

**“Still colourblind”: Using mapping and interviews with former students to explore racial and ethnic diversity in university dance programs in Canada**

by

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## Abstract

Dance is a form of cultural expression spanning all nations, showcasing ceremony, community, and/or performance for pleasure (Anderson, 2018). However, within the university setting, there is a hierarchy of genres, with superiority being based on race and ethnicity. As dance can be a connection to culture and ancestry, being given permission to explore cultural identity through movement may yield a deeper understanding of self, culture, and their significance on society (Zhang et al., 2020). This interpretive study uses critical race theory (CRT) as a lens for deciphering the system of oppression felt by university dance students with regard to representation, recruitment tools, and curriculum. Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013) is used for web-based content and semi-structured interviews. This study seeks to answer: How is racial and ethnic diversity perceived by students in dance departments in Canadian universities? Web-based data coupled with interview answers confirm a lack of racial and ethnic representation in faculty members, student base, and course content which directly affects career viability, research opportunities, and stunted educational involvement. The results revealed themes including: a) early indoctrination of acceptability, b) how career goals changed with exposure, c) witnessing of hegemony or diverse representation, c) the importance of mentorship, and d) lack of course diversity. Participant experiences have left them with little hope of change in this context, without great effort at all levels of Canadian dance.

Key Words: dance, higher education, racism, interpretivism, constructivism, critical race theory

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## Table of Contents

<b>Exploring student perceptions of racial and ethnic diversity in university dance faculties in Canada .....</b>	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
<b>Abstract .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Acknowledgments.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Table of Contents .....</b>	<b>4</b>
List of Tables.....	9
List of Figures.....	9
<b>Preamble .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Chapter 1 - Introduction.....</b>	<b>4</b>
Synopsis.....	4
Canadian Dance Statistics .....	4
Canadian University Statistics.....	5
Systemic Racism in Higher Education .....	6
Rationale.....	7
Implications .....	7
<b>Chapter 2 – Literature Review .....</b>	<b>9</b>
What is CRT? .....	9
Components of CRT.....	9
Tenets of CRT.....	11

Critiques of CRT.....	13
Dance Education.....	16
Differing Dance Concepts.....	16
Dance & Race.....	20
Diversity, Race, Ethnicity and Dance in Higher Education .....	22
Diversity in Higher Education .....	22
Dance in Higher Education.....	24
The Role of Race and Ethnicity in Dance Higher Education .....	26
Rationale and Purpose .....	28
<b>Chapter 3 - Methods .....</b>	<b>29</b>
Methodology.....	29
Interpretivist/Constructivist Paradigm.....	29
Reflexivity.....	30
Recruitment.....	31
Methods & Procedure.....	32
Visual Web Analysis.....	33
Interviews.....	33
Data Analysis.....	34
Quality Criteria .....	34
<b>Chapter 4 - Results.....</b>	<b>36</b>

Web-Based Data Faculty .....	36
Faculty.....	36
Courses.....	39
Interviewee Demographics .....	39
Interview Results .....	40
Early dance experiences/ indoctrination.....	42
Primary interest.....	42
Finding a ‘home’ dance studio.....	42
Career Goals Change with Exposure.....	43
Dreams of the future .....	43
Influence of the university experience.....	44
Reality after graduation.....	45
Hegemony versus Diverse Representation .....	45
Who is teaching?.....	45
Am I alone?.....	46
How it makes me feel .....	47
Course diversity.....	50
Prevalence of ballet.....	50
The eloquence of modern dance .....	50
Marginalization of ‘ethnic’ styles .....	51

Mentorship.....	52
Family Support.....	52
Faculty support.....	53
Other support .....	54
Will it ever change?.....	54
Who is responsible for change? .....	54
Is there hope? .....	55
<b>Chapter 5 – Discussion.....</b>	<b>57</b>
Racism and Representation .....	57
Systemic Change.....	59
Limitations .....	62
Delimitations.....	64
Future Directions .....	65
Conclusion.....	65
<b>References .....</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>Appendix - A .....</b>	<b>78</b>
Interview Guide – Students .....	78
<b>Appendix – B.....</b>	<b>80</b>
RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM.....	80
<b>Appendix – C .....</b>	<b>85</b>

Student Recruitment Poster ..... 85

**List of Tables**

List of Themes and Sub-Themes.....37

**List of Figures**

York University Faculty .....33

University of Calgary Faculty... .....34

## Preamble

Diversity! We cry. Diversity! We seek. Diversity is elusive.

Change starts today. It started yesterday. It starts in our bones, in our hearts, and in our actions. I've worked so hard. 30 years. Still little has changed.

People who look like me still don't belong.

Hair texture. Skin colour. Body-type. What is acceptable for human movement?

The stinging whispers, "You don't deserve opportunities to dance, to learn, to teach, to create, to research."

Children hear, "Ballet is necessary!"... "But, it's not the style for you, Hunny."

Audition today! 25 years of training, sacrifice, and pain. A house of cards brought down by 3 shades of Too Dark.

Let's name and hold high the FEW who have run and passed the gauntlet. If we can count them, there are too few.

The applause ring hollow for the stunning, athletic, talented dark-skinned dancers. The sound is just kudos for staying in their lane.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century. The activity, the Art, the Life, stuck in Eurocentricity.

Change is slow.

Dance survived millennia as culture, history, hope, soul medicine... to die the slow death of myopic supremacy.

Swan Lake, the epitome of ballet's perfection. I laugh at the images of White uniformity. No. I cry.

Who on social media fought through the trauma of being The Other. Always anticipating the spit, the vitriol, the ridicule, the bullying, the harassment, the thinly veiled attempts to

dismiss your Power.

What has changed? Tights as 'flesh' is a defining moment. We have much work to do.

What has changed? One more tokenized Brown body accepted in a Ballet company. We have much work to do.

What has changed? A conversation at a boardroom table. Symbol lauded; contents ignored. We have much work to do.

Dance is for everyone. Dance will be for everyone.

## **Chapter 1 - Introduction**

The following chapter examines how university dance programs in Canada perpetuate notions of racial and ethnic hierarchy with its subsequent impacts on students. This includes statistics specific to the Canadian dance industry and post-secondary institutions' racialization of dance styles, exploring critical race theory (CRT) as a reflexive lens, and the implications of this research study.

### **Synopsis**

It is generally understood that the arts are a reflection of society (Blocker, 1988), with dance being an expression of culture since time immemorial. From fireside rhythmic stamping and ceremonial traditions, to performance for society's elite, dance maintains purpose and function in defining various cultures' past and present (Anderson, 2018). In today's Canadian context, the dance industry is multifaceted and includes the Eurocentric tradition of ballet, White emphasized modern, and racialized styles considered ethnic and 'other'. The inequity of racial hierarchies are evident in post-secondary institutions in course offerings, faculty makeup, and student recruitment policies (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Douglas & Halas, 2013; Green, 2003; Henry et al., 2017; McCarthy-Brown, 2014; Stewart, 2014; Tamtik & Guenter, 2019; Vargas et al., 2020; Walker, 2019). By emphasizing one genre and aesthetic over others, the education system is perpetuating racial and ethnic inequality while limiting access to culturally relevant opportunities (Walker, 2019). When students do not see themselves represented within their dance faculty (Cukier et al., 2021) or through course inclusion, their career paths may be stunted as feelings of inadequacy based solely on their race or ethnicity otherises anyone outside of the White normative aesthetic (Heinecken, 2017; Walker, 2019). As Richard Dyer (2006) points out, decisions and judgements are made every day about individual and collective worth, while value and acceptance is based on the imagery of race.

### **Canadian Dance Statistics**

The latest compilation of comparative numbers illuminates the degree of inequity in Canadian dance. Hill (2019) found that of all the 10,100 dancers reported in Canada, 86% are female, 25% of them hold a higher education degree, 15% are minorities and have the lowest

mean income of all Canadian artists at \$15,800 (lowest of all artists), with most dancers (76%) reported to be working in educational settings (Hill, 2019). Interestingly, the upper echelon of dance occupations, such as producers, directors and choreographers, have a slightly higher (13%) median income than all Canadian workers and have the highest proportion of males with a university degree (50%), with only 17% of this higher-paid sector composed of immigrants (Hill, 2019). Unfortunately, “[a]rtists who teach in post-secondary, secondary, or elementary schools are excluded from these statistics, because they are classified as professors or teachers rather than in artistic occupations” (Hill, 2019, p. 7). These statistics demonstrate that race, gender, and cultural identity are factors in dance career decisions, systemic barriers that may extend into higher education as well as throughout the dance industry.

### **Canadian University Statistics**

There is a lack of Canadian census data specific to the number of dancers participating in training and teaching at all levels (Hill, 2019). Statistics Canada’s (2020) online report states that there are currently 1237 dance companies and 3966 arts education centers. That makes for an assumed large number of students along with aspiring and practicing professionals. As Hill (2019) reported that 50% of all Canadians reported making or performing art, and racialized Canadians attending cultural performances, such as dance, at a higher rate than their White counterparts, dance education should be diverse in scope to represent those participating in and supporting dance as an art form.

When data is outdated or unavailable, informed analysis is absent (Smith, 2018). There are significant gaps in data that create challenges in assessing progress to equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) commitments (Henry et al., 2017). However, the limited data shows that diversity in academic settings does not mirror the diversity of the population (CAUT, 2018; Douglas & Halas, 2013; Henry et al., 2017; Smith, 2018). Researchers and policy-makers can assess advancement in wage gap reduction and diversity in hiring practices including EDI targets (Smith, 2018) due to limited information from disaggregated data reports for Canadian universities. Between 2006 and 2016, university professors reporting an Indigenous identity went up 0.4% to 1.4% compared to the general workforce of 3.8% Indigeneity (CAUT, 2018). The Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT; 2018) found that by 2016

minorities made up only 21.1% of university teachers while minorities held 31% of doctoral degrees in Canada and 36% of university students' spots. In all categories, adding the intersection of gender translated to lower employment rates, lower ascension to top-level careers, and lower pay overall (CAUT, 2018; Smith, 2018). While there is limited data emerging regarding individual programs or provinces in Canada (Choi, 2016; Douglas & Halas, 2013; Henry et al., 2012; Sweet et al., 2017), it is agreed that there are significant gaps requiring ongoing research to fully understand the breakdown of diversity in post-secondary institutions while also investigating the lived experiences of racialized individuals in academia.

### **Systemic Racism in Higher Education**

The lack of proportionate representation of racialized individuals in post-secondary education means that mentorship opportunities for racialized students and a dearth of targeted research is part of systemic racism in the university context. By undervaluing non-Western practices, a macro-systemic (i.e. educational, political, financial) imbalance upholds multifaceted racism leading to racialized students turning away from research and higher education. This also results in an inequitable micro-system (i.e. interpersonal), resulting in racialized students to accept the negative actions and ignorance of day-to-day oppressive behaviours by leaders and peers (Cukier et al., 2021). Those with systemic power find comfort in the reinforcement of the status quo within university hierarchies, as those in power either do not know how to discuss nor have been made fully aware of the disparity that exists and how it affects students (Vargas et al., 2020). Biological difference in IQ based on race has been discussed as a reason for unequal enrollment of non-White students in higher education, particularly in *The Bell Curve* (Bell, 1995). Bell (1995) emphatically denounced this fallacy, as he saw it as a means of publicly motivating systemic policy to quash non-White success in the US.

The combination of lack of understanding of different cultures, underrepresentation in leadership, and the othering of non-White knowledge, leads to a cycle of complacency with racism in higher education (McCarthy-Brown, 2014). Rideau (2019) illuminates the disparity in the experiences of women of colour in the higher education system, with lower wages, higher service expectations and a devaluation of their contributions to academia. Douglas and Halas

(2013) have studied and exposed racial inequality in physical education departments in higher education institutions across Canada. The authors posit that the programs studied “do not reflect the diversity of the communities they serve” (Douglas & Halas, 2013, p. 470). While dance is usually couched in physical education departments, the authors did not break the physical education departments into individual disciplines; thus, further study is needed to understand the unique intersection of systemic racial inequity in higher education dance programs. Considering there are dance classes all across this country from toddlers and preschoolers to professional adults, ensuring equity in higher education for dance is critical to support emerging talent and aspiring professionals. Dance is not exempt from the effects and reality of racism that systematically deny its participants a wide range of opportunities, including the ability to be represented in the highest echelons of education.

### **Rationale**

The current societal discussion of diversity within the entertainment industry (Mairescu & Wrigley, 2016) and the higher education system (Douglas & Halas, 2013; Henry et al., 2012, 2017; Walker, 2019) creates a foundation for pursuing research that recognizes gaps in literature of the racial inequity of dance in the Canadian dance university context. The aim of this study is to explore the racial and ethnic diversity in dance degree programs, specifically faculty makeup, student population, and curriculum. This research enables informed discussions regarding the perceptions of continued oppression through this lack of diversity and highlights the voices of current racialized students who may not see themselves reflected in their departments nor see viability of future careers in dance academia. Emphasizing Eurocentric views on styles of dance studied at the university level will only keep the system from growing with the rest of the Canadian population, further alienating dance and dance research from viability. Leadership, teaching staff, and university policies systemically and actively uphold these views and the status quo of inequity (Cukier et al., 2021). Dancers are already at a disadvantage in income equality, as is shown in current Canadian statistics (Hill, 2019). This study also aims to explore actions taken toward racial and ethnic equity in dance academia, both positive and negative, and to empower these institutions to move forward with inclusion planning and meaningful implementation.

### **Implications**

Existing within inequitable systems of higher education can leave many racialized dancers sidelined and often may lead to prematurely ended careers. This leaves gaps in qualified racialized teachers at all levels. Without post-secondary leaders and professors with knowledge, experience, and qualifications to forward the diversification of dance departments, a swath of underrepresented students, potential researchers, and educators can be disadvantaged for generations. Gaining knowledge through empirical and narrative data to challenge the current system of privilege and oppression will enable current and future students and academic leaders to dismantle these systemic inequities. This study ultimately aims to assist institutions in making informed choices that may better align with socially just expectations of racial and ethnic diversity. The following chapters will address the theories and methods that will be used in formulating this project including CRT within the interpretive/constructivist paradigm, researcher reflexivity, recruitment, methods and procedures, and the role of race and ethnicity in dance and higher education.

## **Chapter 2 – Literature Review**

This study seeks to answer this question: How is racial and ethnic diversity perceived by students in dance departments in Canadian universities? This review of literature begins with definitions of common terms related to CRT. Included will be a discussion of CRT and its role in this study along with a brief history of various dance styles. Discussions of diversity in higher education, the current state of dance in higher education, the role of race and ethnicity in dance, and the role of race in dance higher education provide key contextual information relevant to the study. This chapter concludes with an explanation of the gaps, rationale, and purpose of this study.

### **What is CRT?**

CRT “is grounded in race-based appraisals and examinations of the social construction of the law, administrative policy, electoral policy and political discourse [and] seeks to decloak the seemingly race-neutral and colour-blind ways in which the law and policy are conceptualized, discussed, and formulated, with respect to their impact on poor people and persons of color” (Parker et al., 1998, p. 5). While the intent of CRT in the 1970s was to build on the accomplishments and to forward the goals of the Civil Rights Movement, it was predominantly a legal framework (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). It has evolved into generalized societal power imbalance referenced in current media discourse. Today, a major component of CRT study is in education scholarship and a critique of Eurocentric and colonial based curriculum and education policies (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017), with some CRT researchers focusing on economic, emotional and educational disparities in lived experiences of marginalized populations (Cabrera, 2019; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Critical race theorists aim to dismantle dominant power dynamics by creating a voice for the counter-narrative of White normativity.

