

*Case Studies of Female Leaders in the Dance Field*

by

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for the

**HONORS COLLEGE**

Submitted to the  
Honors College  
at Texas Tech University in  
partial fulfillment of the  
requirement for  
the degree designation of

**HIGHEST HONORS  
MAY 2016**

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## **Abstract**

While the dance field is characterized by participation of a female majority, male leadership representation in this field is significantly higher than that of female leadership. The purpose of this research is to reveal how female dance leaders in the academic and professional sectors practice leadership and navigate a field characterized by unequal gender representation in the United States. It will also explore the challenges women in these roles face, their strategies for success, and the issues that arise as they adapt to the various needs of the communities they serve. To observe this, three case studies were conducted of female leaders in the dance field, from both the academic and professional dance company sectors. This research provides insight into gender representation and inequalities within the dance field. It also illustrates individual leaders' descriptions of overcoming obstacles to succeed in dance leadership positions, and the future shifts and opportunities that these leaders foresee for the future of female leadership and representation in the dance field.

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## **Introduction**

The dance field has often been characterized by unequal gender representation in leadership positions. (Banes, 1998; Dolan, 2012; Green, 2003; Meglin, 2012, Brooks; Van Dyke). Van Dyke argues that there is little change in this representation due to a lack of feminist research as it pertains to dance in particular. A suggestion for greater change in equality and representation in the field exists in the establishment of stronger female voices in positions of leadership (Van Dyke). This research highlights three unique experiences of female leaders in dance, analyzing their strengths and abilities in an attempt to rectify the deficit of strong female voices in the field.

### *Purpose Statement*

This research explores how female dance leaders in the academic and professional sectors practice leadership and navigate a field characterized by unequal gender representation in the United States. It also explores the challenges women in these roles face, their strategies for success, and the issues that arise as they adapt to the various communities they serve. To answer these questions, I conducted three case studies of female leaders in the dance field, from both the academic and professional dance company sectors. The case studies consist of interviews with the participants. This research provides insight into gender representation and inequalities within the dance field. It also illustrates how individual leaders have overcome obstacles to succeed in leadership positions in the dance field.

### *Positioning the Researcher*

As a current Honors undergraduate student at Texas Tech University, I serve as an Undergraduate Research Scholar. My background in dance includes many years of

training in various environments. I began training at a local dance studio, where I was involved in competitive dance training and performance for 14 years. Now at a university, I train in a dance program where I will ultimately receive my Bachelor of Arts degree in Dance. My training encompasses a wide variety of styles and pedagogical experiences; however, most of my experience is situated within Western dance culture. Therefore, my investigation will focus mainly on Western research and literature. This qualitative research will be presented as individual case studies.

As a researcher involved in complex questioning within dance studies, I attempt to be self-reflective in order to recognize my subjectivity within the context of the exploration. I am involved in the dance field as a performer, choreographer, and teacher, producing an insider standpoint, but I am not in a position of leadership like my research participants, which makes me an outsider, as well. I am also a woman and a feminist, which play into my personal experiences and reflections about the current situation of gender representation in the dance field. My research will, therefore, include both insider and outsider perspectives.

### **Brief Review of Literature**

The following explanation of some of the relevant scholarly research involves information from feminist, performance, artistic activism, and dance specific studies. It begins with an overview of female representation in the professional work field and continues with a broad explanation of several feminist movements and explanations of gender, moves into more specific discussion on the role of artistic performance in these movements, and ends with dance-specific research and findings about female perception and representation. While not all of the research discussed herein directly influences the

dance field specifically, all findings and descriptions impact both the professional and personal environments of female leaders navigating underrepresentation in the dance field. Therefore, research outside of the dance field is important to address and recognize as informative to this study.

### *Women in the Work Force*

Judith Warner uses data from The Center for American Progress in to examine the differences between male and female education, job acquisition, and level of leadership positions (Center for American Progress, 2014). Warner investigates various professions and sectors, finding a common theme of female underrepresentation throughout these sectors, despite equal qualifications. In doing so, she also observes a lack of change in equal gender representation in the work place in recent decades (Center for American Progress, 2014). Warner concludes that at the current rate of change in the professional sector, it will take until approximately 2085 for women's leadership representation to equal that of their male counterparts (Center for American Progress, 2014).

Robin J. Ely and Deborah L. Rhode agree with Warner's observations of about the lack of change in unequal gender representation in the work place, stating that, despite the popular belief that the concept of "the glass ceiling" no longer exists, women are still significantly underrepresented in positions of paid leadership nationwide (2010).

Traditional gender expectations play a huge role in this imbalance between male and female power representation, according to Ely and Rhode (2010). Since traits accompanying positions of power usually include traditionally male qualities like dominance and assertiveness, these roles become disassociated with women (Ely, Rhode, 2010). Not only are women seen as unfit for these roles, they are also are often viewed

negatively if they hold positions in which they present these traditionally male characteristics in the workplace (Ely, Rhode, 2010). Whereas male leaders are expected to work this way, female leaders usually struggle with gaining both respect and likeability when in a similar position as a man (Ely, Rhode, 2010).

Other challenges that arise for women seeking paid leadership positions, according to Ely and Rhode, include a lack of influential female mentors and exclusion from networking opportunities (2010). The competitive demands placed on positions of power only partially enable the few women in these roles to provide adequate guidance to younger generations of women leaders (Ely, Rhode, 2010). Women also find it difficult to network properly due to the already demanding work hours plus the burden of being responsible for the majority of household responsibilities (Ely, Rhode, 2010). The need for women in positions of leadership in organizations is recognized by many; however, stereotypes of female expectations continue to dominate the lack of support for women aiming for leadership positions (Ely, Rhode, 2010). Removing barriers to women's success not only aids in individual realization of full potential, but also in the organization's overall performance, according to Ely and Rhodes (2010).

#### *Bridging Feminist and Performative Studies*

Feminist theorists have long analyzed this problem of workplace opportunity and equality. Josephine Donovan examines feminist theory from the Enlightenment to the twenty-first century (2012). During the Enlightenment, women first began fighting for equality with men as they argued for greater education and career opportunities for the female gender as a whole (Donovan, 2012). Donovan studies the approaches to feminist movements politically and socially, as they then shifted from various perspectives on the

inherent definition of a woman (2012). She presents the idea that these movements have consistently shifted between two contrasting ideas: the sameness of the female in regards to the male, versus the unique, and positive difference between the two genders (Donovan, 2012). Donovan leaves readers with the idea that feminist theory is headed towards a more globally centered approach, advocating for all living things and their interconnectedness, and past a more traditional liberal theory of individualism (Donovan, 2012). This study on the attributes and perceptions of the female gender throughout history gives great insight into the lack of female leaders in the past and present compared to male leaders, and the potential shift for female representation in the future (Donovan, 2012).

Noting the themes and positions associated with feminist movements across history brings up important questions about how this research developed and how this field is continually influential to dance studies. Sue-Ellen Case addresses these questions, in “Feminism and Performance: A Post-Disciplinary Couple,” and discusses the differences between the ideas of “interdisciplinary” and “post-disciplinary” work and research (2001). Case argues that feminist studies did not develop in a specific discipline or across disciplines, but rather outside the limits of academic institution (2001). Activism spurred and continues to stimulate scholarly tradition in feminist studies, much like the research of performative studies (Case, 2001). Case argues that through these improvisatory research practices, feminist scholarship breaks free of patriarchal traditions (2001). This study brings together the unique practices of feminist and performance studies, allowing one to see how one discipline can influence the other and bring about clearer and more developed findings (Case, 2001). It is important to note the similarities

of feminist studies in comparison to dance research, and how the two can be intertwined to develop a fuller picture of gender representation in the dance sector.

Ann Cooper Albright continues these ideas as she seeks to bridge feminist and dance scholarship through a development past the typical boundaries of each field of study (1997). Using her background and engagement in both the physical and intellectual opportunities in dance practice and feminist thought, Albright merges these fields to better inform the other (1997). Albright's focus is on the interplay between the critical power of theoretical thought and the physical experience of kinesthetic attentiveness (1997). Despite the extensive scholarship that separates these two ways of learning and thinking, Albright uses feminist scholarship, specifically the writings of Helene Cixous and Julia Kristeva, and choreographic examples, through discussion of Marie Chouinard, Yvonne Rainer, and Isadora Duncan's work and experiences, to find new ways of looking at female identity and influence by acknowledging the interconnectedness of representation and experience (1997). A particularly interesting example lies in Albright's discussion about Chouinard's representation of herself as a woman on stage outside of the traditional, safe depictions of the female personality and experience (1997). Albright closely examines Chouinard's artistic ability to expand her kinesthetic experience to the audience by breaking the confined boundaries of the traditional image of a woman, allowing the audience to participate in her journey (1997).

In "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," Judith Butler develops the conversation further by discussing deeper relationships between feminist studies and performance (2007). Butler compares theatrical acts to the everyday performative acts of maintaining gender expectations

(2007). She examines what it means to be defined as a woman in American culture, and presents gender as a set of gestures and acts that make up the concept or illusion of a gendered identity (Butler, 2006; Butler 2007). While feminism has often presented the experience of women as universal based on biology, Butler argues that gender is better understood in historical and cultural contexts (2006; 2007). The continuous acts that are required of becoming a woman that fits into societal expectations are what create gender; gender without performative acts would be nonexistent (Butler, 2007). The repetitive actions that each individual makes, whether consciously or unconsciously, to reinforce one's gender expectation are what constitute this performative act (Butler, 2007). The "performance" of gender to the public is a parallel to the performance of a character on stage (Butler, 2007). However, the acts of gender have higher cultural stakes and punishments, while performances on stage are allowed to push boundaries and challenge norms (Butler, 2007).

According to Butler, performative acts create distinct binary genders and are nothing but a type of cultural survival (2007). Discrete gender is a way of ensuring reproduction of kinship and societal values of heteronormativity (Butler, 2006; Butler, 2007). While specific acts performed may be individual, the very process by which every person performs and reconstructs these acts daily is not individual at all. While feminist movements have focused so heavily on the female experience that has an inherent necessity to be expressed, Butler argues that what needs more focus is the uniquely diverse experiences of women (2007). Gender is something that is put on and practiced, not something that is natural and therefore universal (Butler, 2007). This allows for a

shift in perspective about gender roles and gender perceptions in both ordinary life and in performance.

Jill Dolan investigates representation in performing arts, specifically in theatre, through a feminist spectator perspective involving Butler's previously stated ideas about gender construction and perception (2012). She argues that examining representation and its meanings through a critical perspective on ideology and cultural expectations allows for greater societal change of the condition of women and men (Dolan, 2012). Another point Dolan makes deals with the increase in female playwrights. She claims that the push for liberal feminism work in theatre has lead to this increase in female professional leaders in theatre (Dolan, 2012). Lastly, Dolan examines the influences of liberal, cultural, and materialist feminism in performance, and contends that materialist feminism is the most effective in representing the female experience (2012). In performance, materialist feminism is a descriptive and explanatory form of feminism, seeking to provide an accurate image of representation in regards to social contexts in both performance and production of the performance (Dolan, 2012). Materialist feminism seeks to disrupt gender narratives and representations that have traditionally placed female bodies in a realm imaged for and desired by males, and instead present a description of true experience (Dolan, 2012). This is extremely important in accurately depicting female experiences, which in turn influence further perpetuation or a shifting of these experiences.

Further developing these ideas surrounding rejection of universality and traditional representation, Tiina Rosenberg in "On Feminist Activist Aesthetics" discusses social activism in the performing arts in Sweden, where the trends have shifted

from individual art making to collective collaborations (2009). Alongside this trend, political activism has shifted from presenting inequalities as universalities to presenting them as individual experiences that unite groups based on unique understandings with shared perspectives (Rosenberg, 2009). The concept of political solidarity is reliant upon acknowledgement and celebration of diversity in the face of commonality (Rosenberg, 2009). Feminist performative art in Sweden has followed this concept of solidarity in presenting activist agendas (Rosenberg, 2009). The leading activist artists heavily influence what happens politically and culturally.

“Street theory,” coined by Jane Mansbridge, defines ideas that are created in communities and often presented through activist art, that then transfer to academic scholarship (Rosenberg, 2009). The problem that arises so often is that scholarship does not acknowledge the community in which the ideas or concepts began, which is an important aspect in fully understanding various political activist movements (Rosenberg, 2009). The lines between the art world and the real world are becoming blurred through performance activist art in Sweden, specifically for feminist movements through the performance of the explicit body and the autobiographical body (Rosenberg, 2009). No longer can artists view themselves as intellectually dependent from society; they must recognize their position and active participation in the life around them (Rosenberg, 2009).

Doug Borwick argues for this same idea in his development of the concept that the transformative power of the arts on a personal level must translate to the communal level in order for the state of the arts in the United States to grow and succeed in coming years in *Building Communities, Not Audiences: The Future of the Arts in the United*

*States* (2012). He examines successes and failures of artistic practices in various settings, and the obstacles for change in the American art setting (Borwick, 2012). Borwick studies specific organizational examples to assess his theories of the positive influence of community engagement on artistic groups (2012). This book argues strongly for broader engagement of audiences in the attempt to create sustainable growth and stability for the future of the arts (Borwick, 2012).

#### *Dance Practices and Examinations*

Sherry Shapiro, alongside eight other dance educators, examines traditional dance pedagogy practices and the aims and goals of dance education in *Dance, Power, and Difference: Critical and Feminist Perspectives on Dance Education* (1998). The authors introduce readers to significant questions about gender and culture in traditional dance pedagogy through historical and personal examples (Shapiro, 1998). Through personal experiences in case studies, this book calls for thought-provoking change in the way we teach dance students through questioning dance environments in a sociocultural context. Shapiro acknowledges the influence of the dominant European society on dance culture, and examines the ways in which this impacts pedagogical methods of training women specifically (Shapiro, 1998).

Focusing in from Shapiro's ideas on a specified population and environments, Jill Green aims to describe typical dance training in college dance programs in America, specifically in ballet and modern classes (2003). She focuses on the ideas of Johnson (1992) and Behnke (1990-91) and the effect of a body/mind separation in congruence with cultural influences that shape our bodies (Green, 2003). This body/mind split is perpetuated by dominant cultures to keep power from the oppressed in an effort to

maintain societal norms (Green, 2003). As a result of this practice, ideal body myths in both dance and culture at large are presented (Green, 2003). Green collects observations and accounts from her students about their bodily perceptions and how they affect their experience as both dancer and student (2003).

The concept of a docile body becomes relevant as the students account for how they aim to achieve perfection (Green, 2003). Because the study of dance is so focused on the physical self, the body easily detaches from the mind to become objectified and controlled (Green, 2003). Even just the powerful presence of the mirror and the traditional clothing attire in a typical dance technique class aids in constantly surveying and manipulating the body (Green, 2003). These tactics become particularly relevant for women, as the gender majority is female in the dance field. While this is true outside of dance practices in general cultural expectations, female dancers have a heightened awareness of and struggle to maintain the “ideal body” (Green, 2003). The body becomes the measure of success and control. The idea of bodily perfection gives the female dancers a false sense of control over the dominance of the males; however, the impossible ideal body can never be achieved (Green, 2003). Therefore, female dancers are constantly put and kept in positions under male dominance and power (Green, 2003). The concept of training the body does not need to be negative all the time, but rather examined for intention and purpose. Jill Green acknowledges the differences between training the body for greater kinesthetic awareness and ability, and training to aim to satisfy the outside observer: the dominant culture (2003).

Looking at the observer-focused training of the dominant culture, Sally Banes reexamines significant European/Euro-American dance works through a feminist lens in

*Dancing Women: Female Bodies on Stage* (1998). Working through major historical periods, Banes describes what occurs onstage through a woman-centered perspective: an often-neglected perspective in dance (Banes, 1998). Starting with Romantic ballet and ending with postmodernism, she focuses on the sociocultural environment in which the work was created and how the performance aligned with or challenged those traditions (Banes, 1998). Banes closely examines the marriage plot in various creations, and reveals how choreography both shapes and is shaped by the outside social context (1998). Through movement ideas about women's corporeality are exposed, as feelings about and towards women are physically embodied onstage.

Examining perceptions about women in various historical time periods is enhanced through the close study of dance works, according to Sally Banes (1998). While plot lines tell audiences a great deal of information about character relations, the physical, performative aspect of dance cannot be undermined in analyzing dance works (Banes, 1998). Contrast can often be found between gender relations that are described and the physical power and virtuosity of the dancers, which can reveal relevant information about dancer and choreographer influence on societal expectations and practices (Banes, 1998). Observations from dance performances about women's sexual identity and independence reflect the growth of feminism and the surrounding culture at large in Euro-American areas (Banes, 1998).

This reflection of performance as it attributes to life and work is explored in Jan Van Dyke's study describing the relationship of funding for dance opportunities in the United States to gender in "Gender and Success in the American Dance World" (1996). Despite the female majority in the dance field, male participants overwhelmingly receive

grants, funding, leadership roles, and other opportunities over their female counterparts (Van Dyke, 1996). Van Dyke argues that part of the lack of change may be due to a deficiency of feminist research as it relates to dance specifically (1996). Stronger establishment of voices from successful female leaders in the dance field is one of the author's solutions for greater equality in opportunity and representation within dance (Van Dyke, 1996).

