



Fostering Equity

Andrea Downie (she/her)

PhD Candidate

University of Calgary | Healthy Dancer Canada

Healthy Dancer Canada



Why “Healthy Dancer Canada”?

“Names, once they are in common use, quickly become mere sounds, their etymology being buried... beneath the dust of habit.” – Salman Rushdie

Health: a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (1948)

Why do disparities exist?

“The context of people’s lives determines their health...Individuals are unlikely to be able to directly control many of the determinants of health.” – World Health Organization

“...gender, along with ethnicity, race, place of residence and socioeconomic status, continue to shape the chances people have in life.” – United Nations

Inequity

(Canadian Conference Board, 2023; Ferber & Samuels, 2018; Girard, 2020; Little, 2016; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2018 & 2022; Raphael et al, 2020)

Health & social inequities are increasing

Inequities: unfair and avoidable systemic disparities between population groups.

Indigenous peoples, racialized people,
people with disabilities, women
& other marginalized groups

- Likely to experience social exclusion
- More likely to earn lower wages & be unemployed
- Less access to health & social services
- Less influence on decisions made by governments & other institutions

Determinants of health

(Public Health Agency of Canada, 2022; Raphael et al, 2020; World Health Organization, 2023)

- Biology & genetics
- Lifestyle (behaviours & coping skills)
- Medical care & treatments
- Physical environment, housing & food
- Income, employment & working conditions
- Access to health & social supports
- Gender, culture, race & social inclusion
- Childhood experiences, education & literacy

Social determinants of health (SDH), the primary factors that shape health & life, are powerfully influenced by the social policies & programs of our institutions



Childhood experiences



Housing



Education



Social support



Family income



Employment



Our communities



Access to health services

Status quo

(Ellis et al, 2020; Klein & Huang; Little, 2016; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017)

Dominant narratives & ideologies maintain status quo

- Exacerbate individual & group traumas
- Result in health disparities + social & economic disadvantages
- Lead to inequitable policies, social structures & institutional systems
- Normalize the collective experience of oppression



“I don’t see gender/race/class...”

“A person’s life is the sum of their own choices.”

“Some disabled/unhoused people aren’t interested in working hard and improving themselves.”

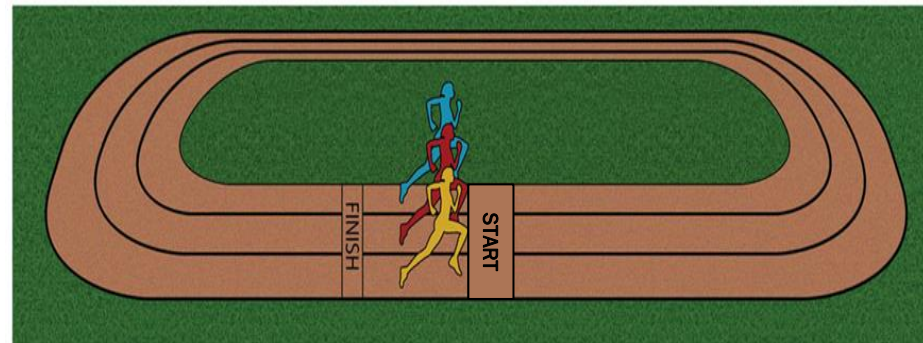
Ideology: a constructed and shared framework of thought that rationalizes existing social order.

Oppression (the –isms): discrimination backed by institutional power; the systematic devaluing, undermining, marginalizing, and disadvantaging of certain, socially constructed, identity groups in contrast to a privileged “norm.”