### **Components of CRT**

CRT has recently emerged as a hot topic (Campbell, 2022) in research and in the general population, though it is often misunderstood and misused. It is important in the research context to properly define terms and develop more understandings about the relationship between these terms and the research areas related to CRT. Language is ever-

evolving in accordance with time and context. In science fiction, the word “race” refers to an entire planetary alien species (Kwan, 2007) while in modern medicine, detailing the race of a patient could inform doctors of an elevated risk of genetic disease, or specifying ethnicity could trigger tests for cultural diet related illness (Gennaro et al., 2013). Linguistic terms are often used interchangeably (Worrell, 2015). This study relies on the following definitions for clarity. There are many terms related to CRT used throughout literature. Each term has its place in the literature, however, for the purposes of this study, the focus will be on race and ethnic diversity and the definitions outlined above, with race defined as the visible characteristics that invite assumptions based on cultural context.

Discussion and seminal research led by W.E.B. DuBois (1935) emphasized the difference between race and ethnicity, due to the assumptions made about the abilities and purpose of the non-White human in post-Civil War America. Dubois emphasized that Black people were not limited based on their physiology, but by the systems of oppression (Sall & Khan, 2017). Dubois’ influence still resonates in modern research and discussions, relevant not only to the Black experience but for all ethnic and racial lived realities in Canada.

**Race** is both a societal construct as well as biologically determined (Benson, 2018; Sun, 1995). Inheritance of physiological characteristics such as skin colour and facial features (Sankar, 2003) are markers often presented as immutable, with the reality being that 99% of human DNA is identical and many physical features can cross classifications (Benson, 2018). However, perceptions of race are socially constructed over time (Benson, 2018). We are embedded in a society where racial assumptions, based on physical presentation, are used to oppress, exclude, and exploit systematically in education, income, housing, leisure and more (Benson, 2018).

**Ethnicity** describes commonality of cultural heritage, geographic location, religion, language, and social organization (Sankar, 2003). For example, in Quebec, a visibly diverse group, feels that they have a distinct ethnic and cultural identity within the broader Canadian identity (Eriksen, 2015). By photo alone, it is nearly impossible to determine a person’s language, religion, culinary or dance traditions.

**Diversity** describes a single social system that includes a variety of people with differences in race, ethnicity, genders, sexualities, (dis)abilities and cultural backgrounds

(Fredette & Sessler Bernstein, 2021). When this variety of lived experiences is reflected in decision-making, accountability and trust are emphasized (Benson, 2018; Fredette & Sessler Bernstein, 2021).

**Equity** is the parity, or equivalency, in quality of life, work outcomes both academically and financially, and representation of all genders, sexual orientations, races, and ethnicities (Klein et al., 2002). Reduction or elimination of stereotyping, increased opportunity to learn new skills, realistic expectations of achievement and affirmation of previous experiences is the goal of equity (Klein et al., 2002; Tamtik & Guenter, 2019).

**Representation**, in the simplest of terms, is to be able to see oneself in your peers and those with power over you. In the context of this study, representation extends to include the content of dance curriculum taught in higher education. Walker (2020) describes the dismantling of the heterogeneous ethnocentric model to a broader and more inclusive model of dance education. Without diminishing the contributions of racialized styles and historical figures, ensures a less myopic and incomplete education (Walker, 2020).

There are many terms and varied definitions related to CRT, each with its place in the literature. However, for the purposes of this study the focus will be on race, ethnicity Equity and representation and the definitions outlined above.

### **Tenets of CRT**

The fundamental tenets of CRT outlined in this section have been consistently applied by various researchers and in the literature (Cabrera, 2019; Crenshaw, 2017; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Parker et al., 1998; Taylor, 1999). These five tenets discussed are: the factual existence of racism; race as a social construct; interest convergence; identifying who CRT aims to help; and intersectionality.

The first tenet is that movement from the status quo of dominance and subordination based on race can only be changed if it is acknowledged as fact (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Cabrera (2019) defends this point stating that racism is a normal part of everyday life, is system wide and not limited to a radical few. As the national discourse of Canadian identity includes a non-racial society self-image, conversation about the realities and need for change is difficult to begin when the prevailing thought is that racism does not exist here (Douglas &

Halas, 2013; Potvin, 2020; Vargas et al., 2020). For example, the premier of Quebec, François Legault, continues to assert his belief that systemic racism does not exist in Quebec, while a coroner found that in the medical case of an Indigenous woman, Joyce Echaquan, would still be alive if she were White (Banerjee, 2020). Change is difficult when the conversation is stifled from the onset due to denial of the existence of racism.

The second tenet outlined by Delgado and Stefancic (2017) is social construction. Social construction suggests that classifications of inferiority are not based on scientific physical facts proving a difference of abilities, but creates a lasting fabricated narrative of physical attributes, intelligence, and unequivocal social standing. Race is described by Delgado and Stefancic (2017) as “[n]ot objective, inherent, or fixed, they correspond to no biological or genetic reality; rather, races are categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 9). If all humans are created equal, then there must be a fictional reason for the lived disparity (Cabrera, 2019). Informed and compassionate discourse begins at a disadvantage when inclusionary policies are drafted with the subconscious idea of White-male-able-bodiedness as normative, with everything else labeled as ‘other’.

As an example, film as text has been used as a method of discovering the origins and perpetuations of the negative construct of Black women in American culture (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Ladson-Billings (2009) dissected stereotypical film-based images of Black women as mothers and teachers as an examination of racial inequality in the education system. This illuminated the reinforcement of negative discourse in relation to the efficacy and appropriateness of leadership opportunities for Black women. The Ladson-Billings (2009) study adds to the body of knowledge regarding the construction of Black women in Western society, specifically acknowledging that current discourse retains negative tropes (Ladson-Billings, 2009) that inform the views and actions of individuals and institutions regarding race relations. While the Ladson-Billings study focuses on the Black woman narrative, it can be surmised that this oppositional narrative applies to other races and ethnicities.

The third tenet of interest convergence addresses how the current system positively affects White dominant elite and the stability of the White working class (Cabrera, 2019; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Taylor, 1999). Change only occurs when self-interest of the

powerful elite is the impetus, most often due to outside influence or pressure (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). There is a current groundswell of activism currently labelled ‘cancel culture’ (Ng, 2020), exemplifying how lower classes can have some power over the elite (Bouvier & Machin, 2021). Cancel culture is a social media justice phenomenon wherein individuals and interest groups use their influence to pressure racist individuals, institutions and companies to publicly change their language or practices or face financial or social ruin (Ng, 2020). Collective movement of the lower classes can therefore influence the behavior of the elite due to societal pressure for change.

Defining whom CRT aims to help is crucial to understanding how to use the theory in research and social action. The three ways to define these groups are differential racialization, (i.e. Latinx vs Black vs Muslim contexts), intersectionality (i.e. the combined effects of race, ethnicity, finance, gender and sexuality), and unique voices of colour (i.e. the narratives of racial truth from those experiencing it (Cabrera, 2019). These varied voices contain the stories of oppression that must be heard in conjunction with the other core tenets of CRT for social justice to be effective.

Intersectionality is field of inquiry within CRT (Cho et al., 2013). The concept was developed to begin incorporating the multitude of forces and identities that create power imbalances (Crenshaw, 2017). Intersectionality in relation to social activism is rooted in the US legal system of the 1980s, exploring the similarities and differences in the multi-faceted experiences of racialized and gendered citizens (Cho et al., 2013). This CRT tenet frames the idea that a person’s life story is not confined to a single aspect of their identity. A Latina cis woman and an Indigenous gay man, while both minorities in Canada, will recount their day-to-day life and obstacles in education and career very differently. To gain the deepest insight into a lived experience, intersectionality must play a role in research. However, because the dance industry is a microcosm of elitist Eurocentric idealism and sexism, this study will focus on the exploration of race and ethnicity.

### **Critiques of CRT**

Questions raised in Cabrera’s (2019) study include an acknowledgment of opposing views within CRT, including colourblindness masking dominant standards set within White normativity. If CRT is a “utopian vision” (Cabrera, 2019, p. 219) of a world beyond race, then it

is “a permanent, oppressive social force that must be battled constantly” (Cabrera, 2019, p. 219). It is important to this study to understand critiques of CRT to be mindful of how the theory might be limited, and to unpack common challenges to the abovementioned tenets of general racial equity as understood through CRT. This section will describe oppositional ideas to CRT including: racism doesn’t exist; staying separate is best; colourblindness; and affirmative action/employment equity being oppressive to White people.

### **Does racism exist?**

As with all burgeoning theories, critics of CRT find fault in premise, definition, and purpose. Some say that if the narrative of the oppressed is not in consensus, then it lacks validity and is not worth discussing. In short, a person or group cannot be a victim until it is proven unquestionably to those in power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Cabrera (2018) posits that White dominance/supremacy exists, but it is only an issue for the dominant group when a social change is looming. Many White people do not believe that racism exists, and therefore they feel this terminology is thrust upon them in the attempt to disenfranchise their way of being (Cabrera, 2019). An argument by CRT critics suggests that if there are some successes seen within a marginalized group, then those who individually feel they are being oppressed are assumed to not be working hard enough to change their plight (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). However, as this study will explore, having a framework inclusive of history and reliant on collective action to continue asking difficult questions about power imbalances, accessibility to all opportunities regardless of race, and being unequivocally included in curricular offerings is a systemic plight worthy of study and social justice.

### **Why not stay apart?**

“Separate but equal” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p.155) was the basis of systemic and legally mandated segregation, and lauded by historical figures in North American race relations like Marcus Garvey (1920). Garvey felt that Africans were not less-than and would be better served as separate from White colonial spaces. This premise emphasizes that races should be restricted and separate, with the stated intent of equality while upholding the idea of ‘other’. This remains today in universities, but under the guise of progress; even though there are racialized professors, they are expected to teach race-based courses and frequently participate in race relations committees (Rideau, 2019).

In the early 1900's, Canada was booming with immigration and new settlement (Brown & Cook, 2016). French Canadians wanted their own identified spaces, Indigenous were relegated to reserves, and new immigrants tended to settle in proximity to families coming from the same geographical areas. They were fed the dream of separate but equal (Brown & Cook, 2016).

### **Colourblindness/ I don't see colour**

A strategy utilized by institutions and companies in their idea of combatting racism is the concept of colourblindness. The concept of colourblindness consists of the idealism of the White middle-class as normative while excluding cultural diversity (Burden et al., 2012). Colourblindness in decision-making does nothing to ameliorate the plight of the underserved or underrepresented as it ignores their lived realities and histories (Burden et al., 2012).

Colourblindness negates the ancestral history of an individual or group and dismisses the extra effort required for minorities to achieve the same level of success as their White counterparts (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). These authors also suggest that high-level representation would ease the path to success for the underserved in society.

As an example of potential harm from colourblindness policies, Thorsjussen and Sisjord (2020), in a Norwegian study exploring diversity in physical education, describe the rhetoric of ignoring colour as problematic. Describing views on race as colourblind perpetuates the notion of assimilation, which is insensitive toward difference and variation and reinforces the status quo in power relations (Thorjussen & Sisjord, 2020). The use of 'colour-blindness' as inclusion perpetuates the notion that assimilation is the only way to achieve equality, while a normalization of the imbalance is evident with the systemically powerful ignoring valid commentary by those being assimilated through racist practices (Thorjussen & Sisjord, 2020).

Colourblindness is a false concept relating to a fictional 'post-racial' society. This is felt as veiled aggressions that tell marginalized populations to 'stop complaining', or that they can individually overcome systemic inequality without challenging systemic racism. Delgado and Stefancic (2017) discuss 'equal rights versus equal results', wherein having a law, rule or policy written on paper can make the continuance of the conversation cease, while the narrow interpretation of the rule can be dismissive and even contrary to the spirit and initial purpose.

This insensitivity towards difference and variation reinforces “the denial of prejudice” (Augoustinos & Every, 2007, p. 123).

### **Affirmative action/Employment equity**

Affirmative action/employment equity aims to redress historical harms done in the workforce by denial of employment or access to higher education due to race, and is often seen as an aggression against White people while attempting to right centuries of wrongs (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Opatow, 1992). Affirmative action is the term used in American discourse, while equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) is the language used in the Canadian context (Tamtik & Guenter, 2019). Policies created with false or performative notions of EDI can be seen in aspects of our Canadian society, including the arts. In dance education, knowledge of the origins of the individual styles is an important affirmation of the culture it represents. However, validation of various genres as worthy of study, are often based on race. In this way, the entire system is rigged against minorities in not only stereotypes but in “standards of appearance” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 116).

### **Dance Education**

Just as ‘sport’ refers to many different athletic endeavors, ‘dance’ also has numerous styles under its umbrella. Anderson (2018) discusses that, “[i]n one sense, all dances are made similar by use of the human body in motion, but because the body can move in a multitude of ways, dances vary astonishingly from culture to culture” (p. 15). Here I will discuss the basics of the origin and aesthetic expectations of ballet, modern dance, and what is commonly considered ‘ethnic dance’.

### **Differing Dance Concepts**

Ballet is of European origin and design (Kirstein, 1969), and has been extremely successful in creating the narrative that this style of dance is superior to all others (Heinecken, 2017). There is a continuation of idealism in body shape and skin colour in ballet, reinforced through the narrative that this tradition must remain untouched. Modern dance is a style born out of freedom of expression movements in North America, but also holds to the Eurocentric ideal with most focus being on Graham and Limón syllabi, who were White creators. ‘Ethnic’ dance refers to any styles of dance that is steeped in non-Eurocentricity (i.e., West African,

Māori, Jingle dress, etc). It must be acknowledged that there are numerous dance pioneers, influential dancers and choreographers that helped shape the dance landscape in North America. However, due to the length and breadth of this paper, a brief discussion of some of the most known will be presented in this section for general context.

## **Ballet**

Ballet is considered a theatrical dance form, meaning that it is presented to an audience (Kirstein, 1969). Its origins can be traced back to Egyptian ritual, Greek tragedy, pantomime in Rome, Medieval and Renaissance dance (Kirstein, 1969). However, ballet as we would recognize it today has its roots in Russia, adopted in France, then augmented with Italian influence (Kirstein, 1969). Each style is recognized for precise alignment of feet, legs, arms and head, with specified steps and combinations (Kirstein, 1969).

In the United States during the 1860's, ballet was embraced as a “popular form of entertainment,” (Anderson, 2018, p. 95), becoming seen as a more serious art form in the twentieth century (Anderson, 2018). Most of the ballet stars in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century were of European origins (i.e. Russia, France and Italy), before American born dancers rose to their own fame (Anderson, 2018; Morris, 2005). Drastically changing the ballet landscape was George Balanchine. He was born in Russia, emigrated to the US and co-founded the New York City Ballet (Lobenthal, 2016). Balanchine was considered “superficial [and had] ‘anemic aesthetics’,” (Morris, 2005, p. 21). This marks the beginning of the standard of anorexic thinness and standard physical aesthetic of ballet dancers we know today.

Many studies of dance with a lens toward illuminating race and ethnicity have come from the US context, with gaps in Canadian context being slowly researched (Boye, 2018; Kelly et al., 2021). Kelly et. al (2021) discuss the othering of non-White dancers, while Boye (2018) explores the untold histories of Black dancers in Canada and their challenges existing in a system built to oppress them. Karen Kain, the preeminent Canadian prima ballerina, states in her autobiography that even she, as a conventionally slim, White girl, thought that she did not fit ballet's conventional aesthetic and felt too curvaceous for the style. (Kain et al., 1995). Kain states, “[b]allet is custom-made for highlighting every little flaw, and it was obvious that I needed some reshaping,” (Kain et al., 1995, p. 13). These statements show the specificity of aesthetics of a ‘ballet body’. Perfection and uniformity are valued, thus slamming the door on

varying body types that come with racial diversity.

