Name** | **Piece/Project Title(s)** | **Premier Date(s)** | **Subject Matter** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Anne Bluethenthal | A. *Andares*<br><br>B. *I Got a Truth to Tell* | 2015, ongoing<br><br>2017 | A. Investigates "30 years of silence around the thousands of disappeared citizens, and the countless crimes against humanity [in El Salvador]—which were sanctioned and supported in part by the US government" (ABD Productions, 2021a, para. 1)<br><br>B. Racism, urban renewal, part of Skywatchers, "an enduring commitment to creating performance that centers the urgent concerns of formerly unhoused residents of San Francisco's Tenderloin district" (ABD Productions, 2021b, para. 1) |
| Anya Cloud | *The Gentleness Project: How to Stay Unnumb in the Eye of the Storm* | 2018 | Radical independence and responsible citizenship; part of *The Gentleness Project*, a collaborative investigation with Nhu Nguyen |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Cindy Brandle | *A World on Fire* | 2019 | "Social privilege, racial discrimination, the #MeToo movement, LGBTQ [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer] marginalization, and the constantly evolving the antics of the [former U.S. President Trump's] administration" (Yellow Scene Magazine, 2019, para. 1) |
| Gerald Casel | A. *Splinters in Our Ankles*<br><br>B. *Not About Race Dance* | 2015<br><br>2018, ongoing | A. Racial (in)equity, collective cultural amnesia, and colonialism in the Philipino folk dance Tinikling<br><br>B. Racial (in)equity; homoraciality, whiteness, and privilege in U.S. postmodern dance (see The Humanities Institute, 2020) |
| Gesel Mason | A. *antithesis*<br><br>B. *Yes, And* | 2016<br><br>ongoing | A. Women's sexuality<br><br>B. "Recenters Black womanhood as the norm and operating force in the creative process" (Texas Performing Arts, 2021, para. 1) |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Helanius J. Wilkins | A. *Trigger*<br><br>B. *A Bon Ceur: Pages from a Journal* | 2011<br><br>2018 | A. Part of a larger project exploring the Black experience in the United States<br><br>B. Cultural identity, human diversity, and place |
| Jacob Mora | *A Landing Place* | 2016 | "Insecurities, bullying and trying to rise above . . . the perspective is that we are all landing places for emotional arrows" (Moraporvida Contemporary Dance, n.d., para. 1) |
| Jill Sigman | A. *Our Lady of Detritus*<br><br>B. *Weed Heart* | 2009<br><br>2016 | A. Composting, trash, and the environment<br><br>B. Immigration, colonialism, place, history, and climate justice |
| Kate Speer | *White Lies* | 2020 | Surveillance and White privilege; part of a larger collaboration with Kayla Hamilton |
| Keith Haynes | *Right to Remain* | 2018 | Survival and identity in disenfranchised communities, and impacts of disenfranchisement on the body and psyche |
| Larry Southall | *Stereotypes* | 2019 | Racial assumptions, stereotypes, oppression, and daily experiences of injustice |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Morgan Wilson | *Sail* | 2017 | Mental health, suicide, ability, and equality |
| S. Paola López Ramírez | *transfronteriza* | 2017 | "A women-led cultural organizing project focused on generating developmental spaces where women can lead and shape powerful ways to share their (or create new) stories" (Sandra Paola López Ramírez, n.d., para. 1) |
| Silva Laukkanen | *And Then There Was Silence* | 2019 | Collaboration with war veterans that investigates their narratives and who gets to dance |
| Vivian Kim | *between black and white* | 2020 | Adversities faced by and the Asian American experience in the United States, as viewed on a Black–White racial binary |

The fourth section asked about choreographers' communication with audience members about/through their SJA dance pieces. Choreographers were asked, for instance, about how they intended, expected, and/or wanted their SJA dances pieces to influence audience members (e.g., raising their awareness of and/or taking action to address the social injustices pieces explored), as well as whether, after performances concluded, they engaged in discussion (e.g., talkback sessions) with audience members about their SJA dance pieces.

Interviews concluded by asking whether there was anything else related to choreographing SJA dance pieces that interviewees wished to discuss. They also were asked whether I could contact them if I had follow-up questions that I wanted to ask them.

## Data Analysis

To analyze the data obtained, all interviews were transcribed. Initial transcripts were generated by Zoom from interview recordings. These transcripts were revised using software, such as Express Scribe Transcription, Otter.ai, and OTranscribe; audio files of the interviews were played as revisions were typed. Interviews were transcribed verbatim with reference to interview videos when interviewees replaced words with nonverbal gestures, which were described in the transcript, but otherwise, pauses and nonverbal cues were not consistently accounted for.

Interview transcripts then were analyzed using Tracy's (2018) phronetic iterative approach, in conversation with both Braun and Clarke's (2006) phases of thematic analysis and Owen's (1984) criteria for denoting themes. Tracy described the *phronetic iterative approach* as practical data analysis that focuses on

> narrow aspects of the data that have the potential to extend specific theories or address practical problems. In an iterative approach, researchers are encouraged to actively reflect on and capitalize upon their previous interests, past literature, and directives from external funders. (p. 62)

Employing that approach, findings of and research questions developed from studies that had been conducted about communication, dance, and social justice were used to loosely guide the inductive analysis of the transcribed interviews.

Specifically, the first step of the data-analytic process involved becoming familiar with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which included reading the transcripts numerous times and highlighting on them words and phrases that seemed important to interviewees. I also copied and pasted quotes from interviewees into a Word document that answered the questions, "What is SJA dance?" and "What communicative practices do choreographers engage in when making SJA dance pieces?" Quotes for the first question included any statements that interviewees' made about what they considered to be SJA dance, how their dance pieces connected to social justice, differences that they identified between SJA and other forms of dance, and examples that they offered of SJA dance pieces. Quotes related to the second questions included any accounts that interviewees offered of their interactions with others involved in their SJA dance pieces, as well as any decisions that they made about those pieces, with one or more people in mind.

Interviewees' quotes then were analyzed to create categories in a codebook, based on repetitive, recurrent, and forceful themes (Owen, 1984), with quotes conveying similar ideas put into the same category. That analysis resulted in identifying 24 emergent themes regarding interviewees' definitions (characterizations/views) of "SJA dance" (see Table 2) and 28 themes related to communicative practices in which they engaged when making social justice dance pieces (see Table 3). Those themes formed the basis of the findings reported in Chapter 4.

**Table 2**

*Emergent Themes for Choreographers' Definitions of "Social Justice Activism Dance"*

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. Telling a story; communicating a message<br>2. Community organizing<br>3. Intentional/conscientiously social justice dance/intention of actioning and collective laboring<br>4. Research/investigation-driven dance | 12. Advocacy/advocacy agenda/dance for social change/making believe<br>13. No formula/many ways to approach social justice in dance<br>14. The work, process, time, and effort that go into pieces |

| | |
|---|---|
| 5. Work (typically) made by Black, Indigenous, and people of color choreographers, or by people who are marginalized<br>6. Work that highlights injustices and/or taboo subjects<br>7. Work about/related to a social justice/political/social issue/theme; "aboutness"<br>8. Mending the world<br>9. Everything being political or social justice<br>10. Problems with "social justice" label<br>11. Bringing awareness | 15. A way of life/(part) of a/the lived experience/self- or emotional expression<br>16. Racial equity/decentralizing whiteness<br>17. Equal access/equal dignity/bridging differences<br>18. Performed for an audience<br>19. Working with specific groups or communities<br>20. Serious tone<br>21. Not clear-cut<br>22. Limits to "aboutness"<br>23. Political dance<br>24. Failing and doing it again |

**Table 3**

*Emergent Themes for Social Justice Activism Dance Choreographers' Communicative Practices*

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. Awareness of/respect for identities involved in the work<br>2. Considering audience; surrendering in relation to audience<br>3. Talkback sessions and other discussions with audiences<br>4. Using multiple resources to communicate meaning; layered meaning<br>5. Drawing on emotion and memory<br>6. Talking with collaborators about social justice<br>7. Learning from failure and disagreement<br>8. Ethical relationships with collaborators/languaging around people/relationships with and treatment of people<br>9. Showing up; implicating self in work | 17. Sound score/music as a way to communicate<br>18. Not considering audiences<br>19. Feedback/audience response; responses reflect accomplishment of goals or are viewed positively, but, sometimes, are not known<br>20. Creating accessibility for audiences through online platforms and other means (but many prefer face-to-face interactions)<br>21. Wanting to/letting audience find meaning; not giving away too much<br>22. Doing research/putting in the work authentically<br>23. Communicating/dropping hints through dance movements<br>24. Using text to communicate |

| | |
|---|---|
| 10. Working on self<br>11. Open, nondirective approach to making work; not pre-deciding what pieces are about; letting questions guide process; letting work emerge from conversations<br>12. Using title to convey messages/make statements, or inspire the work<br>13. Creating conditions for audience members to experience/participate<br>14. Dancing around social justice with collaborators and audience members<br>15. Program notes: help to clarify, are extra, are too much<br>16. Props, costumes, and settings to communicate | 25. Listening to/being in conversation with others and self, before showing piece<br>26. During all stages of the process, thinking about ethics and social justice<br>27. Ethical engagement with communities<br>28. Problematic practices |

# CHAPTER 4

# RESULTS

This chapter presents the findings from the analysis of the data collected from the interviews conducted with professionals who choreograph social justice activism (SJA) dance pieces. The first section explicates choreographers' conceptualizations of "SJA dance," and the second section examines their communication with dancers, collaborating artists, and audience members about social justice aspects of their dance pieces.

## Choreographers' Conceptualizations of "Social Justice Activism Dance"

Although I recruited and interviewed professionals who have choreographed dance pieces that, in line with the scholarship reviewed in Chapter 2, promoted what, generally, is considered to be "social justice" (e.g., human rights, equitable opportunities, and nondiscrimination based on people's identity markers; see Chapter 1), a primary goal of this study was to ascertain choreographers' views of such dances. This section, thus, examines interviewees' conceptualizations of "SJA dance," in general and with regard to their work.

First, many interviewees expressed difficulty labeling their work as "SJA dance pieces" because they did not know, specifically, what constituted such pieces. As Gesel R. Mason, Artistic Director of Gesel Mason Performance Projects and Associate Professor of Contemporary Dance Technique and Choreography at the University of Texas at Austin, claimed, "I wouldn't be able to specify how many [of my dance pieces] were social justice pieces, because it's not a box that I check off to determine if [a] piece is about social justice." Helanius J. Wilkins, an Assistant Professor in the Department of Dance at the University of Colorado Boulder (CU Boulder), also had said that he had difficulty using that label to describe his choreographed dance

pieces because "social justice is a big palette; it's not so finite where you could just say, 'Here's that thing and that's what makes it social justice.'"

Although interviewees had difficulty denotatively identifying specific characteristics of "social justice" dance pieces, they, certainly, found the term connotatively meaningful, with a few interviewees having negative connotations that led them not to use that term. For instance, although Jacob Mora, Artistic Director and Founder of Moraporvida Contemporary Dance, qualified his choreographed dance pieces for inclusion in this study as being connected to social justice, during the interview, he said:

> I don't know if I would identify with the wording "social justice" . . . I kind of feel that it's a word that people use to their own benefits or for their own anger and for their own, I don't know, agenda.

The potential negative connotations associated with social justice may be one reason why Anne Bluethenthal, founder and Artistic Director of ABD Productions, said that she often uses other terms to describe her dance pieces:

> I don't call my work "social justice dance" . . . but I have no problem with it being known that my roots are in dance and choreography, and that I'm totally committed to social justice with the arts. Absolutely, 100%. I just call the work that we're doing either "socially engaged art" or "community arts practice." "Community-engaged arts practice," actually, is what I usually call it.

Despite the difficulty that interviewees had determining what constituted and whether to characterize their work as "SJA dance pieces" or to use some other label, many distinguished SJA dance from what they called "dance for dance's sake," "repertory work" (a collection of works that dance companies and/or choreographers perform regularly), and other types of dance

that were not social justice oriented. For example, Cindy Brandle, Artistic Director of Cindy Brandle Dance Company, differentiated her SJA dance pieces from those that she choreographed for youth program summer intensives, which she described as "just sort of dance for dance's sake, and having fun and being a little more lighthearted." Larry Southall, an Instructor in CU Boulder's Department of Theatre & Dance, who teaches traditional hip-hop, also said that if a dance piece "is social justice oriented, maybe the tone is a bit more serious; if it's not, then it's more like a repertory piece for me."

Going beyond distinguishing serious from lighthearted dances, Wilkins, who, as explained previously, had difficulty identifying characteristics of "SJA dances," offered a more substantive distinction between SJA and other forms of dance:

> I don't think that all work could be social justice work based on how I describe [it, which] . . . is the act of doing. It's actioning, and if actioning is not part of the intention, then I'm not sure how it can be labeled as "social justice work." I'm also questioning if something can be social justice work if it's not considering something outside of the construct of "whiteness," [and] if it's not decentralizing it. I'm not sure if something can be social justice work if its true intent is not something embedded in collective laboring.

Some interviewees, however, did not make any distinction because they viewed all dance pieces as being social justice oriented. Jill Sigman, founder of jill sigman/thinkdance, claimed:

> I'm not sure that this distinction makes sense between social justice dance pieces and [those that are] not. In some way, they're all reflections on our world. Some just do that maybe more overtly, but we're always making dance in a world and in a social context, and in a context that involves injustice, and how we choose to highlight that injustice, ameliorate it, or exacerbate it is up to the choreographer in that moment. I don't know

> that I would claim . . . that some dances are quote "social justice dances"; I would say that they're my dances, . . . [which] are concerned with what's going on in the world.

Kate Speer, a Denver, CO-based independent artist and arts administrator, also did not distinguish SJA from other dance forms because she viewed all dance as being political. She explained her view by referencing David Dorfman, Artistic Director of David Dorfman Dance, one of her collaborators:

> He talks about how the stage creates this hierarchy of what's elevated. These are beautiful bodies; this is beautiful art. . . . Even if we think it's [a dance piece] not political, or not a social issue, it's still embedded in someone's opinion of what they chose to focus on [e.g., in terms of beauty, value, and what is worthy of attention and resources].

Thus, these interviewees argued that all dance pieces are SJA oriented because they are performed in social contexts where, invariably, injustice occurs, with choreographers' work (whether intentionally or unintentionally, and/or directly or indirectly) acquiescing, upholding, and/or challenging those injustices.

Part of addressing social (in)justice contexts through dance, according to some interviewees, had to do with relationships created among those involved in making dance pieces (e.g., choreographers, dancers, and audiences). As S. Paola López Ramírez, Founder and Director of the Institute for Improvisation and Social Action (ImprovISA), explained:

> Everything that I do, even if it's not explicitly against something or for something, or trying to draft a particular message, its process and the way in which it engages people, because it's improvised work . . . that is always performed in relationship with the

> audience in some way, [makes] that political and addresses issues of social justice in terms of connectivity and awareness of space and relationship.

From Ramírez's perspective, not only did the social context of dance bind it to social justice but its sociality did as well. Performing dance in front of audience members, thus, was political because of the connectivity, awareness, space, and relationships that are negotiated in the interactions that occur during performances between dancers and audience members, as shaped by choreographers.

Interviewees also described an important aspect of the relationships created during dance performance, especially those that choreographers and dancers formed with audience members, as involving the exchange of resources. As Speer explained, "It's about resources and ideas, and when you make a piece, you're occupying space and you're occupying people's time, and, often, you're occupying people's money to buy a ticket, and those are all resources." Thus, regardless of choreographers' social justice intent, interviewees viewed the resources, relationships, and social contexts involved as connecting dance pieces to social justice.

Choreographers' views, thus, differed about whether some or all pieces constituted "SJA dance." With that debate explicated, the next section discusses characteristics of SJA dance identified by interviewees who distinguished it from other dance forms, or, for those who did not make that distinction, characteristics of dance pieces that overtly engaged social contexts, relationships, and resources.

**Characteristics of Social Justice Activism Dance Pieces**

Interviewees associated a number of characteristics with SJA dance pieces, including social justice affecting the subject matter that pieces explored, choreographers' work processes

and practices, the dancers who performed, and as being an extension of choreographers' lives and life experiences. Each of these characteristics is explicated below.