Joellen A. Meglin and Lynn Matluck Brooks dive deeper into these ideas in the ballet genre specifically (2012). As editors of the *Dance Chronicle: Studies in Dance and the Related Arts*, they observe the staggering underrepresentation of female leadership in the ballet world historically, as well as in current times (Meglin, Brooks, 2012). The authors examine the patterns of growth seen across the United States in professional ballet companies, and how growth relates to gender representation (Meglin, Brooks, 2012). Meglin and Brooks argue that as a professional ballet company rises in popularity and influence, female leadership representation decreases, and male directors and choreographers seem to take control (2012). Dance training and development based on gender, paired with societal expectations of women, are definite causes of this continued inequality seen in ballet leadership positions, according to Meglin and Brooks (2012). Dance studies also contribute to why there are so few notable (or recognized) women choreographers and directors. There is little written history and scholarship about prominent female leaders in the dance field, which perpetuates the pattern of male leadership dominance currently in the professional sector (Meglin, Brooks, 2012).

Throughout history, very different perspectives about female experience and representation have gained recognition in both professional and personal sectors of life.

Ideas developed out of feminist studies and generalized performance studies, such as the importance of uniqueness in individual female experiences, reexamination of patriarchal research structures, and mentorship and focused development of female leadership, directly impact postmodern dance studies. Examination of typical dance practices and recognition of unequal leadership representation in current research surrounding female opportunity in the dance field calls for the necessity of continued research and writing. In order to further the development of women leaders in dance, researchers in the field must continue to provide information about individual experiences in this specific artistic environment. There is a lack of written research in the dance field in general, and more specifically by and about women leaders in this sector. In order to spur development and shifted perspectives, those involved in dance practices must make their voices known and their individual and communal experiences heard.

Therefore, this research will add to the current conversation surrounding unequal gender representation in dance. It presents unique descriptions about individual experiences of current female leaders in the dance field, providing information about the past and current states of gender concerns in dance training and practices. This research will contribute information about the trends and shifts in female leadership in dance, acknowledging the importance of personal experience: a unique, and important perspective involved in both feminist and performance studies. Added research about the underrepresented majority in the dance field allows for better understanding of the female experience, and in turn provides a structure for acknowledgment and actual perspective-shifts towards change.

## **Methodology**

To conduct this research, I recruited the participants via email correspondence. In looking for potential research participants, I began by searching for female dance leaders in various geographical locations in the United States. I also searched for variation in age, background training, and career paths. In choosing the subjects that I decided to ask, I picked leaders in various areas of the dance field: university programs, professional companies, private studio companies, and administrative roles. In finalizing the participants, I chose an artistic director of a professional company, the founder of a university dance degree program and private local dance studio, and a professor in a university and previous artistic director of a professional company. All three are of different ages, they developed their careers at different generational times, and they are from three different geographical locations.

All of the potential participants' email addresses are publicly available on their university or dance company websites; I obtained the participants' email addresses through these publicly available websites. In recruitment materials, I described the research questions, what interested me about that particular dance leader, and expectations for the research process. I also let potential participant know that the research was voluntary and that they could opt out of the research at any time. I also let them know that they had final approval of all direct quotes and information submitted about their personal leadership style before the thesis was finalized. To perform this research, I conducted a one-hour, face-to-face interview with two participants, and an email interview and follow-up interview with the other. Each participant had the option to complete the interview in person, or by phone, Skype, or email. They also had the option to complete a potential follow-up interview in

person, or by phone, Skype, or email if needed to clear up any questions arising from the initial interviews. The initial in-person interviews took place in a private space: a private home and a private office space. I did not conduct interviews until the participant signed a consent form. I digitally audio recorded the interviews and took notes during the interviews.

Once data collection was complete for each case, all interviews were transcribed and sent to each participant for approval. As I placed the data within the context of the thesis, I also sent relevant materials to the participants for further input and approval. The review process took approximately one hour or less for each participant. The participants were encouraged to ask questions and voice concerns during all stages of the process, including the initial request for participation and the interview process. The consent form included in writing a formal invitation for questions. The structure of the interviews was set up to be conversational; therefore, questions could easily be asked at any time.

### *Ethical Issues*

A potential risk related to participation in the study was loss of confidentiality. Confidentiality was protected to the extent that is allowed by law. The interviews were held at private locations that the participant and I agreed upon. There existed the possibility that information and experiences revealed by the participant may cause public embarrassment or compromise a participant's reputation based on personal events or experiences that emerged in the interviews. Also, participants in this study are named; however, if the participant wished, they had the opportunity to delete any information from the transcript. None of the participants removed or edited any information that was originally given. There was also a potential risk of loss of confidentiality in all email, downloading, and

Internet transactions. To minimize this risk, the participants were given the option of other means of communication for information deemed sensitive such as postal mailing, telephone, or face-to-face communication. The second participant opted for only telephone and face-to-face communication.

There was a risk of fatigue and physical or emotional discomfort during the interview process. Breaks were taken when needed and the participants had the right to stop the interview at any time or reschedule. She was also allowed to opt out of participation in the research at any time. None of the participants ended participation before the research was over. Each participant was also cautioned that loss of confidentiality is a potential risk in every study involving people. The confidentiality of any identifiable data, such as paper documents, computer files, or audio tapes are kept a locked private home on a password protected computer and hard drive. All data identifiable will be destroyed within five years from the end of the study.

### **Voices of Female Leaders in the Dance Field: Interview #1 with Banning Bouldin**

I chose Banning Bouldin as a participant in this study for several notable reasons. Firstly, Bouldin's current geographical location is Nashville, Tennessee. This is an area I am unfamiliar with in terms of the societal and artistic environments that exist there; it is different from the other participants in this study. Secondly, her professional performance and choreography training is extensive, exposing Bouldin to a variety of experiences across genres and locations. She had (and continues to seek) opportunities working with many prominent leaders in the dance field, both nationally and internationally. This has given Bouldin a wide range of perspectives that inform her current practice. Lastly, Bouldin is the youngest participant in the study and the professional company she leads is

the newest in terms of formation date. Bouldin's current activity in the professional sector of the dance field informs the study about issues and topics relevant to the present situation. It provides perspective that is current to gender representation in the dance field, specifically in terms of professional companies.

### *Training and Career Introduction*

Banning Bouldin is a “choreographer, dancer, instructor, and the Artistic Director of New Dialect, a contemporary dance company that offers movement classes to the public based in Nashville, Tennessee.”<sup>1</sup> Initially, her dance training consisted of classical ballet. However, when introduced to contemporary ballet and modern forms, like the techniques of Paul Taylor, Jose Limon, and Martha Graham, she remarks, “I knew right away this was the kind of dance I wanted to do professionally.”

Bouldin began her professional dance career after receiving her B.F.A. from Julliard in 2002. From there, she had the opportunity to work with various influential choreographers and companies, working as a performer, teacher, and rehearsal assistant. Hubbard Street 2, Azure Barton and Artists, Lar Lubovitch Dance Company, Buglisi Dance Theater, the Cullberg Ballet in Stockholm, Sweden, Rumpus Room Dance, Wen Wei Wang, Mats Ek, Alex Ketley, Ayman Harper, Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, Alexander Ekman were some of the companies and professionals Bouldin had the chance to work with. While part of Rumpus Room Dance, starting in 2007, Bouldin and colleagues were “nominated one of Dance Magazine's '25 to Watch' in 2010.” Also in 2007, she began teaching at Studio Harmonic in Paris, France. Bouldin states that “from then on teaching and mentoring dancers became a huge part of my love for dance, and ultimately led me to

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all quotations are from the interview with Banning Bouldin.

return to my hometown, Nashville, in 2010.” Bouldin credits much of the respect she has attained as a leader in the dance field from the credentials she has and choices she has made in her education and professional career.

Bouldin remarks that “from the time I said yes to teaching my first master class for Aszure Barton, I knew leadership would be an important part of my career. I had no idea I would go on to start and direct my own company at the time, but I knew I had a gift for sharing information and motivating people.” From dancing to teaching, each step led to the next for Bouldin as she developed her own company as a nonprofit organization with the guidance and support of her teachers and mentors. In 2012, she founded New Dialect. Bouldin states:

I founded New Dialect, as a response to Nashville’s need for a professional contemporary dance company that would allow dancers, teaching artists, choreographers, and audiences the opportunity to explore the wide variety of groundbreaking movement vocabularies that exist in the world of 21st Century dance—vocabularies and approaches [she had] traveled the world to research.

Bouldin continues to serve as the Artistic Director of New Dialect while also regularly teaching and choreographing for other companies such as the Nashville Ballet and Visceral Dance Chicago. She is also the winner of “Northwest Dance Project’s 2015 Pretty Creative choreographic competition” and was selected as “an e-choreographer for Springboard Danse Montreal 2015.” Despite Bouldin’s already impressive career as dancer, choreographer, and artistic director, she remarks that her proudest achievement thus far has been the dynamic of her company through the environment she has worked hard to facilitate for New Dialect.

### *Influences*

Bouldin remarks that through the different periods of her career, several mentors have impacted her path, but the most important one to her is the late Benjamin Harkarvy, the director of Julliard's Dance Division during the time she attended Julliard. "He helped me to discover and deepen my love for the creative process, gave me countless opportunities to explore and take risks, and his feedback was always on spot (even when it hurt)," states Bouldin. Not only did this influence her dancing in her performance career, but it also continues to affect her teaching style, choreographic process, and the types of people she chooses to work with in her company. "Prioritizing process" helped her gain the opportunities she has had with companies she desired to work with both as a dancer and choreographer.

Alexandra Wells, previous Julliard faculty member and the cofounder of Springboard Danse Monreal, has also been a mentorship presence in Boudin's career as it has shifted from dancer to choreographer and artistic director. "She is passionate about helping artists find their way, [and is] a marvelous resource and an inspiration to me," states Bouldin.

### *The Beginning of New Dialect*

Bouldin addresses initial challenges and obstacles that were prevalent in founding a professional contemporary dance company in Nashville, Tennessee, where one of this scale did not exist. Forming New Dialect "required [her] to lay a lot of groundwork before [she] could begin rehearsing and performing." While many were excited about the idea and aims of the company, Bouldin also met many artists and patrons that did not see the need for this kind of company, or a contemporary dance presence, in a city where a

great ballet company was already well-established. “Helping people to see the value in both preserving classical forms and investing in new approaches to dance can be challenging in more traditional and conservative climates,” Banning explains. One approach she found helpful in combating this lack of interest was by offering classes that did not require previous dance experience. She expresses that “to those who were curious, but skeptical, I would invite them to observe a rehearsal and set up time with them to talk about their observations. Many times, if I could get someone in the studio to see what we were working on, they would leave feeling moved, inspired, and excited to see more.” A remarkable 700 people attended New Dialect’s first show, and Bouldin attributes continued audience growth to the available “behind the scenes experience” the company provides for the community and interested participants.

Financial support was also an obstacle Bouldin had to navigate at the formation of New Dialect. As may be expected, she states that “financial support for the arts, and nonprofits in general, is minimal in the first three years... Fundraising when your company is brand new and relatively unknown and grant resources are limited, was a great challenge in our first two years.” Finding studio space for daily rehearsals while also acquiring the funding to pay the dancers became a major challenge for New Dialect in its formative year. Bouldin states that “many studios in Nashville were either closed and unwilling to open during the day, were already in use, or charged rental rates that we could not afford.” As a result of lack of financial support, Bouldin took on all leadership and management roles a newly formed dance company requires, from marketing to artistic mentoring. While this worked for New Dialect in its beginning stages, she knew this set up would not be manageable for a sustained period of time.

Bouldin found that partnerships with local nonprofit organizations were key in solving these early financial obstacles. Through these collaborations, New Dialect "secured an ongoing residency that allows us to rehearse daily and rent free, and pay reduced studio rental rates for the dance classes we provide... [and] have also provided us with paid performance opportunities and commissions." Not only did these partnerships aid in early financial alleviations, but also expanded New Dialect's "network of contacts and supporters." The local presence and connection Bouldin has created with New Dialect and the Nashville community has been key to the company's success and growth from the beginning.

Bouldin also built a team to help her run New Dialect, and eventually this team of people helped her develop the business into a sustainable system that continues to thrive and provide for the company's needs. "I have a business advisor, Board of Directors, and an Advisory Board comprised of people with very different skill sets than I possess and that help me to tackle the myriad of responsibilities associated with running a dance company," Bouldin states. These other leaders involved with New Dialect also help in tackling the financial obstacles and limitations that come with starting a nonprofit organization. They fundraise for the company through their many contacts within various parts of the community that New Dialect would not otherwise have connection with. Bouldin also explains that she joined the Arts and Business Council, providing herself and New Dialect with free business and legal services. This has continued to be a resource for Bouldin in leading a nonprofit and bringing in new opportunities for the company nationally and internationally. She remarks that "each step has led to the next for me, and I am grateful for all of the brilliant teachers, directors, and mentors I've had

access to throughout my career, who continue to serve as sounding boards and tremendous sources of support.” The development and continuation of New Dialect has been heavily impacted by the relationships and connections Bouldin has worked to maintain throughout the Nashville community. Bouldin’s effective use of outside resources and guidance has also been extremely helpful in sustaining New Dialect as a successful dance company.

*Deeper into New Dialect: Relationships and Impact*

Many of the dancers in New Dialect are former students and/or dancers Bouldin has worked with, but she explains that these past relationships have matured in unique ways. While she is a mentor for some, all of her relationships with the dancers are friendly; she explains, “we often meet for coffee to talk about what we’re creating and the things we’re interested in exploring.” However, Bouldin does not neglect to remark on the importance of the boundaries that must exist between artistic director and dancer while working in the studio: “Creating new material and rehearsing requires an incredible amount of focus and discipline; the boundaries that I have in place with each of the dancers enable our time in the studio to remain professional without being cold, and to connect in appropriate ways in our free time.” These boundaries put in place by Bouldin have made her successful in establishing strong, adaptable relationships with the dancers in her company in varying environments.

With other leaders Bouldin chooses to bring in to work with the company, a similar friendly interaction exists as it does with the resident dancers. These teachers and choreographers are colleagues and friends, as the dance world is small and connected. She states that the reason they are able to collaborate so well artistically while

maintaining friendly relationships outside of the studio is the individual cultivation of the “self discipline it requires to work at the level we each have.” They exchange ideas about process: discussions Bouldin savors as they help her develop and refine her approaches to choreography and leadership.

Bouldin describes another interesting relationship she has as the artistic director: “the marketing and development director of New Dialect is my [Bouldin’s] husband.” She acknowledges that this situation is unusual, and that many couples are unable to work successfully in a professional environment. However, Bouldin remarks that “having boundaries that allow us to differentiate between our work time from our time together as a couple has been essential to us and the growth of our company.” She is able to be successful in, and enjoy the work they accomplish together for New Dialect, and be positively influenced as a leader through her husband’s insight and ideas about different aspects of the company because of these boundaries they have effectively put in place. Through the various relationships Bouldin has established with different members and leaders in her company, a major strength in her leadership stems from her ability to effectively develop deep relational connections while maintaining balance with clear professional classifications and esteem.

Bouldin describes how her relationship with the company as the leader directly influences the work the company produces. She states:

...how I lead and the kind of work environment I facilitate has everything to do with the work we as a dance company are able to make together. Providing a safe place for dancers to take risks, grow in self-confidence and respect for one another, and contribute their voices to the creative process allows our work to have a stronger impact.

She attributes this nurturing environment and creative product to the authentic bond the artists all have outside of their artistic practice itself. The complex themes that emerge out of the company's work "wouldn't be possible without the environment I take great care to facilitate as the leader of our company," Bouldin states.

These "intricate moving tableaux" Bouldin describes as emblematic of her choreography explore ideas about community: "many bodies coming together, arms and legs working in perfect coordination like the gears of an organic machine to paint abstract images..." Bouldin is "constantly exploring connection, community, manipulation, rescue, support, and their counterpoints, and using these themes to explore building human sculptures, landscapes, and architecture." The community focus Bouldin has in her choreography translates to the rich connection New Dialect has, and continues to develop, with the local community in Nashville. Bouldin has created a deep attention to the importance and influence of community on progressive development of New Dialect and artistic endeavors, and the creative environment that develops out of this focus is intriguing to artists outside of the local community in Nashville. She remarks that she has "received emails from dancers, choreographers, and audience members attesting to their experiences with us; people feel refreshed, encouraged, and emboldened by our work, and that means a great deal to me." Bouldin's attention to community needs and desires has not gone overlooked. Since New Dialect's formation and integration of community dance classes, the amount of contemporary dance work being created has greatly increased, as well as the interest in new dance forms in Nashville. This rich relationship with the community seems to have a reciprocal impact on New Dialect; the community is

influenced by, and simultaneously influences, the work that Bouldin and her company seek to explore and create.