There remains a void in the Canadian Ballet scene for non-White, or non-pale-skinned dancers. However, in the US, Misty Copeland is a current example of a Black female ballet dancer who was able to overcome the racial barriers in ballet by becoming the first Black prima of the American Ballet Theatre. In her Netflix film “A Ballerina’s Tale”, Copeland “challenges the ideology of White supremacy that undergirds the world of classical ballet,” (Heinecken, 2017, p. 606).

## **Modern**

‘Modern’ dance is a term that defies a concise definition. Anderson (2018) illustrates that “[d]ancers, choreographers, and critics have found it awkward, or confusing. At times, some of modern dance’s most passionate devotees themselves have had difficulty defining just what modern dance is” (Anderson, 2018, p. 112). To understand the variations within this genre, one must discuss the various dancers and choreographers. They each created a form of movement that propelled new ways of thinking about and interpreting human dance movement.

In the North American modern dance context, Anderson (2018) describes Isadora Duncan as the first historically relevant pioneer. Isadora Duncan was known for her ethereal, flowing and eccentric movement style, stemming from limited-to-no formal training depicting poetic and innovative need for personal expression (Anderson, 2018; Duncan, 1958). Both Anderson (2018) and Duncan (1958) describe Isadora (as she is still commonly referred to) as a White female dancer, born in the United States who made her debut in London in 1900 to mixed reviews and requiring much in the way of private benefactors to sustain her family financially. Her reign as living icon ended tragically when her eccentric long shawl, for which she will always be associated with, got caught in the wheel of her vehicle and strangled her (Anderson, 2018). Despite her tragic demise, her poetic movement quality inspired generations of dance artists. Other White modern dance icons from the late 1800s to mid-late 1900s were Ruth St Denis and Ted Shawn, who partnered not only in marriage, but to organize a company named Denishawn (Anderson, 2018). Discussing international influences in modern dance, Anderson (2018) states, “[t]horoughly eclectic, Denishawn’s curriculum included Oriental dance, Spanish dance, Native American dance, basic ballet, and just about

any other dance form that struck the fancy of its directors” (Anderson, 2018, p. 114). St. Denis was inspired by a Coney Island Exhibit featuring Indian religion and improvised “what she imagined to be the action she saw represented in pictures of sculptures and other art objects of ancient India” (Whitmer, 2004, p. 498). Ted Shawn’s creation of Jacob’s Pillow Dance Festival is still flourishing today.

Trained at Denishawn, one of the giants in the modern dance world whose style is often taught in higher education degree programs and company technique classes is Martha Graham. Graham is the source of many commonly used inspirational quotes, as her work as a dance innovator was based on poetic philosophies. For example, “[t]he spine is your body's tree of life. And through it a dancer communicates; his body says what words cannot, and if he is pure and open, he can make of his body a tragical instrument” (Graham, 1991, p. 8). The most famous, while the exact source is often miscredited as being from her autobiography *Blood Memory*, is found on water bottles and notebooks: “Dance is the hidden language of the soul,” (Graham, 1985). Beyond quotes, Martha Graham was a White dance choreographer and dancer born in the United States and is known for an angular, precise, spine flexible style coupled with intense muscular strength (Graham, 1991).

Another modern dance leader, José Limón’s technical strength was in employing fall and recovery in movements providing the dance world with new modalities of performer expression that included yielding to gravity. Limón grew up in Mexico in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century with mixed European and Indian heritage, then on to the United States, where he was inspired by other great dancers such as Martha Graham (“Jose Limon,” 1999; Pollack & Woodford, 1993), with his White passing features easing his career in the United States.

The legendary Alvin Ailey created a synthesis of dance techniques, that encompasses Horton, ballet, Graham, Cunningham, Limón, African and Jazz. In Manhattan, New York, this influential Black modern dance visionary incorporated all the genres he learned into a style, school and company that is renowned the world over for its multicultural training and racial acceptance (Friedman, 2003). From humble beginnings, Ailey’s accomplishment has become the nexus of Black modern dance in North America, including producing in 1960, the masterpiece and most seen modern dance piece ‘Revelations’, still being performed today

(Ailey & Bailey, 1995). However, his amalgamated technique style is largely ignored outside of his company and school.

### **Folk/Cultural/Ethnic**

Every corner of the world has dances that are endemic to their unique culture. The dances can be precipitous to group movement, ceremonial, or theatrical. Anderson (2018) explains that, “theatrical dances—dances done by people while other people watch—constitute one of the major forms of dance in cultures around the world, and each great civilization produces its own” (p. 15). Dance has its roots in every culture and society since time immemorial. Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Egypt, Aotearoa, South Africa, China, Tonga, Turtle Island, among others, all have movement and dance that encompass symbols, beliefs, stories, history and nuance. Anderson (2018) for example, describes Greece as developing theatrical dance since the Middle Ages, alongside religious and social distinctions in purpose. However, predominantly White ‘cultural’ dances (i.e. Celtic, Green) traditional dance are not what is meant or included in university dance curriculum in North America (Walker, 2019). Ethnic dance is a term most commonly used as a moniker for non-White dance styles originating from Africa, India, or South America for example, and are sometimes referred to as ‘primitive’ (Kirstein, 1969). Dance is a link to culture, while race defines acceptance.

### **Dance & Race**

Many images seen on television, movies, and in dance have historically been a fulfillment and perpetuation of the predominantly negative construction of race, as they diverge from the norm of Whiteness in the media and common social norm comparison (Ogbar, 2019). Ogbar (2019) points out that tropes of African aesthetic including the overuse of dashikis, raised clenched fists, family dysfunction, minstrel imagery, and speech patterns reinforce historically colonial construct of the abilities, or lack thereof. When a narrow checklist of acceptability is employed, the social and racial constructs are emphasized by the commercialization of art with its inherent heralding of diversity while holding the barriers in place for true inclusion (Ogbar, 2019). Highlighting true stories of the people, by the people, is quintessential in representing and defining identity.

Storytelling is a method used by some CRT researchers in exemplifying the lived experiences of the participants, combined with autoethnography (Zhang et al., 2020), with dance

as a form of expression to explore knowledge transfer (Prickett, 2016; Zhang et al., 2020). Dance in itself is not a direct vehicle for social change but a tool to narrate the issues and ways of overcoming inequality (Prickett, 2016). Choreographic license can be used in disseminating lived experience stories and how symbolism is an expression for social justice with dance as a “humanizing process” and a method of free expression (Prickett, 2016, p. 49). This is oppositional to hegemonic dance styles such as Ballet and Modern. Dance has been noted to facilitate a connection to one’s own culture and ancestors. When cultural identity can be explored through movement, a deeper understanding of self and culture, and their significance on society can be discovered. (Zhang et al., 2020). Through self-reflexivity coupled with the performance of dance, these findings can impart knowledge towards social change (Zhang et al., 2020).

Visual representation of knowledge such as dance is a means of cultural and self-exploration as well as knowledge transfer when discussing racial inequity (Prickett, 2016). Prickett (2016) contextualized the prison system and death row through dance storytelling to mobilize those outside of the system to reject what they previously did not understand about the underpinnings of social inequality. Choreography and other performance art such as television and films showcase memories of unequal treatment and conceptualizes past research and current events. These are tools that are often overlooked as valid research methods but do have a strong impact on societal consciousness (Ogbar, 2019; Prickett, 2016; Zhang et al., 2020).

Racialized creators strive to show the normalcy of ‘ethnic’ lives instead of depicting how White society views other ethnicities and their inherent assumptions. More mainstream depictions of ethnicity are attempting to move beyond depictions of trauma. Realistic representation in popular culture, due in part to the hiring of diverse writing staff, has increased visibility of racialized individuals, challenging inequity by fostering acceptance of art as a reflection of the community, society, politics, and individual interests (Ogbar, 2019). Ogbar (2019) notes that the data shows that there is improvement in representation in television, but with a lack of specified data for dance in universities, a robust conversation cannot begin in earnest.

Deagon (2008) demonstrates the importance in seeing the North American

development of visibility and acceptance of cultural/folk dances while understanding historical knowledge and context to understand the differences between varying dance presentations. As “dance reflects larger shifts and conflicts in a community’s sociocultural politics of representation, as well as persistent stereotypes held by the dominant Anglo-American culture” (Deagon, 2008, p. 276), understanding the lens of each presentation should be a major focus of ethnic inclusion in dance departments. A folk dance can be created by a group or individual seeking mainstream exposure of their perceived culture through “polished, appealing and supposedly “authentic” representation of national identity” (Deagon, 2008, p. 276) or can be a recently created demonstration by choreographers and performers in an attempt to re-imagine or revisualize their culture’s contemporary experiences (Deagon, 2008).

Currently, when most cultural festivals and where cultural presentations occur, there is still a feeling of Euro/colonial leadership being “endowed... as benevolent curators of immigrant cultures” (Deagon, 2008, p. 277). Through widespread media presentations, such as *So You Think You Can Dance Canada*, there has been a push for representation as dance being “commonly associated with freedom, affinity and authenticity” (Boyd, 2012, p. 260). Positive spectacles of individuality with cultural themes understood through a contemporary lens lends credibility to the idea of inequitable construction of race in our multicultural society (Boyd, 2012). This construction of race permeates higher education, and as universities are bound by purposes of research and dissemination of knowledge, the study of the intersections of dance and race must be interrogated to advance equity in dance academia.

### **Diversity, Race, Ethnicity and Dance in Higher Education**

The following section will discuss the racial oppression experienced by people in higher education as students and educators. Dance in universities perpetuates this racism through the guise of tradition, exclusionary curriculum, and an implemented hierarchy of dance styles based on race.

#### **Diversity in Higher Education**

Douglas and Halas (2013) expose that there exists a “racial hierarchy” in their study of Whiteness in Physical Education programs across Canada. Overall, the hegemony of

Whiteness minimizes and discourages conversations about what (and who) is/are not present” (Douglas & Halas, 2013, p. 466) and that “the majority of interviewees admitted that their programs do not reflect the diversity of the communities they serve and that their graduates are unprepared to work with diverse populations (Douglas & Halas, 2013, p. 470). The researchers’ methods included viewing web-available course listings and images of faculty then interviewing 40 faculty members to ensure triangulation of results. Douglas and Halas’ (2013) focus was on gaining a comprehensive accounting of the dominant culture of Whiteness in Physical Education programs across Canada and serves as a methodological starting point for this study, as dance programs are often under a Physical Education umbrella within higher education institutions.

A four-year study illuminates the systemic barriers felt by Indigenous and racialized people across Canada in the university context (Henry et al., 2017). Using a CRT lens, the researchers found that for racialized faculty members’ scholarly potential was stunted, their professional judgements were more often questioned, and their income was not commensurate with their experience and knowledge, which often came alongside the differential valuation of publication record. When land-based knowledge is valued less by prestigious scholarly publications, for example, hiring and wage policy based on these metrics can adversely affect Indigenous scholars (Henry et al., 2017). Henry et al.’s (2017) study therefore provides insight into how racialized faculty and aspiring academics experience systemic barriers in academia, prohibiting equity and therefore limiting representation for future students and scholars.

Rideau’s (2019) study of American non-tenure-track Women of Colour faculty members illuminates the disparity in workload and acceptance in the academy based on race. Rideau (2019) states that “[n]on-tenure-track faculty members are marginalized within higher education. They receive inadequate pay for their work, lack job security, and may not be able to access the same resources as their tenure-track and tenured peers,” (Rideau, 2019, p. 161). Specific data on the lived experiences of oppression faced by racialized women in academia is largely missing from literature (Rideau, 2019). According to Rideau, this work has been largely the responsibility of academics of colour to provide, creating a greater workload or shift in academic focus to complete these necessary studies. In the US, “[w]omen of colour are underrepresented in higher education, accounting for about 10% of faculty members at 4-year

institutions,” (Rideau, 2019, p. 162). This is in addition to having their teaching and research being delegitimized, with additional constraints of promotions stemming from systemic racism, either overtly or covertly (Rideau, 2019). In addition, students in universities can organize cultural recognition days, while curriculum continues to focus on Euro/Colonizer-centric topics (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The onus remains on racialized students to educate their peers and enjoy opportunities for celebration of their own culture, while the universities prioritize Eurocentric cultures in formal curricula.

There is empirical evidence of the benefits of a diverse representation in faculty, student populations, course offerings, and an unfurling of hierarchical cultural subjectivity (Guo & Jamal, 2007). According to Guo and Jamal (2007): “[t]hese benefits include an improvement in intergroup relations and campus climate, increased opportunities for accessing support and mentoring systems, opportunities for acquiring broader perspectives and viewpoints, and participating in complex discussions, all of which can contribute to increased learning,” (p. 30).

### **Dance in Higher Education**

Most North American university dance programs focus on Ballet and Modern with a smattering of African or World Dance (Green, 2003; Robinson & Domenici, 2010). Calling only Ballet and Modern training ‘technique’ classes creates a normality of assimilation to a Eurocentric ideal or norm, where the dominant group reinforces the oppression of racialized culture and contribution (Green, 2003; Robinson & Domenici, 2010).

In her book discussing the study of cultural dance education and pedagogy in the New Zealand/Aotearoa context, Ashley (2012), she writes, “[r]elatively little research interrogates pedagogy that is designed specifically to develop understanding about dances from contextual purposes” (p. 3). When a teacher is made aware of the context, history, symbolism and richness of a culture, they are more likely to approach the pedagogy with enthusiasm and appropriate reverence that would not diminish the influence and reality of the people it represents. In 2003, the Government of New Zealand made dance education mandatory from Kindergarten to post-secondary nationally (Ashley, 2012). This lends credibility and generational acceptance of not only dance as a valid educational tool but reinforces in policy and curriculum that dance is a part of the “multi-modal ways of knowing the world” (p. 6).

Teaching fulsomely *about* cultural dances, and not just mimicking steps, embraces a fuller investigation of the meaning, expectations, and relevance of that culture.

While being made to teach or learn cultural dances is positive on the surface, the aspects of appropriation, understanding self within the learning framework of removing hierarchical perspectives, and “binary ways of thinking” (Ashley, 2012, p. 7) are important theoretical considerations. Tradition and change go hand-in-hand in globalization and colonization that occur at different paces and levels of completeness (Ashley, 2012). The choice of who makes the decision of the most ‘authentic’ moment in history to highlight in curriculum is as important as the lessons themselves (Ashley, 2012). If, especially at the university level, cultural nuances are taught through only the oppressor’s lens, or framed to be more compelling to the dominant sensibilities, the risk of changing the histories of these otherwise silenced traditions is another problematic imposition to the subordinate minority (Ashley, 2012). Hawaiian dance, for example, as non-islanders know it today, is a product of the 1960’s, born of the commodity-centricity of Hollywood. However, Hawaiian historians hold original or authentic Hawaiian dance to include a sharing between the other Polynesian island cultures, flowed by a near complete decimation by colonization. Which history to teach and how to teach it is the question asked as commodification, appropriation, and acculturation in cultural curriculum is a challenge for all institutions (Ashley, 2012).