***Social Justice Activism Dance Pieces' Subject Matter***

For most interviewees, SJA dance pieces were characterized by their intentional focus on subject matter that was about social justice (or what some interviewees called, simply, "aboutness"). For instance, in talking about her first SJA work, Brandle, said:

> My very first piece that . . . had a sort of a leaning towards social justice, . . . was [about] climate . . . [and, specifically,] acid rain. That was my first endeavor as a choreographer to make something that had substance and meaning, other than just creating dance for dance's sake.

Other social justice issues on which Brandle's subsequent work has focused, such as her piece *A World on Fire Project*, have included social privilege; racial discrimination; the #MeToo movement; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer marginalization; and social injustices associated with former U.S. President Donald Trump's administration (Yellow Scene Magazine, 2019).

Gerald Casel, Bessie Award-winning Executive Artistic Director of GERALD CASEL DANCE, and a Professor in the Department of Theater Arts at the University of California Santa Cruz (whose work *Not About Race Dance* "call[ed] attention to how whiteness historically formed the structures, experiences, and experiments of postmodern choreographers" (Central for Cultural Studies, 2021–2022, para. 1)), explained how SJA dances connect

> "social," meaning where and how we interact in society with each other, and talking about the intersection of inequities that are present but might be invisible to everybody, and how we participate and or passively avoid, not seeing or not paying attention to

> something that's unfair, and then "justice," making this correction, addressing how we're gonna fix them, how we're gonna deal with equity, and ways to move forward.

According to Casel, by connecting social justice problems and solutions, dance pieces encourage viewers to engage in social justice activism. Thus, interviewees saw the social justice "aboutness" of pieces that raise people's awareness of social injustice and prepare them to engage in activism as being an important characteristic of SJA dance pieces.

According to interviewees, SJA dance not only raises people's awareness about social justice problems and solutions but also choreographers' awareness of their social backgrounds and their choices, especially in terms aiding others. As Mason explained:

> Leading this graduate program in dance and social justice, I'm not asking the students to make dances about social justice; it's also how you choose to be in the world. It's creating an awareness almost of what you know, and thinking about the awareness of what kind of privileges do you also have, what ways can you unlock possibilities for other people.

Casel also described how SJA dances involve "collaborating and speaking together, while underscoring and acknowledging the structures that we participate in, and that they [collaborators, and in Casel's work in particular, White collaborators] could potentially benefit from." Hence, interviewees saw raising people's awareness of their role in sustaining vs. ameliorating social injustice as another important characteristic of SJA dance.

For some interviewees, however, raising people's awareness of social injustice did not mean that dance pieces had to be about social justice issues per se. For instance, although Ramírez's dance work often addressed social justice issues (e.g., injustices of the Bracero

program, which, from 1942 to 1964, allowed millions of Mexican men to engage in short-term, mainly agricultural work in the United States), she also claimed:

> When the content is very overtly addressing a social justice issue, I think that's what most people think about when they refer to or ask about "dance and social justice." . . . We're a very content-focused society, at least here in the West; it's very much about the "aboutness" of things: What is this about? It is that "aboutness" most people refer to, and making work that is challenging that "aboutness" and is more process centered, and that is "aboutlessness," is drawing away from focusing on a particular topic, can be incredibly provocative and political, and that's what a lot of my work is.

Even when dance pieces were overtly about social justice problems, interviewees differed with respect to their pieces offering audience members solutions for those problems. Sigman, for instance, explained why her piece *Weed Heart*, which used weeds to explore social justice issues that included immigration, colonialism, place, history, and climate justice, did not offer a specific agenda for what audience members should do about those social justice problems:

> Sometimes, I have a clearer, concrete agenda for people where it's, like, I wanna ask them to, maybe, be aware of something and then address it with their elected officials or take some [other] form of action. With that piece [*Weed Heart*], it was more about bringing awareness of the interconnectedness of all of these things and then letting people choose their actions.

Choreographers' choice of providing or having audience members identify solutions for social justice problems was at the heart of Speer's description of the difference between SJA and political dance: "I think social justice is probably people wanting to move the needle of where we're headed in a [specific] direction, and, so, maybe, not every [dance that is politically

oriented] has a social justice focus." Speer also raised an important question about whether political and SJA dance pieces affected people's subsequent activism:

> One argument against political work is . . . did you cause people [to] change their mind, . . . to act, . . . to go protest, . . . to go vote differently, and if you didn't, then you failed. That's kind of the general argument for the social justice work. What this author writes [referencing a book she read] is that it's not that simple and that's not the goal per se. It's because people enter an audience or enter an experience, and they're at different points in their life, and you don't know at what point they're going to enter, and you're one puzzle in their life trajectory, and it might be 10 years down the road that everything clicks and, suddenly, they change their mind, or they're inspired to go vote . . . or to go knock on doors. We can't always measure that impact.

Mason went even further than did Speer, arguing that choreographing SJA dances about social justice issues was not enough to promote social change:

> In some ways, it almost feels like it's not enough for something [dance pieces] to be about a social justice issue. If we're really talking about social change and socially engaged work, thinking about its impact, some dances should just be that; they should just be dances that have a theme that is connected to social justice, but that also is not enough when we're talking about the multiple ways that we want to impact our communities. Just making a dance about protest, one dance about protest, that gets seen by 200 people, that's great for you, but let's just be honest; it's almost like when somebody puts up a quote, a Martin Luther King quote, and thinks, "That's enough. I've done it." That's not enough. Yes, that's important, but it's this much [holding up her thumb and a finger in close proximity to suggest a small amount].

Mason said that choreographers needed to go beyond creating SJA dance pieces and become involved with and create space for members of marginalized communities to participate in the arts.

Despite interviewee's differences about whether SJA dance pieces had to focus on social justice problems, offer solutions to those problems, affect audience members' subsequent political actions/activism, and promote measurable social change, all of the choreographers interviewed wanted to have some impact on those who saw their work. Sigman drew on a Jewish concept to explain what she and other choreographers were trying to accomplish via their SJA dance work:

> In Jewish tradition, there's this concept of "Tikkun," which is about mending the world, and, . . . in some way, that's something that I've kind of inherited and think about a lot as one of the functions of my work.

***Dance Choreographers' Work Processes and Practices***

In addition to SJA dance pieces' subject matter, some interviewees talked about social justice influencing choreographers' work processes and practices. As Sigman explained:

> The thing I would highlight is that when you're making a work that is consciously about social justice, I think there's even more awareness and more need to think about the values that you're talking about, that you're focusing on, outside of the frame of the work. You're not just thinking about what you put on stage—what movements you do, what set you have, or whatever—but you might be thinking about the ways that all of those interactions, that process of creation and that process of audience development, and where those materials go when you end the show and you get rid of them; how all of those issues, those practical questions, interact with the social justice issues that you're

> talking about. . . . Working under this mantle of "social justice performance" puts even more responsibility on you [the choreographer] to think about the extension of the work into the larger world and to think about your practices, your materials, and your relationships in a way that is in keeping with the values that are instantiated in the performance.

Hence, Sigman believed that SJA dance choreographers' work processes and practices needed to reflect social justice values.

Interviewees saw those processes and practices as beginning with choreographers thinking about their work from a social justice perspective, even if their pieces were not about social justice issues per se. In explaining that point, Mason used the example of a Christmas dance:

> Your dance is just a regular a Christmas dance, and you're gonna just dance to the song, but you are aware of how who you are impacts the environment around you; . . . what are the ways that you're really thinking about and letting these socially engaged ideas and concepts, social justice approaches [permeate through the work and influence your interactions with collaborators]? How are you thinking about how you are situating yourself and your work in that conversation [regarding social justice]?

Choreographers thinking about their dance pieces from a social justice perspective, as Keith Haynes, Codirector of VisKosity Dance Collective, noted, subsequently influenced how they communicated with collaborators about those pieces:

> My choreographic style I don't think necessarily changes when I do social justice work, in terms of, like, choreography and how I create movement, but in [it is different in]

> terms of the psychological, mental part of the piece, the way in which I talk about the movement, [and] the way in which I introduce movement.

Interviewees, thus, saw social justice informing how choreographers worked as another important characteristic of SJA dance.

***Dancers from/Representing Oppressed Populations/Communities***

In addition to social justice informing pieces' subject matter and choreographers' work practices, interviewees also talked about the dancers who performed SJA pieces. Specifically, regardless of whether pieces were about social justice issues, interviewees perceived certain pieces that were performed by (at least some) dancers who were members of marginalized populations/communities as promoting social justice. As an example, Silva Laukkanen, Lead Instructor of Body Shift, said that her piece *And Then There Was Silence*, performed by war veterans, "doesn't actually address so much social justice [as the topic of the dance], but the fact that they are overweight, injured, sometimes disabled veterans doing the dance is the social justice part of it." She went on to explain:

> I actually looked at the definition of "social justice" . . . in terms of the distribution of wealth, opportunities, and privileges within a society. The performers in that piece [were] veterans, and . . . privileges, for a high-quality dance education or to be able to perform a dance piece, is pretty low for a veteran, untrained dancer doing a piece.

As another example, Morgan Wilson, a choreographer for Spoke N Motion, which is a mixed-ability dance company, made her piece *Sail*, which addresses mental illness, for the company as a dedication to a Spoke N Motion dancer who had committed suicide earlier that year. In addition to raising people's awareness about mental health, Wilson said that the piece

promoted ability equality for dancers by "seeing people with disabilities as equals and portraying that to an audience." During rehearsals, for instance, as Wilson explained:

> We focus[ed] a lot on how we're all dancers and we all have different bodies . . . [and] move in different ways, but we're . . . all dancers, we're still all people, we're all in the same group, and we're [all] human.

Interviewees, thus, saw having their work performed by dancers representing oppressed populations/communities as another important characteristic of SJA dance pieces. As Laukkanen claimed, "Just by bringing bodies that are not traditionally thought as dancer bodies to a space, it is sort of social justice work, and advocacy work, advocacy for arts and access really."

***Social Justice Activism Dance Pieces and Choreographers' Lives***

Finally, many interviewees saw their commitment to promoting social justice through their dance work as a way of life. As Wilkins explained:

> Social justice, social actioning, it's a way of life. It's in the process; it's in the daily grind. . . . A choreographic piece feels like a journey, where, at a moment, there's a public opening to share what's ongoing. I don't see it as work that you figure out how to put steps to, because if you're only putting the steps, great for the steps, but is that a lived experience, and how much is there for you to draw in, you know, and pour into that?

Interviewees, such as Anya Cloud, Assistant Professor in CU Boulder's Department of Theatre & Dance and Director of the MFA program's Somatic Emphasis area, spoke about her commitment to promoting social justice through her dance work reflected their general lived experience:

> I really believe that I am the material of the work [and that] we are the material of the work. What we're doing, what I'm doing, and as a person and how I am with myself, is

> informing what the work is and can be. . . . I have to drive my car, go to the grocery store, talk to my neighbors, and figure out what I consume and what my impact is as a human, and that's integrally connected in this work. It's not just, like, oh, I make a piece with people of diverse identities and then, somehow, I get to call that "social justice work." Not like that can't be, but I am continuing to try to rupture and reckon with these bigger realities [that create and sustain social (in)justice].

Finally, for many interviewees, their SJA dance work was a direct result of social injustices that they had experienced in life. In talking about his piece *Stereotypes*, Southall said:

> I've always felt I am social justice, because I am a victim of not receiving social justice. . . . When you deal with racism on a regular basis, it's a defense mechanism, and I choreograph what I feel, and being an oppressed American in this country [the United States], I portray that in my work, a lot of my work.

***Summary***

As this section revealed, interviewees identified some important characteristics of SJA dance pieces, including pieces' subject matter, choreographers' work processes and practices, dancers chosen to perform, and as a way of life or a reflection/extension of choreographers' lives. However, as this section also revealed, interviewees' differed in terms of what these characteristics meant and how they applied to SJA dance work. Perhaps most importantly, interviewees believed that there was no formula for determining what constituted "SJA dance pieces," and that there were many ways of promoting social justice through dance work. As Mason explained, "When we're talking about socially engaged pedagogy and social justice practices, it's a journey, and there's not one way to get there." Vivian Kim, Codirector of VisKosity Dance Collective, summarized what she and many interviewees believed:

> However you choose to choreograph social justice-based works is valid. I feel like, especially in this "high art," whatever that means, "concert dance," contemporary modern world, we get pretty stuck on what's right and what's wrong, . . . [but] there is no right or wrong way to social justice.

Interviewees, thus, had a "big-tent" view of what constituted and characterized SJA dance, and they saw many ways for dance work to promote social justice. However, as the next section explains, interviewees identified some communicative practices that aided or undermined choreographers' efforts to use dance to promote social justice.

## Social Justice Activism Dance Choreographers' Communicative Practices

An important finding of this study was that choreographers saw their SJA dance work as transcending the topic(s) that pieces explored and being constituted in *how* they created, developed, and shared their work, which included their communication with collaborators (e.g., dancers) and with audience members. The sections below explicate interviewees' perceptions of choreographers' positive and problematic communication with collaborators during the development of dance pieces, and with audience members during and after performances.

### Choreographers' Communication during Development of Social Justice Activism Dance Pieces

SJA dance choreographers' communication with collaborators included open-minded, nondirective communication to generate ideas for pieces; discussing social justice directly vs. dancing around that topic; and cultivating ethical relationships with collaborators. The sections below explicate these characteristics.

***Open-minded, Nondirective Communication***

Although, as discussed previously in this chapter, some interviewees characterized SJA dance pieces as being about social justice issues, rather than starting with that focus and telling collaborators what pieces were about, many choreographers wanted their pieces' "aboutness" to emerge inductively from interacting with their collaborators (e.g., dancers). Choreographers who employed that process to develop their SJA dance pieces engaged in what I call "open-minded, nondirective communication," to obtain, consider, and incorporate collaborators' views. Wilkins's description of how he develops SJA dance pieces illustrated this approach:

> I don't believe in revealing coming from a place of hierarchy and saying, "This is what the piece is about, and this is everything you need to know about it; now, we're gonna go do it." I, again, am interested in discovery, self-discovery, collective discovery, collective laboring, [and] collective work, cultivating something that we all have to work through to experience . . . [and] find. The pathway to revealing or sharing that kind of information happens more in an unraveling way, and, so, we're discovering together. That holding space for collective work, transition and transformation is what . . . my actioning of social justice [dance] work is about.

Bluethenthal also engaged in an inductive, communication-centered process to develop her SJA dance pieces, describing the "Skywatcher Method" that she and other artists in her dance company employed to transform storytelling into dance pieces as being "conversational, relational, durational, and structural." Bluethenthal used that method to create *I Got a Truth to Tell*, a dance piece about racial and economic injustices faced by people living in San Francisco's Tenderloin District (TL), where Bluethenthal's company is based. The piece emerged from Bluethenthal's conversations with TL residents with whom she had formed long-

term relationships about their neighborhood. Bluethenthal recounted her conversation with some residents living in low-income housing about the television shows that they watched, which evolved into talking about sociopolitical issues, such as the crack epidemic, war on drugs, and urban renewal. When Bluethenthal asked about the recent police shooting of Trayvon Martin, she said that their response was, "It is what it is," which, as she explained, led her to engage in a series of conversations about that response, which, eventually, led to creating that and other pieces:

> For several weeks, I went to every site that I was going to, and I was just, like, we're amplifying that idea: what does that mean, you know, what kind of pain is underneath "It is what it is," or what kind of attitude in life is that? After a few weeks, I came back and I said, . . . "If it wasn't what it was, what might it be?" and then we had two pieces, "It is what it is" and "What if it wasn't?" That's an example of how it [one of her SJA dance pieces] evolves. You just have to have faith that a gem's gonna fall [from open-minded, nondirective conversations].

