

Equity-Informed Dancer Wellness

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EQUITY-INFORMED DANCER WELLNESS

Abstract: This article examines the current construction of *dancer wellness* and argues that the focus on intrapersonal aspects of safety, health, and wellness should be balanced with a stronger consideration of interpersonal, institutional, and systemic aspects. The author explores how infusing dancer wellness with *equity literacy* can support individual and institutional aims to dismantle structural barriers and encourage equity and wellness in dance contexts. *Equity-informed dancer wellness* is advanced as a route to healthy dance practice and social justice.

Keywords: dancer wellness; healthy dance practice; equity literacy; social justice; dance pedagogy

INTRODUCTION

As an experienced dance educator committed to healthy dance practice and social justice, I have spent decades striving to support my students' learning and goals. The concept of *dancer wellness* has helped guide my efforts toward healthy dance practice. This concept reminds me that the health and wellbeing of my students' minds and bodies are fundamental to optimal progress and performance. My approach to social justice in dance contexts has evolved over the years. For a long time, it was simply guided by a personal commitment to human rights and a desire to provide my students with a safe and supportive learning environment. I endeavoured to establish a climate in which diverse perspectives, experiences, and bodies were valued. More recently, I have realized the need to be deliberate in my efforts to create a just dance learning context if meaningful individual and collective growth are to be fostered. A framework that aligns well with my aim for social justice in dance education is *equity literacy*. Equity literacy is an approach to cultivating and sustaining equitable learning settings (Equity Literacy Institute 2021). Infusing dancer wellness with equity literacy provides a means to strive for social justice

and healthy dance practice simultaneously. There is a need to balance the focus on intrapersonal aspects of health, safety, and wellness inherent in the current construction of dancer wellness with stronger consideration of interpersonal, institutional, and systemic aspects to promote social wellness and justice within the dancer wellness framework.

COMMITTED TO DANCER WELLNESS

My commitment to dancer health and wellness prompted a mid-career return to school to pursue a PhD to research the topic further. Beyond informing my research interests and personal approach to my work as a dance educator, the concept of dancer wellness and its goals were also instrumental in the formation and development of Healthy Dancer Canada, an organization I co-founded and have spent more than a decade helping grow. Like similar associations in other countries, the organization’s goal is to enhance dancers' health, well-being, and performance through an annual conference for healthcare professionals, dance educators, and dancers, and through educational resources, including workshops, resource papers, and dancer screening tools.

Dancer wellness (also known as *dance wellness*, *safe dance practice*, and *healthy dance practice*), is an approach to dance practice that aims to reduce injury risk, enhance dance performance, and prolong dance participation by applying multidisciplinary dance science concepts that support optimal physical and psychological functioning in dance contexts (Quin, Rafferty and Tomlinson 2015; Safe in Dance International 2015; Wilmerding and Krasnow 2017). Marita Cardinal (1993, 20-21) articulated the following definition of dance wellness in her doctoral dissertation: “[Dance wellness is] an area of dance which is comprised of a wide array of components which share as a common goal the overall health and well-being of the dancer, as related to increased qualitative and quantitative performance potential. Dance wellness draws from, but is not limited to, the disciplines of dance medicine, dance science, somatics, and

wellness, seeks a balanced, integrative, and multidisciplinary approach to health and well-being, is specific to the individual participant and unique to the field of dance. Specific goals include injury prevention, efficiency in movement, training and performance enhancement, and extended careers.” This description and the goals of dancer wellness have remained largely unchanged in the years since. Embraced by dance organizations, universities, dance schools, and medical clinics around the globe (Cardinal, Rogers and Cardinal 2020; Galbraith 2021), dancer wellness is generally accepted to be about promoting safe and effective dance training, encouraging healthy lifestyles and optimal conditioning, providing injury prevention treatment and rehabilitation information or services, and giving dancers tools to develop and use self-care strategies (Galbraith 2021; The Ohio State University 2021; Wilmerding and Krasnow 2017). In addition, dancer wellness programs often include education in anatomy, nutrition, complementary training, and psychology, and may offer on-site healthcare supports and dancer screening (Clark, Gupta and Ho 2014; One Dance UK 2020). The purpose of dancer screening, whether for the professional dancer (Task Force on Dancer Health, Dance/USA 2021) or for the pre-professional or recreational dancer (Healthy Dancer Canada 2019b, 2021), is to collect health and wellness information about individual dancers that can be shared with the dancer and those working with them (e.g., teachers, artistic staff, conditioning specialists, and healthcare professionals) to develop appropriate responses to points of concern related to dancers’ physical and psychological status (Galbraith 2021; Healthy Dancer Canada 2019a).