### *Individual Leadership Development*

Development of a personal leadership style began for Bouldin through examination and practice of various styles she experienced through her career as a dancer. With the opportunity to work under various leaders in the field, she was able to gather what worked best in her opinion from each experience, using her performance career as research for her next artistic endeavors. Bouldin describes this process as shifting through “what worked best for me and the dancers I was working with in each of these companies, as well as what didn’t work, and [I] really used this as a template for my own leadership style- taking the best from each of my experiences and using that as my model.” Bouldin takes on each new experience as a rich learning opportunity to continue to grow as a leader, consistently developing her personal style as new experiences inform the type of environment she seeks to facilitate.

Bouldin describes her leadership as collaborative: “I [Bouldin] value the voices and opinions of the dancers and people I’m working with, and believe in the power of the collective over hierarchical models that make one person the ultimate authority.” The community focus Bouldin seeks to establish with the company is prevalent in her personal leadership style as well. She firmly believes that this collaborative attention allows for greater impact, clearly impacting and supporting the dance works that are produced by New Dialect. Bouldin remarks that over the course of her career, her leadership style has evolved, continually allowing for more self-awareness and incorporation of personal voice from the dancers. This focus impacts both her artistic

direction as well as her teaching methodology. She strives to focus less on herself and in controlling the environment or outcome, and works to encourage dancers “to bring their entire selves to the creative process.”

Looking back upon her career thus far, Bouldin explains that the environment she has worked to facilitate in the dance studio is her proudest achievement. It has “empowered dancers and given them confidence to know what they want and go after it. I’m proud that the dancers who work with me have tremendous self-respect and respect for each other.” Bouldin’s focus for her company and dancers lies in individual empowerment and expression, which translates to immense success for New Dialect as a whole in the Nashville community.

While Bouldin has established herself as a collaborative leader, and a successful one at that, in her current role as Artistic Director of New Dialect, she remarks that this confidence and ability did not come without time and effort.

I think some of the fears and bouts of lacking self-confidence I felt, when I was considering taking the plunge and starting my own company, had much to do with the fact that as a female dancer I was not often given room to lead or use my voice, even when working under other female choreographers.

As many female dancers experience, Bouldin’s greatest fear at first was stepping out of the boundaries of “silent obedience” taught to dancers from a young age. However, she remarks that with practice and continued support, she found she actually had “a wealth of information, opinions, insights, and ideas to share” in leading a group of artists. She states that the confidence she now has in leading successfully grew from her own personal experiences which she carries with her in all situations. Bouldin’s educational and career choices and accomplishments have helped her gain respect in the dance field.

However, she remarks that she is also “aware that as a woman I have to work a lot harder to get and maintain that respect than my male counterparts.” Despite this continued obstacle, Bouldin has effectively established herself as a successful leader in the field, and continues to impact not only her company but also the surrounding community through her continually developing leadership style and artistic practice.

#### *Bouldin’s Experience in Context*

Many of Bouldin’s experiences throughout the development of her training and career thus far support the arguments and theories being discussed in current scholarship surrounding representation in the dance field. Bouldin clearly recognizes and values the community in which her company is located. It is obvious through her development of the company financially, as well as her initiatives to integrate the community with new forms of dance, that Bouldin’s success is in part due to the importance she places on relationship with the community. Her experiences and perspectives support the ideas of current scholarship that deals with the role of the community in growth of artistic groups nationally and internationally (Burwick, 2012; Rosenberg, 2009). Bouldin’s desire to engage her audiences past the duration of a single evening concert has led to much success for New Dialect and directly aligns with concepts currently discussed about the importance and growth of artistic works and practices.

Another aspect of Bouldin’s career that seems to match the progression of the dance field deals with her artistic practice and direction. Bouldin’s choreographic work centers around the idea of community and collaboration; key aspects prevalent in the current trends of progressive performance art (Rosenberg, 2009). The themes that consistently pop up in her dance-making and the processes in which she facilitates with

her company to do so reflect current scholarship that highlights the importance of collaboration, vulnerability, and genuine representation of experience (Dolan, 2012; Rosenberg, 2009). Bouldin also finds the value of female perspective and experience highly important in both artistic work and in culture in general. Since these perspectives represent half of the population, Bouldin states that the continuation of growth in female voice in choreography and leadership is of utmost importance. She reflects the ideas of Banes, valuing the often-neglected female perspective and its influence on the surrounding culture at large (1998).

Another aspect of scholarly research that aligns with Bouldin's experience is the learning curve she encountered when stepping out into leadership in forming New Dialect. Her descriptions of the thoughts and feelings she experienced in deciding to begin her own professional dance company support much of the scholarship dealing with dance training for female students. Through dance culture, and the broader Western culture in general, expectations for the participation of women in the field remain in positions under male dominance (Green, 2003; Meglin, Brooks, 2012; Shapiro, 1998) Women are not trained and often seen as unfit for positions of leadership that require traits associated with the male gender, such as assertiveness (Ely, Rhodes, 2010). Bouldin's experiences reveal just that. She felt unequipped and unprepared for leadership at first, until she was able to realize her potential and talents in the areas of teaching, directing, and administratively leading.

Bouldin's experiences seem to align quite well with the literature written about female representation and performative practices, however one specifically notable difference must be addressed. While much of the literature surrounding female leadership

in dance and in the workplace attributes underrepresentation to a lack of mentorship, Bouldin's experiences seem to contradict this idea (Ely, Rhodes, 2010). She states many examples of mentorship and support from those she has interacted with along her career path. For Bouldin, it seems that this presence of mentorship helped her realize her ability to lead sooner than if there had been a lack of support in this area. Bouldin's experiences with continued mentorship throughout her career may indeed actually support the literary claims surrounding the importance of mentor support and encouragement. It is clear that this presence in her career has influenced her desire for leadership as well as her pedagogical and leadership style.

An interesting aspect of Bouldin's career that brings about new information and questions not discussed in the literature is her development of acceptance and excitement surrounding new forms of dance in the community. Bouldin's creation of a professional company working with modern dance forms rather than the ballet foundation that already existed in Nashville brought about unique challenges to her career. Much of her leadership strength and ability is revealed in the way she handled bringing about new dance forms to this area. Bouldin engaged with the community through performance, but also found that more personal and explorative settings were incredibly helpful in gaining acceptance and respect for modern dance.

This experience brings about information regarding her influence as a leader in the field, particularly focusing on her tactics and unique solutions to issues prevalent in many other locations as well. Her unique ways of approaching leadership and strictures of teaching open up opportunities to expand and spread revolutionary pedagogical styles and promotion of local dance culture. Given her potential number of years she can still be

active in her community, the influence she could spread in these sectors of dance culture are fascinating to consider.

### **Interview #2 Suzanne Aker**

Suzanne Aker's most unique and significant contribution to this study is her personal experience introducing dance to Lubbock, Texas, an area which previously lacked this art form. Through the formation of the dance program at Texas Tech University and a private dance studio and its corresponding pre-professional company, Aker brings a vastly different perspective than the other participants in terms of her era of activity. Her experiences give understanding about previous situations in the dance field and reveal information about historical shifts that have occurred in gender representation. Aker's addition to the study also provides insights into successful navigation of a wide array of obstacles and environments that existed and continue to exist in the dance field. I chose her as a participant for the study because of the geographical location in which she developed dance, the array of time periods her career developed over, and her prominence and influence in the community she worked in.

#### *Training and Career Introduction*

Suzanne Aker, now retired, became a professional ballet dancer at the young age of 17, after graduating from high school two years early to pursue her career. She traveled around the nation with the company, studying with the best teachers available in every town: "When I was dancing professionally, I realized that I needed a better understanding of technique. And so I sought wonderful people."<sup>2</sup> She studied with Hanya Holm, Jose Limon, and Luigi, as well as at Ballet Theatre. Aker remarks that she had

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<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all quotations are from the interview with Suzanne Aker.

“absolutely marvelous teachers.” Suzanne Aker also studied ethnic dance, with real Hindu and Spanish teachers, but was really focused on Royal Academy classes and training. She felt that she got the technique she was earnestly seeking from various teachers and mentors around the nation.

Early on, Aker did not think about teaching; rather, she just sought the best technical training possible. However, while dancing professionally, Aker remembers that she didn't particularly enjoy the repetition of doing the same thing every day, over and over again. She eventually thought, "I really am a choreographer, I really am a teacher." After this realization, Aker left performing after two years to return to Tulsa, Oklahoma, where her family was residing. "I started teaching because that was what was in my heart to do, to teach," Aker states. Although the mentorship she received in her training was more performance-based rather than guidance in teaching, Aker believes the superb technical training she received helped her extremely in passing that technical excellence on to her students.

After performing professionally, Aker taught in Tulsa, Oklahoma, at Tulsa University and a private studio, teaching both ballet and modern. She came to Texas Tech University when her husband at the time began work on his Ph.D. Aker states that "there was a Department of Women's P.E. and they desperately needed a dance teacher." She remarks that she was lucky to receive the job in which she taught folk dance, ballroom dance, and modern. Through teaching over the years, Aker became an Assistant Professor at Texas Tech University. While teaching at Texas Tech, Aker noticed that the ballet training of the dancers in the program, and those wanting to enter the program, was not strong enough, and she began a private studio to supplement the training of dancers at

Texas Tech and around Lubbock. She remarks that coming from Tulsa, where an outstanding ballet company exists, inspired her to start her own company, Ballet Lubbock. Aker continues to work in various ways with the company, and she states, “I really am so proud of the way the ballet has developed.”

### *Teaching at Texas Tech*

When asked about her early teaching experiences, Aker immediately remarked on a very interesting experience from her time at Texas Tech.

I was primarily a ballet dancer and ballet teacher, and of course there was no ballet at Tech in the early 60’s, and I told my department head that some of my girls wanted to take ballet. And you won’t believe this, but Tech had the lunch, everybody had lunch at twelve o’clock. And she said if you can get people to come during the lunch hour and take ballet, then I will include it. And that’s, that’s how it happened (laughs).

In the early days of Lubbock’s exposure to dance, Aker was faced with this obstacle amongst many in bringing ballet to Texas Tech. This experience provides a vivid description that helps illustrate the environment she had to navigate in developing the dance program and in her own personal development as a leader in the dance field.

Another significant experience Aker describes is the process she went through in establishing the Dance degree at Texas Tech University, a very big challenge and advancement for both Aker’s leadership and the presence of dance in Lubbock: “I wrote a degree plan and took it to the academic counsel- all were men, not one woman- and I was young. I was in my early 30s, and it was kind of scary. And they turned me down.” However, the musician Dr. Gene Hemmle was interested in all arts forms and helped Aker through his support of the Dance degree. Aker explains: “I wrote another one [degree plan], it was like writing a Master’s thesis all over again, and I took it to the

academic counsel and it went over.” She remarks that getting the Dance degree through at the University was all about gaining and maintaining the right support.

After the Dance degree passed and began, Aker came across yet another obstacle is establishing a dance presence in Lubbock, specifically at Texas Tech: “Since I was in a P.E. department, there was no money for performance. And I had to come up with a way for my kids to perform, because I really loved them and they really worked hard. So I started a Civic Ballet.” Aker invited everyone in Lubbock to come and audition, and she began this civic ballet. She laughs, “They weren’t very good, the dancers they weren’t very good, but we had a ballet company, and that’s how I managed to have a place for my kids to perform.” She explains that the support of a man in town that owned a local theatre offered for Aker and her Civic Ballet to come perform in the theatre because they did not have money to rent a place on their own. He allowed them to use their Board as well, making it possible for the Civic Ballet company members to gain performance experience in Lubbock.

Another way her students were able to perform was through invitations from the Theatre and Music departments at the university. Aker explains that the funding and opportunity to perform was not from the dance program’s own department, because they simply did not have it available, but from outside support and interest in the art form. While this support came in many ways, Aker remarks that this challenge in finding performance opportunities and funding was a huge obstacle she had to navigate during her time at Texas Tech. She also states that getting the Dance program into the College of Visual and Performing Arts (the current location of the program) was not possible during her time working there, despite her strong desires to get it moved into its proper location.

*Pedagogical Influences and Development*

While Aker describes that she studied with the best teachers possible and gained the best training she could in every situation, she explains that the presence of mentorship in her career was directly related to technical training and did not involve pedagogical mentorship. Aker also states that there was a lack of peer and mentor influence that aided in her leadership development while working at Tech: “I wish there had been, but there was no one.” Aker remarks that she had to navigate all of the obstacles and challenges on her own. Through this, Aker developed a pedagogical style that is very much influenced by her training and career background.

What worried Aker about the program at Texas Tech was that they were only getting Modern dance training, which was not preparing them for professional shows in which strong Ballet training is often necessary. She started the program with half Modern and half Ballet because she wanted her students not only to be well-rounded, but also to be able to make it into a professional show or company: “I wanted every student that I had to get the best technique possible... That was what I wanted to pass on, was the best technique that was possible. That’s been my mantra.”

Aker remarks that she thoroughly enjoyed her students at Texas Tech: “Oh, I loved them. Because they came to work, and they worked hard.” She not only took pleasure in her students and in teaching, but was successful in preparing them for professional performance careers in the field. She only mentions a couple of examples, but states that several of her students have ended up in positions with the New York City Ballet and San Francisco Ballet. While Aker is hesitant to speak on behalf of her

students' perspectives, she states that she would like to think she has been a mentor to her many students over the years.

### *Developing Ballet Lubbock*

Aker remarks that her proudest accomplishment looking back on her career is not related to Texas Tech; rather, it has been the development of Ballet Lubbock. Coming from Tulsa, in which the ballet company has a two-million dollar budget with highly skilled professional dancers, Aker was inspired to create something of her own in Lubbock.

I left Tech in seven years because my then-husband was working on his Ph.D., and he refused to take some courses so they dismissed him, and so I thought we were going to move. He did move, I did not (laughs). And umm, so I thought that what would be really neat is a good private dance school, and I started one... And that worked into the Ballet.

“It was extremely hard,” Aker remarks as she spoke about developing a Ballet company in which there really was no dance presence in the community already. She describes that the challenges that arose were mostly due to finances and trained dancers. Through support of partnerships, individuals, and the use of any and every resource possible, Aker worked to combat the financial struggles that come with the start of a new dance company. She states that she, along with others involved in the beginning of the Ballet, created a Board so she no longer had to worry about finances and support after that developed. However, Aker describes one specific experience she had with the development of this Board that was particularly horrible.

Here I was giving all my time and doing all that I could for the Ballet, and we had a Board at that time and umm, this man who was head of Art for the public schools said, we cannot have a local Ballet with a local Director. We have to have somebody with a reputation, a big reputation. And they fired me (laughs). And

that was horrible! But they, they would always get in trouble and they'd hire me back.

Another obstacle in the start of the Ballet was finding a location to house the company and studio: "We would just move around to every place... We've taught at community centers, we taught at the Boys and Girls Club, we taught at 50<sup>th</sup> and University, in a basement of Lubbock High (laughs)." After a while, Ballet Lubbock was able to find their own location, but Aker states that moving around helped the Ballet reach many different people in the community.

Ballet Lubbock has not only influenced individuals as well as Aker's career, but has greatly impacted the Lubbock community at large. Aker states that Ballet Lubbock has been a partner with various arts groups in the community and that "it's a very positive thing in the art community. And it's recognized as such." Scholarships are given to students to receive dance training that would not otherwise be able to afford dance, and community centers all over Lubbock are offering dance training through Ballet Lubbock. Looking at the current presence of Ballet Lubbock, Aker remarks that she is very proud of the way the Ballet has developed and impacted the many lives it has thus far. Aker states that this presence of dance and of the arts in general in this community is extremely important for the growth and development of Lubbock. "Well, you've seen the saying 'Art Saves Lives,' and I believe that. I really do. Anything in the arts will ennoble a person."

Aker is still involved with Ballet Lubbock currently, while there is a new Artistic Director, Yvonne Racz-Key. She paints ornaments for the company's production of "The Nutcracker," donates money, and attends as many functions possible. Aker also states

“they have started a new fund that’s actually in my name... It’s to keep the Ballet alive... It will go on long after all of us are gone, and they put it in my name.” Aker remains excited and involved in the company’s new endeavors and investments, and clearly supports and remains a great influence on the success of the Ballet and the continuation of a strong dance presence in the Lubbock community.

### *Aker’s Experiences in Context*

Suzanne Aker’s experiences throughout her career are difficult to categorize due to the array of areas she worked in and the unique obstacles that arose. Much of the literature used in this study deals with concepts and discussions about relatively current situations in the dance field. There is a lack of scholarship written about gender representation in dance during the time Aker was developing her career as a leader in the field. However there are still some clear similarities found in her experiences that exist in the literature as well.