When narrow and false images are used as the cornerstone of decision making for educational diversity policies and curriculum inclusion, integration of truth in cultural histories and current trends in racism has a steeper hill to climb to have all students, no matter their ethnic heritage, feel heard. Ultimately there is a need to be represented and supported within their educational journeys in a positive and honest way. Integration of culturally diverse curriculum in schools has been a step forward in body, but not in spirit of true inclusion, as the curriculum is still centered around the hegemonic White narrative. Empowerment as a social change factor within the higher education system had a start when “Black students form [B]lack cultural centers, [B]lack student unions, demanded more [B]lack faculty, staff and students. And, importantly, they demanded a new academic field of study: [B]lack studies” (Ogbar, 2019, p. 4). Some in university leadership believe that by allowing solidarity groups and celebrations of varying cultures within the walls of campus, or including an optional

course in ‘world dance’ is a symbol that they have arrived at inclusivity. In reality, these performative measures do not dismantle the everyday practices that alienate marginalized people and groups as little or no effort is made for inclusion in mandatory coursework and valuation of non-White content (Stewart, 2014; Vargas et al., 2020).

Beyond the social and cultural impact of dance, dance in physical kinesiological terms is a burgeoning sector being explored. An empirical, scientific review of Haas’ *Dance Anatomy* (2018) focuses on technique improvement, injury care and prevention, strength and resiliency, balance and fine motor control (Berardi, 2018). This deep study of individual movements being broken down into components, analyzed and retaught with scientific backing for safety and efficiency while maintaining the artistic aesthetic (Berardi, 2018) is ongoing, and speaks to the importance of recognizing dance as both an art and a physical practice.

Dance therefore exists at the intersection of art and science. There is discussion surrounding the importance of scientific backing for improving the health and well-being and that further study is required, which is what some researchers have been able to accomplish (Fitt, 1988). However, that the seminal book *Dance Kinesiology* produced its last edition in 1988 is evidence of the lack of funding and the ability to add to the growing sport knowledge in the dance context in a linear way. Within this book that has been used for decades by dance practitioners there is also a gap in acknowledgment of some racial physical differences that can hide or alter the diagnoses of various injuries or potential physical problems, alignment assumptions within the aesthetic, and a lack of discussion of non-Western dance genres’ unique challenges. Though outside the scope of this study, further research is needed into the physicality of racialized dancers to holistically support equity in dance inside and outside of academia.

### **The Role of Race and Ethnicity in Dance Higher Education**

The norm of dance training from community studio and professional companies including university technique classes involves being in a studio filled with mirrors. Students are continuously told to self-regulate into the typical, normatively White, skinny, defined featured dancer, and leaves little room for cultural individuality within the constancy of attempting to undo ‘othering’ in order to find success (Green, 2003). Docility in studentship

where questioning is discouraged aids in the unchanging status-quo (Green, 2003). Within this system of achievement and acceptance based on objective ideals, the basic culture of dance in university is in question for perpetuating race-based scale of worth.

In this time of Black Lives Matter resurgence, institutions are attempting to placate stakeholders by including messages of diversity within their re-written mission statements (McCarthy-Brown, 2014). However, mission statements alone did not show a department's true commitment level to racial and ethnic diversity (McCarthy-Brown, 2014). Degree requirements for graduation favor traditionally White dance forms and are often privileged with higher credit points or mandatory status within degree requirements (McCarthy-Brown, 2014). The author mentions that some departments in the US with diverse offerings, equalized the credits by offering equal standing between each course, based on the student's individual interests without privileging one particular style. She also states that the purpose of diversifying is not to get rid of Western styles, but to hold space and ensure academic legitimacy to others (McCarthy-Brown, 2014).

Walker (2019) completed a study of nine national dance departments to discover the Black dance experience in US higher education curriculum. She emphasizes that “[t]he absence of substantive knowledge of African and [B]lack American dance traditions in the dance discipline is among the many reasons for their current lack of recognition” (Walker, 2019, p. 37). Eliminating ‘othering’ of styles, instigating a system that allows dance majors to focus on a stream of study that is in line with their epistemological ways of knowing, and allowing a choice of movement experiences and historical frameworks allows a freedom from hierarchical colonized perspectives (Walker, 2019).

Faculty representations generally do not include racialized people as tenured professors for the Western styles of dance and the racialized are relegated to teaching so called ‘ethnic’ styles, which devalues the contributions and possibilities for students entering either of those streams and finding success (McCarthy-Brown, 2014). Due to the lack of qualified faculty and department resources, only offering entry level courses in each ethnic style also devalues those students who may want to focus their post-secondary study in a non-Western style, or those who have decades of training in non-western styles, far beyond the beginner status (McCarthy-Brown, 2014). “As educators, we have a responsibility to offer students opportunities to

develop their full identities in a manner that relates to their education” (McCarthy-Brown, 2014, p. 127). McCarthy-Brown (2014) also poignantly states that “[w]e have a responsibility to uplift other cultures to ensure that students do not adopt a monocultural perspective” (p. 127). Therefore, having the system of dance in higher education accept, nourish, and advocate for diversity in all aspects facilitates social justice and change inside and outside of the academy.

### **Rationale and Purpose**

Racism is not a singular event, nor is it a thing of the past. CRT illuminates oppression as the result of discriminatory policies and decisions that systemically disenfranchise minorities. Language (i.e., equity, diversity, inclusion) is used by institutions to appease and congratulate the majority on their work toward racial equality, while marginalized populations are sidelined and invalidated. Recognizing systemic racism through cultural expression including dance, and working from within institutions to correct the systemic inequities, is critical to perpetuating racial equity in academia.

Dance is among many human talents that is present throughout history and continues to be a core part of most cultures around the world. Each country has dance, or multiple dances, representing a multiplicity of cultures. By defining which dance styles and their origins are worthy of university level study, institutions are perpetuating systemic inequality. In Canadian society, dance is fraught with division with genres placed in a hierarchy of value based on race. As an important component to cultural study, dance in the university setting must be given a higher standard of inclusion to ensure that knowledge, both researched and taught, is commensurate with the community it serves.

Although dance education is increasing in popularity, there remains a gap in terms of diversity and the inclusion of race and ethnic diversity within dance curriculum. Although a study of Canadian physical education departments found that in a country with over 200 diverse ethnicities, 94% of faculty were non-minorities (Douglas & Halas, 2013), there is no race-based data in post-secondary Canadian dance departments. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to map and explore the racial and ethnic diversity of students, faculty, and course offerings within university dance programs. The goal of this research is to begin the discussion of the perceptions of the efficacy of institutional efforts or inaction toward inclusivity in dance academia.

## Chapter 3 - Methods

This chapter will introduce the participant demographics (i.e. universities and students), procedures (i.e. ethics, recruitment), data collection (i.e. web data collection and interviews), and analysis (i.e. thematic analysis) plans for this study.

### Methodology

#### Interpretivist/Constructivist Paradigm

This study utilizes constructivism (Zitomer & Goodwin, 2014) and interpretivism (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018) within a CRT lens to gain insight as to how individuals in academia, specifically in dance education faculties, shape the narrative of racial inequality based on their knowledge, views, and personal subjectivity. To utilize CRT is to also acknowledge the validity of constructivism. Gratton and colleagues (2003) explain that “[c]onstructivism suggests that multiple realities exist, formed within a particular context. The researcher studies how reality is ‘constructed’ by the individual within this context” (p. 21). As CRT emphasizes how race creates differentiated experiences for individuals and groups based on systemic power imbalances, constructivism is an appropriate framework to use when employing CRT.

Denzin and Lincoln (2018) explain “[t]he *constructivist paradigm* assumes a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and respondent co-create understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures” (p. 57). They later posit that “[c]ritical theorists, for example, examine the material conditions and systems of ideology that reproduce class and economic structures [...and] constructivist researchers examine the stereotypes, prejudices, and injustices connected to nation, race, ethnicity, and gender” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 548). The tradition of Whiteness with its assumed superiority and otherness in the dance hierarchy will have a place in this discourse within the participants’ own constructions of reality.

This study utilizes an interpretivist approach to identify and understand themes found in the participant interviews. Denzin and Lincoln (2018) discuss how social injustice and

oppression can be uncovered through critical thematic analysis as, “elements of interpretivist/postmodern, critical theory, constructivist, and participative inquiry fit comfortably together,” (p. 231). As reality is not immutable, but constructed by individual subjectivity, varying perspectives must be sought for a more thorough analysis. This research begins with a deep personal connection to the subject matter, with each interview bringing opportunities to enrich the understanding of the phenomenon of racial injustice (Patton, 2015) in Canadian university dance departments.

Ladson-Billings (2009) expands on the idea of individual experiences within a single social structure, with schools representing an ecosystem with existing hierarchies and traditions. She proposes that a CRT researcher is tasked with identifying racism while gathering a counter-narrative to stereotypes. Focusing on the university context, this study utilizes an interpretivist/constructivist paradigm with a CRT lens to hopefully illuminate specific student perceptions of racial and ethnic diversity in their programs.

### **Reflexivity**

I recognize my inherent subjectivity while conducting this study, with reflexivity as “the means by which the researcher realizes her/his integral part in the investigated phenomena” (Zitomer, 2014 p. 201). Having received my bachelor’s degree from one of the universities included in this research study, being a Black female dancer, and a leader in the current dance community as a teacher, choreographer, mentor, and adjudicator, an insider’s perspective is inherent in any questioning and analysis of data. The preamble to this thesis is a poetic representation of my own experience. I have witnessed and have been on the receiving end of overt racism in my over 40 years in the dance industry. These acts of racism were both overt and in micro-aggressions used in the name of acceptability. Examples of these acts of racism within in my experience include: being put on academic probation until I could find a way during the summer break to ‘get rid or at least hide my backside’, having my hair fall out from chemical burns while straightening my hair in order to make a ‘cleaner’ bun, and being told when hired at a prestigious ballet school that I should just teach tap, even while being the only one person on faculty with Bachelor’s degree in ballet and modern.

There may be pitfalls as some of the language in conversation may not be accessible to all readers, and some data may be considered common knowledge and may not be seen as

having to address further explanation. These constraints were recognized and overcome with common parlance for complete data collection and effective dissemination of findings.

### **Recruitment**

After ethics approval was confirmed through the Research Ethics Board 1 at the University of Manitoba, all interview participants were provided informed consent an informed consent form and asked to sign (Appendix A). All identifiable data has been anonymized. Individual university programs in this study are identified by name, city, and province, but exact data attributed to each has been anonymized.

### **Universities**

Two university dance programs were used for web analysis: York University and the University of Calgary. These institutions were chosen as the two dance degree programs in Canada via the below criteria.

- 1) having dance as a 3- or 4-year major in a bachelor's degree program,
- 2) having an internal student selection process within the university,
- 3) being a stand-alone department not reliant on outside dance companies or dance schools to provide coursework,
- 4) including course options that go beyond technique studio classes (i.e. dance history, pedagogy, anatomy, and physiology),
- 5) the presence of at least two clear career streams in either performance, history, choreography, or pedagogy-based streams,
- 6) being primarily English-speaking institutions.

### **Students**

A poster was created for recruitment outlining the goals and importance of this study to facilitate snowball purposeful sampling (Appendix D). This was distributed on social media to relevant specific groups. As the pandemic constraints make in-person location-targeted recruitment prohibitively difficult, the goal was to identify and connect with possible participants who are currently unknown to this researcher through social media groups

(Leighton et al., 2021). This strategy was found to bring awareness to the study, but yielded no active participants. The successful method was individual, personal connections to known past university dance students, which resulted in purposeful snowball recruitment of the remainder of the interview participants.

Students interviewed were five dancers who participated in a Canadian dance university stream. They were a mix of races and ethnicities (i.e. East Asian, Latina, European, French-Canadian, and Southeast Asian). Their academic levels in dance ranged from an incomplete undergraduate program to PhD candidacy. Two participants are currently in their dance programs, with three having completed their programs within the past 5–10 years. All participants were over 18 years-old and met ethics age requirements for consent.

### **Methods & Procedure**

Utilizing Douglas and Halas' (2013) strategy for data collection, data collection began with a 2-step approach. Utilizing the participants' university websites, a visual analysis of the racial composition of faculty was conducted by interpreting faculty images into racial categories. Those assumptions were verified by reading their individual bios and otherwise public online webpages. The following steps included individual interviews with students (explanation below). The final step was data analysis using reflexive thematic analysis (RTA).

Douglas and Halas (2013) used web analysis coupled with semi-structured interviews for data collection. By visually interpreting the perceived racial makeup of faculties, course content, and student populations before triangulating the results with interviews, a more accurate portrait of the landscape of diversity was accomplished for Kinesiology and Physical Education departments in Canada. By acknowledging the problematic subjectivity of identifying race through singular images, the authors were able to verify their initial results with more objective statistics from the interviewees, while adding to the body of literature a mapping and critique of the lack of diversity in these specific departments. The methods used by Douglas and Halas (2013) also created a platform for discussion on the impacts of multi-leveled hegemony regarding the benefits to the majority with continued oppression of the racialized groups and individuals.

## Visual Web Analysis

Using Excel as the index database, data collected from the university recruitment web pages included: faculty lists, and course titles and descriptions. Faculty specific data comprised of an image, name, credential, position, biography, race, and ethnicity. Determining race and ethnicity by image alone can be inaccurate (Douglas & Halas, 2013), therefore a thorough search within each faculty member's listed biography was also conducted for statements made of their race and ethnicity. These images were collated into groupings of displayed diversity. These categories include, but are not limited to race groupings (i.e. White, Black, Asian, Indigenous, Latinx, or unidentifiable). If questions remained, external web sources were viewed to attempt to ascertain a race and/or ethnicity. These external locations included personal marketing websites, dance studio and dance company websites, conference speaker listings, LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram.

The next stage of web analysis looked at dance course titles and descriptions that include traditionally Eurocentric styles (i.e. ballet and modern) and traditionally 'ethnic' styles (i.e. African and Mosaic). The final piece of web content data collection encompasses the language of diversity inclusion or exclusion included in their mission, vision and EDI statements (McCarthy-Brown, 2014).

## Interviews

According to Gratton and colleagues (2003), interviews are appropriate for data collection when there are few participants, the participants have variation and complexity in responses, and "[w]here the research is exploratory, and interviews may be used to identify information that could be used to refine and develop further investigation" (2003, p. 141). When gathering interview data that can be seen as topically controversial, ethically created semi-structured questions asked within a space of empathy and free of judgement ensured compliance and honesty from the participants and gave a richer telling of their lived experience within the context of the research question.

Interviewees included five current or recent university dance students within Canada. These participants took part in a 60–90-minute semi-structured interview process pertaining to the diversity makeup of their departments and course offerings. There was an added

opportunity to delve into their perceptions of the efficacy of their attempts at inclusivity, and the realities of their efforts or those of inaction. The participants were given the chance to tell stories of their racial and ethnic experience while in university. A semi-structured approach was chosen as “[t]his approach uses a standard set of questions, or schedule. However, the researcher adopts a flexible approach to data collection, and can alter the sequence of questions or probe for more information with subsidiary questions,” (Gratton et al., 2003, p. 141).

### **Data Analysis**

Using mapping and critique, (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018) information from the visual web analysis was used to identify the racial diversity within the faculty, staff, student base, and course offerings, then contrasting these with the perceptions of the diversity inclusions or exclusions by interview participants. These results give insight into the representation present at these institutions. RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2019) was employed to tease out themes and sub-themes in the interviews. Each interview was analyzed separately and then compared to the other interviews and the web-based data. RTA acknowledges the researcher’s inherent sensibilities and theoretical assumptions while coding and interpreting the collected data. Braun and Clarke (2019) state that “[t]hemes are creative and interpretive stories about the data, produced at the intersection of the researcher’s theoretical assumptions, their analytic resources and skill, and the data themselves” (p. 594). Braun and Clarke (2020) also discuss the process of analysis requiring immersion in the data, reflection, and re-writing as a loop to conceptualize the information, instead of an immovable set of coded themes.