Some choreographers who had a priori ideas of what they wanted their pieces to be about engaged in open-minded, nondirective communication with collaborators about dance movements that best expressed those ideas. For example, Casel explained how and why he communicated collaboratively with dancers about movements for his piece *Not About Race Dance*, which focused on racial (in)equity:

> Usually, I would come in with a phrase that I've been working on, the dancers "learn it," and then they make a riff [improvise] on it. To me, that's imitating a process of colonization, whereby I'm putting a series of steps on their bodies [and] they have no agency, until I say, "Now improvise." By critiquing these hierarchies—"Choreographer

> dancers, be quiet; don't speak until I tell you to"—we're also replicating the hierarchical structures of colonialism and White supremacy, right? I don't want to do that, so I haven't been doing that. I don't come in and then they [the dancers] learn materials from my body; instead, we devise systems, like movement scores, where they create their movement based on "questions" and problem solving [scenarios] that I've posed. That process was really illuminating, where I didn't even make a step; not one step.

The movements that dancers performed to express the social justice messages of Casel's piece, thus, emerged inductively and collectively from these conversations and collaborative movement scores.

Other interviewees' choreographing of dancers' movement were slightly more directive compared to Casel's approach, but they, too, engaged in collaborative communication with dancers that both achieved what choreographers' wanted and honored dancers' agency. Wilson, for instance, described her balanced approach:

> I'll show them a movement with my body, and then I might tell them to put it into their bodies, just because you can't tell somebody how to move if you aren't them. They have their ways of moving, and, so, I . . . embrace that a little bit and let them kind of dictate how they're moving, and then I add qualities to it. [For example,] if I want something sharp, I tell them I want this to be sharp, but I don't tell them exactly what to do.

Hence, although interviewees' process of developing SJA dance pieces differed in the degree to which it was nondirective, all of them valued and engaged in collaborative communication to obtain and, in some way, incorporate collaborators' views and preferences.

Engaging in open-minded, nondirective communication with collaborators not only aided choreographers' development of their SJA dance pieces but, as interviewees explained, it also

prevented them from engaging in problematic practices that included rigid thinking about their SJA dance pieces and compromising collaborators' humanness. Mason, for instance, described how communicating with collaborators her concerns about rehearsals of her female sexuality piece, *antithesis*, helped to overcome her tendency to be rigid about changing her work:

> I sat everybody [cast members] down, [and] I [asked them], "What are we going to do?" . . . We put together another version and then we tried it, and I was, like, "That's better." . . . It was . . . being willing to experiment and . . . [to] let what I understood about it [the script] go. I can get kind of rigid sometimes, like, "I want it to do this," and when I do, that is usually when I exert too much control over the product, and it doesn't have room to . . . breathe.

Her open-minded, nondirective communication with cast members, consequently, led to changing the piece in ways that, in her view, improved it significantly.

Interviewees also believed that open-minded communication prevented choreographers from treating their collaborators in dehumanizing ways. As Cloud explained:

> Part of it, for me, is working with people I love and trust, who also love and trust me, so that we can collectively try to make conditions that prioritize humanity, so that when challenging things come up, we can be quite real about what's going on and collaboratively, with empathy, look at how it is that we take accountability for, or kind of reorient or reorganize, to keep going or not. . . . Often, as a choreographer, there can be an ambition to arrive somewhere and to be willing to compromise certain things, [which] often mean[s] compromising humans.

Interviewees, thus, perceived choreographers' open-minded, nondirective communication with collaborators as both benefiting the development of their SJA dance pieces and as helping

them not to engage in problematic behaviors that undermine that process and their work. However, as the next section explains, in discussing their SJA dance pieces with collaborators, some choreographers talked explicitly about, whereas others evaded or danced around, the topic of "social justice."

***Choreographers Explicitly Discussing vs. Dancing around "Social Justice" with Collaborators***

Many of the choreographers interviewed claimed that talking with dancers (and other collaborators) about the social justice aspects of their pieces was crucial. Brandle, for instance, pointed out how talking about that and other aspects of her pieces influenced who she hired to perform them:

> I absolutely talk to everyone about what we're aiming towards, and when I hire dancers, I'm learning even more to become even more explicit about what my desires are. I'm learning to be even more explicit about what I'm aiming for, because I need people who are . . . going to dance this [work and] who believe in it [e.g., social justice cause]. . . I think if you're going to spend time working on a piece, . . . you have to feel connected to the subject, and you have to feel passionately about it.

Importantly, Brandle did not just tell dancers what she wanted; she engaged in open-minded communication to learn about and honor dancers' views and desires.

Haynes also pointed out how open, honest conversations enabled choreographers to hear how dancers experienced his SJA dance pieces, and, in particular, anything that concerned them or that they saw as problems:

> I think it's very imperative that I, sometimes, stop and [say to dancers], "Okay, let's have a conversation about where we're going," because one, that helps them to drop into "Okay, this is where we're going," so it's not just about mastery of choreography. . . .

> [That conversation] . . . opens the door to . . . what dancers are feeling and experiencing while they're dancing, [which] I may not be privy to because I'm the choreographer and I'm watching from the outside. So, I'll . . . say to them, "Here's what the thing [concept guiding the work] is," [which] then [can] open up the door to conversation [about] something that they may [see as being] kind of problematic.

Sigman summarized the importance that she (and other choreographers) placed on dialoguing with dancers and other collaborators about any and all aspects of her SJA dance pieces:

> Dialogue is completely a part of our process. In every artistic process, we'll have chunks of rehearsal where we're talking about the issues that we're working on, where, maybe, I'm sharing something like a video or I'll invite a guest to come in [to] speak about what they do, . . . [with] our improvisations and mining of material coming out of those conversations. [Those] conversations . . . [are] very much interwoven throughout the process.

In contrast to those who explicitly discussed their SJA dance pieces with collaborators from the start of the process of developing pieces for presentation, some interviewees said that they did not talk with collaborators about social justice (and some other) aspects of their work. More the case, some choreographers waited to have those conversations until later in the process of developing pieces, and, before then and even during those later conversations, they talked about those aspects tentatively and cautiously, engaging in a form of communication that I refer to as "dancing around social justice."

Interviewees identified a number of factors affecting and/or reasons why they waited to have those conversations and danced around social justice. One reason was because they did not want to influence dancers' choices. As Haynes explained:

> Sometimes, I'll let dancers know right off the bat [that] this is what this piece is about [and] this is where we're going. Sometimes, [however,] I'll withhold that [information] and just say, "I just need you to find the movement and the groundedness in the [movement], or whatever it is, the angst in the body first, and then I'll let you know what the narrative is."

Kim also expressed similar reasons engaging in those conversations toward the end of the rehearsal process:

> I like to save specific conversations for further along in the process, because I don't want the conversations to impose how they [dancers] authentically react or how they choose to do the movement. The way that I work is [to] give my dancers all the movement at once, . . . kind of movement-bomb them, and then start deconstructing those movements to create a completely different structure. Along the way, I might give [dancers] little Easter eggs; . . . little things about like "Okay this is generally about this or . . . about that," but . . . the closer to the end of the process that I get, the more conversational I become, because . . . dancers have already started creating their trajectory about who they are in this work. I [thus] like to [engage in] conversation towards the end about [what is] the general theme [of a dance piece and what] specific sections mean, [which] I say . . . to help them continue to develop their character.

Of particular concern to choreographers was that talking too early and too explicitly about social justice and other issues related to their pieces would lead dancers to act rather than

engage in authentic movement. To avoid acting, interviewees said that they withheld information about the (social justice) subject matter of their pieces until later in the process. Haynes also said that he employed analogical prompts to have the social justice messages of his pieces, which often have been about racial injustice and police brutality, communicated by dancers in an authentic way rather than acted out:

> For my social justice work, I try to give analogies. Some analogies might be relatively dark, but they are a way in which I approach movement and not acting per se. Another prompt that I gave my dancers is this idea of being in a room that, maybe, has bouncy walls, or each time your body moves, it's hitting and rebounding off something else, . . . so I'm not saying, "Oh, I want you to mimic being pushed and tugged, and somebody pushing you to the floor or enacting some sense of violence on you, but how [you] can use this prompt of bouncing to find that that ricochet or rebound of the body that is reminiscent to being pushed and tugged, and having acts of aggression imposed upon you and your body by external forces, [such as the] police [or] whoever."

Mora's statement summarized well what many interviewees believed about the problem of dancers acting out the social justice elements of their work: "I find that, sometimes, when we [choreographers] tell too much information to a dancer, it [a piece] starts to become a little bit hokey, and it starts to become a little bit contrived." Thus, some choreographers danced around social justice issues with collaborators to prevent them from acting or exaggerating movements to communicate social justice messages that did not align with what choreographers' intended/wanted.

Other choreographers danced around social justice because they did not want that aspect of their pieces to overshadow collaborators' experiences of the dance process. As Laukkanen explained:

> One of the reasons why I don't talk [with dancers] about anything like that [social justice messages of her dance pieces] is because I don't want [my pieces] to be focused on changing the world or changing them, or making them somehow be messengers of anything. I want it to be purely an experience of dance and movement.

Wilson had a similar reason for being cautious about talking about social justice with the mixed-ability cast of dancers she choreographs for in Spoke N Motion, saying:

> A lot of the communication that I do with my dancers is more through movement and their experience of the movement. I don't necessarily like to put words in their head or, you know, tell them a story or a message that we're trying to do with the piece, because I like to make it an experience for the dancers themselves, too.

Finally, interviewees said that dancers' social identities could make choreographers cautious about discussing social justice issues with them. Kim, who, as noted previously, often talked with dancers toward the end of the rehearsal process, explained how dancers' social identities affected the depth of her conversations with them about social justice:

> I don't like to converse too much with my dancers, mostly because a lot of the issues . . . that I speak about in my pieces are just exclusive and very specific to the Asian American experience, and, as you may or may not know, Colorado [where Kim is based] is very homogenous [and] very White, and so . . . I have a lot of White dancers.

Casel offered a specific example of how collaborators' social identities can make discussions of the social justice issues explored in his work problematic. During the preparation

of his piece *Not About Race Dance*, Casel said that a discussion among the mixed-race group of dancers about White privilege became "oppression Olympics," with the White dancers drawing "false equivalencies" between their experiences of oppression and those of the dancers of color. The end result, as Casel claimed:

> This was the hardest piece I've ever made because . . . there was a lot of resistance from the White participants in terms of their White fragility and confronting their complicity in these issues that we were talking about. Even sharing stories was pretty difficult.

Because of those problems, in part, Casel decided to cast only people of color for later renditions of that dance piece.

***Cultivating Ethical Relationships with Collaborators***

Collaborators' social identities affecting choreographers' communication with them about social justice and other aspects of their SJA dance work was part of a larger desire by choreographers to form ethical relationships with collaborators. That desire often led choreographers to work with people they knew and trusted, which allowed them to further cultivate these relationships in ethical ways during the dance process. For example, Cloud saw working with people with whom she had a relationship as helping her to engage in open-minded, nondirective communication with them, and she questioned whether the lack of a relational foundation allowed collaborators to engage ethically:

> Part of it [SJA dance] for me is working with people that I love and trust, who also love and trust me, so that we can collectively try to make conditions that prioritize humanity . . . When you don't know and love people and trust them already, then, to me, there's a question of how, what kinds of experiences and processes and practices, and how much time [do you have to make conditions that prioritize humanity], and this is often

> complicated in terms of resources and capital. How much time does it take to really build trust?

Dance choreographers, however, often do collaborate with people with whom they do not have a prior relationship, in which case, interviewees said that they tried to build ethical relationships with them by allowing for sufficient time for a project, listening to them, seeking to benefit them in some way, and bringing awareness to the identities present in the creative process. Ramírez explained the importance of taking time to cultivate ethical relationships to avoid "parachuting," which occurs when choreographers come into communities, create dance work, and leave without following up, building relationships, and/or benefiting the community:

> It's [SJA dance] not easy work; it's emotionally draining [and] it's really time-consuming, which is another thing that I'm recognizing right now, with this new project I'm doing; that you need to give time. Working in the community is very anticapitalist and very much outside of our dominant culture, at least [in terms of] doing it ethically, generously, and humbly . . . It [SJA dance] really calls us to show up in a different way . . . It [preparing pieces] can't be all about competition, costuming, and venue, and all that is part of what we do as artists, but in my opinion, all that needs to always take a backseat to the ethical work [of] building relationships, to be with others [and] to give of yourself. That's where the real work is.

Choreographers cultivated ethical relationships with collaborators by sharing leadership with them, recognizing their contributions to the work, and acknowledging the social positions that people in the piece occupy. As Casel explained:

> If the message is coming from you [the choreographer], yourself, there has to be an agreement between the parties involved, between the choreographer and the dancers on

> how we're going to work this process out . . . I always say, "in collaboration with x, y, and z." Shared leadership [also is important, as] we all take responsibility for taking care of ourselves in rehearsal, and, once in a while, inviting [collaborators to lead by saying], "Hey, you lead the warm-up today," or "Hey, you lead a discussion, or, maybe, pick a reading, and then we make an improvisational score about that." That's one way. Another way is to just acknowledge everyone's social position, and for each person to self-identify. . . . All of those things have to be addressed intersectionality before we start working, because, then, the hierarchies are exposed, and we can work to create more horizontal rather than vertical ways of working together.

To avoid hierarchies and unfair power imbalances in the production process of his SJA dance pieces, Casel cultivates ethical relationships with collaborators by creating space for him and collaborators to reflect on their identities, which opens the door for shared leadership and ownership of pieces.

Cloud also saw sharing ownership of pieces with collaborators as cultivating ethical relationships, drawing attention to the importance of communication not only with collaborators but also about them. She discussed how the language of ownership creates an ethical, egalitarian production process:

> I really shifted language away from ownership, [such as] "my dancers" [and] "my students," particularly when it's related to hierarchy. It [a relationship between a choreographer and a collaborator] feels a little bit different if it's more . . . on an even playing field . . . [It's] different even to say "my choreography" . . . [than] "our choreography" or "my work inside of the choreography." Really changing language around ownership of people [is important].

### *Summary*

This section revealed communicative practices that choreographers engage in with collaborators as they develop their SJA dance pieces, with those practices contributing to the performance of SJA dance pieces. As the next section explains, choreographers also considered communication with audience members, both during and after SJA dance pieces were performed, to be important.

## Choreographers' Communication during and after Social Justice Activism Dance Performances

When sharing their dance pieces with audiences, choreographers engaged in multiple practices to communicate their social justice messages. In communicating with audience members, choreographers sought to balance sending clear messages with not giving too much away or making the message too heavy-handed. Some choreographers interviewed had clear intentions for what they hoped for or wanted audience members to know or do as a result of viewing their pieces, whereas others did not because they left those things up to audience members completely. As explained below, choreographers' communication with audience members included creating accessibility for diverse audiences; communicating through movement; supplementing movement communication with text-based elements, such as titles, program notes, and audio texts; communicating through non-movement design elements; and involving audience members in pieces.

### *Increasing Diverse Audiences' Accessibility to Social Justice Activism Dance Pieces*

Similar to how collaborators' identities mattered for choreographers' communication with them during the development of their SJA dance pieces, audience members' social identities also affected how choreographers communicated with them through the performances of their

work. One important concern that interviewees had was how they could make their SJA dance pieces accessible to diverse audiences.

Sigman said that choreographers making their SJA dance work accessible to diverse audiences involved asking themselves the following questions:

> Who's in your audience? What did they have to pay to be there? How did they get there? How can they get there? Is the space accessible, or are there people who are not gonna be able to come see your performance because perhaps they're in a wheelchair, or for other reasons because there's not audio description or because, you know, they're in some way, in some other way not given access to this work.

Thus, choreographers started by considering who had access to their dance performances and then made choices to increase people's access to their SJA dance work. Interviewees viewed increasing accessibility to their SJA dance work as an act of social justice.

One way that choreographers increased access to their work was by using digital platforms. For example, Haynes shared his work online because he wanted more people to have access to it, even though he recognized that the online experience of his work was different than seeing it in-person. As he explained:

> I usually try to share my work because the message is not, it doesn't stop onstage only, or the message is not only for the people who are able to show up to the performance, because that's privilege, and it's privileged for you to show up to the performance, to pay for a ticket. . . . I will share my work or share glimpses of my work so that the message is not only conveyed and conversations are not only started based upon a three-night run. . . . Sharing it, I'm, like, "Oh, you may not have had the live experience but you can still engage with this piece in some way and possibly have an experience."