As a variety of studies reveal, Aker experienced several roadblocks in her leadership development that were unparalleled by her male counterparts (Ely, Rhode, 2010; Meglin, Brooks, 2012; Van Dyke, 1996; Center for American Progress, 2014). Striking examples exist throughout her anecdotes that reveal the importance of male support for her development of dance in Lubbock. In many situations, Aker was not allowed to continue developing the various dance programs in the way she saw fit until she received support from her male colleagues. These situations support scholarly claims that women in leadership positions have to work harder to gain respect and likability that males in similar positions often receive right away (Ely, Rhode, 2010). This inequality plays out financially as well, as stated by Van Dkye (1996). Aker found it difficult to find

funding for her dance programs and was only able to provide new opportunities at first through support of male colleagues and friends in the community. These male leaders had various resources to call upon, but she was only able to find initial support through their willingness to help and encourage her endeavors. Aker also received a lack of mentorship and leadership training from influential women. While she states that technically she received the best training from all kinds of teachers, she did not have the same experience in terms of leadership. Ely and Rhode claim that female leadership representation struggles stem in part from a lack of female mentorship in the exact way that Aker describes her lack of female leader role models and support (2010).

Another staggering example exists in Aker's career that directly aligns with written scholarship and theory. Meglin and Brooks make the claim that female leadership representation in ballet specifically decreases as popularity of the ballet company increases (2012). Aker's experience with the other leadership figures in the beginning of Ballet Lubbock's growth seems to represent this exactly. As Ballet Lubbock developed and became influential to the community and other areas, Aker was seen as unfit for the high leadership position she held and was fired. While this specific literature seems surprising, Aker's experience as a leader in the ballet world makes this scholarly theory and data a reality. It also highlights the literary argument for the necessity of development in scholarship written about prominent female figures in the dance field (Meglin, Brooks, 2012). This literature would recognize the importance of discussing and documenting Aker's experiences and influential accomplishments.

Aker's involvement in the community once again supports scholarship dealing with the importance of community and audience engagement (Borwick, 2012). She relied

heavily on community support financially and relationally in the formation of both the dance program at Texas Tech University and with the development of Ballet Lubbock. Through performances at local theatres, the formation of the civic ballet, and dance lessons taught at various locations throughout Lubbock, Aker was able to create an influential place for dance through continued engagement with the community. The programs Aker developed in Lubbock continue to impact the cultural environment of the city and place both dance and other art forms in important positions within the community. This continued growth is further evidence of Borwick's ideas about artistic stimulation and stability in relation to community engagement (2012).

An interesting contrast to the literature that Aker's experiences provide deals with the idea of traditional dance training and pedagogy. The scholarship surrounding this issue deals mostly with the negative effects of traditional pedagogy in a dance setting (Banes, 1998; Green, 2003; Shapiro, 1998). However, Aker describes her training and subsequent teaching methodology as focused on technique and development of dance skill. These aspects of dance training are highlighted as frequently harmful to female students, however this does not reflect Aker's actual experiences (Green, 2003; Shapiro, 1998). Despite the claims of certain dance scholars, Aker's successful career as a dancer, teacher, and leader provides evidence that may contradict this argument. It is interesting that Aker's teaching style remained unchanged and constantly focused on technique even as her position in dance changed and her leadership developed. This sort of experience is not common in dance studies and seems to contradict what is said about the relationship between leadership and teaching style. Aker's methods bring about questions regarding

traditional pedagogy and its effect on students, particularly on female students and their confidence and ability to pursue leadership roles.

### **Interview #3: Elizabeth Johnson**

I chose Elizabeth Johnson for her immense involvement and experience with the dance field in performance, teaching, and leadership. Johnson's current and past positions as a professor in a variety of university dance programs bring information to the study that is current to the issues and trends in gender representation in this specific educational setting. She has teaching experience in five different universities ranging in geographical location from the northeast, Midwest, and south central regions of the United States. This provides Johnson with a wide array of pedagogical experiences and perspectives that is unique to the other participants' careers. Johnson is also continually involved in feminist and somatic pedagogical and developmental practices in the dance field, which influences her teaching and leadership style and impact.

I also chose Johnson because she is positioned between the other two participants as far as her age is concerned and the eras over which she has developed her career. She has also had the opportunity to work for and with several notable leaders in the dance field throughout her career. Johnson's immense performance experience across the nation over a lengthy period of time provides her with unique background and training across genres and locations. Lastly, Johnson's formation of a professional dance company in Wisconsin and time spent serving that company as an artistic director brings another perspective in terms of work with a professional company. It offers another experience in light of the first participant's work in the professional sector in a different geographical location and societal environment.

### *Training and Career Path*

Elizabeth Johnson decided early on in her dance training that she wanted to become a professional ballet dancer, so at age 15 she left home to train at the North Carolina School of the Arts (now known as the University of the North Carolina School of the Arts). After graduation, she remarks that her career is “not a straight path, it’s not a path that had a lot of you know single minded and purposeful direction.”<sup>3</sup> While at George Mason University, Johnson switched to training in contemporary dance. While she felt that this genre fit her personality and intelligence better, she felt like transitioning from a classical to contemporary style signified failure of some kind because of her conservatory background. During her undergraduate schooling, Johnson married at age 21 and had her first child before graduation. She took seven years to finish her B.F.A. while working full-time and part-time, and raising her first child. Johnson states, “I knew I wanted to finish, but because my life became so interrupted by other conflicting choices, I didn’t really have an idea of what I wanted to do with my degree. I just knew I wanted to finish it.”

After finishing her B.F.A., Johnson danced with Chamber Groups in northern Virginia, rehearsing and producing work on the weekends and weekday nights while she worked at a hospital full-time. She discovered through producing work that was presented at different venues and substitute teaching at well-known studios around the area that she really enjoyed that side of dance. Johnson choreographed high school musicals as well, taking any small job she could find in the area. She even commuted to Fredericksburg to teach at a studio that offered a substantial hourly wage. She explains,

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<sup>3</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all quotations are from the interview with Elizabeth Johnson.

“So I really wanted to choreograph more and you know present choreography, and work with dancers and think about life that way... so I just kept going.” Johnson became interested in liturgical dance during this time in her career, so she set work on Ballet Magnificat and taught at their studios in Jackson, Mississippi.

However, by the time she had her third child, she felt “out of the game,” as she was only teaching at smaller studios. The financial need for her family of five sent her back to graduate school, where she was originally uninterested in continuing her dance training. Johnson remarks,

just kind of bumbling around, I looked at graduate schools and I was looking at changing my major, going into education or literature or English and perhaps teaching in those areas because I was also really interested in writing and literature, and when I called all the schools they said well you’ll have to go back for another year of undergraduate, or more probably, to you know earn the credits in the field that you’re interested in going to graduate school in. And I thought oh dear, well I think maybe I’ll look at dance schools (laughs) because I have a solid dance degree. And so I did.

Johnson felt that she was unable to further develop or gain opportunities to grow in her dance career, due to many factors. Her husband at the time was both unsupportive and abusive, leaving Johnson unconfident about her potential and abilities. However, after she realized she needed to use her dance degree, she attended Ohio State and then transferred to the University of Illinois, where she received a graduate assistantship. Johnson remembers that “going back to graduate school helped me kind of claim my life back because people saw me as competent and a good teacher and a good writer.” During this time, however, her husband divorced her and Johnson was left as a single parent in her first year of graduate school. While this disrupted and changed her whole life, Johnson found help in her family, friends, work, and government assistance to support her family and continue her education: “It was a very, very hard road. But I also knew watching my

mentors and teachers... [that] I really liked the possibilities and the organization, and the mentoring and the connections that could happen in an organized structure that seemed supported at the time.” Despite difficult circumstances that uprooted what life previously looked like for Johnson, she persevered and was determined to advance her career forward.

During her time at the University of Illinois, she met her current husband, Luc, and life changed drastically again for Johnson. Despite other job offers, they stayed at University of Illinois as faculty. From there, they moved to Wisconsin, where both worked at the university and Johnson began her own pick-up company, Your Mother Dances, in 2003. After working for some time there, Johnson states: “we were looking around saying... despite my investment, because there are two of us and one is already in the system, that it’s not very friendly for both of us to be in the system, so we should go and look to see what else is out there.” That is how Johnson ended up where she currently resides as Visiting Assistant Professor at Texas Tech University.

### *Mentorship and Influences*

Johnson remarks on the significance of mentorship in her career development throughout several anecdotal descriptions during multiple stages of her career. She states: “people had modeled really generous leadership both in my graduate program I think especially, and then in Sara Hook... David Parker... and Molly Rabinowitz, who I danced for in New York.” These three specific mentors pushed Johnson to think about what she wanted to do, and helped support and encourage her along the path she took. She remarks that they were fundamental support systems in the formation and continuation of Your Mother Dances. This mentorship was hugely influential; Johnson

states that “because I had people saying you’re great and keep going. Look what you’re doing. You might feel like it’s a lot of work but you did something important and you’ve accomplished something. You ran this company.” Behind every obstacle or challenge was a sturdy support system that kept her pushing forward to keep creating work and advancing her company and dancers.

She also states that another huge influence in her ability to direct *Your Mother Dances* and with her career in general is her husband Luc. While maintaining a full-time academic job and training Alexander teachers, he also served the role of Associate Artistic Director of the company.

So underneath all of that was this baseline of support saying, yes we should do this, we should dance together. And we should dance work that we love that might not be famous but has integrity, and is complex, is emotionally, theatrically, and technically complex. And we know that those are our values. And it might not be popular, it might not make us a million bucks, but we’ll feel gratified being committed to these people, and to our company and to the work.

Johnson describes that through this support system found in her husband, she was able to balance being a mother, working a full-time academic job, and leading a new dance company. Without that, she remarks that none of it would have been possible.

### *Beginning Your Mother Dances*

Johnson realized her desire to direct her own company during an exercise in graduate school in which she had to develop a company, making decisions about everything from promotion to management. She also remarks, “because my path has been so full of disadvantage and disappointment, I needed to have agency over something.” Johnson performed as a pick-up dancer in shows and gigs around the nation, and through the people she danced for, was pushed to figure out what she wanted to do with the finite

amount of time she has. Johnson describes that she realized making the artistic decisions was how she wanted to be involved in dance during this time in her career.

So when I formed Your Mother Dances, all the sudden I was the founder and artistic director and that's when I went, oh okay I have to make decisions for myself and my family, and for the people dancing for me, and for the people letting me commission their work, and the work I want to make. And oh, I have a lot of things to think about.

During the startup of Your Mother Dances, she remarks that clearly-focused leadership became a huge part of her involvement in the dance field.

As Johnson began her company, there were three or four well-funded companies already in the area that existed in competition for support with Your Mother Dances. However, after a couple of years, all of the rules for nonprofit funding changed in Milwaukee. Even the previously well-funded companies no longer received support, so Johnson self-produced her company. Without any business education, she was under a lot of stress to manage the financial needs of the company.

Johnson found ways of working without much training within this difficult structure by collaborating with other arts groups who were more financially secure. This did not help her pay the dancers, but rather allowed for more opportunities, rehearsals, and performances for the group. She also did Kickstarters and other crowdsourcing resources to raise funds for travel and performance. Johnson remarks, "Kickstarter was kind of a hit or miss because if you didn't raise the money that you put you down as your goal you didn't get anything. So that felt really risky and scary..."

During the last year Johnson was in Milwaukee, a new company member joined the group who was also an arts administrator who had been actively administrating across the nation. In collaboration with this woman, Johnson put on a burlesque-themed

fundraiser for Your Mother Dances, and for the first time was able to raise all of the funds to produce a show beforehand. She remarks that there was such support in that endeavor, but it took nine years for the company to get to that point. She concludes, “So you know, if you have good people that can help you, then you can figure stuff out.” Johnson describes through all of the obstacles and resources that she relied heavily on the generosity of supportive friends and mentors along the way.

### *Leadership and Pedagogical Development*

While Johnson states that she does not think she has a signature leadership style, she does believe that her approach to leadership has evolved over time. She often finds herself too sensitive to the opinion of everyone involved and as a result has questioned her abilities as a leader in the past. She remarks that this has lessened more and more throughout each new experience, but Johnson still has trouble with her desire to make everyone happy: “And that’s not to say that I was weak or indecisive or anything like that, I was very decisive about the work... But I think when people were unhappy I was too sensitive as a leader.” Johnson describes the challenges that arose for her as a leader when she was not able to compensate her dancers or when audience turnout was low. She desired to show her appreciation for all the hard work put in by everyone involved and found it hard to not take disappointment of others personally in the formative years of the company. Johnson states that having other leaders in the company for administrative duties is a system that she thinks would have worked better for her, especially at the beginning. Like the arts administrator that joined the company within the last years, Johnson would have benefitted from having a person deal with the financial and organizational stressors while she managed the artistic side of the company’s needs. She

remarks that doing both was a lot of stress. While Johnson is currently stepping back from this large-scale leadership and focusing on her development and smaller scale performances, she hopes that her leadership qualities and abilities will continue to evolve and be influenced by the challenges and experiences she had in forming Your Mother Dances.

Johnson's mothering quality in her leadership style was something she had to learn to work with and use to her advantage in the stressful and uncomfortable situations. Her ability to lead effectively without getting hurt personally was challenged at times, but she remarks that this caring nature has also developed some of her best qualities as a leader. Strengths that exist in her leadership style include flexibility, accessibility, and openness to creating a space for everyone. She states that it "allowed people who had schedules like me the ability to have this experience dancing professionally and doing not just local work, but national work." Johnson is also proud of her artistic integrity in the way that she leads, and the fact that even in stressful situations concerning time and money, she has produced work for her and her company. She has never put on a show unless she felt that the company was ready for performance, something that is often difficult to stick to as an advocate for dance as an art form: "I feel very proud of sticking to that level of integrity as a whole. Not to have a show to have a show, not to make a dance to make a dance, but to make art and to invest in the artistic value of integrity of the work." The only kind of process Johnson is interested in and desires to be a part of exists in this integrity and investment to choreographic exploration and development through the rehearsal process. She remarks that this is something she is extremely proud of as a leader and artistic voice in the field.

Johnson states that her pedagogical method and development is directly related to her leadership approach and how it has evolved over time. Her teaching style has developed from her experiences in conservatory, academia, and professional performance environments, and has also been influenced by her work in somatics. Johnson's Laban Movement Analysis and Alexander Technique training has impacted her pedagogy methods with focus on a thorough and close attention to the whole person. She describes her method as a feminist pedagogy that considers community and inclusion of personal voice and experience. Rather than adhering to a hierarchical structure, Johnson sees herself as a facilitator of learning and growth. While she acknowledges that she may have more experience and knowledge than those she is teaching, she seeks to create a community based on the developmental stage of the class that includes everyone's perspective and informs the education of all involved. Johnson remarks, "I'm really interested in how people learn and I want to facilitate learning by any means necessary."

This directly relates to how Johnson facilitates the choreographic and rehearsal processes as an artistic leader. As a leader of a company, this non-hierarchical approach to teaching and leading caused some trouble. She states this conflict arose when she needed to take on a hierarchy but had established an environment where everyone's voice was included and could be heard. In the classroom, she experienced the opposite problem at times. Some students, coming from more traditional backgrounds, wanted her to tell them exactly what to do "so they did not have to be responsible for their own learning." Johnson has not had too many of these problems, though, due to her ability to be insistent and verbal about her expectations and teaching style. Her focus on inclusion, critical thinking, and community have proved successful in both pedagogy and leadership

approach overall. Johnson remarks, “most people respond really well to that because most people enjoy the experience of being seen and feeling like they matter. So generally, we build a pretty good community.” She receives positive feedback continually on her evaluations and maintains good relationships with her students during their education and after graduation.

Johnson views herself in a position of mentorship to her students, in which she helps them navigate all that comes with a dance career.

Like where are you going to go to grad school, or do you want to dance and how are you going to do that, and you know, are you getting married and have you thought about how that’s going to affect what you’re doing next, and are you having a baby, and you know, I think life mentoring is the most important.

Johnson feels that she not only helps her students with their dance training and development, but with their growth as people in the world. She finds it very important that they have these kinds of mentorship opportunities available to them, as she has realized the impact of her choices as a young student throughout every part of her career. She explains, “You know when you’re young, you don’t say, I’m making a choice and do it, you just roll with life and without a lot of mentoring and guidance, you have no idea where you’ll end up or how those choices will have affected you.” Because of Johnson’s experiences with choices she unwittingly made influencing the amount of available opportunities for her, she seeks to help students navigate the field and think about the effects of their choices ahead of time.

Alongside the achievement of surviving the intense conservatory training Johnson experienced, she remarks that she is most proud of the teacher she is becoming. Amongst all of the accomplishments, Johnson treasures the growth and development she has had

pedagogically and in relation to her students. She also states that she is proud of continuing her involvement in the field, as a performer, teacher, choreographer, and leader despite the many obstacles and challenges: “I’m still in the field and producing work and making work and dancing when so many of my peers... are retired now and most of us didn’t continue in the field.” The investment in her own consistent development in the field is something that gratifies and pleases Johnson in the path her career has taken.