Thematic Analysis consists of eight steps, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2013). The first is transcription, written verbatim from the Zoom recordings. The second step is “reading and familiarization; taking note of items of potential interest,” (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 202). The third and fourth are coding and searching for themes. Review of themes, subthemes, and relationship between the identified themes, are the fifth step. The sixth and seventh steps are defining and naming themes, then finally, the writing of the analysis is the eight and final step.

### **Quality Criteria**

In order to determine success of this study, quality criteria as described by Zitomer and

Goodwin (2014) were utilized. These include: 1) *reflexivity*; understanding that my own experiences and assumptions are integral to the research and analysis; 2) *credibility*; employing verification that uses numerous sources of data and interpretations to ensure that the same or similar conclusions are reached; 3) *resonance*; which “is the impact of a study on readers, its ability to meaningfully reverberate with them, expanding their appreciation and understanding of the phenomena investigated and their ability to transfer study findings to their contexts...” (p. 210); 4) providing *significant contribution*; which is how the new knowledge from the study relates to the stakeholders, general public, showcases future research possibilities or clarifies misconceptions; 5) “[e]thical research is carried out in a respectful, humane, honest, and empathic way, honoring collaboration between researcher and participants” (p. 211); and, 6) *coherence*; underpinned by clear epistemology and defined theoretical lens. This study may provide a template for continued discussion, as the results are practically valuable to the stakeholders (i.e. faculty, administrators, current and future students) to make informed hiring and course inclusion decisions. CRT will hopefully illuminate the systemic barriers placed before dancers to gain an education in dance with diversity, inclusion, and a non-hierarchical approach to dance styles.

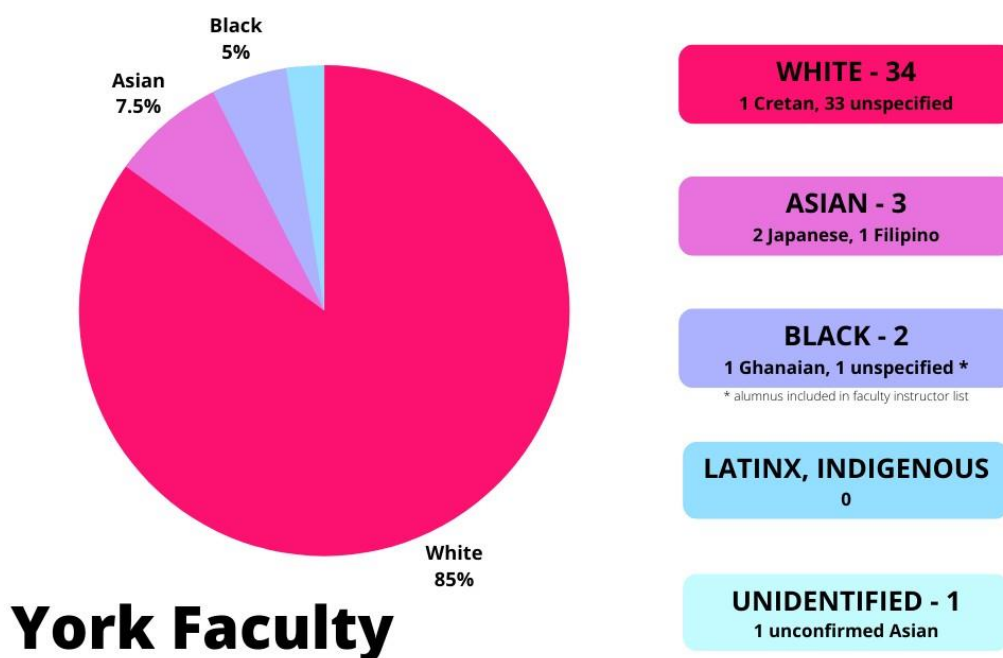
## Chapter 4 - Results

This section details the results of data collection (i.e. web-based data and interviewees' demographic data), followed by a discussion of those results utilizing the interview data.

### Web-Based Data Faculty

#### Faculty

*Figure 1*

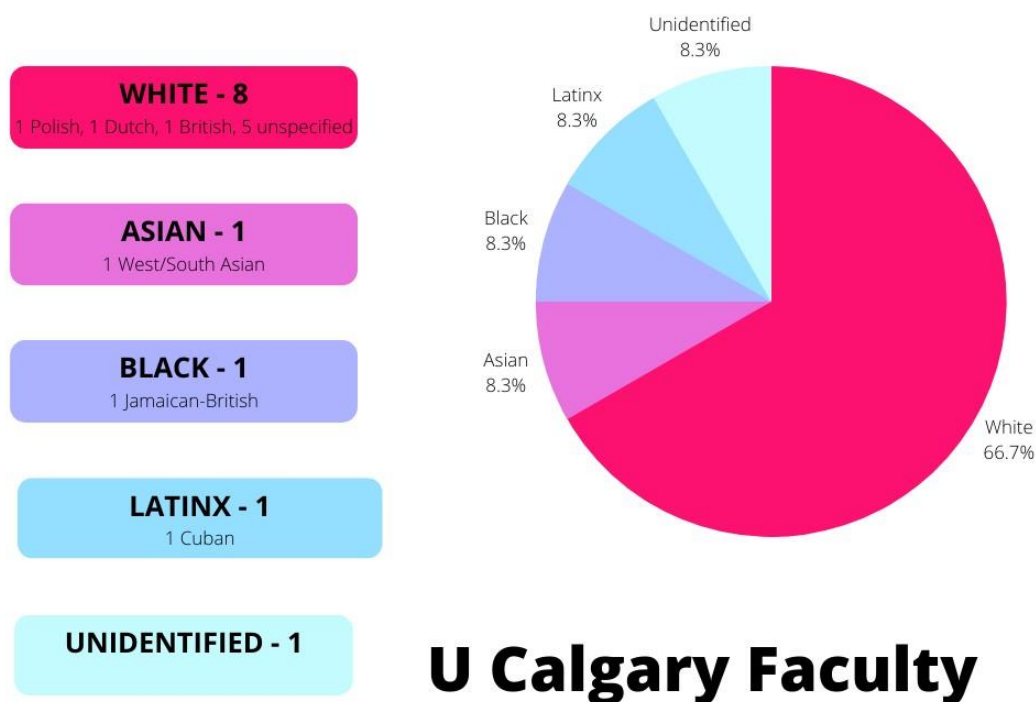


The predominance of White faculty at York University is displayed in Figure 1. York lists 40 faculty members (York University, 2022a). Of those listed, the faculty is made up of 85% White and 15% People of Colour (i.e. Asian and Black). It should be noted that confirmation of Whiteness through the faculty bios or external searches is a difficult task. This could be due, in part, to White-normativity (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017) in that White people do not feel the need to explain their Whiteness, while People of Colour are racialized, and therefore societally expected to explain their 'otherness'. Therefore, when the images were assumed to be

of White faculty, the absence of racial or ethnic identity in bios was used as positive verification of Whiteness. One White identified faculty member listed their ethnicity as Cretan.

The faculty identified by photos as People of Colour (i.e. Asian and Black), were verified by their bios or external sources. The five identified, or unconfirmed, as People of Colour listed their ethnicity as: Ghanian, Japanese, and Filipino. There was one member listed on the York faculty page who, based on the image and academic training location could be assumed to be Asian. However, her position in the faculty (i.e. contract, Associate, Emerita etc.) is not listed on the website, and her race is not discussed after a thorough search of external sites therefore this member has been listed as 'Unidentified/Unconfirmed'. Her presence as a teaching member of faculty was also not mentioned by interviewees (individuals with internal knowledge of the program). One Black member listed within the faculty, a recent MFA graduate, with no position listed.

Figure 2



White faculty constitutes the majority at The University of Calgary, displayed in Figure 2. U Calgary (University of Calgary, 2022a) lists 12 faculty members teaching in their department. Of these 12, eight are White, three are People of Colour and one is unidentified. Of the White identified faculty, some chose to share more detail about their personal identity including one person who identified as Polish, one who identified as Dutch, and one who identified as British. The remaining five are unspecified.

The faculty identified by photos as People of Colour (i.e. Asian, Black, and Latinx), were verified by their bios or external sources. The three identified, or unconfirmed, as People of Colour listed their ethnicity as West/South Asian, Jamaican-British, and Cuban. One member listed as Professor Emerita but not currently teaching, had little to definitively confirm race or ethnicity in her bio, nor in external sites. The exposition of her ethnicity is some Polish language on her personal Facebook page coupled with awards for work in Poland.

## **Courses**

York University listed 71 courses in its course offerings (York University, 2022b). It is recognized that not all courses are available to students at every registration period. For the purpose of this study, only clearly identified culturally relevant courses have been broken out within the larger total (i.e. technique, history, and specified cultural courses). Modern dance technique classes dominated the style offerings at 16, with Ballet coming in a close second at 12. Both are mandatory between the first to third years of dance major study. There are three Breaking/Hip Hop technique courses, two Hip Hop pedagogy courses, and three Filipino technique courses. There are five non-technique courses that reference culture in their descriptions with one not available to dance majors.

The University of Calgary has 63 courses offered through their dance department (University of Calgary, 2022b). Within that total, three courses are not open to dance majors, and 14 are not included in a students' GPA. As these 17 courses do not reflect a dance major's common experience, they have been removed from the styles and culturally referenced accounting for the purpose of this study. U Calgary lists three Ballet, six Modern/Contemporary, and three jazz dance technique courses. Of the courses remaining on the course offerings list, three courses directly reference culture as a focus (i.e. "Cross-Cultural Currents: Embodying Global Dance"). Non-European styles of dance offered, as introductions to various dance forms, though not admissible for GPA, include Latin, West African, South Asian, Tap, and Hip Hop.

## **Interviewee Demographics**

There are five interviewees in this study. Even though the pool of students who are currently in or recently in dance university programs in Canada is small and those that identify as People of Colour are even fewer in number, these five participants were invaluable to the data collection. Any identifiable data has been removed and participants have been anonymized as much as is possible. Many of the quotes, attributed programs, and times of participation have been concealed to protect the identity of the participants. Interview participants self-identified as Filipino, Latina, Japanese, European heritage, and minority language Canadian, representing a racially and ethnically diverse participant pool. These women ranged in dance academic training (i.e. one incomplete undergraduate degree, two completed undergraduate degrees, one Master's degree completed, and one PhD Candidate).

The online platform ‘Zoom’ was used to interview participants due to time, distance, and Covid-19 related constraints. All interviews took place in April and May of 2022, recorded on a biometric and password protected local computer and stored on Microsoft Teams for security, consistent with REB 1 Ethics protocols.

## **Interview Results**

This section uses the interview conversations to unveil the lived experiences of students in dance departments in Canada. Interview participants each gave a rich testimony of their lived experiences in their respective faculties. As the participants may be unintentionally harmed (i.e. reputation, lost job opportunities, etc.) by being identified, many quotes and stories have been redacted, paraphrased, or not attributed to a specific pseudonym. Pseudonyms are sparsely used as the amalgamation of information may inadvertently identify participants. Themes and sub-themes identified in the data are described in Table 1 and analysed throughout this chapter. Themes include early dance experiences, career goals, hegemony versus diverse representation, hierarchy, mentorship and will it ever change, and sub-themes are detailed in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*List of Themes and Sub-Themes*

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Sub-Themes</b>
<b>Early Dance Experiences/Indoctrination</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Primary interest</li> <li>b) Finding a ‘home’ dance studio</li> <li>c) Finding a ‘voice’ in the genres</li> </ul>
<b>Career Goals Change with Exposure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Dreams of the future</li> <li>b) Influence during the university experience</li> <li>c) Reality after graduation</li> </ul>
<b>Hegemony versus Diverse Representation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Who is teaching?</li> <li>b) Am I alone?</li> <li>c) How it makes me feel</li> </ul>

<b>Mentorship</b>	a) Family Support b) University Faculty c) Other support?
<b>Course Diversity</b>	a) Prevalence of ballet b) The eloquence of modern dance c) Marginalization of “ethnic” courses
<b>Will it Ever Change?</b>	a) Whose responsibility is it? b) Is there hope?

## **Early dance experiences/ indoctrination**

The main theme of early dance experiences includes three sub-themes: primary interest, finding a ‘home’ dance studio, and finding a ‘voice’ in the genres. Interview participants began by describing their early dance training before attending university, explaining the early indoctrination of acceptability in dance. Most participants tried many different local studios, transitioned from other activities to dance, or, like most, were introduced to a myriad of genres of dance before focusing on modern dance.

**Primary interest.** All participants reported beginning dance at or before the age of 10. Anna explained, “I started dancing when I was 10 years old. Just recreationally. Just like, you know, my parents dropped me there and I was like, I like it. Let’s keep going!”. Emily stated that she began classes at age three. Ivy started recreationally at age five or six then participated in a more professional program at age nine.

I don’t remember a time that I wasn’t dancing. My mom loves to dance, and so she was taking her adult ballet class when she was pregnant with me ... So, I like to think that we were doing a little pas de deux together. (Nora)

**Finding a ‘home’ dance studio.** While dancing before birth is not a requirement, initial training involves finding a home in a local studio.

Emily tried many studios before finally being comfortable and confident in one near her home. Hailey stated, “I started dancing when I was 10 years old... dancing all the way through high school, just taking Jazz and then I started taking Modern, and that’s what I fell in love with when I was 16 years old. Like, Me and modern found each other, and it was you know, fate!”

For Anna, finding dance was just as important as finding the right studio for her. Her training began with gymnastics, which shares some similar characteristics with dance, including the use of ballet concepts.

**Finding a ‘voice’ in the genres.** Each studio has a unique atmosphere, which attract different students, while each genre retains certain participants. It took Hailey six years for ‘fate’ to match her with modern dance style. Once entrenched in that style, she found a local modern dance company that accepted her into their ranks. Disillusioned with her non-Arts based

university degree, she began a dance undergraduate program focused on modern dance.

Ivy's journey to modern dance was much longer. She began with hip-hop and jazz, then professional ballet training for five years. She feels lucky to have been able to participate in an intensive high school performance training which included jazz, ballet and modern in the curriculum. However, for university, modern was the vehicle for creativity and non-verbal language. Ivy determined that due to unearthing the unique language of dance in the university context, she was able to begin developing her English written language describing dance creation.

For Nora, "dance is the lens that I look through." She was enrolled in ballet, tap, modern, and hip-hop as a child. Modern was rationalized as the conduit to continued dance education, while she grappled for her true purpose in dance. Cultural (non-Eurocentric) styles are where she found her path and her voice.

The influence of American culture caught the interest of one participant. Jazz and tap were the commercial versions of dance offered in her home country. Once she found modern dance in university, between physical training and exposure to modern dance companies, she feels like her life changed. Modern dance was her conduit to Canada, and her realization that she could be an artist in her own right. "It just felt better in my body. Modern dance was, like, amazing."

### **Career Goals Change with Exposure**

Dance, in general, was the vehicle for expression for all participants. Interviewees describe dreaming of future careers, based on their exposure, before university, being influenced by the university experience, and how the realities of post-graduation, professional goals changed throughout their training.

**Dreams of the future.** Before beginning university, a goal of one of student was to be a backup dancer to a pop star, another was more interested in being a dance dramaturge, while another was more interested in non-performing aspects of dance.

All I wanted to do was dance. That's all I wanted to do. There was no other option for me. That's it. Like, I'm just dancing and when I graduate, I'm gonna dance and I'm going to live off dance and that's it. That was my mind. It changed along the way but...

(Anna)

So, I didn't want to just dance professionally, let's say. And I also didn't want to teach, that I knew for sure... I started branching out a bit more... I knew I wanted to do something in dance, but something more broad. Not just dancing, not teaching, so something that encompassed everything. (Emily)

**Influence of the university experience.** Most participants describe how their goals changing during their time at university, while others' goals were reinforced.