Cardinal, Rogers, and Cardinal (2020) point out that despite growth in the fields of dance medicine, science, and somatics over the last half-century, high incident rates of dance injuries, nutritional problems, and psychological difficulties persist in dancers. They suggest these issues could be addressed by creating a culture of wellness through dancer wellness education in post-

secondary dance programs. While there is evidence to support this idea (Clark, Gupta and Ho 2014; Kozai and Ambegaonkar 2020), other scholars report that most Western university dance programs focus on dance as performance, emphasize Eurocentric dance content and teaching approaches, and underrepresent racial, ethnic, gender, ability/disability, and socioeconomic diversity where faculty and students are concerned (Amin 2016; Kerr-Berry 2016; Risner and Stinson 2010). If dancer wellness is being defined by and for White able-bodied women with a background in (as well as the want and means to pursue) higher education in Western concert dance performance, then the construct may not adequately address the needs of all dancers.

EMBRACING TRANSFORMATION AND EQUITY LITERACY

Over 30 years of teaching, I have received numerous letters and had innumerable conversations with students of all ages and levels of experience in which they expressed their gratitude for the conditions and space that allowed them to grapple with difficult life circumstances, fully embrace aspects of their identities, and find community while achieving their dance goals. These stories of facing challenges and finding acceptance, connection, and triumph through dance have convinced me of the potential for dance to be transformative and facilitate deep and lasting change. However, I have also come to see that the environments in which I teach and serve are largely populated by people who are White, like I am, and experience similar socioeconomic privilege. To better understand this lack of diversity and gain tools to foster transformation in myself and others purposefully, I have taken anti-oppression training and courses, joined social justice initiatives, and engaged in readings and discussions about how we can individually and collectively address the inequities in society at large and in dance education more specifically. Discovering equity literacy has proven valuable for thinking about social justice at both these levels.

Social justice is a concept, process, and goal that promotes respect for human rights and the fair and equitable distribution of resources among all people (Adams et al. 2016; Sensoy and DiAngelo 2017). *Equity literacy* is a social justice framework that provides a comprehensive approach to understanding inequities and gaining the necessary skills to cultivate and sustain equitable learning contexts (Gorski 2016a; Gorski 2020b; Gorski and Swalwell 2015). The term equity literacy was introduced by Katy Swalwell (2011) and developed into an educational framework with Paul Gorski (Gorski 2016a, Gorski 2020b; Gorski and Swalwell 2015). Gorski (2014, 1) describes the approach as, “the skills and dispositions that enable us to recognize, respond to and redress (i.e., correct for) conditions that deny some students access to the educational opportunities enjoyed by their peers. Equity literacy also describes the skills and dispositions that allow us to create and sustain equitable and just learning environments.” This framework centers the justice conversation on equity rather than culture (Gorski and Swalwell 2015).

Definitions of *equity* vary. Within the scope of education, it generally refers to a process and way of being that strives to identify and eliminate bias, discrimination, and oppression, and to fairly distribute access, opportunity, and participation (Equity Learning Center 2021). Characterizations of *culture* vary widely across fields (Gorski 2016b). Notions of culture commonly refer to those who belong to a “nation-state, an ethnic group, or religious group” but can include other identity factors (Ladson-Billings 2014, 75). While some culture-focused frameworks (e.g., multicultural education, culturally relevant and responsive teaching) incorporate principles of justice and equity, they are sometimes reduced in practice to celebrations of group differences based on cultural stereotypes without accompanying recognition of the inequities experienced by a community and the heterogeneity of its members

(Gorski 2016b, Gorski and Swallwell 2015). By focusing on equity, equity literacy encompasses important notions of cultural diversity; includes aspects of identity (e.g., gender, sexual orientation, ability/disability, and socioeconomic status) that may not be explicitly represented in common conceptions of culture; and brings attention to students' rights to educational opportunities that are fair and morally sound (Gorski 2016a). Thus, equity literacy is a fitting approach to bring a social justice lens and commitment to individual and institutional aims of dancer wellness.