Although most choreographers did not share their SJA dance pieces online, the COVID-19 pandemic had led many of those choreographers to consider using that medium. For instance, Laukkanen, who, typically, did not share her dance work online, acknowledged that digital platforms could expand its reach and, in light of the pandemic, said that she might use those platforms in the future:

> I guess sharing that work [online] also then expands who gets to see it [her pieces], maybe whose mind gets tickled with the idea of who can dance and where can dance happen. [Although] I haven't put [much of my work online], . . . I'm pushed to think more [about doing that] in the future, especially after this pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic also had influenced Sigman's use of online platforms to share her dance work, which had raised her awareness of the importance of people having access to her work. She described a public movement laboratory event, called "Motion Practice," that she held:

> We're in a time where not everyone can or feels comfortable gathering . . . live, but people are still wanting participation and connection. We had a version of the event that was happening in Riverside Park in New York City, and then we had a version of the event on Zoom that was hosted by some of the other dancers I work with who were facilitating the same score we were using. Then the two were connected via Zoom . . . In the past, I've been less inclined to [use online platforms] because I really value the experience of live performance and live interaction, and I've really wanted to remind people of the importance of that in a society that's becoming increasingly virtual, and the equity issues around it haven't felt as evident or as urgent before as they do right now.

The COVID-19 pandemic, thus, has had significant effects on interviewees' consideration of and attempts to make their SJA dance pieces accessible, especially to those who could not afford to attend live performances. Making their work accessible was an important social justice message itself, with, of course, as explained below, one of the most important ways that choreographers communicated social justice messages to audience members being the movements performed in their SJA dance pieces.

***Communicating through Dance Movement***

Movement communication starts between choreographers and dancers, and then extends to audiences. Sigman described how movement arises from interactions with dancers that occur during the development process of pieces:

> The movement comes out of the process of thinking about and dealing with these issues of being on certain land, of talking with people, of engaging with objects that have a history, of being on land that has a certain history, and the movement is whatever movement authentically comes out of that. It's not about representing justice, issues, people's emotion[s], or people's plight; it's about what movement genuinely arises from interacting with these people, this land, these materials, and how then [to] honor . . . and not fetishize those things.

During dance performances, movement, thus, communicated experiences that Sigman and her dancers encountered during the dance development process, and a new experience for audiences to encounter rather than a reconstruction or representation of (in)justice.

Other choreographers, however, did use dance movement more representationally. For example, in her piece *between black and white*, about "the Asian American experience in the

United States on a Black and White racial binary," Kim said that movement and movement qualities simulated and represented Asian Americans' experiences living in the United States:

> I wanted there to be really driving movement. I wanted it to be fast and . . . to feel kind of hectic, like you couldn't really stop to catch your breath, because . . . that's how it feels being a Korean American woman functioning in the United States: you're constantly on edge, feeling very anxious, especially now due to [the] corona[virus].

Whether interviewees used movement to communicate and create experiences and/or to represent and convey ideas and narratives, they said that they attempted to have their dance pieces communicate their social justice messages clearly but not too obviously and/nor heavy-handedly. Mora explained the importance of dance pieces communicating their messages clearly to audience members

> Everything is about communication, whether we like it or not. I'm gonna to tell you the most profound thing, ready? [Mora paused and gestured with his hands, as if presenting something] Now I said it; I said it inside of me, right? It could have been such a profound thing, but if I don't really say it to you, you don't know. Watching a dance, we're saying things, and if you don't say it clear enough, they [audience members] don't know.

Although interviewees wanted their SJA dance pieces to convey clear messages to audiences, they did not want that communication to be heavy-handed. As Brandle explained:

> Everything that goes into the show has a layering aspect to it, and [that] quality fleshes out the ideas in a way that feels like art more than just, "Hey, we're gonna hit you over the head with these ideas."

Brandle and many other interviewees, thus, used dance movement to communicate to audiences clear but not heavy-handed social justice messages. One important way that choreographers tried

to achieve that goal, as explained below, was by using texts that helped communicate choreographers' social justice messages.

***Communicating via Texts***

Texts that choreographers used to communicate with audiences included audio texts that were used as sound scores, such as audiorecorded poems and narratives, titles, and program notes. Audio texts often were paired with and supported rather than replaced dance movement. Wilkins explained his rationale for combining dance movements and texts to communicate his dance pieces' messages:

> Words have power, and words become another tool of choreography for making, but I don't use words . . . in place of the choreography. I'm looking at that greater landscape to see how those things relate to each other. Most certainly, there are things that the body is meant to do that cannot be put into words, [and] there are things that words can do that . . . translation through the body does not always [express] clearly.

Wilkins offered an example using texts and movements together in his SJA dance piece *A Bon Coeur: Pages from a Journal*, which explored place and cultural identity:

> To see the choreography and hear the text and harmony, you get the full picture of what I'm reflecting on and what I'm wanting you to take away from that experience, and the sentimentality, in terms of my connection to growing up in Louisiana and [how] my childhood memories of it . . . are carried with me . . . today [and] have shaped me in my adult life. Without the text, you would have, potentially, a lovely dance that is dynamic in its quality but does not necessarily locate you [in relation] to the specific references I make. It [the piece's messages] becomes more open-ended for interpretation. . . . What

> the choreography added was this personal sense of vulnerability, openness, invitation, and intimacy by me. . . . allow[ing] you to feel that I was sharing my story with you.

In using audio texts, choreographers, again, did not want to be too heavy-handed. As Sigman explained:

> [Using texts in dance pieces] hits on a real tension that I think a lot of people experience, in terms of wanting to make work that's about stuff that's pressing and urgent, . . . [but] I don't want to necessarily use language in a way that tells people what to think, and, sometimes, language can pin things down in a work in a way that [is] too didactic. At the same time, I've been really aware of how, if I let the work be too open and too abstract, people won't have what they need to be able to connect the work to the issues, and a lot of these issues are really complex. . . . [The question, then, is] how can we use words, . . . language, . . . [and] dialogue as anchor[s] and still carve out space for the movement to be as abstract as it needs to be to have its full resonance and openness?

In addition to audio texts, a few choreographers provided audience members with program notes. Program notes were used less frequently than were audio texts because interviewees saw notes, potentially, as being heavy-handed. Southall articulated this danger in explaining why he does not use program notes:

> I've done other venues and stuff with other choreographers, collectives, and then I see these choreography notes, and I always . . . [see them as] telling the audience what to feel, . . . think, . . . and see. I want you to see my work and feel what you feel. Whether you like [a] movie or [a] play, . . . you have your reasons, [which] I respect, because you're the audience-goer, [and] you chose the time out of your day to come see my work.

> I [thus] want you to enjoy it as it comes to you, rather than me telling you, "Well, this piece is about this." . . . I want you to get that on your own.

Occasionally, however, choreographers who did not typically use program notes provided them to audience members. For instance, Haynes explained how he used program notes to frame sections of his SJA dance piece *Right to Remain*, which was about identity and the assertion of disenfranchised identities, to help audience members create associations among words, movement, and other elements of the piece:

> That was the only time I really used program notes. . . . Because my thesis concert was so abstract, . . . I used [notes] as a way to invite people in or allow them to think of those certain sections [of the piece] in [a particular] way. You see [a] word and . . . look at the piece; [program notes explain] how . . . that word . . . appl[ies] to the piece.

Finally, interviewees said that they carefully considered the titles of their SJA dance pieces, because of the important message that they send. As Haynes explained:

> The title [of his dance piece] *Right to Remain* is a statement. It's a statement [that] I found journaling. I chose it as a title because it was a statement that people within these groups that are disenfranchised [and] oppressed . . . can [use to] state their claim [of their] "right to remain." . . . So, *Right to Remain*, just by the title, is a statement owning one's identity [and] uniqueness. . . . In terms of racial injustice, it is a statement of, "I have a right to remain alive." . . . *Right to Remain* is also . . . centered around this idea of identity in a larger scope, and the ways in which society and societal expectations can suppress identity; how, sometimes, as disenfranchised, marginalized groups, we are put into . . . or we keep ourselves in a small box to appeal to . . . the White masses or the non-

> Black or non-BIPOC [Black, Indigenous, and people of color] masses as well. That's also what the piece is based upon.

Interviewees, thus, saw titles as encapsulating for audience members the social justice orientation of choreographers' SJA dance pieces.

***Communicating through Non-movement Elements***

Choreographers also use other, non-movement, elements to communicate to audience members various aspects of their SJA dance pieces. In particular, interviewees said that they used sound scores, props, and setting/staging.

Closely related to audio texts, interviewees said that sound scores helped choreographers to contextualize and, sometimes, create movements for and meanings of their pieces. For example, Wilson said that she used music to communicate emotion:

> [For] most of my pieces, I like to choose music that emotes or has some kind of emotion attached to it, [as] people connect with [that] music in a way. . . . With my choreography, the idea is to kind of portray that we have these emotions and [that] these dancers are showing the same emotions in all these different ways.

Some sound scores that choreographers used were rather unique. For example, in addition to employing audio text, Ben Coleman, the sound artist with whom Speer collaborated on *White Lies*, which explored themes of surveillance and privilege, incorporated white noise into the sound score to communicate about whiteness.

Props also were used by choreographers to create meanings about and to contextualize dance movements performed in their SJA dance piece. For example, Sigman explained her use of weeds in *Weed Heart* to communicate about social justice issue with audience members:

> There are a lot of social justice issues that kind of meet in these plants, so I use them to raise those issues through performance, . . . workshops, . . . conversation, . . . serving tea, and to talk to people about, basically, the ways that . . . the language around these plants . . . parallel[s] the language around immigration and immigrants. . . . I used the plants to open up discussions about colonialism and . . . colonial occupation of this land, . . . so there are many different connections to different forms of racial and social oppression that these plants reveal, . . . [the plants also] reveal a lot of things about the climate.

Some interviewees, however, did not use props because they perceived them as being distracting. Kim, for instance, acknowledged that props can be useful, but said:

> I was never really a big fan of props because . . . [they seemed to be] a cop-out. I truly want to utilize dance to . . . create . . . atmosphere, . . . draw out an emotion, or get the audience members to think, and I think the audience needs that because, sometimes, when there's a backdrop or props, . . . we are spoon-feeding them. The goal of my work, whether or [because] it's mostly social justice oriented, is for audience [members] to get the gears working. I want them to think about what this piece is and why they're responding in the way that they are, . . . so I don't like to use props. [However,] if the work calls for [props], and there is a good [answer] to the question, "Why are we using [them]?" [they're] definitely . . . valid to use . . . to get your message across.

Kim's views of the use props, thus, reinforced the fine line that choreographers walk between their SJA dance pieces communicating clear but not heavy-handed messages to audience members.

Finally, interviewees identified staging, or settings, of SJA dance pieces as an important form of communication with audience members. Mason, for instance, explained the importance

of lighting, saying, "If I'm thinking about [a person's sense of] isolation, . . . I could use a light to . . . [suggest that this] person is by themselves."

Interviewees also talked about how dancers' proximity to audience members was an important form of communication. Wilson, for instance, explained how her piece *Sail* used dancers' proximity to the audience to communicate:

> We performed in a black box studio, and it was a really . . . small audience, and we were really close to the audience. . . . I was trying to portray this message that's kind of loud, and [dancers being close to the audience] kind of influenced it a little bit, just because . . . you're right there and you can be really close to the audience.

Wilson also talked about how dancers' close physical proximity increased audience members' attention and involvement in the piece. As the next section explains, many interviewees talked about how they sought to involve audience members in their SJA dance pieces, including via active participation.

***Audience Members' Participation in Social Justice Activism Dance Pieces***

Many interviewees talked about creating opportunities for audience members to participate before, during, and after their SJA dance pieces were performed. Casel, for instance, talked about his plan to have future renditions of his piece *Not About Race Dance* engage audience members in long-table discussions prior to the performance, to give them reference points for understanding the work:

> In proposing the piece, this long-table discussion, called "Dancing Around Race," precedes it. We [will] have a . . . community reader that people [will be] encouraged to read before they arrive, and then the day before [the] show, [we will hold] a Dancing Around Race long-table discussion for the community [and] any audience member, [and]

> they can bring friends, . . . critics, [and] anyone can come. . . . The performance then has a frame that people can already understand and unpack, [as] they [will have] talk[ed] about their social position and racial identity, the day before they come to see the work.

Some interviewees also said that they created opportunities for audience members to participate during performances. For instance, Speer explained how, during the performance *White Lies*, she had audience members participate in an experience that helped them to understand the issues of surveillance and privilege that her piece explored:

> I hacked into everyone's phone and set it on self-recording of a video, and then I put the phone one slot over, so your phone was recording your neighbor, who you may or may not know. So, . . . when people walked away, someone took your image with them and had control over your image, and could do whatever they want[ed with it]. [For] some people, that [was] fine, [but] other people [did not] want to be filmed or photographed, [and they] lost that power or that privilege of [owning their] image.

Interviewees believed that audience members' embodied participation during SJA dance performances helped them to engage in subsequent social justice activism. As Sigman explained:

> I often serve food or tea [during performances of] my work, so that people are more guests than consumers, and . . . have a very embodied experience. It's not just, "I'm sitting here watching this thing"; it's, "I'm having soup with these people, and we're talking and I'm thinking," and they're dancing. . . . That kind of lived experience . . . is what helps people to move into action, and it doesn't necessarily catalyze huge action but we need to think about action really incrementally, so that people can get unstuck . . . Getting people engaged in any way in anything . . . get[s] them out of their apathy and their cynicism about many of these [social justice] issues.

Sigman also engaged audience members in embodied, participatory experiences, which she weaved into the performance of her SJA dance pieces. As an example, she described how, as part of her piece *Weed Heart*, she had audience members participate in an experience that raised their awareness of historical injustices that had occurred at the location in which the piece had been performed, land that she described as "part of what used to be the African Burial Ground of colonial New York":

> My goal was to ask them [audience members] to think about that [the colonial history of Gibney] and to think about what their relation to that was and what it meant for their current uses of that space and of that land. At the end of the piece, we actually went out [of] the space, and I led them down the block to a tree that [was] growing in a parking lot down the block, and we watered the tree. [It was] a weed tree, a paulownia tree. I was wearing a leaf from that tree over my face for most of the performance, and . . . [standing next to that tree] you realize the roots of that tree go down into the ground . . . where people are buried, and that tree [was] our connection with that time and these . . . 20,000 people [whose remains are buried] below that part of New York City.

Sigman's creative approach to involving audience members in the performances of her work was more the exception than the rule. The most common practice that interviewees said that they employed to create opportunities for audience participation was inviting their audience members to participate after performances through talk back sessions. The next section discusses that and other practices that choreographers used to obtain audience members' feedback about their SJA dance pieces.

## Choreographers' Communication to Obtain Feedback about their Social Justice Activism Dance Pieces

Choreographers varied in the degree to which they wanted to hear audience members' feedback about their SJA dance pieces, with some interviewees claiming that they did not care what audience members thought of their pieces, whereas others cared a great deal. For those choreographers who sought feedback, as explained in the first section below, the most common practices that they employed was holding talkback sessions with audience members after performances concluded. Additionally, as explained in the second section below, they also used some other practices to obtain feedback.

### *Talkback Sessions*

For many interviewees, holding talkback sessions after performances concluded was an integral component of their SJA dance work. Talkback sessions, according to interviewees, served at least two important purposes. First, talkback sessions provided choreographers with the opportunity to obtain valuable information about their dance pieces, including whether and how well pieces communicated what they and their dancers had worked on during the development and rehearsal processes. Wilkins, for instance, said that his work successfully communicated what was intended when, during talkback sessions, "I [am] hearing the same things that I actually use[d] to make my work."

The talkback sessions that Ramírez held as part of her piece *transfronteriza*, a cultural organizing project involving several communities that sought to give borderland women a space to create and share stories, also aligned with what she and her collaborators talked about during the piece's development. Moreover, because some of the audience members had participated in the development of the piece (e.g., attending workshops), Ramírez said that she could evaluate

whether her piece communicated successfully by hearing audience members' comments, such as "Oh, my gosh, I heard my voice, and that was so, you know, fun or so interesting"; and "Oh, I recognize that movement that we did in the workshop."