*Perspectives on Disadvantage and Disappointment*

Johnson describes many obstacles throughout her career path, but she cites one specific aspect of her journey that has brought about the most challenge: being a woman with children. As she looks around at women in tenure track-positions, she notices that most of the women do not have children, or waited until they were secured in their position to have children. She remarks,

...when I look around, I don’t have access to the things women who made different choices than me do. That could just be chance, but in a kind of anecdotal look around I don’t see women in dance unless they have wealthier partners, so they don’t have to make their living in dance. I don’t see women able to fulfill all of their potential in academic and artistic positions with multiple children.

Because of the choices Johnson made in her family life, her access to what she desires to accomplish feels limited. While this has hindered the availability she has for opportunity to develop her career, she remarks that it has completely changed her relationship to her students and the world. She states that it is disappointing that women with children do not have as much opportunity because doing so has changed the way she teaches and leads in a unique way.

Johnson also remarks that being a woman in general leads to disadvantage, “because we’ve so glutted the field, yet we’re so unrepresented all of the time.” While Johnson was at the University of Illinois, Bill T. Jones came for a question and answer session. Through this experience, she describes a striking example of the characteristic representation and opportunity imbalance in dance. When a young undergraduate student asked a commonly addressed question regarding what artistic directors look for in hiring a dancer,

He looked at her and he said, you know there are, I can’t remember it was some hyperbolic number, like there are thousands and tens of thousands of you: a white girl out there dancing. And I’m not sure I’m interested in anything you have to say, and I’m not sure you know what you have to say, and I’m not sure that I would resonate with anything about your experience, but you’re everywhere and yet you’re invisible.

This statement resonated with Johnson and made her reflect on what she had to say artistically and academically, but also on the state of female opportunity in the field.

This gender inequity plays out in another example, one that is personal to Johnson’s experience. She remarks on Luc’s career versus her own, stating that because he is a man he is able to apply for solid jobs with great salaries, while she feels limited to lower-level positions with less flexibility and stability. While in Wisconsin, Johnson had to teach five courses a semester in order to get the full salary for her academic job. If she only taught four, she only received 80% of her full salary. During this time, she was teaching five courses each semester, directing a company, and raising three children, “which if you ask any academic it’s a crazy, nutsy schedule.” Since she was not able to get the kind of stable jobs Luc had, despite their equal qualifications, she followed the good jobs that Luc received. People made deals and promised that there would always be plenty for her to do, but Johnson has not always found that to be the case. Johnson does

not feel that she has been able to invest in her education to the extent she desires and is not satisfied with the outcome of where that has lead thus far: “I’m not unhappy, I have a job this year and next year, but I don’t have the building of investment that other people have who are on tenure tracks here.” Johnson wishes for an opportunity, like her partner has, to invest deeply in and develop her career long-term to all of her artistic and academic potential.

When asked about foreseeable change for the future, she states “until women have more actual liberation in our culture, and you can be all the things that you choose to be or don’t choose to be and still have access to leadership, I’m not sure what’s going to change.” Johnson describes that this disadvantage for women with families exists within a larger cultural framework, which requires general structural and institutional change to impact the dance field specifically. She also notes that leadership in the field is getting harder to define, so she questions what that title realistically means to artists and academics in dance currently. She hopes that someday soon all the discussion around gender inequity will catalyze actual cultural change and will enable women in all fields and circumstances the opportunity to support and provide for the families and lifestyles that they choose.

#### *Johnson’s Experiences in Context*

Elizabeth Johnson’s training and career experiences follow and support the scholarship in many ways. Based on her descriptions of her career path, disadvantage and disappointment stand out more clearly and obviously as characteristic of her experiences than the other participant’s experiences. Throughout this disadvantage, Johnson’s career points most respectively to gender inequity and obstacle; her disadvantage stems from

choices she has made specifically as a woman that have limited her achievements based on the current state of the field.

Johnson most closely aligns with the written scholarship on female underrepresentation in the professional work sector. Just as Warner found this trend common in many fields, Johnson continually finds herself equally qualified to her male counterparts that receive jobs over her time after time (Center for American Progress, 2014). Her descriptions of her struggles to receive a full-time, tenure-track job at a university in parallel to her husband's reveal this staggering inequity that exists in the dance field. Male leaders consistently receive positions, grants, and funding over female leaders, and Johnson's experiences prove the reality of this observation (Van Dyke, 1996). Johnson's experiences and career path have left her in a position of dissatisfaction and fulfillment of her potential. Despite her deep investment in the field, she has not received close to the amount of recognition that her husband has for the same amount of dedication and qualification. Johnson's experiences directly support Van Dyke and Warner's studies that note the lack of change in gender equity in the professional workplace (1996; 2014). Johnson's experiences across different phases of her life and career support the argument that not much actual change has occurred for women in position of leadership in the professional sector.

Alongside these analyses, Johnson's experiences with disadvantage also support Ely and Rhode's statements regarding the idea of the prevalent "glass ceiling" (2010). Johnson remarks that while much discussion surrounding inequity is going on consistently, she has not seen a lot of actual change. Striking influence of the dance field's current state comes from surrounding Western culture, which is evident in both

workplace observations and in performance (Banes, 1998). She believes there is still much societal and cultural shifting that must occur before women are able to lift the “glass ceiling,” and hopes that leaders in prominent positions will notice that there is still much to be done about gender inequity in leadership. At this point in her career, Johnson has developed a strong investment in her growth in the field, which is backed up by her accomplishments and reverence. However, she still feels unable to receive a job position that adequately supports her goals and development as a leader, teacher, and choreographer. While this may seem ordinary for a woman at the beginning of her career, Johnson’s experiences provide a shocking reality of inequity even in a mature female leader’s career opportunities.

Further supporting Ely and Rhode’s observations, Johnson describes her disadvantage rooting from her personal choices as a woman (2010). Because she decided to become a mother at a young age she was automatically given limitations and obstacles that a man, or other woman without children, would not have. Ely and Rhode describe these difficulties that come with being a female leader as generating from gender role expectations and the corresponding limitations that come with those expectations (2010). Trying to reach higher levels of leadership and power require characteristics that are not generally associated with women, and place time demands that are not always feasible for women who have household responsibilities (Ely, Rhode, 2010). Johnson remarks that at several points in her career she felt “out of the game” in terms of ability to rise in position due to family and personal responsibilities. However, Johnson feels that this part of her life greatly affects her leadership and teaching styles, and she is burdened by the fact that being a mother becomes somewhat of a hindrance in leadership acquisition in the dance

field. As noted by written scholarship, many believe that women bring specific attributes and strengths to leadership that men do not always have, however role stereotypes and barriers to female leadership still exist that prevent women from reaching their full potential in the workplace (Ely, Rhode, 2010). Johnson's experiences and perspectives directly support these ideas as a reality in the dance field. She feels, and has proven, that many of her strengths as a leader are due to her experiences as a mother, something she feels should be accepted and celebrated, not regarded as burdensome.

Another aspect of Johnson's career that aligns with written scholarship exists in her realization of the importance of community involvement and support. Johnson's resources for success rely heavily on community support, as Borwick describes in regards to development of the arts as a transformative discipline (2012). Throughout various points in her career she called upon engagement of surrounding groups to encourage her artistic and leadership goals. Johnson's experiences with founding and directing her own professional company prove how integral community support is in the reality of starting up a new arts group. Without that engagement, Johnson remarks that she would not have been able to do all the things that were possible with her company, such as performances, traveling, and recognition of individual artistic voices, without the resources from community involvement.

Another interesting similarity that exists between Johnson's observations of her path and written scholarship about female experience in dance is revealed through Johnson's artistry. Many scholars comment on the unique presentation of individual female experience by women choreographers, directors, and performers in theatre and dance performance, as opposed to representation of a universal female experience on

stage (Albright, 1997; Dolan, 2012). Johnson's artistic focus on autobiographical choreographic works supports these ideas as relevant and important. Johnson remarks on the significance of describing your own experiences, perspectives, and values even if those ideas are not popular or do not make you famous. Her commitment to artistic integrity that reveals authentic experiences in which personal voices are able to be heard backs up ideas in research of performance on the importance of this type of feminist representation. Johnson would agree with the ideas of Albright, Butler, and Dolan that suggest the necessity of breaking traditional female depictions and representing real experience in order to effect shifting perspectives of female leadership (1997; 2007; 2012). She seeks to produce work that values personal perspective, and seeks to provide environments in which individual voices are heard and viewed as significant.

An integral part of Johnson's career development that is interestingly different from written scholarship is the level of mentorship she has continually had throughout her path. Unlike scholarship that points to the lack of adequate female mentorship to developing leaders, Johnson has had consistent, strong mentorship throughout her entire career (Ely, Rhode, 2010). She remarks continually on the importance of those support systems as integral to her development and achievements. Without mentorship and encouragement Johnson would not have figured out what she wanted to do with dance, nor would she have developed into the leader she is currently. This consistent base of support from female leaders in the field presents an opposing reality from written scholarship. However, it does prove the necessity of this mentorship for success and the impact it has on individual leaders.

She also strays from scholarship in the fact that she does not attribute, or at least discuss heavily, the influence of female-specific training as a hindrance to her leadership capabilities. Scholars would argue that female dancers have a disadvantage when it comes to stepping in positions of power due to their training as young women (Meglin, Brooks, 2012; Green, 2003). However, unlike these observations and the experiences of the other participants, Johnson surprisingly does not remark on these ideas. She does not state that her training did not prepare her for future leadership roles or hinder her abilities to succeed in any way. Instead, she focuses on the state of the field in regards to opportunities for women, stating that this is the main obstacle that keeps her from reaching her full potential.

Specific questions that Johnson's experiences bring up deal with the relationship between leadership and pedagogy. Johnson illustrates through several examples how interrelated her leadership and pedagogical styles are, describing them as integrated rather than separate. She finds it difficult to distinguish between the two, especially as she has developed as a teacher over the course of her career. The scholarship that has been written is often either about one or the other, rarely intermingling the two approaches. Johnson's experiences bring about interesting questions about the pedagogy methods used in relation to the type of leadership approach enacted. While her two styles coincide and find many similarities, it would be interesting and worthwhile to examine how these approaches relate for other leaders and teachers in the field.

## **Conclusions**

Despite their many different backgrounds, involvement, and observations, Banning Bouldin, Suzanne Aker, and Elizabeth Johnson share many similarities in their

experiences along their unique career paths. All three participants in this study have proven through various circumstances that they have had to work harder than their male counterparts to gain the same amount of respect and confidence in the dance field, despite their equal qualifications. They feel the presence of a prevalent glass ceiling, and often times have had to receive male support in order to see their goals and ideas come to fruition. All three remark on the difficulty of stepping out into a position of leadership in competition with male leaders that permeate the dance field. While it would be easy to generalize this observation and state that all female leaders have this obstacle against them, I believe it is more important to note that these specific individuals have had these specific experiences. In aiming to promote personal voice and validation to individual experience for female leaders, it is important to note that their experiences were similar, but may not be universally true for every female leader in the field. It is also worth repeating, however, that their experiences generally replicate the major conclusions of the relevant scholarship.

Another similarity that arises between these case studies is the importance of community engagement for these three leaders. Bouldin, Aker, and Johnson all found support financially and artistically through their various communities, and continue to be successful because they recognize the importance of engaging the community in their art form. They not only focus on involving the community artistically, by gathering support for funding and performance opportunities, but they also strive to be advocates for the arts as an integral part of a thriving society. They firmly believe that what they are doing with dance is important and necessary, and continually seek ways of involving the whole

community in that purpose. These leaders would not be as successful or highly achieved without their involvement in outside support and encouragement.

These three leaders also support the idea that strong mentorship presence is hugely important to leadership ability and development. While Bouldin and Johnson support this idea through their experiences having mentors that are essential to their growth, Aker also supports the claim through her experience with a lack of mentorship in leadership training. Since dance training for young females often does not prepare them for leadership roles, Bouldin and Johnson specifically note how integral their mentors were to their abilities to be successful leaders. Aker, on the other hand, notes how she had to figure everything out on her own in order to be successful. While this worked for this extremely talented and determined individual, Aker remarks on how difficult it was and how badly she wanted someone who could have helped her along the way. Strong mentorship presence definitely has an effect on female leaders' career paths, and the hardship and struggle they experience in working towards their goals.

Lastly, these case studies support the ideas that growth of representation of female experience, establishment of female voices, and written scholarship on female individuals is necessary for future change. Bouldin and Johnson specifically work to accurately represent personal perspectives in dance performance, focusing on their experiences, as well as their company members' and students' experiences. All three participants advocate for support of continued female voice and leadership growth, and hope to see dramatic change for female opportunity and leadership acquisition. Since the female experience accounts for half of the general population and the majority of the population

involved in dance, establishment of female voices and representation is hugely important for the growth and development of the field.

This research specifically seeks to support that establishment of individual female voices in the field. Unlike current published scholarship, these case studies focus on personal experience, looking at the obstacles and solutions for specific situations in specific environments and circumstances. This kind of scholarship does not exist in the amount that is needed to implement change regarding gender inequity in the dance field, and so this research provides continued growth in establishment of female representation. It also provides information on current realities in the field, providing insight as to what is happening right now with individuals and communities in dance. Rather than generalizing the observations like current published scholarship, this research presents individualized representation of influential voices otherwise unheard in written scholarship.

Through this research, more questions and ideas are presented regarding female experience and representation in the dance field. These case studies could be expanded in a multitude of ways. The relationship between pedagogy and leadership approaches stands out as a unique aspect of female leadership specific to academia that this research highlights, but does not dive into deeply. The case studies could be expanded in general to look at more experiences in various locations and situations, but they could also be narrowed to focus on academic leaders with strong pedagogical development. It might be important to look at leaders in different genres, sectors of academic dance, geographical locations, and from different training and career backgrounds. Observing more participants in various environments and communities would reveal more information

about the state of the field while simultaneously providing more establishment of individual female voices. It also may be helpful to not only talk with participants about their experiences, but also observe and analyze their practices. Looking at rehearsals, classes, and performances they lead and are a part of may provide deeper insight into the influence these leaders have, and their approaches to leadership, teaching, and mentoring. Overall, it is important that this research continue to include more establishment and representation of female voices and experiences.

## Appendix A: Recruitment Material

Here is a sample recruitment script to be included in the email message to potential subjects:

I am writing to ask if you would be interested in participating in my upcoming thesis research.

In this research, I am interested in exploring how female leaders in the dance field practice leadership and navigate a field characterized by unequal gender representation in the United States. I hope to gain insights into the challenges women in these roles face, their strategies for success, and issues that arise as they navigate through differing leadership environments. I also want to know how they adapt their leadership approaches and goals for the various communities and environments they serve. Finally, I want to know more about why women in these leadership positions continue with this work, given the challenges/state of the field today.

Since you have had experiences as a leader in the dance field, I feel your insights and descriptions will greatly contribute to this research.

Your involvement in this project would include at least one in-person interview with me, if possible, lasting no longer than one hour. If a face-to-face interview is not possible, an interview by phone or Skype (your preference) will be conducted. The interviews will be digitally audio recorded for accuracy. I may also need to have no more than one follow-up interview in order to clear up any questions emerging from our initial interviews. This follow-up interview should take no more than one hour and could be by email, phone, or Skype. Participation in this research is strictly voluntary, and you can opt out of the project at any time. I will also make sure that you have final approval of any text concerning your input into the thesis. You will have a chance to edit or omit any of your own words throughout the writing process of the thesis and before the thesis is finalized. This should take no longer than one hour. In total, the interview and review process will take no longer than three hours of your time.

Thank you for your time and consideration in helping me to answer these important questions. Please email me back at [allison.pelham@ttu.edu](mailto:allison.pelham@ttu.edu) accepting or denying the request for your participation. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to also contact me at (817) 718-3306, or the Primary Investigator, Ali Duffy, at [ali.duffy@ttu.edu](mailto:ali.duffy@ttu.edu).

Sincerely,  
Allison Pelham  
Undergraduate Research Scholar, Texas Tech University  
2408 Mac Davis Ln, 2302-B  
Lubbock, TX 79401

## **Appendix B: Pre-Interview Script**

Participation in this research is strictly voluntary, and you can opt out of the project at any point. You can stop the interview at any time, or skip any questions you prefer not to answer. There is a risk of fatigue and physical or emotional discomfort during the interview process. Breaks will be taken when needed and you will have the right to stop the interview at any time or reschedule. You may also withdraw from the study at any time.

The loss of confidentiality is a potential risk in every study involving human subjects. However, to minimize this risk, the confidentiality of any identifiable data such as paper documents, computer files, or audio tapes will be kept in the researcher's locked private home in a locked file cabinet or on a password protected computer or hard drive. All data identifiable will be destroyed within five years from the end of the study.

There is also a potential risk of loss of confidentiality in all email, downloading, and Internet transactions. To minimize this risk, you will be given the option for other means of communication for information deemed sensitive such as postal mailing, telephone, or face-to-face communication.

You will be given an opportunity to review the written transcriptions of the interview and amend or delete data that they view to be sensitive and/or potentially embarrassing or damaging. The deleted data will not be included in the final research product, nor will it be made available to the public by the researcher. You may delete any information from the transcript before the thesis is finalized.

## **Appendix C: Consent Form**

### **TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

Please share your thoughts in our research project.