For some participants, the introduction to new directions of expertise was illuminating. For a few students, it was the first time studying kinesiology and witnessing the intersection of art and science. They mentioned that deeper knowledge of the body in specificity increased their list of potential future jobs. Some stated that completing non-technique courses also gave them a resume line that other dance professionals may not have, making them potentially better candidates for certain positions. One describes her contact with new information as an amalgamation of new viable possibilities. Her new skills outside of performance gave her ideas of stage management, lighting design, and costuming.

Hailey's university experience made it clear to her that as a modern dance student, her role was to continue performing as a modern dance artist. "I guess I just wanted to dance with a company. And then eventually maybe have a company of my own and choreograph and make dance. [...] Just to be a vessel, to be an interpreter, I guess."

Anna also described her university experience as reinforcing her performance goals.

I was dance dance dance dance dance, right. I remember walking to the dance studios at [my new university] and wow, like this is amazing, the facilities are so beautiful! I wanted to learn from every single person. I'm just going to take it all in. I wanted to dance for a dance company. That was my goal. I remember being introduced to [a renowned Canadian dance company] and watching them perform [...]. That's the company. I'm going to dance for that company. In my mind, I thought, I'm going to wake up every day, go to dance class with the company, rehearse, and then just perform and travel around the world with a dance company. That was my goal for many years.

(Anna)

**Reality after graduation.** While some participants had careers within the dance industry while awaiting their ‘dream jobs’, not all students interviewed continued with dance post-university.

A few are or have used their knowledge in local studio or small company settings. These jobs included teaching workshops and regular season classes, and/or administrative positions. While they stated that their academic knowledge better prepared them for more well-rounded class pedagogy with injury prevention and historical nuance, some admitted that a person without a university dance degree could have fulfilled most of the required duties.

The excitement of graduation with evolved curiosity for creation faded quickly for some. When asked about post-graduation, one participant responded that she sees the limited of possibilities for her after graduation. She hopes to pursue more dance writing, to help encourage others to think more critically about ethnicity and division in the dance industry. She has lost hope for a full career in academia, as, “there’s no tenure-track jobs anymore.” This participant also discussed the pervasive nepotism and favouritism of specific body-types in the Canadian modern dance performance realm.

“It’s a little sad because even the one company that I wanted to be a part of, it still feels like they’re still doing the same thing. Still the same people. So okay, what else. I feel like it’s hard in a contemporary world [...], I feel like it hasn’t changed that much. Nobody’s really done something completely different and cool in a while. (Anna)

### **Hegemony versus Diverse Representation**

With goals in mind, these women found programs in cities where racial and ethnic diversity exists in the general population. However, they all concur that their peers and instructors, specifically in the dance departments, did not exemplify the Canadian reality of diversity. This section unpacks who was teaching in the programs studied, whether the students of colour were alone, and how this lack of representation made the students feel.

**Who is teaching?** The race and ethnicity of the participants’ faculty were documented in the interviews. All participants noted the preponderance of White faculty with statements like, “Yup, all White, except for one or 2,” and, “Just about all White Canadian.”

... most of my professors that I’ve had are white... umm, maybe one or two,

geez, like 90% White 10% visible minority... it was mostly White women... It's always been a huge imbalance. I would say that my experience has been predominantly White.  
(Nora)

Interviewees confirmed that the lack of faculty diversity was not isolated to a particular year, but extended throughout undergraduate programs:

Participant: There was one guest artist that we had in my entire 3-4 years that I was there who was Asian.

Interviewer: Okay, and everybody else was...?

Participant: Everybody else was Caucasian.

Being a racialized teacher does not inherently imply complete acceptance by departments. Unfortunately, racism exists and teachers, especially with accents, can be targets of disrespect:

I mean, you know how people are. Someone or something is different and they don't know how to react and a lot of it is being made fun of ... Everyone has their way of communicating movement... there was a distinct difference because this was making fun of the accent she would use when using those words, or just certain words she would use, or sounds she would use. It was a distinction... She had a very thick accent... And a lot of people would make fun of her for that outside of the class.  
(Emily)

**Am I alone?** Participants were very clear with their accounting of the racial and ethnic makeup of their peers. The lack of Black, Asian, Indigenous, or Latinx students is noted repeatedly in the interviews. They stated not seeing a mix of ethnicities, with their peers being mostly White. Emily reflected:

Let's say in my year of, how many were we, 60? There was three or four from different backgrounds... And, in other years there was maybe two or three students that were from abroad, from other ethnicities that were in the program. It's funny because in the program, yeah, we were all white."

However, some stated that half of the small graduate program (i.e. Master's and PhD)

were non-White. Emily “definitely noticed that the Masters students were a lot more ethnic.”

**How it makes me feel.** Some participants noted that they felt welcomed in their departments, while others highlighted they were used to a lack of diversity in their every day lives. One participant noted that they only really noticed it when confronted with greater diversity outside of the dance department.

International student participants stated that from the outset, their prospective universities made them feel welcome with positivity and helpfulness. One student felt that her being of a different ethnicity would help her stand out and did not feel that her application was threatened by it. Anna stated, “I didn’t feel discriminated against, or like I was, like I had a disadvantage because I was from [another country].”

I never felt discriminated against. I never felt like someone talked to me, or wrote back to me in a negative way. And I’m sure that my English wasn’t very well back then. You know. [...] Everybody was very welcoming, very helpful. Not just in the dance department, but in general, the university. Like my entire application process was stress free. And I didn’t feel discriminated against, or like I was. Like a I had a disadvantage because I was from [elsewhere]. I never felt that way... And I thought that it would be, if anything, it would make me stand out. (Anna)

A White participant was very forthright in her consciousness of personal advantage, “Because as a White privileged person, it’s like when you’re White, it’s as if you don’t have a race. We don’t racialize whiteness in the same way. So, yeah. I don’t feel in any way that I would lose out on opportunities.”

A White participant stated, “If I stepped outside of the dance department and walked in the university, I felt like the minority.” The conversations based on feelings of race and ethnicity were not easy. There were many pauses, halted statements and visible discomfort. Two examples of this are below:

Yeah, but again, like I was the only like [racialized person] in there and I think that one of the little kids of another family thought I was their nanny. Because I look like (giggle) She’s like, “Oh there’s..” You know like... You know. So it’s still like, yeah. Like I still.. It’s now that I feel it more so than when I was growing up. Umm. But, now

I realize how much more representation we do need in dance, like in dance in general, because it's still so much, there's just... it's not reaching... I don't know whether it's... It's not reaching everybody, I don't think. And it's not accessible to everybody. I don't think so... umm. Yeah. So for me it's a question of, why isn't it more accessible and why isn't there that representation even now? And even here in [...] where it is so ethnically diverse – population wise. [...]

I mean in my world it wasn't, because... I mean it just wasn't apparent to me, because I was so used to, I mean I lived [...] where it was all White people, so I was used to seeing just White people everywhere, so it wasn't like. For me I didn't feel like I was left out, like you know, or that I was different, because I was always around these kind of people all the time. Like I didn't feel like separated from them for some odd reason. Umm, and it was never. For me it was not something that I was aware of really. Or like to note of. Like I knew that I was [ethnically different] or whatever and then there wasn't any other [ethnically different] but it wasn't anything that, ah, I noticed or took note of, or mattered to me in any way. So in the audition process I wasn't surprised to be the only [non-White] there (giggle), and I wasn't surprised to be you know, to be judged by you know the faculty that was all White, because that's mostly what you see in the dance world. So it's not, yeah. So that's something that was just expected, and I guess I never questioned it in that point in time. (Hailey)

Recognizing discomfort as a tool for change was discussed with all participants. Anna stated, “Even when I look at things now, all the checkboxes, I always have in the back of my mind, is this an asset or is this a risk, to describe who I am racially or ethnically?” [...]

Just a little bit more comfortable about doing the work because... if as settler Canadians, if we don't do this work, it's always going to remain a very marginalized issue. And so, it's our responsibility. And, part of the work is feeling uncomfortable. And unsettling ourselves.

For most students in this study, this interview process was the first time that they dug into their feelings regarding race and ethnicity, both past and present.

It's only now that I'm talking about it that I realized that what I was feeling during that time (giggle) so actually haven't even unpacked I haven't even really looked at that stuff until I talked to you. But. Umm.. Like of me for me I want to push toward more towards diversity into the faculties of every dance school, you know, like. And you see it here in [...], I mean there's so many people of different ethnic backgrounds. [...] But all the people that are [dancing main-stream styles] are still like 97% White people, White dancers. And I just keep wondering why that is, Like why is it that that's still the case? (Hailey)

Anna felt that as one of the only ethnically different dancers in her class, she had the responsibility of representing her entire culture. However, she found that she was lacking the basic knowledge of her home country's traditional dances. This has led her to researching her cultural music and movement styles, and incorporating them into her current choreography. For her, being the only one, made her hungry to know more about her heritage.

The interviews did not yield any stories of overt racism or racist behaviour toward students. In fact, most participants of colour relayed that they felt safe, welcomed, accepted in their departments. It was mentioned that non-White dance peers were seemingly better dancers. They were also chosen to participate in a wider variety of choreographic styles due their movement vocabulary being larger. This was not, however, the case for one participant who felt held back in her dramaturge study due to the diversity of body types (racial and otherwise) in her year. Hailey mentioned that she did not feel challenged physically or seen as equal to other classes. It was made clear that the resident and guest choreographers felt that cohesiveness could not be attained with such varied body types. The lack of diversity in course offerings was another way in different choreographic styles impact the student experience in dance academia, as discussed below.

## Course diversity

This theme describes the courses offered by the dance departments. The sub-themes include: the prevalence of ballet, the eloquence of modern and the marginalization of ‘ethnic’ courses. At both U Calgary and York, both ballet and modern are mandatory for graduation. Ethnic and ‘urban’ styles are offered, but not as degree requirements, nor in most cases even counted toward a student’s GPA.

**Prevalence of ballet.** In all cases, was discussed by participants as the essential genre. Most mentioned that there was no personal passion for that style, but that ballet is always said to give the best technical background. For example, ballet was repeatedly mentioned, “Ballet is such a great foundation to become a technical dancer, but you don’t have to do ballet to become a dancer.” “To be considered serious, I took ballet.” “Because I had to, not because I wanted to.” Going through a university degree should have options, “some people don’t want to be a dancer. They just want to do pedagogy to teach, and you don’t have to be a great great dancer to become a great teacher.”

Ivy stated that to be a great dancer, does not inherently mean that you have to be a great ballet dancer. She understood and discussed that many ‘ethnic’ dancers are experts in their own genres without any ballet training.

Due to, in part, the ranking of styles, dancers are forced into genres that they are not interested in. In one program, “They kind of look down at you if you wanted to do other things than Contemporary dance.”

**The eloquence of modern dance.** All participants stated that they found their ‘voice’ with modern dance. They agreed that Modern seemed to be the genre that had an inherent freedom of expression. A few expressed that within the set movement qualities of modern technique (i.e. Graham and Limon), they were able to incorporate personality and individualism to research and tell their personal stories.

But I wish that that would open up their you know to the contemporary dance world you know. Like for me contemporary dance is very... I don’t know what it is. It was falling in love with me. When I started doing Modern. But that was only because I was exposed to it, right? Like how many dancers are there that would fall in love with it if only they met

it. I don't know how to reach those people but, my hope is that more people will feel like... feel that and be motivated to change the face of the contemporary dance in Canada (giggle). Yeah... (sigh) (Nora)

Dance faculties in Canada have placed great emphasis on modern dance throughout dance programs, perhaps with the ability to draw-in students. Every participant stated that modern dance was a requirement for graduation from their programs. They also noted that choreography and pedagogy courses centered on modern dance knowledge.

**Marginalization of 'ethnic' styles.** Though ethnically diverse styles were offered within the participants' dance departments, it was clear that any genre outside of Eurocentricity was considered 'fringe', and less deserving of time dedicated throughout the major.

In terms of history, like dance history, it was mainly Western, United States, of course a little bit of Canada... The few classes that I had were about different cultures... We did a little bit of Indian dance. A little bit of African dance. But it was like an hour in the four years. Just to give us a taste of what it was like. (Participant)

Scheduling of culturally diverse coursework is evident in the interview answers by all participants. All full courses of 'ethnic' movement styles were placed in the summer months.

It was a little strange that they offer these electives [ethnic dance styles] but they don't really offer it in the main courses for the dance students ...I think it's just because that's who's taking those classes. Who's the majority of the people who are taking classes are White Canadians. I don't know why they don't consider that [my city] is multicultural. (Anna)

I remember that we had a dance course about [a non-Western genre]. That was the closest I ever got to my roots (giggle)... And I enjoyed it and met different people. It was a summer course, so people come from different departments to do that elective, right? And that was fun. And I met a... teacher, but she wasn't a regular in the dance department. So, it. Was a little strange that they offer these electives, but they don't really offer it in the main courses for the dance students. (Participant)

One participant tried to unfurl the potential reasons for differentiation of Eurocentric genres and these ‘other’ classes. Ivy pondered the departments, “juggling part of what students want and what the faculty wants to offer.”

The participants who took these summer electives concurred that the racial and ethnic makeup of students was much more diverse. There were very few White students. “Like you could see more diversity in that class.” (Anna). Barring taking the summer courses, interviewees mentioned workshops or one-off chances to partake in cultural dance styles

During those workshop times we were excited, it was fun... There was music, there was the djembe and the regular musicians for the ballet class... so the energy of that class was incredible. For that one, everybody gave it their all. But there was never an explanation of why are we doing this. I don’t remember any, where did this movement come from, how is this African dance embedded in the African culture, and how does this affect them. (Emily)

## **Mentorship**

Students that come from culturally varied backgrounds, even if general feelings of being welcomed are present, require robust supports. For all participants, mentorship was involved to begin and continue dance training. This mentorship included: family support, faculty, and other supports.

**Family Support.** Immediate family was the impetus for beginning dance training for the interviewees. Their dreams were made manifest by deciding that they should and could dance.

An interviewee commented that her family was incredibly supportive of her dance career, even though her home country dismissed art as a meaningful course of study and employment. She stated that this encouragement was due, in part, to her family being involved and successful in the art industry. She was told to follow her dreams by pursuing a university degree in her chosen field.

All interviewees stated that early introduction to dance was made possible by their families. Parents sought local studios, paid tuition, and attended recitals, thus fostering their child’s love for dance. Once the enduring passion for dance was clear, a transition to university

study was accepted by most of the interviewee's families.

**Faculty support.** Canadian universities can provide general supports such as financial aid and housing arrangements, but there is a need for cultural sensitivity and specialized mentorship to ensure a complete education. The majority of university dance students are White-Canadian, but, “[w]hen we have somebody with a different ethnical background, we need support. We need a different kind of support... that’s the juggling part of what students want and what the faculty wants to offer,” (Ivy). Students felt that departments must be fully prepared to support students of varying ethnicities. This includes not only verbal language, but the language of movement and a breadth of research interests. Participants highlighted research interested including de-colonization, traditional ways of counting, and a specific cultural dance in a contemporary world.

Positive mentorship is especially important in graduate research. For one, “I had more support from my supervisors to research about my own historical and ethnical research than other people. But it was available. But depending on the supervisor, how you make the research will be totally different.”

Mentorship plays a key role in fully exploring diverse contexts. One participant was encouraged to explore a fusion of movement between her home country’s music and environment with Western ideals.

So that was accepted and that was wonderful. I never felt like it was inappropriate. Nobody ever told me don’t do this or don’t share that. If anything, it was... people were happy to hear about it. People were interested to know more about it.