Second, interviewees said that talkback sessions offered audience members the opportunity to participate in the process of developing and refining pieces, as well as digest, ask questions about, and discuss what they had seen with other audience members and with the choreographer of and the dancers who performed the work. As Kim explained:

> I like to do talkbacks because it gives the audience [members] a chance to metabolize what they saw and be able to form it [their experiences] into words, ask questions, and be curious in ways that the people involved in the creative process can kind of fill in those blanks for them.

Of particular relevance, choreographers perceived talkback sessions as helping audience members to understand more fully social justice aspects of their dance pieces, which interviewees said, audience members often did not glean during performances. Moreover, as Kim explained, choreographers could use talkback sessions to increase audience members' awareness of their social justice positions:

> The one thing that I do keep in mind with viewers is how I [can] get them to question their position on sociopolitical . . . or social justice issues. I want them to be reflective of themselves after watching or during the viewing [of my SJA dance pieces].

Although interviewees valued talkbacks for increasing audience members' understanding of their SJA pieces, they also talked about not over-explaining their work. Mora, for instance, loves doing talkbacks and sharing about his choreographic processes, because, as he said, "once

people see how I think and how I create, and then watch the pieces, . . . it does benefit people to hear how intensely I do think about things." However, as Mora also claimed:

> Sometimes, some people don't care enough about process necessarily to want to go down that road, and . . . you don't wanna give too much [away]. If you give too much [information about pieces], it's kind of like a song . . . where I mess up the words, and it means something to me, and then once I learn what the real words are, I'm, like, "Damn."

Mora and other choreographers, thus, tried during talkback sessions to provide audience members with some, but not too much or too little, information/explanation of their work.

Although talkback sessions commonly were held, some choreographers did not employ them because they did not want to influence audience members' views of the work. Southall, for instance, tended not to hold talkbacks because, as he explained:

> I want the audience [members] to get their own opinion of the piece. . . . I want [people] to see it [my work], experience it, and find [their] own conclusion[s]. I'm always open to questions, if ask[ed], but I prefer people getting their own idea from it [one of his pieces].

Speer, however, argued that choreographers discussing their work during talkback sessions did not undermine audience members' meaning-making agency. As she claimed, when I "talk about [a piece] with them [audience members] and see what they perceived, they're the ones making the meaning; I'm not imposing it on them.

Most choreographers interviewed held talkback sessions because of their perceived benefits, described above, for choreographers, dancers, and audience members. They also, as explained below, engaged in some other practices to obtain audience members' feedback about their SJA dance pieces.

***Other Ways that Choreographers Obtained Feedback about their SJA Dance Pieces***

In addition to holding talkback sessions, other practices that interviewees said they employed to acquire audience members' feedback about their SJA dance pieces included watching how audience members behaved during and after performances, and, after performances concluded, engaging in informal conversations with them, observing whether audience members engaged in actions that their pieces recommended, and having them complete questionnaires. Additionally, choreographers sought feedback from their dancers.

Choreographers often watched audience members' reactions during and immediately following performances, with Wilson, saying, "During [a] piece, I like to watch . . . audience [members] and their attention, and see how much it's grabbing them." Wilson also noted that "after a piece, . . . sometimes, there's . . . that moment of silence where everybody's kind of hesita[nt], [which is] really meaningful, too." Casel said that he viewed audience members' silence immediately after a performance ended, in some cases, as indicating that his piece had not communicated what he intended and, therefore, needed revision:

> I can read the silence as a reflection of discomfort, like [a] passive bystander [who says,] "Oh, I see it, but I'm not gonna say anything." The silence after the piece [*Not About Race Dance*] was premiered or previewed reminded me of the same kind of safe, bystander performance.

Casel used the feedback that audience members' silence communicated to develop his Dancing Around Race long-table discussions, discussed previously, to communicate more effectively with audience members about his SJA dance pieces.

Other responses by audience members also helped choreographers to understand the effects of their work. Wilkins, for instance, said:

> [When] you can see audiences leaning in or leaning in with care, . . .feel a palpable need of them wanting to come and be supportive or walk with you, or you see them crying and reflecting on stories, those things are ways in which I'm able to sense that there is a connection that's being established [with his pieces and their messages].

Choreographers also engaged in informal conversations with audience members after performances to obtain their feedback about their work. Mason said that those conversations were especially helpful for understanding how and whether audience members experienced her work in ways that she intended:

> I don't tend to expect [that,] at the end of any piece, . . . they [audience members] got exactly what I was going for; instead, what I do is try to create an experience, . . . listen to what people's experiences were, [and] then decide whether or not [they reflect what I intended]. [For instance,] if somebody's like, "I was depressed the entire time," I might go, "Hmm, well I wasn't really going for that."

Interviewees also said that actions in which audience members engaged, especially, those that SJA dance pieces encouraged, was a form of feedback about the success/effectiveness of their work. Sigman offered a concrete example:

> For this one [piece] we did last year, we did this laboratory where we had speaking, discussion, and movements, and we even got the audience to move, and then it was accompanied by [what] is called an "accompaniment training" . . . to train them to accompany [U.S.] asylum seekers to court and to ICE [U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement] check-ins. We [trained] 100 or 120 new people, [which was] amazing. There [also] were actually a lot of people who went and volunteered for New Sanctuary Coalition after the performance lab.

Some interviewees also said that they obtained valuable feedback from audience members who completed questionnaires after performances ended. Laukkanen described how elated she was from audience members' comments on the questionnaires she asked them to complete after viewing her piece *And Then There Was Silence:*

> I did a survey [questionnaire] after each [performance]. . .[and] there was a lot of, "Oh, wow, yeah, I could see myself dancing, and I would like to be involved, and that looks so much fun, and oh, my gosh, you guys were so amazing." That happens often.

Finally, in addition to seeking feedback from audience members, choreographers also sought dancers' feedback. For example, Laukkanen described how she understood the impact of *And Then There Was Silence* from communicating with one of the dancers:

> One of the new people, Kevin, after this first performance, sat down, and . . . [said], "I wanted to thank you, because I never thought I could do something like this. I would never [have] thought I was able physically to do something." It [performing the piece] truly changed his outlook in life and gave him motivation. . . . He was actually teary-eyed, and [the experience] truly impacted his identity and who he thought he was, and he was so proud of himself [and] what he accomplished.

## Conclusion

This chapter explicated how the choreographers interviewed conceptualized and characterized "SJA dance," as well as their communication with collaborators and with audience members during the development and performance of their SJA dance pieces, and after performances concluded. Chapter 5, the final chapter, discusses the implications of these findings for scholars who study and for professionals who choreograph SJA dance.

# CHAPTER 5

# DISCUSSION

This study interviewed professional choreographers to ascertain how they conceptualize and communicate with collaborators and audience members about their social justice activism (SJA) dance pieces. As the findings revealed, although interviewees had difficulty defining "SJA dance," and a few did not distinguish it from other forms of dance because they considered all dance to be related to social justice, they did perceive some important characteristics to be associated with SJA dance pieces, including pieces' subject matter being about social justice issues/problems, choreographers engaging in socially just processes and practices to develop pieces, dance performers being from/representing populations/communities that are or were experiencing injustice, and choreographers' promotion of social justice through their dance work being a way of life and reflecting their lives. Interviewees also shed light on choreographers' communication (especially about social justice): (a) with collaborators (e.g., dancers) during the process of developing pieces (e.g., communicating in a nondirective way and with an open mind to collaboratively and collectively create/develop pieces' social justice foci, messages, and dance movements; deciding whether, when, and how explicitly social justice aspects of their pieces were discussed; and communicating in ways that cultivated ethical relationships with collaborators); (b) with audience members during performances of their SJA dance pieces (e.g., by creating access for diverse audiences, through choreographed dance movements and non-movement design elements, texts that accompanied pieces, and by having audience members participate in pieces); and (c) with audience members (and dancers and other collaborators) after performances ended to obtain feedback about their SJA dance pieces (e.g., the degree to which pieces' social justice messages were communicated effectively).

This chapter discusses the significance of these findings for the scholarly study of communication and social justice dance, and for the professional practice of choreographing SJA dance pieces. The chapter starts by discussing the contributions that the findings from this study make to scholarship about SJA dance. I then use the study's findings to offer choreographers considerations/recommendations for creating and developing SJA dance pieces, having them performed, and for acquiring feedback about them after they are performed. I then discuss the findings in light of potential limitations that characterized this study and suggest directions for future research about communication and SJA dance.

## Contributions of the Study to Scholarship

This study adds to the body of scholarly knowledge about social justice, SJA dance, and communication. Specifically, the findings of this study provide support for what researchers have found and, in some cases, offer new and valuable knowledge.

Some of the study's findings align with and provide support for what other scholarship has found. For instance, in line with many scholars' contention that "social justice" is an ambiguous, contested term that has no agreed-on meaning/definition (see, e.g., Hayak, 1976; Jancauskas, 1959; Miller, 1999; Munger et al. 2016; O'Boyle, 2011), there was no consensus among the choreographers interviewed in this study about the meaning/definition of that term, in general, or as applied to dance. Although scholars have documented the historical use of dance to engage in social justice advocacy/activism (see, e.g., Foulkes, 2002; Gottschild, 2008; Jackson and Phim, 2008a; E. Martin, 2017; Prickett, 2013; Roberts, 2013; Sherrod, 1998), SJA dance is not necessarily considered to be a genre of dance, such as jazz or street dance, because, as some interviewees claimed, all dance is political and related in some way to social justice, in line with Philipps-Fein's (2007) argument that all dance either supports and/or challenges the status quo.

Despite the lack of agreement among interviewees regarding the meaning of social justice and SJA dance, and whether that constituted a specific genre of dance, they did identify (even those who viewed all dance as being related to social justice) some characteristics that they associated with dances pieces that focused more overtly, compared to others, on social justice. One of those characteristics was pieces focusing on social justice issues, which is no surprise, and which appears to be the primary characteristic that scholars have used to select the SJA dance pieces that they have studied.

Interviewees, however, also identified some characteristics that choreographers associate with SJA dances that other research has not highlighted or highlighted enough. In particular, interviewees discussed the importance of social justice informing SJA dance choreographers' work processes and practices, including the hiring of dancers, and as being a way of life for choreographers and/or reflecting their life experiences.

Similarly, some of the findings of this study about SJA dance choreographers' communication with collaborators and with audience members provide additional support for what scholars have found, with some findings being new knowledge about choreographers' communicative practices. Although there has been a dearth of communication scholarship about SJA dance, research conducted by scholars in other disciplines has revealed some practices engaged in by choreographers that advance their social justice dance work, such as interacting dialogically with their collaborators (Atlas, 2005; Kloetzel, 2019; Wilson & Moffet, 2017), employing community-based methods that communicate social justice messages to collaborators and audiences for further spread (Atlas, 2005; Gerry, 2018), constructing virtual platforms that invite audience members to use dance as a social justice tool (Bhatia, 2019; Gerry, 2018), participating in intercultural collaborations that incorporate diverse perspectives to address social

justice issues (Burnard et al., 2018), fostering inclusive and accessible work environments for collaborators and audience members (Kloetzel, 2019), performing their pieces in politically charged spaces (Kloetzel, 2019), engaging in egalitarian communication and organizing with collaborators (Bhatia, 2019), and anchoring pieces for audience members via reference points that they understand (Bhatia, 2019). Additionally, although practices that hinder dance choreographers' social justice aims have received less attention, compared to positive practices, some of those practices that research has revealed include hierarchical communication (Zervou, 2019), othering of collaborators from disenfranchised populations/communities (Zervou, 2019), working with collaborators who are not well suited to and/nor interested in community dance work (Atlas, 2005), and communicating ineffectively with audience members (Kloetzel, 2019).

The practices engaged in by SJA dance choreographers that this study found promoted social justice included open-minded, nondirective communication with collaborators, discussing social justice explicitly with collaborators and/or dancing around social justice topics, cultivating ethical relationships with collaborators, increasing the accessibility of their work for diverse audiences, communicating social justice messages through dance movements and non-movement design elements, constructing texts to accompany performances, involving audience members in pieces, holding talkback sessions, and engaging in other practices to obtain feedback from audience members and collaborators. Some of these practices are consistent with what other researchers have found, but some that were found flesh out/add complexity to what has been found and/or are practices that have not been reported previously. For example, the open-minded, nondirective communication that choreographers engaged in with collaborators to collaboratively create/develop their SJA pieces identified how, specifically, choreographers communicate to create egalitarian relationships with collaborators (Bhatia, 2019). Identifying

and explicating those and other practices adds depth and/or breadth to the body of scholarly knowledge about SJA dance choreographers' communicative practices.

The study also found problematic practices that SJA dance choreographers tried to avoid and tensions they navigated in their work. In line with what research has found, interviewees viewed miscommunication with audiences (Kloetzel, 2019), disagreement with collaborators (Atlas, 2005), othering (Zervou, 2019), and hierarchical communication (Zervou, 2019) as being problematic. The findings also, again, fleshed out some problematic practices that researchers have found, such as the many meanings that interviewees had regarding hierarchical communication, which ranged from demonstrating movement for dancers and having them repeat it, to telling dancers how to move their bodies, to abusive interaction that leads to trauma. The study also found problematic practices that have not been identified previously, such as the contrasting social identities of choreographers and collaborators making their interactions difficult, as well as ways that choreographers sought to ameliorate that problem, such as by working with others who had similar views and/or identities and by organizing community discussions.

In addition to problematic practices that choreographers tried to avoid engaging in, the study identified some significant tensions that they navigated in their SJA dance work. For instance, some choreographers took more directorial roles than did others, but none of them wanted to be hierarchical or rigid in their thinking. Engaging in open-minded communication with collaborators to collaboratively create, for instance, social justice dance movements, helped choreographers to avoid being rigid about their work and creating hierarchical relations with their collaborators, even if they, as choreographers, held more power in the creative process.

A particularly intriguing tension identified was choreographers' debate about whether, when, and the extent to which they explicitly talked about vs. danced around discussing social justice with their collaborators. That choice revolved around choreographers' views regarding the positive vs. negative effects of those discussions on collaborators. For instance, discussing social justice aspects of the work could help dancers to understand and express choreographers' intent effectively, but it also could lead to dance movements that were contrived and acted out. Importantly, both discussing social justice explicitly and dancing around such discussions could aid choreographers' SJA dance work, a finding that stands in contrast to, or, at least, adds texture to, research that has claimed it always is beneficial for SJA dance choreographers to "dialogue" about social justice with their collaborators (e.g., Atlas, 2005; Kloetzel, 2019; Wilson & Moffet, 2017).

Finally, the findings of this study also reflect, expand, and/or offer new knowledge about SJA choreographers' communication with audience members who see their SJA work. For example, the findings support research about how choreographers use virtual platforms (Bhatia, 2019; Gerry, 2018) not only to communicate their pieces' social justice messages but to increase access by diverse audience members. The findings also showed that choreographers often had their pieces performed in politically charged spaces (Kloetzel, 2019), but the study additionally identified how they used those spaces to raise audience members' awareness of injustices that had occurred in those spaces. Finally, the study identified both known and new communicative practices that choreographers engaged in to convey social justice messages in their dance pieces, including movement communication and non-movement design elements, supplementing dance movement with texts, and involving audience members in pieces.

The findings from this study, thus, validated what research has found, expanded those findings, and/or contributed new knowledge to understanding communication and SJA dance (in this case, with regard to choreographers' communication with collaborators and with audience members). Table 4 summarizes the contributions of this study by comparing the findings from this study and from other studies about SJA dance practices.