THE NEED FOR HEALTHY PRACTICE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN DANCE

Physical and psychological problems in dancers are associated with a motivational climate commonly employed in Western concert dance training in which skill perfection and comparison are emphasized rather than self-referenced progress and individual effort (Nordin-Bates et al. 2014; Quin, Rafferty and Tomlinson 2015). A competitive climate, within a dance context that is continually changing and becoming progressively more demanding, can lead dancers and teachers to push the physical limits of the human body and over-train (Redding 2020; White, Hoch and Hoch 2018). There is evidence that traditional training methods are not founded on current understanding of human movement and that this is a factor in the prevalence of musculoskeletal injuries and problems with nutritional deficiencies, self-esteem, and perfectionism in dancers (Cardinal, Rogers and Cardinal 2020; Krasnow, Mainwaring and Kerr 1999; Mainwaring and Finney 2017). These issues are important to address if, as individuals and institutions, we are committed to encouraging dancers' optimal performance, health, and wellness.

Lakes (2005) describes a disturbing paradox in Western concert dance (e.g., ballet, modern, postmodern, and contemporary dance) in which authoritarian pedagogical practices are

used in dance training intended to prepare dancers for choreography and performances with anti-authoritarian aims. She argues that change is needed at multiple levels to address ideologies that maintain authoritarianism in dance pedagogy and contribute to physical and psychological struggles for dancers. Diverlus (2013) takes the conversation into the social realm. He suggests that an emphasis on *how* to dance, without an accompanying examination of the impacts of dance on individuals and their communities, has resulted in the repetition of oppression in dance contexts, despite the dance community's rejection of oppression in principle. Dance education scholars have long called attention to the inequities in our studios and institutions and a need to critically approach teaching and learning (Amin 2016; Barr and Risner 2014; Kerr-Berry 2016; McCarthy-Brown 2009; Risner and Stinson 2010; Shapiro 1998; Stinson 1991). Nevertheless, stories in dance magazines and on social media suggest that problems of abuse and oppression in dance are far from solved and continue to impact dancers' health and wellbeing (Forcier 2017; Gotkin 2018; Marshall 2021; Perkins Denault 2018; Mosley 2020; Spears 2020; Wngz 2018). Sexism, heterosexism, racism, ableism, ageism, and classism are just some of the forms of oppression that persist in dance education, training, and professional dance settings.

The repetition of a heteronormative and gender-binary ideology in dance perpetuates: the objectification, hypersexualization, and sexual abuse of girls and women (Clark 2004; La Flèche 2019; Sandlos 2020); androcentrism and the privileging of males in learning contexts and positions of power (Perkins Denault 2018; Risner 2009; Westle 2018); and discrimination against transgender, gender-nonconforming, and queer dancers (Ford 2020; Whittenburg 2020; Wngz 2018). The persistence of White hegemony and Western cultural dominance in dance perpetuates: the racial tracking of White dancers to Eurocentric dance forms and racially marginalized dancers to non-Western forms (Patton 2011); the positioning of Eurocentric dance

forms as part of the core curriculum in higher education and non-Western forms as electives (Amin 2016; McCarthy-Brown 2014; Walker 2019); and the centering of Western concert dance forms where funding and performance presentation are concerned (Crowell 2020). The privileging of able-bodied dancers and virtuosic aesthetics in dance perpetuates the presumption of difference by audiences (Whatley 2007) and the sidelining of disabled dancers who face architectural barriers, have fewer disability-specific and mainstream dance training opportunities, and frequently lack qualified instruction, relevant pedagogy, and appropriate complementary training initiatives (AXIS Dance Company 2017; Coates and Dance/NYC Disability Task Force 2015; Coates, Nolan and Dance/NYC Disability. Dance. Artistry. Task Force 2018). Such barriers threaten the safety and wellbeing of those who belong to marginalized communities.