However, Nora felt that in her undergraduate program, they were discouraging of any career other than contemporary/modern dancers without leadership roles. For several participants, the idea of career mentorship in her undergraduate program was non-existent.

I don’t think I had a conversation with anybody and anybody asked me like you know, what do you really want to do? That’s great, but these are other options, you know? You could also do this. I don’t think I had a serious conversation about that while I was there. (Anna)

I think the teachers are more into teaching the materials they have prepared. They helped me or helped us to become a great dancer or a great choreographer, but to get a job, I don't think we had any interaction with, oh, here's an audition, or there's a residency or there's funding. I wish we had more of that for the students in the dance department. (Ivy)

**Other support.** Support not only comes in education and training, but also in general conversation. Due to this study, many participants stated that they would love more conversations like the interview, but on less formal terms.

I think I would like to see a little bit more, more of a conversation like one on one conversation about this topic in universities. Because I never felt out of place. Like, my experience was incredible with all the goods and bads and ups and downs. I would do it all over again. It's the best thing that's ever happened to me, coming to [university], really. And I loved my time at in the dance program. But I wish I have had the opportunity to have this conversation eight years ago. 10 years ago with somebody. Even for me to start thinking about it. I think it would be nice to have one-on-ones ... and not just with people with who are from a different ethnic group or people who are international students. I think it would be nice to have it with as much people as possible, because even someone who is White Canadian might feel out of place. Or they might say, "I'm Irish, but I don't really feel Irish". I don't know. I'm just thinking of those things that it would be nice to have these types of conversations as a student.

### **Will it ever change?**

The participants responded to this question with mixed results. There was hope mixed with some defeat as the myriad of reasons why dance in university is dominated by White bodies and coursework. This section will examine who the participants believe are responsible for change, and whether they felt that there is any hope.

**Who is responsible for change?** There was not a consensus on who is ostensibly responsible for changing racism in university dance.

Anna pondered, "[pause] I don't know. I honestly don't know. And maybe it's my job

and the job of other people from different cultures and different backgrounds to change it. So yeah, I don't know."

Hailey suggests that change possibly begins with parents.

I don't know if it's just a culturally thing, where culturally parents don't want to encourage dance or don't want to enroll them in dance. I don't know if it's that aspect of it or if it's just you know lifestyle or means, that you know, the monetary means to enroll in such an activity. Or, so you know it's hard to tell, if it's just that people have given up because they can't see the representation and they just, you know what, I'm just going to do activities where I do see representation, you know what I mean? So. Yeah so, I don't know what it is, and hopefully we can change that? I don't know.

(Hailey)

A White participant takes the responsibility for change into her own hands, "If as settler Canadians, if we don't do this work, it's always going to remain a very marginalized issue. And so, it's our responsibility. And, part of the work is feeling uncomfortable. And unsettling ourselves." This participant realizes that the work must be shared by the dominant elite along with the oppressed.

Departments must begin to understand their role in creating positive change. Temporary guest teachers are hired by the departments. With only a short time allotment, there is less time to delve into cultural significance; all that is left is a fun hour of movement. Anna states, "Yeah, I don't know why they didn't really offer much history or different styles of different countries. Maybe they just didn't have anybody to teach it."

**Is there hope?** Overwhelmingly, none of the respondents thought that it would be possible in this generation. The participants concluded that the dance industry in Canada is not yet set up for true diversity. Local studios, social media, the ever-present hierarchy of ballet and modern, and hiring policies all contribute to a system that oppresses Black, Asian, Latinx and Indigenous dance voices. The blame does not rest squarely on the shoulders of university dance departments. One responded that during an audition process, one faculty jurist whispered about how White the pool of candidates was. This was said in sadness. It

seems that even if the professors want things to change, the applicants are simply not ethnically diverse.

Emily expressed pessimism, “It is hard to say. I don’t think so. And if they do, it would take a long time.” She explained the idea that to have more diversity in dance university programs, recruitment must be focused on international students. She feels that due to Canadian dance schools being primarily populated with White students, there are not enough racialized dancers in Canada to make it to the top echelons.

Nora feels that representation has started in earnest. “I do feel hopeful. We certainly look at the work of, I mean there are a lot of trail blazers. Like in ballet Misty Copeland, there’s also Mikaela DePrince. Really opening up the conversation.”

Social media movements and ‘cancel culture’ (Ng, 2020) have increased Nora’s hope for change:

It just really makes me think back to being a kid and dancing and all of the cultural appropriation that happened. Like at competitions and still it’s happening. But I feel like there is a lot more, well, even with social media and the Twitter-verse, more people calling out appropriation and those sorts of things. (Nora)

Despite the lack of hope demonstrated by some participants, interpretivism with CRT facilitates a fulsome understanding of how the lived realities of these participants can be understood and analyzed to recognize systemic barriers within dance academia to support systemic reform. The following chapter unpacks how the embedded racism and inequities in dance academia can be understood through the lens of CRT and offers suggestions for positive social change and future study.

## Chapter 5 – Discussion

The purpose of this study was to discover the student perceptions of racial and ethnic diversity in dance university departments in Canada. The following discussion will confirm that the existing literature supports the web and interview data collected throughout this study. As informed by CRT, all levels of dance education require change to truly diversify the industry. This chapter will review the participant responses through an interpretive lens of CRT, the racial and ethnic inequalities experienced by dancers, and will discuss future directions and limitations of this study.

Racial inequality is evident in the university context but is a perpetuation of systemic racism based in policy, action, and inaction toward diversity. (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Douglas & Halas, 2013; Green, 2003; Henry et al., 2017; McCarthy-Brown, 2014; Stewart, 2014; Tamtik & Guenter, 2019; Vargas et al., 2020; Walker, 2019) The results of the interviews and web analysis confirm the importance of representation (Cukier et al., 2021), and how access to diverse culturally relevant opportunities (Walker, 2019) affect students throughout the university dance system in Canada. The interview data and web analysis results point to two overarching themes: racism and representation (i.e. racism exists, racism is a part of every-day, and the importance of representation), and systemic change (i.e. constructivism, dominance, multi-level change, interest convergence, and separate but equal).

### **Racism and Representation**

It is clear from the web analysis and interviews that there is a lack of ethnically and racially diverse students and teachers within dance academia, indicating systemic racism in dance higher education. This is consistent with Douglas and Halas's (2013) findings within the physical education departments, that the percentages of racialized teachers did not match the reality of diversity of Canada. Considering Henry et al (2017) expose barriers faced by racialized people as they attempt to navigate the university context, the lived experiences of the participants and the ethnic and racial makeup of the dance academia faculties points to racism as a cause of this disparity.

This study did not find that there is a lack of will to diversify by all faculty. An interviewee commented that during an entrance audition, a professor remarked with a tone of

sadness, “the applicants are so White”, indicates that at least one professor recognizes and acknowledges that recruitment of racialized dancers is failing. The answer to rectify this systemic inequity is not as simple as dance departments accepting more racialized dancers. The racialized dancers are not going to auditions. The power lies with the universities to change their processes, including marketing dance academia, developing and upholding meaningful equity, diversity and inclusion policies for faculty, inclusive student recruitment practices (Douglas & Halas, 2013), and decolonizing dance pedagogy (Ashley, 2012). Further, it would be important to place value on validating non-Western dance knowledge in course content (Ashley, 2012; McCarthy-Brown, 2014) and in the calculation of GPA.

Racism exist as a part of everyday reality. In this study, one participant, Hailey, divulged that she was so used to being the only racialized dancer in her surroundings that she had not fully thought about the disparity of her experiences versus those of her White counterparts until this interview. The assumption by some in her surroundings that she must be an outsider to dance because of her race and ethnicity points to the normalcy of Whiteness in dance by media sources (Ogbar, 2019). The subtlety of everyday racism is so normalized (Cabrera, 2019) in her life, that only during overt discriminatory moments did she note the disparity.

Normalization of oppression is one way that interest convergence succeeds (Cabrera, 2019; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Taylor, 1999). Classifying ballet and modern as the most important courses is one way that discriminates against other cultural ways of knowing. Prickett (2016) and Zhang et. al (2020) discuss that knowledge transfer and personal expression are an integral part of dance. However, the hierarchical policies devalue non-Western styles by not including the grades in overall GPA scores. The students interviewed did not mention that they felt particularly excluded during their time in university by their departments due to the lack of cultural training. Only in hindsight did they realize that there was discrimination by the colorblind attitudes of policy and course inclusion (Henry et al., 2017). The dominant elite have no reason to change behaviour and policies if the oppressed do not see themselves as victims of said oppression as the systemic racism is not being challenged by either the dominant elite nor the racialized individuals.

A reason for this normalization is the connection between colonization, White

supremacy and Ballet. White skin, thin-White bodies, and dance stories reflecting White as perfection (i.e. Swan Lake), are cornerstones of ballet tradition (McCarthy-Brown, 2014). Emphasizing these traditions as immutable in colonized countries (e.g., Aotearoa) burdens the keepers of traditional movement knowledge with re-centralizing their true histories and stories (Ashley, 2012). When students see where values and course emphases lie, it stands to reason that they in turn internalize and normalize the constraints against them. Hailey demonstrated that varied body types were a barrier to equality in opportunity, but that she was so used to being judged by White panels and teachers, she did not question that oppression at that time. Anna discussed that since her early indoctrination into dance acceptability, her cultural dances would not be valued and translated to success and opportunity. These factors uphold the devaluation of non-Eurocentric dance practices. That they are inferior and therefore less worthy of university credit upholds White supremacy in the university and dance contexts.

Representation is important for those spaces that are historically hegemonic. The interviews and web analysis confirm a lack of diversity in Canadian university dance departments. This holds true for students, faculty, and coursework. This is consistent with Douglas and Halas' (2013) findings that in Canadian physical education departments, students and faculty in that field experience racial and ethnic inequality. The student participants of this study agreed that before, during, and after university, they did not observe many racialized dancers in their ranks. This phenomenon agrees with CRT that asserts the existence of systems, both invisible and overt, to keep marginalized dancers away from Eurocentric styles and the university education system in general. Dance pieces like Swan Lake are still considered the epitome of perfection, based on a uniformity of body shape and colour, as described by Kain (1995). Dancers of colour are still considered 'other' in the dominant dance genres (Boye, 2018; Kelly et al., 2021). Hailey confirms that choreographers continue to seek uniformity as the prize of perfection, reporting her class was denied opportunities based on the diversity of body-type and race.

### **Systemic Change**

Constructivism asserts that reality is constructed by each individual (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Gratton, Jones, & Jones, 2003). Each interviewee has a story. Each researcher has a lived experience that leads them to interpret the participants' stories in a particular way

(Denzin & Lincoln, 2018) The dancers interviewed have similar educational experiences in their dance programs, but the effects of systemic realities create building blocks to their individual understandings of their lives. All participants expressed a willingness and openness to interpret their past experiences, thus expanding on the building blocks of their personal stories.

Anna felt very welcomed into the country and into the university, but it is unclear if the recruitment was due to a true desire for diversity, or the higher international student fees. Ivy felt a lack of mentorship and meaningful conversation about racial and ethnic diversity on a departmental level. Some participants witnessed and internalized overt racism toward a teacher, while others stated that they had not contemplated racism in their own lives until the interview process.

Departments reinforce a hierarchy of dominance and acceptance of race and ethnicity through the prioritization of Eurocentric dance styles and prioritizing uniformity in race and body type. Dancers who wish to participate in dance studies must conform to the Eurocentric ideals of genre acceptability (Kain et al., 1995). Interview participants agreed that only those with the personal power to challenge this idealism are then able to research and perform ethnic stylings and fusions. The current dominance of Eurocentricity sustains the oppression of racialized culture and contribution (Green, 2003; Robinson & Domenici, 2010). The interviews made clear that only at the Master's and PhD levels, are students then 'ready' to explore ethnicity. Decloaking the hidden histories and contributions of Black dancers in Canada, as discussed by Boye (2018), are emphasized in this study. Non-White dance stories and bodies are generally hidden from view. Web analysis concludes that the universities included in this study hold the belief that traditionally White styles are more worthy and valued than non-White styles.

Ballet and modern are Eurocentric styles that are held to a higher value than all styles considered 'ethnic'. This is evidenced by ballet and modern coursework being mandatory for graduation and offered at all university levels. Even though graduate students appear to have more leeway and encouragement to study outside of Eurocentric idealism, in undergraduate dance departments, ethnic diversity and inclusion are not priorities.

The most damning hierarchical evidence includes the interviewees confirming that non-Western styles were not offered to dance majors, were taught exclusively in the summer, and/or not included in students' GPAs. Relegating 'ethnic' dance styles to less popular terms and devaluing the grades students receive in the courses demonstrates how dance academia devalues diversity in alignment with systemically racist hierarchies. Interview participants agree that most students taking these classes are of diverse ethnicities. This demonstrates that those students and varied styles are considered inferior for the university's ideal of genre superiority. Deprivileging Eurocentric styles in a higher education system lends legitimacy to non-Western genres (McCarthy-Brown, 2014).

CRT demands that multiple levels of change are required to dismantle systemic racism. The focus of the data collection, however, was narrowed to include only participants at the university level. The lack of diversity of the teaching staff could be due to many factors. Emily posits that perhaps there are no qualified racialized teachers. Unpacking that statement requires a full system review of the Canadian dance education system.

At the university level, it should be expected that students have a higher level of understanding of the work being done in their courses as it relates to their overall education, as opposed to a surface level exposure of a style. Without a deeper understanding of the meanings in cultural movement, there could be an argument of appreciation versus appropriation (Ashley, 2012). Surface-level engagement with 'ethnic' dance styles could be a check mark for institutional diversity and inclusion statements, or perhaps simply a reprieve from the daily Eurocentric teachings of ballet and modern. Perhaps it is a product of the system that keeps knowledgeable racialized people from the echelons of dance and academia. Reducing the myopic Eurocentric idealism in education would allow a greater exploration of non-Western ways of knowing (Walker, 2019). It would be interesting to discover the rationale of the decision makers in providing these short bursts of exposure without deeper exploration.

Interest convergence (Cabrera, 2019; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Taylor, 1999) plays a role in the slow change toward diversity. The university classes are full so there is no financial reason to change. The status-quo is being maintained, even with an interest from the greater university population in diverse course offerings and inclusion of multiple ways of knowing

and being. Universities maintain an existing system of hierarchy, falsely assuming that is the will of the students based on the current dominant elite, as reflected in the participant interviews. The evidence in this study shows that White normativity is embraced in the regular stream, while successful ethnic inclusion tallies are increased within diversity programming (Walker, 2019).

For example, Anna not feeling discriminated against as an international student is not necessarily a sign of positive change. This only shows that the efforts made toward inclusion are working in recruiting students from abroad. However, there is currently no data to know if the efforts are genuinely due to the push toward inclusivity, or for the higher tuition fees imposed on them. An antithesis to equality, the idea of separate but equal (Garvey, 1920), is clear in dance. An interviewee mentions the accomplishments of Misty Copeland and the success of The Alvin Ailey Dance Theatre and School as symbols of change. However, the lack of racially diverse, strong, and highly technical dancers such as these in all ballet and modern companies is evidence of the pervasive homogeneity of acceptable bodies in historically Eurocentric spaces. Being able to name a few that broke the racial barrier does not mean true diversity. Critics may say that Misty Copeland got the part only because she is Black (i.e. affirmative action) (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Opatow, 1992), and that those who do not make it aren't working hard enough to be a part of this elite group (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Conversely, those same critics would likely not turn that statement towards all of the White prima ballerinas with, 'she got the part because she's White' (Heineken, 2017).