**Table 4**

*Findings from this and Other Studies about Social Justice Activism Dance Choreographers' Practices*

| **Practices Found in This Study** | **Practices Found in Other Studies** |
|---|---|
| - Engaging in open-minded, nondirective communication with collaborators<br>- Discussing social justice with collaborators vs. "dancing around social justice"<br>- Cultivating ethical relationships with collaborators<br>- Increasing diverse audience members' access to dance pieces<br>- Communicating social justice through dancers' movement<br>- Supplementing movement communication with texts<br>- Communicating through non-movement design elements (e.g., props)<br>- Involving audience members in performances<br>- Holding Talkback sessions with audience members after performances conclude<br>- Employing other methods to acquire feedback from audience members and collaborators (e.g., engaging in informal conversations, observing reactions during performances, and using survey questionnaires) | - Dialoguing with collaborators and audience members (Atlas, 2005; Kloetzel, 2019; Wilson & Moffet, 2017)<br>- Using community-based methods to communicate about pieces' social justice messages with collaborators and audience members (for further spread; Atlas, 2005; Gerry, 2018)<br>- Creating virtual platforms that invite audience members to use dance to promote social justice (Bhatia, 2019; Gerry, 2018)<br>- Participating in intercultural collaborations that incorporate diverse perspectives to address social justice issues (Burnard et al., 2018)<br>- Facilitating inclusive and accessible conditions/environments for collaborators and audience members (Kloetzel, 2019)<br>- Performing work in politically charged spaces (Kloetzel, 2019)<br>- Engaging in egalitarian communication and organizing with collaborators (Bhatia, 2019)<br>- Anchoring pieces for audience members through reference points they understand (Bhatia, 2019) |
| | |

## Contribution of the Study to Choreographers' Social Justice Activism Dance Work

In addition to the findings contributing to scholarship, they also can aid choreographers' SJA dance work. To apply the findings, this section proposes a set of categories and questions for choreographers to consider as they conceptualize, develop, perform and seek feedback from audience members and others about their SJA dance pieces. The questions can help choreographers to add a social justice lens to pieces that previously did not have that focus and/or it can increase the breadth and depth of their SJA dance work. The questions were developed from connections that choreographers interviewed in this study made between social justice activism and dance; communicative practices that they employed when developing, presenting, and collecting feedback about their work; and tensions and problematic practices that they sought to avoid or repair in their SJA dance work.

The set of questions function in the same way as other approaches to creating, developing, and evaluating SJA artwork, such as the Aesthetic Perspectives: Attributes of Excellence in Arts for Change framework, which was developed to "enhance understanding and evaluation of creative work at the intersection of arts and civic engagement, community development, and justice" (Animating Democracy, n.d.-b, para. 1). That framework emerged from the Evaluation Learning Lab, led by Animating Democracy at Americans for the Arts, in partnership with the Nathan Cummings Foundation and the Arts × Culture × Social Justice Network, which brought together artists and allied funders and evaluators to "promote evaluation that embodies values and practices congruent with arts and social justice work—equity, inclusion, understanding context, and the role of arts and culture" (Animating Democracy, n.d.-a, para. 1). The Aesthetic Perspectives framework identifies 11 attributes—disruption, commitment, communal meaning, cultural integrity, risk taking, emotional experience, sensory

experience, openness, coherence, resourcefulness, and stickiness—"of excellence defined by artists that can be observed in socially engaged work in all artistic disciplines. These attributes address the potency of creative expression to embody and motivate change" (Animating Democracy, n.d.-b, para. 1).

All of those attributes could be applied to the SJA dance pieces of the choreographers interviewed in this study; however, my set of questions framework is specific to dance and addresses communicative practices that other frameworks, such as the Aesthetic Perspectives framework, do not necessarily consider. Table 5 explicates the categories and questions for choreographers to consider as they conceptualize and develop their SJA dance pieces, have them performed, and, after being performed, seek feedback from audience members and others after performances of their work.

**Table 5**

*Questions for Choreographers to Consider in Conceptualizing, Developing, Performing, and Obtaining Feedback about their Social Justice Activism Dance Pieces*

---

**Conceptualizing Social Justice Activism Dance Pieces**

- What is the social context in which this dance piece is taking place?
    - How does the piece respond to that context?
        - Does the piece reflect, uphold, challenge, and/or reimagine it?
- What resources are going into the making of this piece?
    - Is the material used to design the piece sustainable?
    - Where is the piece being performed, and what are the implications, if any, of performing there?
    - Do people have to pay to see the piece? Who can and cannot afford the price?
- What is the piece about in terms of subject matter?
    - Whose ideas is the piece representing?
    - Is the subject matter of the piece connected to sociopolitical issues and, if so, how?
    - What are my goals for making this piece?
        - For myself, for collaborators, for audience members, and/or for society?

- What processes will I use to develop this piece?
    - How might I engage in social justice processes in making this piece?
    - What, if any, social justice practices can I weave into creating and performing this piece?
    - How might those processes help me to achieve my goals?
- Who is involved in this piece?
    - Who am I to make this piece?
    - Whose voices are present in the piece and whose voices are absent?
    - Who does this piece benefit?
    - Who does what in the piece? What are the implications of those roles in conversation with the intersectional identities of individuals who enact them?
- How does this piece abide by and/or challenge my values?
    - What actions might I take before and after creating and presenting this piece to achieve social justice?
    - If my piece is social justice oriented, what, if anything, in my life supports and what, if anything, contradicts the social justice activism I am promoting through the piece?

**Developing Social Justice Activism Dance Pieces**

- How do I want to communicate with collaborators for this piece?
    - How open do I want to be to collaborators' ideas about the piece?
    - How much do I want to control the choreography process?
        - Do I prefer to direct the process, share leadership with collaborators, and/or put more onus on collaborators to create movements and other elements of the piece?
    - What communication is most effective for the people I am working with on the piece with and for the process in which we are engaged to develop it?
        - Egalitarian, nondirective, conversational, instructional, and/or didactic?
    - What do I see as my role(s)?
        - Director, curator, facilitator, co-creator, etc.?
        - How does my view of my role influence how I communicate with collaborators?
    - What are the implications associated with the styles of communication and leadership I am engaging in with collaborators?
        - Who has what power?
        - How equally is power distributed?
        - Who benefits from that power distribution?
- What do I want collaborators to know about this piece?
    - How transparent do I want to be about my intentions for this piece?
    - If the subject matter has to do with social justice, how much do I want to discuss social justice with collaborators?
    - If I discuss social justice with collaborators, what might I need to do to prepare for that discussion?
        - What is my position on the social justice issue(s) the piece addresses?
        - How might I respond to collaborators who disagree with my social justice views/positions?

        - How much am I willing to change my views of the piece in light of what I discover through conversations with collaborators about the social justice elements of the piece?
        - What would be ideal times and spaces in which to engage in those discussions?
    - How might discussing social justice shape the dance movement of this piece?
        - Might those discussions cause dancers to act out the social justice issues? Might it add meaning to movement? Might it add to collaborators' narratives about the piece?
    - How might not discussing social justice with collaborators shape the movement of this piece?
        - Might not discussing social justice give collaborators more freedom to interpret movement and to develop their character? Might it compromise the goals of the piece? Might it allow dancers to experience the process of creating the piece more authentically?
    - How do I want movement to represent the social justice issues that the piece addresses?
        - What analogies might I employ to achieve the movement and movement qualities I envision for the piece?
        - What other methods might I use to abstract and/or mimic social justice activism situations through movement?
- What relationships do I want to cultivate with collaborators?
    - How am I recruiting collaborators?
        - Are my recruitment practices inclusive, humanizing, and in line with my goals for this piece?
    - Am I prioritizing collaborators' humanity?
    - What can I do to ensure that collaborators are safe, brave, and see me as respecting them?
        - How do I show and encourage others to show my collaborators respect, especially if my collaborators are from cultures and/or communities to which I do not belong?
    - How much time am I spending attending and responding to collaborators' needs and desires?
        - How do I balance collaborators' needs and desires with what I see as the demands of this piece?
            - What does this piece demand? What resources are available to me to meet those demands?
        - How do I balance collaborators' needs and experience levels with my vision for the piece?
            - How much of what I intend am I willing to let go of?
    - How do I treat collaborators?
    - How do collaborators treat me?
    - How do collaborators treat one another?
    - Am I asking collaborators to do anything that I would not do myself?
    - How are collaborators benefitting me?

    - How am I benefitting collaborators? Am I compensating them sufficiently for their efforts?
    - How do I speak with others about my collaborators?
        - Do I use ownership language, such as "my dancers" or "my musicians"?
        - Do I recognize collaborators' efforts explicitly and, if so, how?
            - Do I share credit for this work with them and, if so, how?
        - What ramifications might the language that I use to talk about my collaborators have for our relationships and for this piece?
- How, if at all, am I taking care of myself throughout this process of developing the piece?

**Performing Social Justice Activism Dance Pieces**

- What identities might viewers of this piece have and how might those identities shape how they receive/respond to this piece?
    - Who does and does not have access to performances of this piece?
    - How can I increase people's access to performances of this piece?
    - How might technology and online resources increase people's access to performances of this piece?
- What, if any, messages about social justice do the dance movements in this piece communicate?
    - How clearly do I want those social justice messages to come across to audiences?
        - Do I prefer audiences to know the social justice messages I am communicating or to leave room for them to interpret those messages?
        - To what extent do I value and/or want to avoid being ambiguous about my social justice messages?
        - To what extent do I value and/or want to avoid over-communicating or being too obvious and heavy-handed in communicating my social justice messages to audiences?
        - How can I anchor the piece to help audiences understand it? With what movements and other design elements might audience members be familiar?
    - What do the movements and movement qualities in this piece mean to me, to collaborators, and to audience members?
    - How, if at all, does movement work together with other elements of the piece to convey my social justice messages?
- How, if at all, might I employ texts with the performance of this piece to communicate social justice messages to audience members?
    - What statement does the title make about the piece, especially its social justice orientation?
    - Would and, if so, how might program notes help me to communicate my social justice messages to audience members?
    - Would and, if so, how might audio and visual texts help me to communicate my social justice messages to audience members?
    - What, if any, relationships between dance movement and texts do I want to create when performing this piece?
    - Do texts that I use say something different than the movements performed in the piece, and vice versa?

    - How do the texts that I use clarify the social justice messages I am communicating to audience members?
    - Are there any elements of the texts that I am using that make the social justice messages that I am communicating to audiences too heavy-handed?
- What are other design elements in the piece communicating to audience members?
    - How do the staging and arrangement of dancers on stage convey my social justice messages, if at all?
    - How physically close do I want dancers to be to audience members for this piece, and what does that choice communicate to audience members?
    - What does the lighting and costuming say about the piece and its social justice messages?
    - Would and, if so, how would props help this piece to communicate its social justice messages?
    - Do and, if so, how do design elements detract from the piece's social justice messages?
    - Do and, if so, how do design elements support what the piece is communicating about social justice?
- Do I want and, if so, how much do I want audience members to participate in this piece?
    - Would and, if so, how might audience members' participation affect their responses to this piece?
    - What, if anything, do I hope that audience members will do in response to seeing this piece (e.g., actions they will take to promote social justice)?
    - What are audience members' role(s) in this piece?
        - For instance, are they voyeurs, co-creators, participants, and/or clients?
    - How do I hope audience members experience this piece?
        - What can I do to cultivate their experience?

**Obtaining Feedback about Social Justice Activism Dance Pieces**

- How important is/was it for the piece to communicate social justice messages to audience members?
    - How important is/was "expression for expression's sake"?
    - How much leeway do/did I give audience members to interpret my work?
- How will I know if audiences received the piece's intended social justice messages?
    - In what ways am I unable to know how the piece and its messages were received?
- To what extent do I want to understand audience members' reactions to and experiences of this piece?
    - What are the best ways to collect audience members' feedback about the piece?
        - Talkback sessions, questionnaires, watching people as they view the piece performed, and other ways?
- Who, if anyone, decides whether the performed piece was successful?
    - Me, audience members, collaborators, and/or others?
    - Whose evaluation of the pieces do I value?
    - To whose voices am I not listening?
- How important are/were collaborators' experiences to me?
    - How might I acquire feedback from collaborators?

- How much do my opinions about the piece matter to me?
    - How might I understand what the piece communicated by watching it being performed?
- What, if anything, do I want to accomplish if I hold talkback sessions?
    - How might talkback sessions help me to further communicate/clarify the piece's social justice messages to audience members?
        - How much do I want audience members to know about the piece?
        - Is it possible to reveal too much information about the piece to audience members? How do I strike a balance between revealing too much and revealing too little?
    - How might talkback sessions help me to understand audiences' experiences of this piece?
    - How can I facilitate talkback sessions to achieve their goals?
        - Question-and-answer format, small group discussions, debates, and other ways?
        - Should talkback sessions be part of or separate from the piece?
        - Who should participate in talkback sessions? Who is able to participate and how?
        - Who is absent from talkback sessions? Who is not able to participate?
- What, if any, informal feedback am I receiving from audience members and others about the piece?
    - What, if any, emails or other asynchronous communication have I received about the piece?
    - What, if anything, has been brought to my attention through engaging in informal conversations about the piece with collaborators and/or audience members?
- Would and, if so, how might formal feedback collection methods help me to learn about what the piece communicated to audience members?
    - Would questionnaires be informative? Are there digital platforms that I should invite audience members to use? What other ways might I collect feedback?
- How did audience members react to the piece as they watched it being performed?
    - What, if any, sounds did they make? What was their body language? How would I describe the atmosphere in the space during the performance? Was there silence and, if so, what might that mean?
- How did I respond to the piece, if I watched it being performed?
    - What did I feel in my body? What memories, thoughts, and emotions did the piece bring up for me? What criteria did I use (or should have used) to evaluate whether the piece was "successful"?
- How did I experience the piece, if I performed in it?
    - What did I feel in my body? What relationships and movement conversations did I engage in with other dancers? What did I experience in relation to the audience? What connections did I form with audience members? What memories, thoughts, and emotions did this experience bring up for me?
- Did I accomplish what I hoped through this dance piece?
    - What do I think I/the piece communicated to audience members?
    - What will I do if audience members did or did not receive the piece's social justice messages as I intended?

- What will I do with feedback that I received from audience members and others about this piece?
    - For instance, will I apply that feedback to future work, revise this piece, and/or use it to obtain funding for future projects?
- How might the feedback that I received about this piece help me to choreograph future social justice activism dance pieces more effectively?

---

**Limitations of the Study and Future Research Directions**

Although this study obtained some important findings, those findings need to be interpreted in light of some important limitations that characterized this study, and that future research should address. I also identify some additional directions for future research.

First, only 15 professional choreographers were interviewed, with those interviewees selected nonrandomly and all of them living in the United States; these characteristics potentially limit the validity and generalizability of the findings. In addition to increasing the sample size, professional choreographers living in countries other than the United States should have been interviewed.

Second, this study considered only choreographers' perspectives and did not interview dancers and other collaborators who worked with these choreographers, and/or audience members who saw their SJA dance pieces. Future research should interview, as well as employ participant observation, to study choreographers' communication with those other participants.

Third, this study did not interview those who choreographed forms of SJA dance that would be described as vernacular and/or community dance. Although some choreographers did engage in community-based dance, this study focused on concert dance pieces that were performed for audiences and did not explore dance interventions in communities that did not have performances, site-specific work, vernacular dance, theatrical dance, nor other forms of

dance that promote social justice. Future research should explore additional dance forms to gain a fuller understanding of how dance promotes social justice activism.

Fourth, undoubtedly, using the terms "social justice" and "social justice activism" primed interviewees to consider their dance choreography work through that rather than other lenses. Given that some interviewees said that they used other terms to describe their work (e.g., "community-engaged arts practice"), and some even seemed to express resistance to framing their pieces through a social justice lens, in retrospect, interviewees should have been asked to describe/label their work, which would have revealed whether and the extent to which "social justice" was a resonant term.

In addition to addressing the limitations that characterized this study, future research should consider employing other methods than interviewing to understand SJA dance choreographers' communication with collaborators and audience members. For instance, textual-analytic methods, such as content analysis, could be used to explicate social justice messages embedded in texts that choreographers create to accompany their SJA dance pieces. Ethnographic methods also could be used to observe the actual communication that choreographers engage in with collaborators and with audience members, and discourse-analytic techniques could be used to analyze that observed communication.

## Conclusion

As I discussed at the beginning of this thesis, confronting the significant social injustices that too many people experience has never been more urgent and important. Among the many forms of communication that can create collective activism and be used to promote social justice, art is a particularly compelling form, with dance being an important but relatively understudied medium, compared to theatre, for promoting social justice. Moreover, there is a dearth of

scholarship about the communication aspects of SJA dance. To start to fill that gap, this study interviewed professionals who choreograph SJA dance pieces about their conceptualization of and characteristics that they associate with that type of dance, and, most importantly, their communication with dancers, other collaborators, and audience members about and through their SJA dance pieces. Many of the findings from this study validated what researchers have found, but they also extended those findings in significant ways, and, most importantly, contributed new knowledge that both advances the scholarly study of communication, social justice, and dance, and hopes to aid choreographers who promote social justice through their dance work.