Ongoing social inequities and abuse in dance point to problems that are not fully addressed by the dancer wellness concept and most dancer wellness programs. A comparison of general definitions of health and wellness and the dancer wellness definition indicates where more attention is needed. The World Health Organization’s description of *health* has remained unchanged since 1948: “Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (World Health Organization 2020, 1). *Wellness* is defined as “the optimal state of health of individuals and groups. There are two focal concerns: the realization of the fullest potential of an individual physically, psychologically, socially, spiritually and economically, and the fulfilment of one’s expectations in the family, community, place of worship, workplace and other settings” (World Health Organization 2006, 5). Implicit in these descriptions is that health and wellness are multidimensional, relevant in all settings, and no dimension is prioritized. Explicit is the reference to the optimal health of individuals *and* groups. In contrast, the current and widely used definition and goals of the dancer wellness

concept and dancer wellness programs emphasize the individual physical and psychological aspects of health and wellness and understate the group and social aspects of health and wellness.

Bloom (2013) asserts that creating a safe space involves ensuring physical, psychological, social, and moral safety. She suggests that the hegemony of individualism has maintained a focus on physical and psychological safety with relatively little attention paid to social safety. Neglecting social aspects of people's safety, health, and wellness can lead to physical, psychological, and social health problems because these aspects are fundamentally linked (Bloom 2013; Holt-Lunstad, Smith and Layton 2010; Johnson 2015; Umberson and Montez 2010). Non-medical social determinants of health, including education, income, working conditions, discrimination, and systemic inequities related to gender, sexuality, race, and culture, operate at multiple interacting levels and can have a more substantial influence on health than healthcare and lifestyle choices (Government of Canada 2020; World Health Organization 2021). To not recognize or adequately address the impact of the social challenges and structural inequities experienced by our students and the social groups to which they belong is to risk not meeting the needs of some individuals and communities and potentially inadvertently harming them through exclusion or microaggressions. Exposure to microaggressions, stigma, structural inequities, and traumatic events involving overt bias, discrimination, and violence related to racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, and socioeconomic status can lead to mental, physical, social, and occupational health problems (American Public Health Association 2021; Nadal 2018; Valentine and Shiperd 2018).

While no educators like to think of themselves as causing harm, oppression is complex, pervasive, embodied, and challenging to see when in a position of power (Adams et al. 2016; Johnson 2015). Even when educators subscribe to and promote anti-oppressive values, they may

simultaneously value the repetition of traditional teaching approaches and ways of knowing that continue to reinforce oppression (Kumashiro 2002). According to Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017), the social construction of oppression as binary and individual, rather than multifaceted and systemic, can trigger defensiveness and prevent us from individually and collectively examining the complexities of our personal beliefs and behaviors, and the structural nature of oppression. The good news is that because oppression is learned, it can be unlearned (Johnson 2015). Supporting all students, including those who belong to marginalized communities, requires examining personal biases, institutional cultures, and dominant social ideologies, as well as a willingness to take action to rectify power imbalances (Ayres et al. 2016; Gorski 2020c; Kelly 2012). The route to equity and anti-oppressive learning cultures involves embracing a structural rather than individualistic view of disparity (Gorski 2016b). For all the above reasons, there is a moral responsibility to give social wellness and social justice more attention in the dancer wellness construct. Equity literacy provides a path forward in this direction.

INFUSING DANCER WELLNESS WITH EQUITY LITERACY

Equity literacy cultivates five critical abilities in individuals and institutions, including recognizing, responding to, and redressing biases, inequities, and oppressive ideologies, and actively cultivating and sustaining equitable and anti-oppressive contexts and ideologies (Gorski 2020b). Transformative practice is maximized through principles that center equity (Gorski 2020a). These abilities and equity principles can bring a social justice perspective to the dancer wellness construct toward aims of safe, equitable, and healthy dance practice. Some of the ways individuals, organizations, and institutions could encourage equity literacy in support of dancer wellness are outlined below.