## **Limitations**

There are few inherent limitations to this research. First, intersectionality, "the examination of race, sex, class, national origin, and sexual orientation and how their combination plays out in various settings" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 83) is often included as a means to illuminate the multiple layers of inequity (Cho et al., 2013; Crenshaw, 2017; Delgado, & Stefancic, 2017; Smith, 2018). However, for this study with its focus on dance higher education, the inclusion of gender, sexuality and class intersections with racism discussion are outside of the scope of this study and worthy their own separate and detailed studies. A troublesome aspect of CRT is the historical inclusion of all non-White ethnicities

into a single narrative of oppression, therefore igniting separate streams of study in Asian, Latinx, and Muslim identities, with differing narratives and experiences with systemic racism. This study attempts to identify the various races and ethnicities and elucidate on the varied perceptions from each participant.

Dance in general is a very niche part of our culture in Canada. It can feel like a very small community where everybody knows everyone. Starting a conversation about anything that could potentially be controversial within dance is difficult. Criticizing an activity/art that is not considered essential in current society, can be seen as treasonous. This is one reason why participant recruitment was challenging. The original study proposed interviews with faculty. However, the respective universities (and Covid-19) placed insurmountable barriers to recruitment. People and institutions do not want to be seen as racist, carrying racist ideologies, nor as a complainer 'playing the race card'. This study also lacks some external validity (Hoyt & Bhati, 2007). The interview participants are few, in varying physical locations and times of university program participation, and their stories and experiences are singular to themselves. It would be difficult to generalize the findings across other contexts. However, the corroboration of web-based data with interview answers gives credibility in substantiation of findings.

A challenge in discussing the racial and ethnic makeup of teachers and students was language. There was a palpable discomfort in the attempts to use inoffensive current terminology for specific groups. Questions, comments and uncomfortable laughter arose frequently in the interviews. Anna mentions, "I want to say only one, I'm sorry if this isn't the right term, Black Canadian, or do you say African Canadian?" Emily nervously says, "I never know what term to use, ethnic... Non-White (giggle)." One specific participant hesitates with the answer, "Some people might say Pacific Islander, but I'm not sure which one is correct, but mostly East Asian (giggle)." When there are no universal 'acceptable' terms for discussing race and ethnicity, the conversation can be stunted, halted or more focused on the terminology rather than the deeper stories.

A barrier for this project is the researcher's lack of experience in conducting academic qualitative interviews. This challenge was overcome by conducting pilot interviews to ensure proficiency. The second barrier within the interview process is the sensitivity of the subject

matter. Discussions on race can be potentially fraught with assumptions, troublesome language, and deep sensitivity to past negative experiences. To overcome this challenge, the researcher has incorporated advice from the thesis committee who are well versed in discourse analysis in marginalized and disadvantaged populations. The third challenge was recruitment of participants from institutions outside of the University of Manitoba. The faculties that have been identified for the web-content analysis have placed insurmountable barriers to their assistance in recruitment. This barrier was overcome by finding student recruits through social media and through purposeful snowball sampling. Originally, the scope of this study was to include faculty interviews. However, due to the small sample size, subject matter, and difficulty in anonymizing this data to not have serious negative repercussions on this already disadvantaged group, faculty interviews became an unviable option.

### **Delimitations**

There are other universities offering dance programming in Canada, and therefore, the limitations placed on the participating institutions may not convey the full breadth of realities across the country. The included participants were chosen for their range in streams and are located in different provinces that helps to diversify the participants and local culture.

As the researcher conducting this project, it was understood that personal experience of being a bi-racial Black dancer who completed a university dance degree program in Canada may interfere the findings of this research. This was mitigated by focusing on the depth and truth of the participant's observations and feelings to expand collective understanding of the current and recent status of racial diversity in dance higher education in the Canadian context.

The goal of this research was to discover what racial and ethnic diversity means in dance in higher education. With Eurocentric, colonial institutions being slow to adopt changes throughout Canadian society, university, and dance cultures, are dance departments beacons of progressive ideals of inclusion, or are they mired in stagnation and close-mindedness? In asking those who are currently, or were recently participating in dance academia, the hope was to unfurl the lived realities, challenges and successes to inform future policy and inclusive culture within dance departments in Canada.

## **Future Directions**

Student perceptions were confirmed with empirical data. Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and Asian dancers and their cultural histories are not yet equally integrated in dance academia. This high level of dance training is only a single cog in systemic oppression. Change can come only when all levels of dance education make significant efforts toward inclusion and diversity. It is insufficient to applaud when one or two break the colour barrier of institutions or genres without committing to systemic change that supports opportunity for other racialized dancers to do the same. A deep understanding of what racialized dancers experience at all ages needs to be a regular conversation in order to perpetuate fulsome equity. Internal explorations of privilege must occur with all in power positions to ensure that policy, decisions and language create safer and more welcoming spaces.

Further research is required in local studio diversity training (i.e. how to attract and retain diverse dancers), industry representation (i.e. marketing with images of dancers of colour), employment policy (i.e. what is considered qualified), intersectionality (i.e. how gender and sexuality affect training and employment), and physical expectations (i.e. who gets to dance what and how much risk is too much). This is simply the tip of the iceberg is starting to understand this topic. Dance has been around for millennia, and for it to continue fruitfully, all aspects must be studied and better understood.

## **Conclusion**

This study confirmed that my personal feelings and experiences as a Black dancer are unfortunately not unique. The themes of representation, systematic racism, and ‘acceptability’ of the prioritization of Eurocentricity in dance academia were confirmed through the interviews. There is a validation in uncovering the empirical numbers and anecdotal comments that serve as proof that dance university departments are not yet up to the idealistic Canadian vision of diversity and equity. This study reinforces that much more research, on both the academic and personal sides of knowledge, is needed for true change to be seen and felt.

Having been in front of dance classes for over 30 years, it is easy for me to pick up on the side glances between students. As a Black woman, there is a ‘radar’ that is ingrained

since childhood, for self-preservation. The looks of disdain and almost always hear the mockery coming from the change rooms. It could be the shape of my body, or my hair texture, or the fact that I do not conform to the ideal ballet aesthetic in any way. When I was a young dancer in-training, I had ballet examiners write that I had beautiful technique and a rare emotional movement quality, but that I should pursue another genre like tap or jazz. The disrespect that the university teacher, referred to in an interview, received is a product of the systemic racism felt by most, if not all, non-White dancers in Canada. That we are less-than. We are 'other'. Even though we may be the expert in a certain movement style, speak multiple languages, have education and experiences that eclipse the wildest dreams of White students, the scoffing is present. Denigration persists.

Offering The Alvin Ailey American Dance and Dance Theatre of Harlem as markers of progress, is, unfortunately holding up Marcus Garvey's (1920) idea of separate but equal. Those dancers are beautiful, but whispers remain, 'please stay in your lane'. A prominent Dance Kinesiology teacher did not offer any distinction between the anatomy of racialized dancers and White dances, leading students to understand that anatomy is human anatomy. One race is not more predisposed to be a more proficient dancer than another. What is felt as acceptable is socially constructed through time. Five dancers spoke their truths in these interviews. Their journeys are unique, their experiences differ, and their outcomes vary, but their education system was similar. University programs have not changed, seemingly due to the effectiveness of the status quo.

The reasons for disenfranchisement of a culturally/ethnically/racially diverse dance industry are beyond the scope of this study. It is clear from these results that the hierarchy of styles and racial acceptance of students and teachers begins in childhood. The understanding of otherness that is placed on racialized dancers, inhibits many from pursuing passions and careers. This leaves the reality and perceptions of achievable long-term careers for racial and ethnic minorities in the Canadian dance system one fraught with struggle. Representation matters, because as Viola Davis (O, 2022) states, "You need a physical manifestation of your dream."

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## **Appendix - A**

### **Interview Guide – Students**

**Opening:** Thank you for agreeing to answer some questions about your dance faculty. As a reminder from the information included in the consent form, all of your answers will be anonymized, meaning your name and any identifying characteristics will not be printed and will only be available to myself and my advisor until analysis is complete. I will be recording this Zoom meeting to ensure that all the information transcribed is accurate. This too will only be viewable by myself and my advisor for the purpose of this study, on an encrypted server.

We will be talking about potentially sensitive topics regarding race, so if any point you need a moment or a short break, please let me know.

#### **Let's start with:**

##### Demographics

- 1) How long have you been a student of this faculty?
- 2) What styles of dance are in your training background?
- 3) What are your career goals after graduation?
- 4) Have you been encouraged to pursue academia as a career choice?

##### Curriculum

- 5) What are the styles of dance that are most emphasized in your program?
- 6) Does your program encourage you to use your cultural background in the creative and analytical process?
- 7) Do you think that the various ethnic backgrounds of the students are represented or honoured in the coursework?



Race and Ethnicity

- 8) What is the racial and ethnic makeup of the teaching staff?
- 9) What is the racial and ethnic makeup of the current student body?
- 10) Have you noticed any changes in diversity in your department since your time here?

Have you experienced or heard any stories from faculty or students about racism in dance, in this department specifically or in the university?

**Probes:**

- 1) Why or why not?
- 2) Can you expand on that thought?
- 3) Tell me more about why you think that.
- 4) Tell me more about why you think that is.
- 5) Does this bother you?
- 6) How would you change that?
- 7) How do you think it is perceived by the faculty?

**Closing:**

- 12) Is there anything that you would like to discuss that hasn't been brought up in the interview so far?
- 13) Any final thoughts before we wrap up?



## Appendix – B

### RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

#### Individual and Focus Group Interviews

**Title of Study:** “Exploring Racial and Ethnic Diversity in Dance Faculties in Canadian Universities”.

**Principal Investigator:** *Elizabeth Markwart, MA Kinesiology and Recreation Management*  
*Candidate, Frank Kennedy Centre* [REDACTED]

**Co-Investigator:** Dr. Leisha Strachan, Advisor

You are being asked to participate in a research study involving an individual interview or focus group. Please take your time to review this consent form and discuss any questions you may have with the study staff, your friends, or family before you make your decision. This consent form may contain words that you do not understand. Please ask the study staff to explain any words or information that you do not clearly understand.

#### **Purpose of this Study**

This research study is being conducted to study how racial and ethnic diversity are understood and operationalized in Canadian Dance university faculties.

#### **Participants Selection**

You are being asked to participate in this study because as a leading faculty member or student at your university’s dance department, your knowledge of the faculty and student makeup as well as course offerings will be invaluable to understanding how your department acknowledges diversity.

Or, you are participating as a prospective student with extensive an dance background, who will give an outsider’s perspective of the web media/marketing from the included university program. Your unbiased views will assist this research in identifying gaps or successes of the inclusion

practices of each department.

A minimum of 4 (four) faculty/staff participants and 4 (four) current students will be asked to participate.

### **Study procedures**

- The method of data collection for this study will be individual interviews over Zoom.
- Participation in the study will be a single 60–90-minute interview session.
- Elizabeth Markwart, the principal investigator will be conducting the interviews.
- You will be asked some questions regarding your views on the racial diversity of your faculty. These questions will help us better understand the efforts to reduce inequity and the availability of racially diverse course offerings, and the perceptions of diversity in Canadian dance faculties.
- The sessions will be recorded on Zoom and transcribed by the principal researcher to ensure accuracy in reporting the information you provide. The co-researcher will have access to the recordings only for the purpose of verifying the transcription.
- Both the principal researcher and co-researcher will abide by the University of Manitoba Code of Ethics by not sharing identifiable information nor the recordings themselves with anyone outside of this research team.
- All information will be kept private and confidential.
- The recorded interview meeting files will be kept on secure storage hardware (i.e., a USB) in a locked cabinet before and after transcriptions. These files will be destroyed within 2 years of completing the transcriptions (i.e., June 2024) and the transcriptions will be destroyed 6 years (i.e., June 2028) after the completion of this evaluation
- To ensure full anonymity, the results of these interviews will only be shared as the final study paper.

### **Risks and Discomforts**

There are no anticipated physical risks to participants.

However, you may find talking about race and diversity to be upsetting or emotional. You do not

have to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable or that you find too upsetting.

Should you need any additional help or support we will refer you to Scott Erickson (counsellor) at 204-783-6820 or [scott@scotterickson.ca](mailto:scott@scotterickson.ca). or, assist you in finding other counseling help

### **Benefits**

Being an interview participant may not help you directly, but information gained may help students and researchers in the future. Universities may choose to utilize your responses in changing inclusion policies, language, recruitment practices, and augmenting course content to better reflect our culturally diverse population.

### **Costs**

There is no cost to you to attend the interview.

### **Payment for participation**

You will receive no payment or reimbursement for any expenses related to taking part in this study.

### **Confidentiality**

We will do everything possible to keep your personal information confidential. Your name will not be used at all in the study records. A list of names and addresses of participants will be kept in a secure file so we can notify you if any follow-up questions or clarifications are deemed necessary. If the results of this study are presented in a meeting, or published, nobody will be able to tell that you were in the study. Please note that although you will not be identified as the speaker, your words may be used to highlight a specific point. The collection and access to personal information will be in compliance with provincial and federal privacy legislations.

Recordings of the interview will be typed and used to prepare a report. The recordings and typed notes will be kept for 6 years in a secure locked file cabinet and office. Only the researchers listed above will have access to them and know your name.



Some people or groups may need to check the study records to make sure all the information is correct. All of these people have a professional responsibility to protect your privacy.

These people or groups are:

- The Health Research Ethics Board of the University of Manitoba which is responsible for the protection of people in research and has reviewed this study for ethical acceptability
- Quality assurance staff of the University of Manitoba who ensure the study is being conducted properly

All records will be kept in a locked secure area and only those persons identified will have access to these records. If any of your research records need to be copied to any of the above, your name and all identifying information will be removed. No information revealing any personal information such as your name, address or telephone number will leave the University of Manitoba.

### **Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal from the Study**

Your decision to take part in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, or you may withdraw from the study at any time.

If you are a student, your participation or discontinuation in this study will not constitute an element of your academic performance nor will it be part of your academic record.

### **Questions**

If any questions come up during or after the study, contact the principal investigator and the study staff:

Liz Markwart at [REDACTED] markware@myumanitoba.ca; Dr Leisha Strachan at 204-474-8378 leisha.strachan@umanitoba.ca

For questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact The University of Manitoba, Fort Garry Campus Research Ethics Board Office at (204) 474-7122 or humanethics@umanitoba.ca



**Consent Signatures:**

1. I have read all 4 pages of the consent form.
2. I have had a chance to ask questions and have received satisfactory answers to all of my questions.
3. I understand that by signing this consent form I have not waived any of my legal rights as a participant in this study.
4. I understand that my records, which may include identifying information, may be reviewed by the research staff working with the Principal Investigator and the agencies and organizations listed in the Confidentiality section of this document.
5. I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time and my data may be withdrawn prior to publication.
6. I understand I will be provided with a copy of the consent form for my records.
7. I agree to participate in the study.

**Participant signature** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_  
 (day/month/year)

**Participant printed name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**I, the undersigned, have fully explained the relevant details of this research study to the participant named above and believe that the participant has understood and has knowingly given their consent**

**Printed Name:** Liz Markwart **Date** \_\_\_\_\_  
 (day/month/year)

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Role in the study:** Principal Researcher

**Appendix – C**  
**Student Recruitment Poster**

**WE NEED  
YOUR VOICE!**

A Masters thesis study through the U of Manitoba needs current university dance students for a 90-minute interview or focus group asking how race and ethnicity are operationalized in Canadian university dance departments.

**Race & Ethnicity  
in Canadian University  
Dance Departments**

**CONTACT**

Elizabeth.Markwart@umanitoba.ca



**University  
of Manitoba**