Problematic Western ideologies

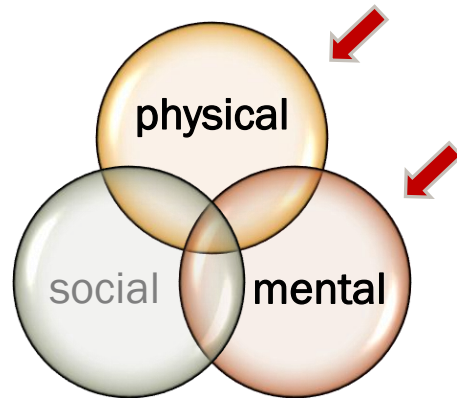
(Bartolome, 2008; Bloom, 2013 & 2017; Ellis et al, 2020; Little, 2016; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017)

Meritocracy



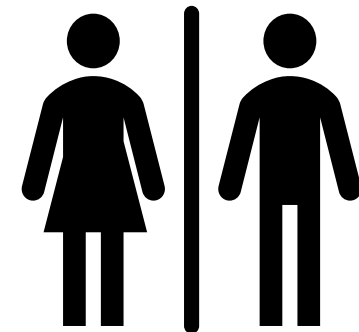
"You just have to work hard, then you'll get where you want to go."

Individualism



"Pull yourself up by your bootstraps."

Binary Ideologies



"Mind over matter"

Dancer: someone who dances
either for a job or for pleasure.

CAMBRIDGE DICTIONARY (2021)

Is the dance milieu any different?

“...we are not immune to perpetuating the very forms of oppression that angers us all.” – Rodney Diverlus

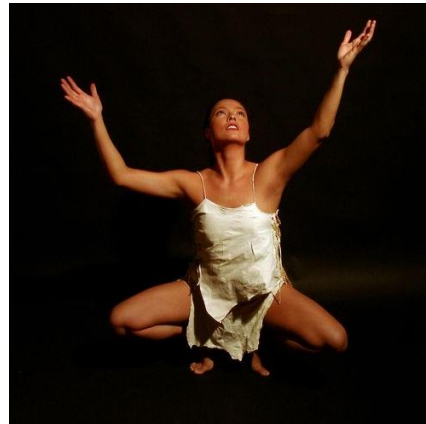
Oppression in dance

(Amin, 2016; Crowell, 2020; Downie, 2022; May, 2022; McCarthy-Brown, 2014; Walker, 2019)

Eurocentrism, racism

- Focus on dance with European roots
- Racial tacking of dancers into particular genres

Santee Smith



*“Ballet is foundational.”
(AKA “Dance from the West is best.”)*

Classism, elitism

- Socioeconomically disadvantaged get excluded
- Job instability, low (or no) pay for dancers



*“We can’t pay you, but it’s great exposure!”
(AKA “Dance doesn’t really matter.”)*

Oppression in dance

(Coates 2015 & 2018; Downie, 2022; La Fleche, 2019; Risner, 2009; Sandlos, 2020; The Butterfly Foundation, 2023; Westle, 2020; Whatley, 2007; Wyngz, 2018)

Androcentrism, sexism, cissexism, homophobia, transphobia

- Privileging of boys/men
- Objectification, hypersexualization & sexual abuse of girls & women
- Discrimination against transgender, gender nonconforming & queer dancers

Dance Awareness: No Child Exploited



“Dance is for girls.”

“Ladies will..., gentlemen will...”

Fatphobia, ableism, ageism

- High rates of disordered eating & eating disorders in dancers
- Presumption of difference
- Unaddressed architectural barriers
- Lack of qualified instruction, relevant pedagogy & performance opportunities

Older & Reckless



“The ideal dance body/line is...”

“Everybody can dance!”

So-called "Canada," a country founded
on the genocide of Indigenous peoples
(who have lived on this land 13,000
years), through the fur trade, the
Discovery, colonization, the Indian Act,
largest country in the world, the
forced relocation and assimilation,
war and persecution.
violence and oppression.

CAMBRIDGE DICTIONARY (2023)

TAREQ HADAD (2021)

CODY COYOTE (2022)

How can we address disparity and foster equity?