Recognizing Inequity

The first equity literacy ability (Gorski 2020b) involves *recognizing* biases, inequities, and oppressive ideologies. To engage this ability, we might begin by observing ourselves and our colleagues and notice tendencies to assume a common need or experience, or to favor one learning approach or genre of dance. I find the equity literacy principle *One Size Fits Few* (Gorski, 2020a) useful when striving to recognize inequity. This principle provides a reminder that no identity group is homogeneous and that group-level generalizations are often based on stereotypes. It can also remind us that “universal” strategies are unlikely to serve all groups and individuals.

A refrain heard in many private dance studios is, “You/your child needs to take ballet because it is the foundation of all dance.” Prioritizing ballet not only endorses Eurocentrism, but also promotes a belief that dance studios are the correct place to learn dance. Yet, ballet does little to prepare dancers for genres like hip hop, salsa, and other dance forms with different roots, aesthetics, and technical requirements that are sometimes learned in different spaces (Monroe 2011). A bias like this could cause dancers with interest in such genres and/or connections to non-Western cultures to feel marginalized, adversely impacting their sense of belonging and social wellbeing. Preferencing Western concert dance genres can also be seen in post-secondary dance programs, where ballet, modern, and contemporary dance courses are commonly part of the core curriculum and students receive more credit hours in these genres than from genres with African, Latin, and Asian roots that are offered as electives or extracurricular activities (McCarthy-Brown and Schupp 2021). This valuing of Western concert dance forms in higher education maintains a Eurocentric perspective of dancer wellness because dancer wellness

programs are part of many post-secondary dance programs (Cardinal, Rogers & Cardinal 2020), and the source of much of the dancer health and wellness research.

A closer look at the dancer screening tools used in dancer wellness programs reveals a missed opportunity to recognize diversity and potential health and wellness problems related to inequities. Demographic data beyond age, sex, and sometimes gender identification is rarely collected during the screening process (Healthy Dancer Canada 2019b, 2021; Task Force on Dancer Health, Dance/USA 2018-2019). The absence of questions about racial and ethnic identity, ability/disability, socioeconomic status, social inclusion, and social supports demonstrates an assumption of a single experience across identity lines. The result may be incomplete assessments of dancers’ wellness and databases that do not help us connect the dots from injuries and psychological stressors to structural barriers. Dancer wellness organizations might also consider collecting demographic information about social identity to understand the make-up and needs of their membership and to identify which communities are underrepresented. We cannot fully appreciate which and whose health and wellness concerns require attention if questions about social identity, social determinants of health, and social wellness are not included in our screening protocols and membership databases.

Responding to Inequity

The second equity literacy ability (Gorski 2020b) involves *responding* to biases, inequities, and oppressive ideologies in the immediate term. To develop this ability, we might engage students and colleagues in discussions about equity concerns and intervene when bias and inequity are observed in our dance spaces. I find the equity literacy principle *Direct Confrontation* (Gorski 2020a) is essential in these circumstances. This principle promotes directly identifying and confronting inequity. Entering potentially challenging conversations with a focus on what

language, practices, and policies are inequitable in our classes, schools, and institutions (rather than who) can lead to constructive exchanges in which people feel safe to consider differences in lived experiences, the needs of those experiencing barriers, and possible changes that could address inequities.

Individuals and organizations could purposefully connect with those who face inequity to ask about their experiences and needs. Through listening, we might learn, for example, that the school’s dress code and the language used by instructors in classes provide some dancers with challenges. Gender binary language (e.g., “boys and girls” and “ladies and gentlemen”) that excludes nonbinary and gender fluid dancers can be easily made more inclusive by referring to all participants as “dancers.” Dress codes that require boys/men and girls/women to wear different dance attire, with the latter frequently required to wear pink tights and shoes for ballet, do not allow gender non-conforming dancers nor to those who are Black or Peoples of Colour to authentically represent themselves (Mitchell 2021). An immediate response to such inequity could involve revising the dress code so that no gender distinction or colour preference is made; dancers could simply be asked to wear a leotard or tank top with flesh-tone or black tights and shoes for classes. This action might further inspire faculty and staff to reconsider their costume choices or to re-name classes and re-articulate who is permitted or encouraged to attend these classes (e.g., men’s and pointe classes) (Mitchell 2021). Such acts nurture autonomy and can help dancers who identify with marginalized groups feel seen, included, and valued.