#### **What is this project studying?**

This project is exploring how female leaders in the dance field, both in academia and professional sectors, describe their personal leadership practice. This research will give insight into gender representation and inequalities within the dance field and the surrounding culture at large. It will also give insight as to how female leaders in the dance field can create a platform for societal change through their leadership practices and experiences.

#### **What would I do if I participate?**

In this study, you will be asked to share your experiences, thoughts, and feelings. Participation will include questions about your experiences, thoughts, and feelings about your practices within the dance field, and with various positions you have held. The interviews will be audio recorded in order for us to obtain accurate information.

#### **How will I benefit from participating?**

Besides providing the project with valuable information, you will have the option to receive copies of all personal interview data collected, as well as a copy of the researcher's final thesis and any other publications connected to the study.

#### **Can I quit if I become uncomfortable?**

Yes, your participation is completely voluntary and you may opt out of the study at any point. Allison Pelham, Ali Duffy, and the Institutional Review Board have reviewed the questions and think you can answer them comfortably. However, you may skip any question you do not feel comfortable answering. You can also stop answering questions at any time. You are free to leave the study at any time. You can keep all the benefits of participating even if you stop. Participating is your choice. However, we do appreciate any help you are able to provide.

#### **How long will participation take?**

The interview will take an hour of your time. A potential follow-up interview will take no more than one hour. Review of materials once transcribed will take no more than one hour. The study will take a total of no more than three hours of your time.

#### **How are you protecting privacy?**

Your name will not be linked to any documentation and any use of this material in reports, publications or presentations will never be associated with participants in this study without permission. No one other than the researchers associated with this project

will have access to the raw data. All related documentation will be stored either in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's office or on a password protected computer.

**I have some questions about this study. Who can I ask?**

- The study is being run by Allison Pelham and Ali Duffy from the School of Theatre and Dance and the Honors College at Texas Tech University. If you have questions, you can call Allison Pelham at 817-718-3306, or email Ali Duffy at [ali.duffy@ttu.edu](mailto:ali.duffy@ttu.edu).
- TTU also has a Board that protects the rights of people who participate in research. You can ask them questions at 806-742-2064. You can also mail your questions to the Human Research Protection Program, Office of the Vice President for Research, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas 79409 or email them to [hrpp@ttu.edu](mailto:hrpp@ttu.edu).

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Signature

Date

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Printed Name

This consent form is not valid after December/10/2016.

## Appendix D: Subject Interview Questions

1. What is your title, and in what setting do you work?
2. Discuss your career path, and how you came to be in the position you currently hold.
3. Discuss how and when you realized that leadership was going to be an important part of your dance career. What prepared you for that role?
4. Discuss some of the biggest challenges you have faced as a leader in the dance field.
5. What strategies or resources do you call upon to tackle these challenges?
6. Was there a presence of mentorship during your training or career? If so, how did this mentor influence your path?
7. Did you ever feel like you were creating a personal leadership style in your work as a leader in the dance field? If so, please describe how this happened and how you would now describe that style.
8. In what ways have your leadership and artistic practices changed over the course of your career?
9. Looking back at your career as a leader in the dance field, of what are you the most proud?
10. Looking to the future of women leaders in dance, what do you anticipate? And what do you most hope to see?

For those in the academia sector (along with the first 10 questions):

1. How would you describe your pedagogical method? Do you see this method intersecting with your leadership style? If so, how do they intersect?
2. Describe your relationships with the students in your classes.
3. Do you view yourself in a position of mentorship towards your students as whole or individually? If so, describe what that relationship looks like.

For those in the professional sector (along with the first 10 questions):

1. Describe your relationships with the members of your company.
2. Describe your relationships with the other leaders in your company.
3. How does your artistic work with your company align (or not align) with your work as a leader of the company?
4. How do you sense that you or your dance company are impacting the surrounding community?

**Appendix E: Interview Transcript #1**  
*Banning Bouldin*

1. What is your title, and in what setting do you work in?
  - a. I am a choreographer, dancer, instructor, and the Artistic Director of New Dialect, a contemporary dance company that offers movement classes to the public based in Nashville, Tennessee. Much of my work takes place in dance studios, where New Dialect offers classes and rehearses. I also manage our bookkeeping, development, programming, donor relations, and a variety of other “behind the scenes” tasks from my home office.
2. Discuss your career path, and how you came to be in the position you currently hold.
  - a. I began studying classical ballet as a young girl and always knew that I wanted to be a professional dancer. At 15, I had the opportunity to participate in Juilliard’s first ever summer intensive where I was exposed to the modern dance techniques of Paul Taylor, Jose Limon, and Martha Graham, and was introduced to the concept of contemporary ballet. I knew right away this was the kind of dance I wanted to do professionally. Two years later, I was accepted to Juilliard. From the time I received my BFA in 2002, I was dancing professionally. I had the tremendous opportunity to work with choreographers and companies like Hubbard Street 2, Aszure Barton and Artists, Lar Lubovitch Dance Company, Buglisi Dance Theater, the Cullberg Ballet in Stockholm, Sweden, Rumpus Room Dance, Wen Wei Wang, Mats Ek, Alex Ketley, Ayman Harper, Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, Alexander Ekman, and many others. I participated in numerous productions and performances all over North America and Europe with these artists. I was a soloist, master class teacher, and rehearsal assistant during my tenure with Aszure Barton and Artists from 2003-2010. In 2007, I joined Rumpus Room Dance, based both in Portland, Oregon and Goteborg, Sweden, where I had the opportunity to co-create and perform multiple site-specific dance works with Stephan Laks and Rachel Tess. I and my Rumpus Room colleagues were nominated one of Dance Magazine’s “25 to Watch” in 2010. In 2007, I also moved to Paris and began teaching at Studio Harmonic. From then on teaching and mentoring dancers became a huge part of my love for dance, and ultimately led me to return to my hometown, Nashville, in 2010. Two years later I founded New Dialect, as a response to Nashville’s need for a professional contemporary dance company that would allow dancers, teaching artists, choreographers, and audiences the opportunity to explore the wide variety of groundbreaking movement vocabularies that exist in the world of 21st Century dance—vocabularies and approaches I’d traveled the world to research. New Dialect is now in it’s third year as a nonprofit contemporary dance company. I also regularly choreograph and teach for other companies and participate in choreographic residencies and competitions. I have created original works for New Dialect, the Nashville Ballet, and Visceral Dance Chicago, and am also the winner of

Northwest Dance Project's 2015 Pretty Creative choreographic competition and was selected as an e-choreographer for Springboard Danse Montreal 2015.

3. Discuss how and when you realized that leadership was going to be an important part of your dance career. What prepared you for that role?
  - a. From the time I said yes to teaching my first master class for Azure Barton, I knew leadership would be an important part of my career. I had no idea I would go on to start and direct my own company at the time, but I knew I had a gift for sharing information and motivating people. Teaching and dancing led me to choreographing my own dances, which led me to gathering a group of dancers with whom I could create new works. The very real need to pay dancers for their time with me and my desire to educate Nashville dancers and audiences about the vast array of choreographic voices existing in the world today, is what led me to start a nonprofit organization, so that I could raise funds and build a business to help me accomplish these goals. Starting a nonprofit, led me to build a team of people who could help me run it, and this team of people has helped me to develop the business infrastructure of New Dialect in a way that is sustainable. Each step has led to the next for me, and I am grateful for all of the brilliant teachers, directors, and mentors I've had access to throughout my career, who continue to serve as sounding boards and tremendous sources of support.
4. Discuss some of the biggest challenges you have faced as a leader in the dance field.
  - a. Building a professional contemporary dance company in a city where one of this scale had never existed before, required me to lay a lot of groundwork before we could begin rehearsing and performing. I've encountered many dancers, artists, patrons, and organizations who are excited about New Dialect and what we aim to accomplish. I've also met with numerous people who don't see the value in having a contemporary dance training program and company in Nashville, when we already have a great ballet company. Helping people to see the value in both preserving classical forms and investing in new approaches to dance can be challenging in more traditional and conservative climates. Financial support for the arts, and nonprofits in general, is minimal in the first three years. Most foundations require organizations to have a three year financial history before they will consider making a contribution. Fundraising when your company is brand new and relatively unknown, and grant resources are limited, was a great challenge in our first two years. Having little money in the beginning also required me to do everything from web design to bookkeeping to production managing to marketing to teaching to mentoring to dancing to choreographing. I knew taking on this much would only be sustainable for a short period of time. Finding studio space that would allow New Dialect to meet everyday for rehearsal and the funding to pay dancers for their time was a great challenge in our first year. Many studios in Nashville were either closed

and unwilling to open during the day, were already in use, or charged rental rates that we could not afford.

5. What strategies or resources do you call upon to tackle these challenges?
  - a. Partnerships have been key to New Dialect's success in our first years; by collaborating with numerous local nonprofit organizations, we have secured an ongoing residency that allows us to rehearse daily and rent free and pay reduced studio rental rates for the dance classes we provide. These partnerships have also provided us with paid performance opportunities and commissions, and in so doing have expanded our network of contacts and supporters. I have a business advisor, Board of Directors, and an Advisory Board comprised of people with very different skill sets than I possess and that help me to tackle the myriad of responsibilities associated with running a dance company and who also help bring in financial support by reaching out to their contacts to fundraise for New Dialect. I became a member of the Arts and Business Council, which allows me to have access to free business and legal services. Their Volunteer Lawyers helped me file for nonprofit status and continues to be a resource for me with everything from filing our annual report to procuring visas for foreign dancers and teachers.
6. Was there a presence of mentorship during your training or career? If so, how did this mentor influence your path?
  - a. I have had a few different mentors during different stages of my career as a dancer. One of the first and most important is the late Benjamin Harkavy, who was the director of Juilliard's Dance Division while I was a student there. He helped me to discover and deepen my love for the creative process, gave me countless opportunities to explore and take risks, and his feedback was always spot on (even when it hurt.) Prioritizing process helped me to ascertain the kind of companies and choreographers I wanted to be working with, all of which inform what I teach, how I teach, and my own movement language as a dancer and choreographer.
7. Did you ever feel like you were creating a personal leadership style in your work as a leader in the dance field? If so, please describe how this happened and how you would now describe that style.
  - a. In my career as a dancer I had the opportunity to work under and with a variety of artistic directors and choreographers, all of whom had different leadership styles. This was excellent research for me. I have parceled through what worked best for me and the dancers I was working with in each of these companies, as well as what didn't work, and really used this as a template for my own leadership style—taking the best from each of my experiences and using that as my model. My leadership style is collaborative. I value the voices and opinions of the dancers and people I'm working with, and believe in the power of the collective over heirarchical models that make one person the ultimate authority. We are able to have a greater impact when we come together as a community, and the dances we make are the richer for it.

8. In what ways have your leadership and artistic practices changed over the course of your career?
  - a. I have become more focused on the importance teaching dancers self-awareness and giving them opportunities to use their voices. I listen more. I show less. I strive to leave more room for dancers to bring their entire selves to the creative process. I have become more collaborative and less controlling.
9. Looking back at your career as a leader in the dance field, of what are you the most proud?
  - a. I'm proud that the environment I've worked to facilitate in the studio has empowered dancers and given them confidence to know what they want and go after it. I'm proud that the dancers who work with me have tremendous self-respect and respect for each other. The dynamic of the company today is an absolute pleasure to create with.
10. Looking to the future of women leaders in dance, what do you anticipate? And what do you most hope to see?
  - a. There are a number of talented women in the field today who are making dances. I see more support and interest from major institutions ahead for these female choreographers. I think it's so important to have a female point of view in the dances that are made to reflect on our time. I hope more women will be given the opportunity to take up positions as artistic directors and that they will be bold to start their own companies.
11. Describe your relationships with the members of your company.
  - a. Many of the dancers in my company were former students or dancers I've worked with in the past. As they've matured our relationship has evolved. For some I am a mentor. My relationship with all the dancers outside the studio is friendly; we often meet for coffee to talk about what we're creating and the things we're interested in exploring. Creating new material and rehearsing requires an incredible amount of focus and discipline; the boundaries that I have in place with each of the dancers enable our time in the studio to remain professional without being cold, and to connect in appropriate ways in our free time. I never forget that I am still the artistic director, and that makes boundaries both in and outside the studio very important.
12. Describe your relationships with the other leaders in your company.
  - a. The dance world is small, even on an international level. The guest teachers and choreographers I bring in are often past colleagues and friends, if not friends of friends or colleagues. The years we all spent cultivating the self discipline it requires to work at the level we each have, allows us to focus and collaborate well together in the studio, while enjoying a friendly relationship in our free time. As teachers and choreographers we talk regularly about our approach, sharing what's working and what's not, and I savor these discussions. The marketing and development director of New Dialect is my husband. While I know not every couple is able to work well together in a professional context, my husband and I certainly do. I value his insight and input and enjoy building

different aspects of New Dialect with him. Having boundaries that allow us to differentiate between our work time from our time together as a couple has been essential to us and to the growth of our company.

13. How does your artistic work with your company align (or not align) with your work as a leader of the company?
  - a. In my experience, how I lead and the kind of work environment I facilitate has everything to do with the work we as a dance company are able to make together. Providing a safe place for dancers to take risks, grow in self confidence and respect for one another, and contribute their voices to the creative process allows our work to have a stronger impact; the movements and partnerships possess a richness that can only come from complete trust and courage. The intricate moving tableaux that have become emblematic of my choreography wouldn't be possible without the environment I take great care to facilitate as the leader of our company.
14. How do you sense that you or your dance company are impacting the surrounding community?
  - a. The overall level of contemporary dancer and choreography produced in Nashville has grown since we began offering our daily community classes. There are also more contemporary dance projects pursuing nonprofit status and seeking to work full time and pay their dancers. There is a growing number of people interested in new dance in Nashville. We had 700 people attend our first show, a remarkable number for Nashville, and since then the number of people interested in learning about ND and other local contemporary dance companies and choreographers has increased. Dancers are traveling from all over North America to attend our classes. And, choreographers are reaching out to us from all over the world seeking the opportunity to create with us. The environment and community we're creating together here in Nashville is attractive to artists from the larger community. I have received emails from dancers, choreographers, and audience members attesting to their experiences with us; people feel refreshed, encouraged, and emboldened by our work, and that means a great deal to me.

*Follow Up Interview*

1. In what ways did you help people see the importance of investing in new approaches to dance to gain support for your company in its early stages?
  - a. In our early stages, and even still, I have found it helpful to offer classes that require no previous dance experience, such as gaga people, Feldenkrais, Bartenieff, contact improvisation, and absolute beginner contemporary technique, as a way to help people who identify as “non dancers” to connect with experientially connect to our art form. To those who were curious, but skeptical, I would invite them to observe a rehearsal and set up time with them to talk about their observations. Many times, if I could get someone in the studio to see what we were working on, they would leave feeling moved, inspired, and excited to see more. Giving people the opportunity to have their own first hand, behind the scenes experience and following up with further conversations has been the key to our audience development.
2. Were there any female mentors that greatly influenced your path?
  - a. Alexandra Wells has been a great mentor to me as I’ve grown into a choreographer and artistic director. She was on faculty at Juilliard for a number of years and is the cofounder of Springboard Danse Montreal- a program designed to support and connect dancers and choreographers. She understands our field very well and is passionate about helping artists find their way. She’s a marvelous resource and an inspiration to me.
3. Would you say you are more influenced by past mentors or peers you are currently working with/alongside?
  - a. I’m influenced by both. I carry the messages I gleaned from past mentors with me and am open to the feedback I receive from my mentors today.
4. In question 8, you discussed the ways in which your leadership style has changed over the years. Was this a gradual shift or did this change occur after a specific experience?
  - a. This shift was gradual. I apply what I learn from each experience to the next one. As long as I’m willing to continue growing, I believe my approach to leadership will also grow and evolve.
5. Why do you think it’s so important to have the female perspective in dances created during this time?
  - a. I think it’s important for female perspectives to be represented and promoted in ALL times. We represent over 50% of the world’s population and to overlook our view points and gender specific experiences leaves our art form subject to sexism and perpetuates male dominance and the male perspective as all encompassing. Men and women are theoretically equal, and we are not the same. The dance works and companies that become emblematic of this era in dance will be the all the richer and more balanced by making room for and supporting female leaders. There are

numerous talented female choreographers and teachers in our field. I believe North American culture is becoming more open to the idea of women artistic directors and choreographers, but we still have a ways to go before we're given the equal respect of our male counterparts.