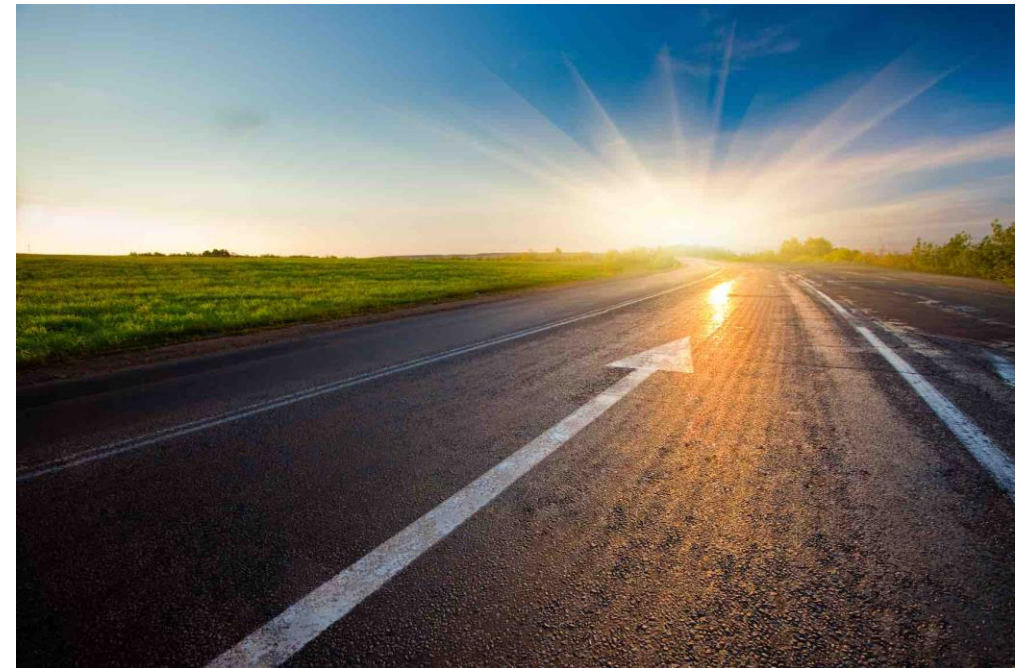
“Awareness of our situation must come before inner changes, which in turn come before changes in society. Nothing happens in the ‘real world’ unless it first happens in our heads.” – Gloria Anzaldua

Equity readiness

(Adams et al, 2016; Ayres et al, 2016; Johnson, 2015; Kelly, 2020; Kumashiro, 2002; Gorski, 2020)

The route to equity & anti-oppressive organizational cultures

- Recognize that equal access \neq equal outcomes
- Understand that oppression are complex, pervasive, embodied & hard to see
- Embrace a structural view
- Listen, learn & take action