Discussions about the genres of dance that are underrepresented in the school’s or institution’s offerings can begin in conversations with colleagues concerning the biases and inequities we observe in our places of work. With a focus on responding to inequity in the immediate term, we might alter the schedule such that an existing class in a non-Western dance

form is offered during a popular time slot to encourage participation. This could lead to the eventual growth of the program and need to offer more classes and levels of this genre (McCarthy-Brown 2014). Discussions about which groups are and are not represented in the school's or institution's population might reveal, for example, that there are no teachers and few students with disabilities. We could respond to this situation by rotating into the current schedule an instructor with a disability, thus diversifying the instructional approach and increasing the adaptability of students in the class (Morris, Baldeon and Scheuneman 2015). There are many practical approaches that can begin immediately and start the process of realizing equity within existing frameworks.

Redressing Inequity

The third equity literacy ability (Gorski 2020b) involves *redressing* biases, inequities, and oppressive ideologies in the long term by addressing their root causes. To engage this ability, we might look at how the practices and policies of our dance companies, organizations, and institutions impact our abilities to foster dancer wellness and social justice. For example, Quin, Rafferty, and Tomlinson (2015) espouse the importance of ensuring moral safety through implementing codes of conduct intended to guide people's behavior and safeguarding policies that protect the health and welfare of specific groups of people. Creating and adhering to professional codes of conduct, such as the Canadian Code of Conduct for the Performing Arts (Cultural Human Resources Council 2019), and in-house policies that address the need for safety, inclusion, and equity is important. However, in my experience, such codes and policies are rarely discussed in our schools and institutions, and do not always translate into practice. Indeed, omissions and breaches in the form of racism, racial and gender disparities in positions of power, and sexual abuse continue to be seen in dance schools, institutions, and companies

with such codes and policies in place (British Broadcasting Company 2020; Dance Data Project 2021; Data USA n.d.; Ekos Research Associates 2014; Wells-Smith 2020a, 2020b; Yntema 2021).

Equity literacy principles (Gorski 2020a) can guide the approach as we deconstruct and rectify practices and policies that leave some dancers vulnerable and at a disadvantage. Applicable principles include the *Fix Injustice, Not [People]* principle, which promotes focusing on transforming the circumstances that marginalize people, rather than trying to change marginalized people, and the *Redistribution* principle, which advocates redistributing “material, cultural, and social access and opportunity” (Gorski 2020a, 1). Dancer wellness literature, curriculum, and practices frequently focus on how individual dancers, teachers, and healthcare professionals can remedy dancers’ physical and psychological issues. This approach potentially deflects attention from how interpersonal interactions and structural barriers may contribute to health concerns. Examining how instructor expectations, school/company/organizational policies, dance culture, and systemic disparities contribute to exploitation and marginalization informs plans to address inequitable conditions and devise more inclusive and just circumstances.

Exploring the root causes of inequity with a goal of long-term ideological change could involve a school, company, or organization making a commitment to gain a clearer picture of whose presence, needs, and/or interests are not being represented and why. Armed with this information, attention can then focus on education. For example, the school’s faculty and staff, or the organization’s board and executive leadership, could participate in annual anti-racism and anti-oppression training to help them better understand the historical and current challenges faced by underrepresented groups. Representation could be furthered by seeking input from

people who belong to marginalized communities, supporting their participation in positions of influence, and following their lead when endeavouring to dismantle the barriers that disadvantage them. Access and opportunity could be improved by reallocating funds to create bursaries that support dancers who experience disadvantage and discrimination, for example low-income students and dancers who are Indigenous, Black, and Peoples of Colour. Such actions contribute to shifting the demographic picture and closing equity gaps.