6. Can you describe any recurring themes or ideas in the “intricate moving tableaux” in your choreography?
  - a. Community- many bodies coming together, arms and legs working in perfect coordination like the gears of an organic machine to paint abstract images of a singular Giant Bride or Centipede or a many headed Animal or a Cliff. I'm constantly exploring connection, community, manipulation, rescue, support, and their counterpoints, and using these them to explore building human sculptures, landscapes, and architecture.
7. Do you feel that any of the challenges you have experienced are due specifically to being a woman in the dance field, or do you feel that these challenges are non-gender specific?
  - a. I think some of the fears and bouts of lacking self-confidence I felt, when I was considering taking the plunge and starting my own company, had much to do with the fact that as a female dancer I was not often given room to lead or use my voice (even when working under other female choreographers.) The chasm between silent obedience and stepping out to lead a room full of artists is great, and I was intimidated by that leap at first. With practice and support I found I had a wealth of information, opinions, insights, and ideas to share. The confidence that I have now grew from my own experience, and I carry that with me into every meeting, class, rehearsal, and performance. The credentials I have from my education and career and the choices I make have helped me gain respect as a female artistic director. And I'm aware that as a woman, I have to work a lot harder to get and maintain that respect than my male counterparts.

## Appendix F: Interview Transcript #2

*Suzanne Aker*

1. What's your title and in what setting do you work in?
  - a. Well, I'm retired (laughs).
2. What was your last, your most recent title?
  - a. At Tech, it was Assistant Professor.
3. Discuss your career path and how you came to be in your last position that you held.
  - a. Well (chuckles), whenever I came here, there was a Department of Women's P.E. and they desperately needed a dance teacher, and the dance that I taught was folk dance, ballroom dance, and (chuckles) modern. And I came here because my then-husband was working on his Ph.D., and umm that was why I came. ("Oh okay") And I was lucky to get the job (laughs).
4. So from there were you automatically a Professor, or
  - a. No, umm ("So how did you get to that position?") Just by teaching over the years. ("Oh okay")
5. Did you umm, did you move on to teach more genres of dance or was that pretty much what you did?
  - a. Ah! This is **very** interesting. (both laugh) I was primarily a Ballet dancer and Ballet teacher, and of course there was no Ballet at Tech in the early 60's (chuckles), and I told my department head that some of my girls wanted to take Ballet. And (chuckles) you won't believe this, but Tech had the lunch, everybody had lunch at twelve o'clock. ("Really?" both laugh), yes. And she said if you can get people to come during the lunch hour and take Ballet, then I will include it. And that's, that's how it happened (laughs). ("That is really interesting!")
6. So before you came to Tech did you teach like at studios and...?
  - a. Yes, and I was in Tulsa, and I taught at Tulsa University and then I had a private studio. ("Oh okay")
7. You taught mostly Ballet?
  - a. Uh-huh. Well, at the University I taught Modern.
8. What school did you go to, do you have a degree in Dance?
  - a. Oh my (chuckles). I dance professionally, I graduated two years early and (chuckles) I was invited into a dance company and umm, we traveled all over the country, and in **every** town I found the best teacher and I studied with them. And I studied a lot of ethnic dance too ("Oh okay"). And umm I studied with a real Hindu teacher and a real Spanish teacher, I had to have proper dress when I went to the Spanish class, and umm that was wonderful. I just studied with the best teachers that I could and I took the Royal Academy classes, and so I was really more Royal Academy directed than anything else. But I studied with **fabulous** people. ("That's awesome.")
9. Discuss how and when you realized that leadership was going to be a part of your dance career.

- a. Well, when I was dancing professionally, I didn't like doing the same thing (both chuckle) over and over and over. And I thought, I **really** am a choreographer, I **really** am a teacher. ("Mhmm") So, I umm, I left performing, I performed for two years, which was a very good thing to do ("Mhmm"), and umm then I went back to Tulsa where my family was and started teaching because that was what was in my heart to do, to teach.
10. So you knew from early on that you wanted to teach instead?
- a. (laughs) Yeah, I think so. Yes.
11. Umm, discuss some of the biggest challenges that you've faced as a leader in the dance field.
- a. Well (both laugh), getting the degree, the dance degree, was a very big challenge. I wrote, umm, a degree plan and took it to the academic counsel- all were men, not one woman (laughs) ("Wow")- and I was young, I was in my early 30s, and it was kind of scary. And they turned me down. (chuckles), and then, bless him, Dr. Gene Hemmle, who umm, the painting of him is really wonderful there across from Hemmle Hall, he was interested in **all** of the arts. And I think he thought, hmm if we have a dance degree they can decorate our performances (chuckles), and bless him, he helped me. And so I wrote another one, it was like writing a Master's thesis all over again, and I took it to the academic counsel, and it went over (both chuckle). ("So it was a lot about getting the right support?") Oh yes, and then another thing. Since I was in a P.E. department, there was no money for performance. And I had to come up with a way for my kids to perform, because I really loved them and they really worked hard. So, I started umm a Civic Ballet, they don't have Civic Ballets anymore, but what that is, you invite everybody in town to come. And I had people come and audition, the dancers, they weren't very good, but, the dancers they weren't very good (laughs), but we had a ballet company, and that's how I managed to have a place for my kids to perform. Then, the Theatre department and the Music department would ask us to do things. So it wasn't money from my own department, because they didn't have it. That was a **big** challenge. ("Yeah, I can imagine.")
12. So while you were working there, were you able to get it transferred over to the College it's in now?
- a. No. Later that happened, even though I wanted it very badly. And of course it's in the right place now (both chuckle).
13. Were there any other kinds of challenges along the way that came up?
- a. No, not really. Umm, it was pretty peaceful. (both chuckle) ("That's good.")
14. Besides the support and kind of the help from the Theatre and Music departments, were there any other resources or strategies you came up with that helped you?
- a. Well, only the Civic Ballet that I created.
15. Where were they able to perform? How did you go about finding that?
- a. Well, there was a lovely man here, who's no longer on this earth, but he said "Oh come," (chuckles) because I didn't have money to rent a place or anything, he said "come dance at our local theatre." There was a **lovely**, at

one time, theatre here in town. It became condemned (laughs), and they tore it down. But he said, use our Board, and we'll let you perform.

("Wow, that's great.") So, he made it possible for us to perform. ("I see.")

16. Was there a presence of mentorship during your training or career, and if so how did they influence you?
  - a. Well, just that I studied with the best teachers possible. ("Mhmm.") And umm, early on I wasn't thinking about teaching, I just wanted to- My parents gave me the best training that was available, but it wasn't the best training in the whole world (chuckles). And when I was dancing professionally, I realized that I needed a better understanding of technique. And so I sought wonderful people. I studied with Hanya Holm, and Jose Limon (laughs) ("Wow, that's amazing."), and at Ballet Theatre, and so I studied in just **absolutely wonderful** places. And I even studied with Luigi, who was the beginning of Jazz. So I've had **absolutely** marvelous teachers.
17. Did those teachers help you or influence you in any way towards teaching as well, or just in the technique?
  - a. No, it was just the technique that I was seeking. And I really believe that I got it.
18. When you started teaching and became a Professor, things like that, did you have any peers that helped influence you or aided in developing your leadership?
  - a. (shakes head) ("Nope, it was just you? (laughs)) No, I wish there had been (laughs), but there was no one. ("So you really had to navigate it on your own?") Yes.
19. Did you ever feel like you were creating a personal leadership style for yourself, and if so, what does that look like?
  - a. (chuckles) No, I don't think so. I just wanted, I wanted every student that I had to get the best technique possible, because I thought, I hadn't had that. That was what I wanted to pass on, was the best technique that was possible.
20. In what ways have your leadership and artistic practices changed over the course of your career path?
  - a. I don't think it has. (both chuckle) ("It's stayed pretty much the same?") Yes, just umm taking the best technique possible and passing it on. That's been my mantra (chuckles).
21. Looking back at your career, of what are you most proud?
  - a. Well, actually (chuckles), it didn't have anything to do with the University. It was developing Ballet Lubbock.
22. Can you talk a little bit more about that?
  - a. Yes, I'd be glad to. It was **extremely** hard. And umm, oh (laughs) I had one horrible experience. Here I was giving all my time and doing all that I could for the Ballet, and we had a board at that time and umm, this man who was head of art for the public schools said, we cannot have a local Ballet with a local Director. We have to have somebody with a reputation, a big reputation. And they fired me (laughs) ("Oh wow"). And that was

- horrible! But they, they would always get in trouble and they'd hired me back (both laugh). ("To come solve the problems?") Yes! (laughs)
23. When did you start Ballet Lubbock? Were you already teaching at Tech?
    - a. Mmm, well it was umm, let's see. Oh it's very hard to say. Umm, about 67 I think.
  24. And what motivated you to start it?
    - a. Oh, well I come from Tulsa, and Tulsa has an **outstanding** Ballet, **really**, they have a \$2 million budget (chuckles). And they use professional dancers, and that inspired me. And I thought, well here I am in the middle of nowhere and maybe I can start something. And I really am so proud of the way the Ballet has developed. The girl that's the head of it now, was a pupil of mine. Well, and she had moved here from New York and was very depressed because she thought there would be nobody to study with. And umm she found me (chuckles), and we're still very close.
  25. Can you describe some of the challenges of starting a company where there's really no dance presence?
    - a. Well, it's mostly money. And trained dancers. Umm, I left Tech in seven years because my then-husband was working on his Ph.D., and he refused to take some courses so they dismissed him, and so I thought we were going to move. He did move, I did not (laughs). And umm, so I thought what would be really neat is a good private dance school, and I started one. And, because kids would come to Tech for a dance degree, and they just weren't trained well enough to even enter the department. So, I started a private studio, and that worked into the Ballet.
  26. So funding was the major challenge? How did you use resources to combat that?
    - a. Well, (laughs), any way we could! (laughs)
  27. Did you gain partnerships or support from individuals?
    - a. Well, we developed a board. The board did all of that, and I didn't worry about it after that (chuckles).
  28. Looking towards the future of women leaders in the dance field, what do you foresee happening?
    - a. Well, I'm not really aware of what's going on at this time, umm, but I think progress is being made.
  29. Is there anything you hope to see in the future?
    - a. Just more progress (both chuckle).
  30. How would you describe your pedagogical method?
    - a. Well, it was what I gathered from all of the teachers that I had. And it was very well based on the English background. The Royal Academy.
  31. Did you differ this method depending on the level or age you were teaching at all, or was it pretty much the same?
    - a. Pretty much the same.
  32. Did you approach teaching differently depending on a student's gender?
    - a. I think it was just pretty much the same.
  33. Did you have male students that you taught?
    - a. Oh yes. Yeah I had one dance student at the New York Ballet Company (chuckles). And I had some kids that got into the New York City Ballet,

- one in the San Francisco Ballet. Now that is not going on at Tech right now. I think it will. I hope with all my heart that it will.
34. Were these students you taught at Tech or Ballet Lubbock?
    - a. Well, I umm, both.
  35. Describe the relationships that you had with the students in your classes.
    - a. Oh, I loved them. Because they came to work, and they worked hard. And it was a very happy experience.
  36. Were you like a mentor to them?
    - a. Well, I don't know. I would like to think I was, but I can't say.
  37. Do you sense at all that your work at Ballet Lubbock and the start of that company affected the community at larger?
    - a. Oh yes. (chuckles)
  38. In what ways?
    - a. Well, umm, it's been a partner with the Symphony, and with the art department. And I feel like it's a very positive thing in the art community. And it's recognized as such.
  39. Do you think the presence of more dance in Lubbock helped the community grow?
    - a. Absolutely, because they are now giving umm, scholarships to kids that couldn't possibly afford dance. And umm, they are doing that in community centers all over town. And that, that really gives us a good background.
  40. Why do you think the presence of dance is so important in the community?
    - a. Well, you've seen the saying "Arts Saves Lives," and I believe that. I really do. Anything in the arts will ennoble a person. ((chuckles)) "Yeah, I agree"
  41. Is there anything else related to your career or anything you've experienced that you would like to share?
    - a. Well, it's been long and difficult and rewarding.
  42. Do you have anything else to add?
    - a. I haven't helped you much with the idea of being a Professor, because I only did that for seven years, and I spent more time with the Ballet. I don't know if you know what's going to happen with Ballet Lubbock. ("The new complex?") Yes, \$8 million it's costing us ("Wow"), but we've already raised half of that. And umm, Nick said, you've got to live until we do that. I'm 89! (laughs) So I said, oh I didn't plan to live that long! I think it'll be in 2 or 3 years.
  43. Are you helping out with that, are you still involved with Ballet Lubbock?
    - a. Oh yeah. ("What do you do now with them?") Well, (chuckles), I paint, umm, ornaments for the Nutcracker. I made 164 last year! I also donate money. They have started a new fund that's actually in my name, that will, Nick said it will go on long after all of us are gone, and they put that in my name. And I initially gave money for that. And I donate every month a little bit. ("Is that fund for scholarships?") No, it's to keep the Ballet alive. ("That's awesome. Do you still attend the performances?") Oh yeah, yeah.

I'm sorry I don't know the kids like I used to ("Mhmm"), but yeah. They're going to have six studios you know!

44. When you started Ballet Lubbock was it in a different building than it currently is?
  - a. Oh yes. Well we've taught at community centers, we taught at the Boys and Girls Club, we taught on 50<sup>th</sup> and University, in a basement of Lubbock High (laughs).
45. When did you get a studio for housing Ballet Lubbock?
  - a. Oh, quite a while after. We would just move around to every place (chuckles). ("I bet that helped you reach a lot of people that way though?") Oh, yes definitely.
46. Was there anything in your career, whether it was while you were performing or teaching, that just stood out to you as something you'll always remember?
  - a. Hmm, not necessarily I don't think. It was pretty ordinary (chuckles) I guess.
47. How long did you continue performing for?
  - a. Until I was 40 (laughs), and that was a long time ago! Because I did dance some at Tech.
48. Any final thoughts?
  - a. Well, what worried me was that kids were only getting Modern dance at Tech. And they couldn't get into a company, they couldn't get into a show without Ballet training also. And I want the kids to be better rounded. When I started, the course of study was half modern, half ballet, because I thought, this is the only way they're going to make it professionally. I so wanted Tech to be like Utah, and have a school for kids, you know, attached to the dance department. But that was a long way in the distance (chuckles). It might happen, you never know. I think the biggest thing in my life, was to learn the best technique possible. And that was why Yvonne came and worked with me, because she said my technique was like it was in New York. And so she was really pleased she had a teacher who could do that. It's really hard to believe that in my lifetime I've seen such growth and development with Tech and Ballet Lubbock from nothing. It's exciting.

**Appendix G: Interview Transcript #3***Elizabeth Johnson*

1. What is your title, and in what setting do you work?
  - a. My job title here is Visiting Assistant Professor of Theatre and Dance at Texas Tech University.
2. Discuss your career path, and how you came to be in the position you currently hold.
  - a. Career path. Umm, well I intended to be a professional dancer and I went to train at North Carolina School of the Arts, which is now known as the University of the North Carolina School of the Arts, my junior year of high school. And I was a little bit young, kind of a year behind my group, so I left home at 15 to study intensively in ballet because I wanted to be in a ballet company. And that led to many revelations and experiences over my junior and senior year of high school and my first year of college. After that I'm not sure I would describe this as a path (laughs) or if it is I'm not sure, well it's not a straight path, it's not a path that had a lot of you know single minded and purposeful direction. So I eventually switched into contemporary dance at George Mason University, and found that that fit my goals or my personality or my intelligence, maybe better. Even so I was really bummed out on dancing, and transitioning from classical to contemporary kind of felt like giving up or a failure of some kind. A lot of people who went to those kinds of conservatory institutions, we could probably do a study on this, feel similarly. And then life happened and I kept my schooling going, I got married very young when I was 21, and worked part time and full time and also had my first child before I graduated from college. So it took me a long time to keep going and to finish all my BFA credits and to get my degree. So umm, I knew I wanted to finish, but because my life became so interrupted by other conflicting choices, I didn't really have an idea of what I wanted to do with my degree. I just knew I wanted to finish it. And I danced with Chamber Groups in the Northern Virginia area, which is a big suburb of Washington D.C. And I worked in a hospital, I danced on the side. I rehearsed on the weekends and weekday nights. I produced a couple of pieces, actually just one piece. I had an older cast member, who was also kind of an alternative student, and she was kind of connected to Dance Place. And so one of two of my pieces I did, one with one group and one from school, got produced at different venues and I liked that. And then I started substituting at kind of more well-known studios in the area and I liked that. So I really wanted to choreograph more and you know present choreography, and work with dancers and think about life that way. All while I was setting musicals on high school kids and you know just trying to take whatever small job I could. I also commuted out to Fredericksburg, Virginia to teach because it was a great hourly wage, and still even with the driving I could still make a lot per hour at this studio, you know so I just kept going. I moved, don't ask me why, and I ended up, really at this