Developing equity literacy

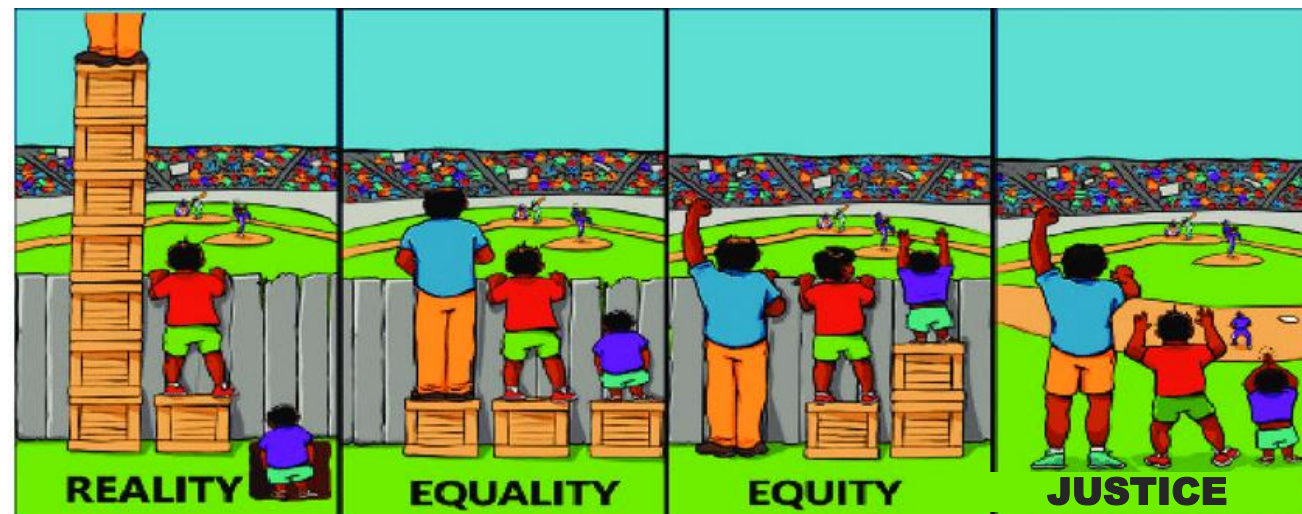
(Adams et al, 2016; Downie, 2022; Ellis et al, 2020; Gorski & Swalwell, 2015; Gorski 2016 & 2020)

A social justice framework that centres equity

- Individual & institutional change
- Eliminate bias, discrimination & oppression
- Fair distribution of access, opportunity & participation

Social justice: a concept, process, and goal that promotes respect for human rights.

Equity: the fair distribution of resources among people.



1. Recognizing inequity

Notice biases, inequities & oppressive ideologies in ourselves, our colleagues & our institutions

- Look for subtle biases
- Consider how policies & practices disadvantage
- Add context to facts
- Examine dominant narratives →
remember one size fits few

*“If they would just...
(simplistic solution)”*



2. Responding to inequity

React to biases, inequities & oppressive ideologies in the immediate-term

- Address problematic language, practices & policies → *direct confrontation* that focuses on inequities “*I noticed that the wording in the dress code/policy...*”
- Include the experiences & needs of those who are marginalized → from *nothing about us without us* to... *nothing without us*
- Diversify representation & information



Propeller Dance

3. Redressing inequity

Address the root causes of biases, inequities & oppressive ideologies with a long-term aim to rectify imbalances & exclusion

- Implement codes of ethics & conduct to guide equitable behaviour & decision making → *fix injustice, not people*
- Educate about issues of oppression → avoid confusing celebrations of diversity with equity
- Redistribute attention & funds



Jessica McMann

4. Cultivating equity

Actively nurture equitable, anti-oppressive ideologies & cultures by applying an equity lens to everything

- Ensure that equitable processes & practices inform events, programs, policies → embrace *equity ideology*
- Develop an equitable institutional culture → “shared” commitment to vision, mission & values
- Prioritize the interests & needs of marginalized groups



CCDT company

5. Sustaining equity

Maintain bias-free & anti-oppressive interactions & institutional cultures by communicating a commitment to equity & adopting a transformative approach

- Craft an accessible message of equity
 - lead with “shared” values
 - bring people into the frame
 - name the positive impact
 - focus on outcomes
- Root decisions in evidence → *evidence-informed equity*
- Measure equity



Flourishing

(Bloom; 2013 & 2017; Downie 2021 & 2022; Titchen & McCormack, 2020)

Physical

- Safe, healthy & well in one's body & material environment

Psychological

- Safe, healthy & well in oneself

Social

- Safe, healthy & well with others & in social contexts

Moral

- Safe, health & well with a guiding moral framework

Human flourishing: is experienced when people achieve beneficial, positive growth that pushes their boundaries in a range of directions.

What does being a healthy dancer in “Canada” mean to us?

“Leaders must encourage their organizations to dance to forms of music yet to be heard.” – William Bennis

(Could we dance our response?)