# REFERENCES

ABD Productions. (2021a). *About Andares: Genesis*. https://www.abdproductions.org/current-work-andares

ABD Productions. (2021b). *Skywatchers: About us.* https://www.abdproductions.org/skywatchers

Acogny, G. (2008). Fagaala. In N. M. Jackson & T. S. Phim (Eds.), *Dance, human rights, and social justice: Dignity in motion* (pp. 137–139). Scarecrow Press.

Afary, K. (2009). *Performance and activism: Grassroots discourse after the Los Angeles rebellion of 1992*. Lexington Books.

Akas, N. C. (2018). The role of dance in a depressed economy: A study of "The Drum of Danger." *Journal of Pan African Studies*, *12*(1), 516–524. https://www.jpanafrican.org/vol12no1.htm

Akinleye, A. (2013). Orientation for communication: Embodiment, and the language of dance. *Empedocles: European Journal for the Philosophy of Communication*, *4*(2), 101–112. https://doi.org/10.1386/ejpc.4.2.101_1

Albright, A. C. (1997). *Choreographing difference: The body and identity in contemporary dance*. Wesleyan University Press.

Aldor, G. (2008). Adib's dance. In N. M. Jackson & T. S. Phim (Eds.), *Dance, human rights, and social justice: Dignity in motion* (pp. 212–214). Scarecrow Press.

Alexander, B. K. (2010). Critical/performative/pedagogy: Performing possibility as a rehearsal for social justice. In D. L. Fassett & J. T. Warren (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of communication and instruction* (pp. 315–341). SAGE Publications.

Altman, A. (2020, June 4). Why the killing of George Floyd sparked an American uprising. *Time*. https://time.com/5847967/george-floyd-protests-trump

Animating Democracy. (n.d.-a). *The evaluation learning lab*. http://animatingdemocracy.org/evaluation-learning-lab

Animating Democracy. (n.d.-b). *Tools*. https://animatingdemocracy.org/resources/tools#aesthetics

Atlas, C. (2005). *The Hair Parties project case study: Urban Bush Women*. Animating Democracy. https://animatingdemocracy.org/sites/default/files/documents/labs/urban_bush_women_case_study.pdf

Backslash. (2018, April 30). *Pan-activism: A new era of American activism*. https://backslash.com/a-new-era-of-american-activism

Bannerman, H. (2014). Is dance a language? Movement, meaning and communication. *Dance Research*, *32*(1), 65–80. https://doi.org/10.3366/drs.2014.0087

Belcher, J. D., & Haridakis, P. (2011). From "alternative" to "trance": The role of music in facilitating political group activity and activism. *Ohio Communication Journal*, *49*, 145–174.

Bhatia, K. (2019). The civic potential of Bollywood based dance flash mobs: On youth participation and digital networks. *Asian Journal of Communication*, *29*(6), 483–499. https://doi.org/10.1080/01292986.2019.1680714

Billone, N. (2009). Performing civil death: The Medea Project and Theater for Incarcerated Women. *Text and Performance Quarterly*, *29*(3), 266–275. https://doi.org/10.1080/10462930903017224

Brabazon, T. (1997). Disco(urse) dancing: Reading the body politic. *Australian Journal of Communication*, *24*(1), 104–114.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Browning, B. (1995). *Samba: Resistance in motion*. Indiana University Press.

Brugger, E.C. (2004). Introduction to Catholic social teaching. *Josephinum Journal of Theology*, *11*(2), 182–215.

Buchanan, L., Bull, Q., & Patel, J. K. (2020, July 3). Black Lives Matter may be the largest movement in U.S. history. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/03/us/george-floyd-protests-crowd-size.html

Burnard, P., Cook, P. J., Jasilek, S., & Bauer-Nilsen, B. (2018). Performing arts activism for addressing climate change: Conceptualizing an intercultural choreographic practice and dance performance called Melting Ice. *Choreographic Practices*, *9*(1), 119–144. https://doi.org/10.1386/chor.9.1.119_1

Byron, W. J. (1998, October 31). The 10 building blocks of Catholic social teaching. *America: The Jesuit Review*. https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/1998/10/31/10-building-blocks-catholic-social-teaching

Cantrick, M., Anderson, T., Leighton, L. B., & Warning, M. (2018). Embodying activism: Reconciling justice through dance movement/therapy. *American Journal of Dance Therapy*, *40*(2), 191–201. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10465-018-9288-2

Carragee, K. M., & Frey, L. R. (2012). Introduction: Communication activism for social justice scholarship. In L. R. Frey & K. M. Carragee (Eds.), *Communication activism: Vol. 3. Struggling for social justice amidst difference* (pp. 1–68). Hampton Press.

Central for Cultural Studies. (2021–2022). *October 21, 2020—Gerald Casel & GERALDCASLDANCE—Not About Race Dance*. https://culturalstudies.ucsc.edu/2020/09/23/october-21-2020-gerald-casel-geraldcaseldance-not-about-race-dance/

Chatterjea, A. (2004). *Butting out: Reading resistive choreographies through works by Jawole Willa Jo Zollar and Chandralekha*. Wesleyan University Press.

Chatterjea, A. (2008). Dancing against burning grounds: Notes on *From Sita: Lament, fury, and a plea for peace*. In N. M. Jackson & T. S. Phim (Eds.), *Dance, human rights, and social justice: Dignity in motion* (pp. 168–187). Scarecrow Press.

Chao, M. (2017). Reading movement in the everyday: The rise of *guangchangwu* in a Chinese village. *International Journal of Communication*, *11*, 4499–4522. https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/issue/view/13

Conquergood, D. (1988). Health theatre in a Hmong refugee camp: Performance, communication, and culture. *TDR*, *32*(3), 174-208. https://doi.org/10.2307/1145914

Cozen, B. (2013). Mobilizing artists: *Green Patriot Posters*, visual metaphors, and climate change activism. *Environmental Communication*, *7*(2), 297–314. https://doi.org/10.1080/17524032.2013.777353

Dawson, M. C., & Bobo, L. D. (2009). One year later and the myth of a post-racial society. *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race*, *6*(2), 247–249. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1742058X09990282

Dawson, Michael C., and Lawrence D. Bobo. 2009. One year later and the myth of a post-racial society. Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race 6(2): 247–249.

Deal, C. E. (2014). Acting for social justice: Students, prisoners, and theatre of testimonial performance. In L. R. Frey & D. L. Palmer (Eds.), *Teaching communication activism: Communication education for social justice* (pp. 435–460). Hampton Press.

DeFrantz, T. F. (2002). *Dancing many drums: Excavations in African American dance*. University of Wisconsin Press.

DeFrantz, T. F. (2004). The Black beat made visible: Hip hop dance and body power. In A. Lepecki (Ed.), *On the presence of the body: Essays on dance and performance theory* (pp. 64–81). Wesleyan University Press

De Laure, M., & Fink, M. (Eds.). (2017). *Culture jamming: Activism and the art of cultural resistance*. New York University Press.

Desmond, J. C. (2001). *Dancing desires: Choreographing sexualities on and off the stage*. University of Wisconsin Press.

Dolan, J. (2001). *Geographies of learning: Theory and practice, activism and performance*. Wesleyan University Press.

Dowling, A. S., & Forbord, D. (Directors). (2013). *Well contested sites* [Film]. Rapt Productions.

Eales, L., & Goodwin, D. (2015). "We all carry each other, sometimes": Care-sharing as social justice practice in integrated dance. *Leisure/Loisir*, *39*(2), 277–298. https://doi.org/10.1080/14927713.2015.1086584

Faulkner, K. (2008). Women, protest, and dance: An activist art? *Congress on Research in Dance Conference Proceedings*, *40*(1, Suppl.), 90–94. https://doi.org/10.1017/S2049125500000558

Fine, M., Roberts, R. A., & Torre, M .E. (with Bloom, J. B., Chajet, A., Guishard, L., Payne, M., & Arafat, Y.). (2004) *Echoes of Brown: Youth documenting and performing the legacy of Brown v. Board of Education*. Teachers College Press.

Foellmer, S. (2016). Choreography as a medium of protest. *Dance Research Journal*, *48*(3), 58–69. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0149767716000395

Foulkes, J. L. (2002). *Modern bodies: Dance and American modernism from Martha Graham to Alvin Ailey*. The University of North Carolina Press.

Frey, L. R. (2009). What a difference more difference-making communication scholarship might make: Making a difference from and through communication research. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, *37*(2), 205–214. https://doi.org/10.1080/00909880902792321

Frey, L. R., & Blinne, K. (2017). Activism and social justice. In M. Allen (Ed.), *SAGE encyclopedia of communication research methods* (Vol. 1, pp. 12–15). SAGE Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483381411.n6

Frey, L. R., & Carragee, K. M. (Eds.). (2007a). *Communication activism*: *Vol. 1. Communication for social change*. Hampton Press.

Frey, L. R., & Carragee, K. M. (Eds.). (2007b). *Communication activism*: *Vol. 2. Media and performance activism*. Hampton Press.

Frey, L. R., & Carragee, K. M. (2007c). Introduction: Communication activism as engaged scholarship. In L. R. Frey & K. M. Carragee (Eds.), *Communication activism* (2 Vols., pp. 1–64). Hampton Press.

Frey, L. R., & Carragee, K. M. (Eds.). (2012). *Communication activism: Vol. 3. Struggling for social justice amidst difference*. Hampton Press.

Frey, L. R., & Palmer, D. L. (Eds.). (2014). *Teaching communication activism: Communication education for social justice*. Hampton Press.

Frey, L. R., Pearce, W. B., Pollock, M. A., Artz, L., & Murphy, B. A. O. (1996). Looking for justice in all the wrong places: On a communication approach to social justice. *Communication Studies*, *47*(1–2), 110–127. https://doi.org/10.1080/10510979609368467

Funke, P. N., & Wolfson, T. (2017). From global justice to Occupy and Podemos: Mapping three stages of contemporary activism. *TripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique*, *15*(2), 393–405. https://doi.org/10.31269/triplec.v15i2.887

Gerry, J. (2018). *Dance as a catalyst for change: Creating cracks in the structure through dance-based activism* (Unpublished master's thesis). Mills College.

Gilbert, J. (2014). Performing advocacy: Staging marginalized voices. In L. R. Frey & D. L. Palmer (Eds.), *Teaching communication activism: Communication education for social justice* (pp. 231–259). Hampton Press.

González, A. C. (2018). Why do electro dancers also dance on YouTube? The media logic of the cultural practices in the electro dance youth style. *Communication Review*, *21*(4), 277–295. https://doi.org/10.1080/10714421.2018.1535727

Gottschild, B. D. (2003). *The Black dancing body: A geography from coon to cool*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Gottschild, B.D. (2008). The movement is the message: Five dancemakers who dare to mix activism with art. *Dance Magazine*, *82*(1), 62–68.

Graff, E. (1997). *Stepping left: Dance and politics in New York City, 1928–1942.* Duke University Press.

Grau, A. (2007). Political activism and South Asian dance: The case of Mallika Sarabhai. *South Asia Research*, *27*(1), 43–55. https://doi.org/10.1177/026272800602700103

Grau, A. (2013). Political activism and dance: The Sarabhais and nonviolence through the arts. *Dance Chronicle*, *36*(1). 1–35. https://doi.org/10.1080/01472526.2013.755599

Hamera, J. (1994). The ambivalent, knowing male body in the Pasadena Dance Theatre. *Text & Performance Quarterly*, *14*(3), 197–209. https://doi.org/10.1080/10462939409366083

Hamera, J. (2005). Regions of likeness: The poetry of Jorie Graham, dance, and citational solidarity. *Text & Performance Quarterly*, *25*(1), 14–26. https://doi.org/10.1080/10462930500052285

Hanna, J. L. (1979). *To dance is human: A theory of nonverbal communication*. University of Chicago Press.

Hansen, A. D. (2006). On the construction and performance of gender in Mexican folkloric dance. *Texas Speech Communication Journal*, *30*(2), 170–186.

Hartnett, S. J. (Ed.). (2011). *Challenging the prison-industrial complex: Activism, arts, and educational alternatives*. University of Illinois Press.

The Humanities Institute. (2020). *Gerald Cassel—Not About Race Dance*. https://thi.ucsc.edu/event/virtual-cultural-studies-colloquium-3

Hyack, F. A. (1976). *The mirage of social justice*. University of Chicago Press.

Jackson, N. M., & Phim, T. S. (Eds.). (2008a). *Dance, human rights, and social justice: Dignity in motion*. Scarecrow Press.

Jackson, N. M., & Phim, T. S. (2008b). Introduction. In N. M. Jackson & T. S. Phim (Eds.), *Dance, human rights, and social justice: Dignity in motion* (pp. xv–xxxv). Scarecrow Press.

Jancauskas, R. (1959). The concept of social justice: Some current applications. *Review of Social Economy*, *17*(1), 34–50. https://doi.org/10.1080/00346765900000003

Janesick, V. (1994). The dance of qualitative research design: Metaphor, methodolatry, and meaning. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 209–219). SAGE Publications.

John Paul II. (1999). *Letter to artists* [Letter]. http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1999/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_23041999_artists.html.

Jones, O. O. J. L., Moore, L. L., & Bridgforth, S. (Eds.). (2010). *Experiments in a jazz aesthetic: Art, activism, academia, and the Austin Project*. University of Texas Press.

Karlson, K. (2004). *On sacred ground: The political origins and cultural outcomes of the Ghost Dance and Wounded Knee, 1890 and 1973*. (Unpublished undergraduate honors thesis). University of Puget Sound.

Kloetzel, M. (2019). Site dance as activist methodology: Creating performance/protest in sites of assembly. *Choreographic Practices*, *10*(1), 7–23. https://doi.org/10.1386/chor.10.1.7_1

Langer, G. J. (2019). Cast harmony and performance through uncertainty: Learning to achieve dance at a distance. *Text & Performance Quarterly*, *39*(2), 135–152. https://doi.org/10.1080/10462937.2019.1595119

Lemon, R. (2008). What was always there. In N. M. Jackson & T. S. Phim (Eds.), *Dance, human rights, and social justice: Dignity in motion* (pp. 156–165). Scarecrow Press.

Lindberg, C. A. (1987). Communication patterns observed in the Dakota Sun Dance Ceremony. *North Dakota Journal of Speech & Theatre*, *1*, 23–32.

MacLennan, J. (2011). “To build a beautiful dialogue”: Capoeira as contradiction. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, *4*(2), 146–162. https://doi.org/10.1080/17513057.2011.556828

Magyar, C. (2019). *A case study of the Arapahoe High School shooting: Representations of school shootings in news media and art* [Unpublished undergraduate honors thesis]. University of Colorado Boulder.

Martin, E. (2017). *Arts in action: A study of the intersectionality between dance, identity and social activism* [Unpublished undergraduate honors thesis]. Connecticut College.

Martin, R. (1995). Over-reading the “Promised Land”: Towards a narrative of context in dance. In S. L. Foster (Ed.), *Corporealities: Dancing knowledge, culture and power* (pp. 183–206). Routledge.

Martínez, C. D. (2008). Human rights issues in the work of Barro Rojo Arte Escénico (N .L. Ruyter, Trans. & Ed.). In N. M. Jackson & T. S. Phim (Eds.), *Dance, human rights, and social justice: Dignity in motion* (pp. 188–199). Scarecrow Press.

Medhurst, M. J. (1988). Argument and role: Monsignor John A. Ryan on social justice. *Western Journal of Speech Communication*, *52*(1), 75–90. https://doi.org/10.1080/10570318809389626

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). hip-hop. In *Merrian-Webster.com dictionary*. Retrieved May 6, 2021, from https://www.merriam-webster.com

Miller, D. (1999). *Principles of social justice*. Harvard University Press.

Mills, D. (in press). *Dance as activism: A century of radical dance across the world*. Bloomsbury Academic.