point in my life I was also really interested in liturgical dance, which I'm not anymore, but it was a phase in my life that I kind of wanted my spirituality and my life to be completely integrated. So I set some dances on Ballet Magnificat and taught at their studio down in Jackson, Mississippi. And got a couple grants, again I was working with really great dancers. So I set a couple pieces on them and it was performed at a big venue, and kept teaching at studios and I had a lot of kids in five and a half years. And I think that's something very important to this study. Because I think that where I am now and the choices I have now, are effected by those choices that I unwittingly made. You know when you're young, you don't say I'm making a choice and do it, you just roll with life and without a lot of mentoring and guidance you have no idea where you'll end up or how those choices will have affected you. At some point, I felt pretty out of the game, by the third child (laughs). I was teaching at very small studios and just kind of waiting to see if I needed to go back to graduate school, and that's what happened is that my now ex-husband decided we needed two incomes because we had these three kids and he was a nurse, and while that was a good and stable job, he could work anywhere and any city, umm it really wasn't you know enough money to support a family of five. And so, just kind of bumbling around I looked at graduate schools and I was looking at changing my major, going into education or literature or English and perhaps teaching in those areas, because I was also really interested in writing an literature, and when I called all the schools they said well you'll have to go back for another year of undergraduate or more probably to you know earn the credits that in the field that you're interested in going to graduate school in. And I thought oh dear, well I think maybe I'll look at dance schools (laughs) because I have a solid dance degree. And so I did. And I went to Ohio State, but umm I often times felt like I was single-parenting. And anyway, I ended up auditioning at University of Illinois and they took me. They gave me a graduate assistantship so I didn't have to pay for tuition, and I got paid to teach. And then my life turned upside down and my ex-husband during my second semester to be a travel nurse, which was more money. And he called about six or seven weeks in suggesting we get a divorce. And it was the right thing, life had been very difficult. He was not supportive. He was supportive of the ultimate goal of me getting a job, but not at how I did it and dance in general. And I was in a very difficult, abusive, manipulative, hard relationship with that person for a very long time so I didn't really understand that I was still very good at what I did. I had kind of forgotten. So going back to graduate school helped me kind of claim my life back because people saw me as competent and a good teacher and a good writer. I knew it had to be his idea, because he was very difficult, but that left me (laughs), the initial kind of violent outcome of that was that I was left alone with no vehicle as a single parent of three children under the age of seven, in my first year of graduate school. My family helped me, I had a great babysitter, and I just kept going. Because I didn't want to quit. And

they gave me more work so my salary went up a hair (laughs), but you know I was on public assistance and my kids were on a state insurance plan, and it was a very, very hard road. But I also knew watching my mentors and teachers, because it took me so long to do my undergraduate, I was in academia a long time, and then coming back to academia I really liked the possibilities and the organization, and the mentoring and the connections that could happen in an organized structure that seemed supported at the time. So I was in school with my current husband, and so you know we met and life changed again. But I remember he graduated before I did, and he was applying for jobs and got a lot of job offers, and he got a really good one actually at TWU in Denton and didn't take it because I wasn't finished with school yet. And that was a really hard decision, but we really didn't think our new relationship would survive the distance if we did it. And then ironically, Peggy who used to be the head of this program left, and I applied for Texas Tech for a job. The job that Genevieve got I believe after I was out of grad school. Or maybe it was a little before Genevieve came. But it was in that three or four year time period. I got a phone interview and she was really interested in me, but we were two people trying to find jobs together. Or at least a good job. So we stayed on at University of Illinois as faculty. That's where I think two people in the same field, one having danced in a professional ballet company, one having been very well-trained in academia but having danced intermittently, but in graduate school I danced quite a lot professionally in New York, umm however, being a man and having that professional ballet background, he could apply for solid jobs with really good salaries, whereas I could only get entry-level kind of beginner level positions where you could go somewhere small and build if you wanted to, but it wasn't going to work for us as a full family. So I had to follow the good job. I applied for all the same jobs that he did, and I applied for the job that he got in Wisconsin, and that's where we ended up. And you know when you go somewhere new and you make deals and look at spouses who are in the same academia or the same field, which is even worse, umm people make deals and they say oh yes yes, there will be plenty for you to do, and she'll find something and we'll have something, but that really wasn't the case. So I found myself gradually building work, so by the time we left Wisconsin I had a full time job. I taught full time and invested full time in the program. But my job, I probably made 30-40% less and I didn't have a tenure track. So that's been my path to where I am now, and that's how I'm here now. That system was under duress, and we were looking around saying, well it doesn't look like I'll ever, despite my investment because there are two of us and one is already in the system, that it's not very friendly for both of us to be in the system, so we should go and look to see what else is out there. And so he came, and I was a finalist for the same place that Nicole was but she got the job, I didn't, she left, and the position was open here. So it just kind of worked out that there was a need or I might not be here. I might have kept my old

job in Wisconsin and we would've done long distance. So that's, you know, it's a bumbling, circuitous, indirect path with not the outcome that I would like for my own investment in my own education. And there may be other questions that lead to other observations, but I'm not unhappy, I have a job this year and next year, but I don't have the building of investment that other people have who are on tenure tracks here.

3. Discuss how and when you realized that leadership was going to be an important part of your dance career. Is there anything that prepared you for those roles?
  - a. Leadership became important when I started my own company. And I started it fresh out of grad school in 2003, and I had a pick-up company. And I had to do an exercise in graduate school as if I had a company, and make a press kit and promote myself and put all my materials together, and I went, you know I want a company. And because my path has been so full of disadvantage and disappointment, I needed to have agency over something. And I had been trained from conservatory through academic life and performed as a pick-up artist (laughs), as a pick-up dancer in companies paid per show, paid per gig if it was a long tour, and people had modeled really generous leadership both in my graduate program I think especially, and then in Sara Hook who I danced for, and David Parker who I danced for, and Molly Rabinowitz who I danced for in New York, all those three really got me to thinking about what I actually wanted since this life is finite and limited, what could I live with based in some sense of continued disadvantage and disappointment. And it was to call the shots artistically and to have great friends who would support me in that. So when I formed Your Mother Dances, all the sudden I was the founder and artistic director and that's when I went, oh okay I have to make decisions for myself and my family, and for the people dancing for me, and for the people letting me commission their work, and the work I want to make. And oh I have a lot of things to think about. And that's when that came into really good, clear focus.
4. Can you discuss some of the biggest challenges you have faced as a leader in the dance field throughout the different positions you have held?
  - a. Sure! Being a woman with children. If you look at even just business, not to mention that there are good articles on academia and being a mother, most of the people that are in tenure track positions did not have children when they entered into those positions. They secured those positions, then had children. Or maybe they had one child, and they had a professional pedigree of dancing with someone very important, like Bill T. Jones or Paul Taylor. Or you know, whatever the disappearing companies are now that we look to to say, oh that's important, and that's very high pedigree of achievement. Yeah, being a woman in general because we've so glutted the field, yet we're so unrepresented all of the time. Bill T. Jones came and gave, when his company was there at the University of Illinois, and I can't remember if it was my second or third year of grad school, but he gave a talk, or kind of a question and answer thing. And I can't even remember what the young woman, she was an undergraduate student and

she got up there and asked him a question, it was kind of benign or kind of one of those always asked questions, you know what are you looking for in a dancer, I don't remember the question, but I remember parts of the answer. He looked at her and he said, you know there are, I can't remember it was some hyperbolic number, like there are thousands and tens of thousands of you: a white girl out there dancing. And I'm not sure I'm interested in anything you have to say, and I'm not sure you know what you have to say, and I'm not sure that I would resonate with anything about your experience, but you're everywhere and yet you're invisible. And that really shook me up, I thought yeah, he's kind of right. What do I have to say? And my work is very autobiographical. But you know, I entered a community after starting the company I didn't mind producing myself, but as arts organizations and monies for granting were shrinking I was coming into a community that had three or four established dance companies that were semi-funded, either fully funded or semi-funded, and then all the rules after a couple of years in Milwaukee, all the rules changed. Even the well-funded companies got the boot because you had to have a working budget of a quarter of a million dollars in order, and to be a nonprofit for the particular arts umbrella there to umbrella you, to support you, to give you substantial monies with which you could produce your work and all of that stuff. So I self-produced and I didn't have business schooling and I didn't have you know, all of this was kind of like just winging it.

5. What strategies or resources did you use to help you face those obstacles?
  - a. Strategies were that I had very generous mentors and friends. I did collaborate with other arts groups who were more secure, you know financially than I was. So we wouldn't necessarily get more pay for dancers or anything but we'd share a space, or one of our works would be shared with dancers in another company to do a big work, or, what else... Kickstarter (laughs). I did a Kickstarter, I got into the Minnesota Fringe Festival and we did crowdsourcing. It was 2010, so I think it's ubiquitous now, but it was kind of like, you know I heard about this thing and let's try it. Kickstarter was kind of a hit or miss because if you didn't raise the money that you put you down as your goal you didn't get anything. So that felt really risky and scary, but I raised the money to take my company you know for the transportation and the hotel stay and a small stipend for food. Pretty much that. I had, sadly, somebody came into my company the last year that I was in Milwaukee who was also an arts administrator, who had gotten a graduate degree in arts administration and was actively arts administrating in different cities and she ended in Milwaukee, and she was so amazing. And for the first time I had a great burlesque fundraiser, which was one of the most fun things that my company and the community came to. It was such support. And that was the first time that I ever raised all the funds beforehand to produce a show. And that took ten years. Almost, about nine years, nine years to do. So you know, if you have good people who can help you, then you can figure stuff out.

6. So you mentioned this earlier, the presence of mentorship in your career. What kind of impact did that have on your path?
  - a. Huge, because I had people saying you're great and keep going. Look what you're doing. You might feel like it's a lot of work but you did something important and you've accomplished something. You ran this company. And you might not be happy with how the money is, but you know I was working a full time academic job, raising three children, and trying to have a company all at the same time. So in my academic job, in order for me to get my full salary, I had to teach five courses a semester. So if I taught four, I got 80% of my 100% salary. So I worked at that kind of level until the last two years before I came here, and sometimes I taught five and five, which if you ask any academic it's a crazy, nutsy schedule. But I had people behind me, Sarah, David, and Molly letting me produce their work. And happy I was producing their work. And happy that I was taking their work to Minnesota, and happy I was performing their work in New York. And because I had those people behind me, and I haven't mentioned him enough, but because Luc was the Associate Artistic Director, you know I couldn't have done anything without him. So underneath all of that was this baseline of support saying, yes we should do this, we should dance together. And we should dance work that we love that might not be famous but has integrity, and is complex, is emotionally, theatrically, and technically complex. And we know that those are our values. And it might not be popular, it might not make us a million bucks, but we'll feel gratified being committed to these people, and to our company and to the work. So without Luc, not one single bit, you know he worked a full academic job and trained Alexander teachers and helped me raise the kids, and without any of that it wouldn't have been possible. Not at all.
7. Did you ever feel like you were creating a personal leadership style in your work as a leader in the dance field? If so, please describe how this happened and if it's changed at all.
  - a. I think my leadership style evolved. I'm not sure I created a signature (laughs). Umm, I really want everybody to be happy, and that's not a really good way of leading. And that's not to say that I was weak or indecisive or anything like that, I was very decisive about the work, the work I was creating and how we were going to go about setting it, performing it, costuming it, and tech-ing it. But I think when people were unhappy I was too sensitive as a leader. Meaning I questioned myself as a leader sometimes. I stopped doing that more and more as they years went on. I often think that it would've been a great structure for me to not manage everything. Like my friend who was the head administrative person who came in the last year/year and a half, to have a person like that to deal with all of the financial and those stressors and organizational things. And me to care for the artistic things. Because I think it was just a lot of stress trying to do both. And then walking out into an audience and realized that we'd programmed something in a time where there was

competition, so you look at your dancers who are working so hard for you and you can barely reimburse them their gas money. You can pay them, on a good day \$75 per show. And then you come out and you know your ticket sales are directly related to what you can do for them, and you see a low audience and I would be very affected by that. And I am a terrible actress, meaning that I could never let it roll off of me and take it personally. You know, we are working really hard and I want people to come see it so bad so I can show my appreciation for everybody who's invested. So there are things I was always very flexible and available, and always wanted to make space for everybody, which I think is a great part of my leadership. Because it allowed people who had schedules like me the ability to have this experience dancing professionally and doing not just local work, but national work. And yet at the same time, that emotional, kind of mothering side of me got very hurt when I wasn't able to fulfill the goals that I had.

8. And has that changed?
  - a. I don't know. Right now I'm taking a break, you know, I'm working on myself and with Luc as a small entity to go do performances instead of managing a company. And until I know what's happening with a permanent job, or not a permanent job, you know that was an exhausting venture, and so now I'm just regrouping and being very small and contained with what you know we know will work and isn't financially risky. So, but I would like to hope that I would learn from that experience and organize myself slightly differently.
9. Looking back at your career as a leader in the dance field, of what are you the most proud?
  - a. (Long pause) I think I'm most proud of the teacher I'm continuing to become. You know, the integration of my worlds. I guess I'm proud I survived my training, and that I'm still in the field and producing work and making work and dancing when so many of my peers, are either highly- and their mostly men (laughs)- one of my classmates is the Ballet Master of American Ballet Theatre and another is the director of a ballet company in Germany, and there are a few modern dance kids who are still working and choreographing and doing work, or who danced with successful modern dance companies, but most are retired now and most of us didn't continue in the field. I've got friends who are physics teachers and lawyers who were really really talented people. Something about our training is really really difficult. So I'm proud I survived that. I'm proud that I presented and make work even in the most stressful and trying times of schedules, time constraints, and money, even with all of that I feel proud of all of the work that I've produced and put on stage. If I wasn't ready to put something on stage, I didn't have the concert. And I feel very proud of sticking to that level of integrity as a whole. Not to have a show to have a show, not to make a dance to make a dance, but to make art and to invest in the artistic value of integrity of the work Even if it's a burlesque show. You know, that I have fully vetted every aspect of the

rehearsal process of the choreographic exploration, as deep of embodiment that my dancers could attain with connection to one another and to the work. And that that is what I did put on stage, and I feel very strongly that that's the only kind of process I want to be a part of and put my name on. And so, I'm proud of sticking to my guns that way.

10. Looking to the future of women leaders in dance, what do you anticipate? And what do you most hope to see?
  - a. Well I think there's a lot of talk about the inequity of women in leadership, and I hope those discussions continue to move something forward instead of just being discussions and nothing changes. I just think the field is changing so much, I'm not exactly sure what leadership means. Because there are fewer companies of which women can be the director and I think leadership is a creative process. And to realize that it's not just business based, but is a full creative process by which you must navigate so many forces that are beyond your control. So until women have more actual liberation in our culture, and you can be all the things that you choose to be or don't choose to be and still have access to leadership, I'm not sure what's going to change. I certainly, when I look around, I don't have access to the things women who made different choices than me do. That could just be chance, but in a kind of anecdotal look around I don't see women in dance unless they have wealthier partners, so they don't have to make their living in dance. I don't see women able to fulfill all of their potential in academic and artistic positions with multiple children. And I think that's a shame, because having children has changed my life and my relationship to my students and the world. And not that it's better or worse, it's not, you can choose what you want to do. But it's sad that because of my choices that my access is much more limited. So I would hope that all women in all circumstances in all fields, you know would be able to have more access to making a living, to supporting the families that they choose to have.
11. How would you describe your pedagogical method? Do you see this intersecting with your leadership style?
  - a. Second part of the question, yes. My pedagogy has evolved from parroting what I was told in my conservatory and some of my undergraduate stuff, to a much more thorough and examined method that takes into account the whole person. My training in somatics, Laban movement analysis and then Alexander technique have both really effected that. And it's a feminist pedagogy, a not a communal but one that considers the community of the class of which I'm a part rather than a hierarchical structure. And yes, that got me into trouble in leadership in my company, because when I needed to be a hierarch, that's in conflict with that community that you established where everybody has, not an equal voice, but can be heard. So I'm looking to create a class community, depending on the developmental stage, you know a freshman class is going to be very different than a junior/senior class is going to be different than a graduate class, where I see myself more as a facilitator of knowledge than a deliverer of

knowledge. Where everybody has a voice, and where everybody's experience and perspective is important and informs the learning that we do. I'm really interested in how people learn and I want to facilitate learning by any means necessary. And I'm not a believer in the hierarchical where I'm the deliverer of knowledge and you're the receiver, because you have knowledge that you bring. I may have more experience, I may have been studying longer, and I'm here to facilitate and open doors. So that's how they have a relationship.

12. Describe your relationships with the students in your classes.
  - a. Generally we have a good relationship I think. Sometimes because I don't come from a hierarchical standpoint it's confusing. And some people want me to tell them what to do so they don't have to be responsible for their own learning. And in those cases, there can be some questioning and some rocky waters. I haven't had too many rocky experiences because I'm very insistent and very verbal and I let them know I'm not going to do that, I'm not going to yell at you. I'm not going to force you to do things without questioning them, I am here to ask you questions too. So you're going to have to start thinking critically. And most people respond really well to that because most people enjoy the experience of being seen and feeling like they matter. So generally, we build a pretty good community. And I get a lot of positive feedback in my evaluations and I keep a lot of good relationships with my students after they graduate. And that's generally how it works.
13. Do you view yourself in a position of mentorship towards your students?
  - a. Yes.
14. In what kind of ways?
  - a. Oh you know, helping them navigate this stuff. Like where are you going to go to grad school, or do you want to dance and how are you going to do that, and you know, are you getting married and have you thought about how that's going to affect what you're doing next, and are you having a baby, and you know, I think life mentoring is the most important. But yeah, definitely.

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