Cultivating Equity

The fourth equity literacy ability (Gorski 2020b) involves *actively cultivating* equitable, anti-oppressive ideologies and institutional cultures. Enacting this ability requires that we apply an equity lens to all that we do when striving for dancer wellness. The equity literacy principles *Equity Ideology* and *Prioritization* (Gorski 2020a) are effective when aiming to foster equitable dance cultures and contexts. These principles remind us that equity is more than practical strategies and to keep the needs and interests of those who are marginalized at the forefront.

To foster equity, we could re-visit and perhaps re-articulate our schools’, companies’, organizations’, and institutions’ vision, mission, and values statements. This exercise would involve examining aims to see if we are working toward healthy dance practice and social justice, then considering if the means by which we pursue these aims are justified and effective. It would also involve ensuring that implicit and explicit systems of beliefs clearly direct people’s behaviours and efforts toward these aims. Some guiding questions might include the following: Is there a shared commitment to promoting the physical, psychological, and social health of all dancers? Are we actively working to eradicate bias, discrimination, and oppression in our context? Do we equitably distribute access, opportunity, and participation? Do our programs and policies consider and prioritize the needs of those who are marginalized? How do we know? Are

these aims clearly stated? What do they look like in practice? Such questions and evaluations can lay a foundation of moral safety, which requires a guiding framework grounded in human rights and emerges out of a common commitment to moral integrity (Bloom 2013, 2017).

Other equity efforts might include purposefully striving to represent a wide range of ages, abilities, body shapes, races/ethnicities, and dance genres in the images used in dance resources, promotional materials, and social media posts. These efforts would be complemented by intra- and extra-organizational oversight to ensure we are not being performative but rather honestly adhering to foundational beliefs and commitments. We could also expand the curricula of our dancer wellness programs to include education in sociology and social justice as essential components, alongside education in psychology, anatomy, injury prevention, motor learning, and nutrition. These endeavors would signal the importance of addressing individual, interpersonal, organizational, institutional, and socio-cultural-political components of safety, health, and wellness.

Sustaining Equity

The fifth equity literacy ability (Gorski 2020a) involves *sustaining* bias-free, equitable, and anti-oppressive classrooms, schools, ideologies, and institutional cultures. Developing this ability involves communicating a commitment to equity and adopting a long-term transformative approach (Gorski 2020b). The equity literacy principle *Evidence-Informed Equity* (Gorski 2020a) inspires the approach I envision for sustaining equity. This principle proposes that equity efforts should be based on evidence, including academic research *and* the lived experiences of people who are marginalized in our institutions.

It is clear from rigorous quantitative and qualitative studies and stories about the lived experiences of dancers who belong to marginalized groups that inequity in our dance spaces

exists and persists. If equity is to be achieved and sustained, we need to update the dancer wellness concept to promote healthy and socially just dance practice. I propose the following definition and goals for an equity literate construct of dancer wellness:

Equity-informed dancer wellness is a process that cultivates and sustains safe, healthy, and equitable dance practice and contexts. Its aim is to reduce injury risk, enhance dance performance, contribute to holistic health and wellness, and prolong dance participation. Its method is to apply multidisciplinary and evidence-informed concepts that support moral safety and the optimal physical, psychological, and social functioning of everyone involved in dance.

This construct could simultaneously support aims for safe, healthy dance practice and social justice at individual and institutional levels.

CONCLUSION

As I contemplate my hesitancy to trouble dancer wellness, I recognize that this speaks to the hierarchical systems of power within dance and academia. I am also reminded that the repetition of oppression in dance hinders its potential to foster transformation. Equity literacy and my desire for the wellness and growth of everyone involved in dance, no matter how they identify or the genre of dance they practice, calls me to be an advocate and accomplice for change. Thus, I submit the concept of *equity-informed dancer wellness* for consideration by my mentors, colleagues, and students. A construction of dancer wellness that acknowledges intrapersonal, interpersonal, institutional, and structural contributions to safety, health, and wellness would support our efforts to embrace and promote social justice and healthy dance practice. It could also help balance long-term goals and commitments to equity and wellness with accessible avenues to change in everyday practice. The likely result is positive transformative change.

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