Mills, M. B. (2015). Performing women's work post academy: Social justice and feminism in practice. *Women & Language*, *38*(2), 123–125.

Moraporvida Contemporary Dance. (n.d.). *A Landing Place*. http://moraporvida.com/repertory/current-rep/a-landing-place

Mullis, E. C. (2016). Dancing for human rights: Engaging labor rights and social remembrance in *Poor Mouth*. *Dance Research*, *34*(2), 220–242. https://doi.org/10.3366/drs.2016.0160

Munger, F., MacLend, T., & Loomis, C. (2016). Social change: Toward an informed and critical understanding of social justice and the capabilities approach in community psychology. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *57*(1–2), 171–180. https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12034

Murgiyanto, S. (2008). Sardono: Dialogues with humankind and nature. In N. M. Jackson & T. S. Phim (Eds.), *Dance, human rights, and social justice: Dignity in motion* (pp. 204–211). Scarecrow Press.

National Communication Association. (n.d.). *Activism and Social Justice Division*. https://www.natcom.org/activism-and-social-justice-division-0

Niwenshuti, M. (2013). Dance as a communication tool: Addressing inter-generational trauma for a healthier psych-social environment in Rwanda and the Great Lakes Region of Africa. *Matatu: Journal for African Culture and Society, 44*(1), 29–37. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789401210546_004

O'Boyle, E. (2011). Social justice: Addressing the ambiguity. *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture*, *14*(2), 96–117. https://doi.org/10.1353/log.2011.0015

Olsson, C. (2008). Your fight is our fight: Protest ballets in Sweden. In N. M. Jackson & T. S. Phim (Eds.), *Dance, human rights, and social justice: Dignity in motion* (pp. 140–153). Scarecrow Press.

Oseroff-Varnell, D. (1998). Communication and the socialization of dance students: An analysis of the hidden curriculum in a residential arts school. *Communication Education*, *47*(2), 101–119. https://doi.org/10.1080/03634529809379116

Osnes, B., & Bisping, J. (2014). Theatre for energy justice. In L. R. Frey & D. L. Palmer (Eds.), *Teaching communication activism: Communication education for social justice* (pp. 461–484). Hampton Press.

Owen, W. F. (1984). Interpretive themes in relational communication. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, *70*(3), 274–287. https://doi.org/10.1080/00335638409383697

Park-Fuller L. M. (2003). Audiencing the audience: Playback Theatre, performative writing, and social activism. *Text & Performance Quarterly*, *23*(3), 288–310. https://doi.org/10.1080/10462930310001635321

Peick, M. (2005). Dance as communication: Messages sent and received through dance. *W-L Journal of Undergraduate Research*, *8*. https://www.uwlax.edu/globalassets/offices-services/urc/jur-online/pdf/2005/peick.pdf

Phillips-Fein, J. (2007). Dance and activism. In G. L. Anderson & K. G. Herr (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of activism and social justice* (pp. 419–421). SAGE Publications.

Pilkington, E. (2020, May 20). Black Americans dying of COVID-19 at three times the rate of White people: New figures from non-partisan APM Research Lab show staggering racial divide in coronavirus deaths across US. *The Guardian*.

https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/20/black-americans-death-rate-covid-19-coronavirus

Pines, R., & Giles, H. (2017). Dance as intergroup communication. In H. Giles & J. Harwood (Eds.), *Oxford encyclopedia of intergroup communication* (Vol. 1, pp. 263–278). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.013.459

Ponifasio, L. (2008). Requiem. In N. M. Jackson & T. S. Phim (Eds.), *Dance, human rights, and social justice: Dignity in motion* (pp. 200–203). Scarecrow Press.

Popa Blanariu, N. (2015). Paradigms of communication in performance and dance studies. *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, *17*(2). https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2331

Potter, J. (1996). *Representing reality: Discourse, rhetoric and social construction.* SAGE Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446222119

Prickett, S. (2013). *Embodied politics: Dance, protest and identities*. Dance Books.

Prickett, S. (2016). Constrained bodies: Dance, social justice, and choreographic agency. *Dance Research Journal*, *48*(3), 45–57. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0149767716000309

Reason, M., & Reynolds, D. (2010). Kinesthesia, empathy, and related pleasures: An inquiry into audience experiences of watching dance. *Dance Research Journal*, *42*(2), 49–75. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0149767700001030

Recht, H., & Szabo, L. (2020, April 22). The other COVID-19 risk factors: How race, income, ZIP code can influence life and death. *USA TODAY*. https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/health/2020/04/22/how-coronavirus-impacts-certain-races-income-brackets-neighborhoods/3004136001/

Roberts, R. A. (2005). *Radical movements: Katherine Dunham and Ronald K. Brown teaching toward critical consciousness* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). City University of New York.

Roberts, R. A. (2011). Facing and transforming the hauntings of race through the arts. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, *44*(3), 330–347. https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2011.591260

Roberts, R. A. (2013). Dancing with social ghosts: Performing embodiments, analyzing critically. *Transforming Anthropology*, *21*(1), 4–14. https://doi.org/10.1111/traa.12002

Roche, J. (2019). Traces from elsewhere: Dancing together across distance and time. *Text & Performance Quarterly*, *39*(1), 74–88. https://doi.org/10.1080/10462937.2018.1527390

Rogers, R. A. (1998). A dialogics of rhythm: Dance and the performance of cultural conflict. *Howard Journal of Communications*, *9*(1), 5–27. https://doi.org/10.1080/106461798247087

Sandra Paola López Ramirez. (n.d.). *transfronteriza*. https://www.sandrapaolalopez.com/transfronteriza.html

Shailor, J. (Ed.). (2011). *Performing new lives: Prison theatre*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Shailor, J. (2012). *Theatre of empowerment: Prison, performance, and possibility*. Routledge.

Shailor, J. (2013). Kings, warriors, magicians, and lovers: Prison theatre and alternative performances of masculinity. In S. J. Hartnett, E. Novek, & J. K. Wood. (Eds.), *Working for justice: A handbook of prison education and activism* (pp. 13–38). University of Illinois Press.

Shapiro, S. B. (2013). The act of making: Dance as aesthetic activism. *Choros International Dance Journal*, *2*, 15–32. http://www.chorosjournal.com/issues.asp?magID=2

Shapiro, S. B. (2016). Dance as activism: The power to envision, move, and change. *Dance Research Aotearoa*, *4*, 3–33. https://doi.org/10.15663/dra.v4i1.53

Shapiro, S. C. (2008). Cambodian dance and the individual artist. In N. M. Jackson & T. S. Phim (Eds.), *Dance, human rights, and social justice: Dignity in motion* (pp. 166–167). Scarecrow Press.

Sherrod, E. G. (1998). *The dance griots: An examination of the dance pedagogy of Katherine Dunham and black pioneering dancers in Chicago and New York City, from 1931–1946*. [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Temple University.

Singhal, A., & Greiner, K. (2008). Performance activism and civic engagement through symbolic and playful actions. *Journal of Development Communication*, 19(2), 49–53.

Somdahl-Sands, K. (2008). Citizenship, civic memory and urban performance: *Mission Wall Dances*. *Space and Polity*, *12*(3), 329–352. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562570802515242

Strine, M. S. (1992). Art, activism, and the performance of (con)text: A response. *Text and Performance Quarterly*, *12*(4), 391–394. https:://doi.org/10.1080/10462939209359661

Texas Performing Arts. (2021). *Gesel Mason*. https://texasperformingarts.org/residencies/yes-and

Thompson, R. F. (2005). *Tango: The art history of love*. Pantheon Books.

Tracy, S. J. (2018). A phronetic iterative approach to data analysis in qualitative research. *Journal of Qualitative Research*, *19*(2), 61–76. https://doi.org/10.22284/QR.2018.19.2.61

Tracy, S. J. (2020). *Qualitative research methods: Collecting evidence, crafting analysis, communicating impact* (2nd ed.). Wiley-Blackwell.

U.S. Catholic Conference. (1998). *Sharing Catholic social teaching: Challenges and directions: Reflections of the U.S. Catholic bishops*. United States Catholic Conference.

Vosen, E. C. (2019). Singing and dance idle no more: Round dances as Indigenous activism. In V. L. Levine & D. Robinson (Eds.), *Music and modernity among First Peoples of America* (pp. 91–112). Wesleyan University Press.

Welker, L. (2014). Staging Sudanese refugee narratives and the legacy of genocide: A performance-based intervention strategy. In L. R. Frey & K. M. Carragee (Eds.), *Communication activism: Vol. 3. Struggling for social justice amidst difference* (pp. 139–178). Hampton Press.

Wilson, L., & Moffett, A.-T. (2017). Building bridges for dance through arts-based research. *Research in Dance Education*, *18*(2), 135–149. https://doi.org/10.1080/14647893.2017.1330328

Yellow Scene Magazine. (2019). *Preview | Cindy Brandle Dance Company: A World on Fire at Dairy Arts Center April 19 – 20*. https://yellowscene.com/2019/04/15/preview-cindy-brandle-dance-company-a-world-on-fire/

Zervou, N. (2019). Emerging frameworks for engaging precarity and "Otherness" in Greek contemporary dance performances. *Dance Research Journal*, *51*(1), 20–31. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0149767719000020

# APPENDIX A

# INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

## Opening Statement

This interview focuses on your use of dance choreography to engage in social justice activism. Questions explore, among other things, your views about how you use dance to communicate about social injustices, both in general and with regard to injustices on which your dance choreography has focused; your communication with dancers and collaborators during the process of choreographing social justice dance pieces; and your communication with and how you hope audiences members will respond after watching/experiencing those dance pieces.

The interview will last approximately 30 minutes. This is a voluntary interview, so you can choose not to answer any question that I ask. If, at any time, you wish to stop the interview, please let me know, and we can take a break or end the interview (and, if you wish to do so, complete it at another time that is convenient for you).

I would like to audio record this interview, but, if at any time, you want the audio recorder to be turned off, please let me know and I will do so. Do you grant permission for this interview to be audio recorded?

Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin the interview?

## A. Interviewees' Background

The first set of questions are asked to obtain some demographic information that will be reported in my MA thesis for the entire set of choreographers that I am interviewing.

1. How many years have you worked as a professional dance choreographer?

2. Approximately how many professional dance pieces have you choreographed? Of those, how many would you say are "social justice oriented"?

3. If you don't mind my asking, how old are you?

4. How do you identify racially and ethnically?

5. What is your gender identity?

6. Are there any other important identities with which you identify that you would like to share with me?

7. Do (and, if so, how do) your identities influence your professional dance choreography work, especially with regard to choreographing social justice dance pieces?

**B. Social Justice Dance Choreography**

8. Would you say that your choreographic piece ____ is, in any way, connected to the concept/issue of "social justice"? If so, how is the piece connected to social justice (e.g., via topics and/or issues focused on, or storylines developed, in the piece; social actions that the piece promotes)? Additionally, how would you describe the basic social justice message that you are trying to convey in/through the piece?

9. How many of your other choreographic pieces would you describe as "social justice oriented" (e.g., all, most, some)? (For anything less than "all") Was that social justice focus always an aspect of your choreographic work, or did it evolve over time after choreographing other dance pieces that were not social justice oriented (if so, was/were there any important events/turning point[s] that led you to take a social justice focus)? Do you still (or intend to in the future) choreograph non-social justice dance pieces?

10. Are there any important differences that you see between choreographing pieces that are and are not social justice oriented? For instance, does (and, if so, how does) a social justice orientation influence the dance movements or any other elements of the piece?

    A) Given that dance, typically, is not accompanied by words, do you (and, if so, why and how do you) use the title, performance program, and/or props and staging to communicate in a relatively explicit way social justice aspects of your pieces (e.g., the social justice topic/issue, your basic social justice message[s])? (For those who do not use them) Do you not use those explicit forms of communication because you see them as being problematic or disadvantageous in some way (e.g., distracting audiences from paying attention to the dance performances)?

**C. Communication with Dancers and Other Collaborators about Social Justice Activism Dance Pieces**

11. Did (and if so, how did) the social justice orientation of the choreographic piece ____ (or any of your other social justice pieces) affect in any way the process of choosing dancers to perform the piece? For instance, did you ask dancers whether they supported the piece's social justice position/orientation?

    A) If not, have you worked with dancers who you knew/learned (either before hiring them or during the process of working with them) did not agree with/support the piece's social justice position/orientation? Did those dancers' views ever lead to any problematic interactions between you and them, and, if so, can you describe one such interaction and what, if anything resulted from it (e.g., a dancer leaving)?

12. When you first started this (or any other) piece, did you (and, if so, how and to what extent do/did you) talk with dancers and other collaborators (individually and/or as a

group) about the social justice nature of this piece ____? If you did talk with them, what purposes were you trying to accomplish (e.g., making your view explicitly clear) and was that talk successful? (If you did not talk with them) Were there any reasons for not talking with them?

13. For this (or any other social justice-oriented) piece, did you ever stop a rehearsal and talk with dancers about their movements with regard to the social justice nature of the piece (e.g., the basic message that you were trying to convey to audience members)? If so, could you provide an example or two about what, specifically, you discussed with them?

**D. Communication with Audience Members about/through Social Justice Dance Pieces**

14. Does (and if so, how does) the social justice nature of the piece influence how you think about goals you set for and/or choices you make regarding audience members' perceptions/responses to the piece (either in the immediate moment or later)? For instance, is your goal to make audience members (more) aware of the (importance of the) social justice issue on which the piece focuses, and/or to take some specific action to address that issue that you are advocating? Are there any differences between choreographing social justice vs. non-justice pieces with regard to your thoughts, actions (etc.) with respect to audience members?

    A) How do or would you know whether you achieved whatever goals, expectations, and hopes you have for audience members' responses to a social justice piece? Do you, for instance, engage in discussion with audience members after the performance (or other things)? If you do, to what extent do those discussions focus on the social justice aspects of the piece? Can you offer examples of what you bring up or what audience members discuss about the social justice nature of the piece?

15. Did or does the geographical location(s) and/or audience(s) for this (or any other of your) social-justice piece(s) affect in any way the composition or performance of your piece(s) in any way? Were there any online platforms that were part of your piece(s)? If so, what were your aims in incorporating online components (e.g. how did they help you accomplish your goals, were there particular groups you were trying to reach)?

**E. Concluding Questions**

16. Is there anything else related to choreographing social justice dance pieces that I have not asked about that you would like to discuss?

17. May I contact you if I have follow-up questions to ask you?

# APPENDIX B

## INTERVIEW RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear (choreographer's first name) __,

My name is Chelsea Magyar, and I am a Master's student in the Department of Communication at the University of Colorado Boulder, with a focus on communication and social justice activism. I also am a dancer who, as part of my BA honors thesis, choreographed an original dance performance. My MA thesis involves conducting interviews with professionals who choreograph social justice dance performances. The interview topics revolve around communicative practices (e.g., with dancers and with audience members).

As a professional choreographer of social justice dance performances, I am hoping that you will agree to be interviewed for this study (via Zoom). If you agree to participate, I will schedule the interview on the day and time that works best for you. The interview takes approximately 30 minutes, which, with your permission, I will video (or audio) record.

Interview questions focus on, for instance, your views about dance as a form of social justice activism, goals of social justice dance performances that you have choreographed (with a particular focus on your piece ____), whether and how social justice aspects of those performances affect your choreographic choices, whether and how you communicate with dancers about those social justice aspects, and, ideally, how you would like audience members' to respond to those performances (e.g., social justice actions that you are encouraging them to take).

I will use what you and other choreographers share during interviews to theorize social justice activist dance choreography from a communication perspective, and to offer recommendations that, hopefully, aid others who choreograph those performances. I will, of course, share my written report with you. I also have applied for a couple of small grants that, I hope, will enable me to offer you some small financial compensation for being interviewed.

Thank you for considering my request to be interviewed, and, most importantly, thank you for your social justice choreographic work. (If the choreographer was recommended by someone: _____ recommended you for this study, and I thought you would be a good fit.) If you are interested in being interviewed, please let me know and we then can talk about possible dates and times that work best for you.

Sincerely,

Chelsea Magyar
Department of Communication
University of Colorado Boulder
720-276-9391