

DANCING MOTHERHOOD

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CHAPTER 7

ORGANIZATIONAL AND CULTURAL TRANSFORMATIONS TO BENEFIT PREGNANT PEOPLE AND MOTHERS IN DANCE

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ORGANIZATIONAL AND CULTURAL TRANSFORMATIONS TO BENEFIT PREGNANT PEOPLE AND MOTHERS IN DANCE

Mothers have martyred themselves in their children's names since the beginning of time. We have lived as if she who disappears the most, loves the most. We have been conditioned to prove our love by slowly ceasing to exist. What a terrible burden for children to bear—to know that they are the reason their mother stopped living. What a terrible burden for our daughters to bear—to know that if they choose to become mothers, this will be their fate, too. Because if we show them that being a martyr is the highest form of love, that is what they will become. They will feel obligated to love as well as their mothers loved, after all. They will believe they have permission to live only as fully as their mothers allowed themselves to live ... When we call martyrdom love we teach our children that when love begins, life ends. This is why Jung suggested: 'There is no greater burden on a child than the un-lived life of a parent.'

(Doyle 2020)

Mothers are the ultimate scapegoat for our personal and political failings, for everything that is wrong with the world, which becomes their task (unrealizable, of course) to repair.

(Rose 2018)

Introduction

If one theme rings true for pregnant people and mothers in dance, it is that the field is not made equitable, accessible, or inviting to them. Obstacles related to the way dance is (de)valued and commoditized in the United States are compounded by large-scale inequities for women, pregnant people, and mothers, overall.

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And intersectional identities further intensify and multiply bias and marginalization. Participant 43 articulates this well:

There is a huge lack of accessibility for pregnant women and moms in the dance field. Huge. Just so much bias. From the language we use with students to the accessibility of our programs and nurturing diverse perspectives, we need to nurture different ways of thinking. I'm seeing so many intersections between this conversation about motherhood and the conversation I'm hearing and trying to participate in about race. They're different issues, but in some ways, the same.

In the same way that the Black Lives Matter movement has initiated or reignited important conversations, policy change, and cultural and individual accountability in dance, similar conversations and transformations are long overdue in relation to the bias and marginalization that pregnant people and mothers face.

Leaving pregnant people and mothers out of dance spaces essentially dehumanizes dance, a form that outwardly centers the human body and portrays the human condition. When specific populations of people are absent from the stage, screen, studio, boardroom, or classroom, a reasonable assumption is that they have been erased or disinvited from these spaces. Unlike ongoing discussions in public scholarship about aging, injured, disabled, and 'imperfect' bodies and their place in dance, pregnant and mothering bodies are rarely centralized and made essential or meaningful.

The apparent challenges of working in dance with pregnant people and mothers, according to the participants in this study are, in part, relate to the fact that dance in the United States is under-resourced and diminished as a discipline of study and as a professional field. Without broad support from federal, state, and local governments and legal protections to ensure viability, dance organizations are ill-equipped to meet the needs of pregnant people and mothers, even if these organizations desired or intended to do so.

Recurring throughout participant data were pleas from mothers asking for answers, solutions, support, and change. This chapter first summarizes major issues as emergent in the data. Then, perspectives from this study's 327 participants, who all identify as pregnant women and/or mothers working in dance, reveal possibilities for improved working and mothering conditions through revised policy and law; ideas to create equitable and fair workplaces, including new models of dance organizations to encompass the needs of all; and best practices for creating opportunities for pregnant people and mothers to thrive in dance organizations and to coexist with and among supervisors and colleagues with and without children.

Summarizing the Issues

Interestingly, several participants shared similar perspectives about the field at large—about which areas of the dance field are more accessible than others and why this is so. Some of their perceptions were based on personal experiences, while

others were based on anecdotal evidence or commonly accepted conventions about different organizational structures in dance. Several participants reiterated that they felt the dance field was ‘built for men with wives at home’ (Participant 4) who could take on the unpaid domestic labor, including caregiving. Generally, they said, this perception is based on models of dance workplaces that require work on evenings and weekends, historical funding and leadership trends that favor single or childless men, and dance environments they interpret as unfriendly to children. Some participants, differentiating various areas of the field, perceived that ballet companies are the most established and, therefore, most financially stable organizations in which to work. However, participants also discussed that ballet companies are the least welcoming to pregnant people, mothers, and children because of longstanding norms of decorum and etiquette and a pervasive culture that upholds overwork and requires a specific body type. Another commonly recurring sentiment from participants is that working in a dance company, school, or organization in which their direct supervisor is a mother is preferable because, in these organizations, there is an inherent understanding of and space to accommodate the needs of pregnant people and mothers in the workplace.

Themes related to work-life integration or balance, time availability and usage, and priorities recurred throughout the data, especially in regard to the visibility of children and motherhood in the workplace:

I think there’s this impression that once you become a mother, you’re then going to prioritize your personal life when you never did before. But my argument is that we should have always been doing this. And your personal time—with or without a family—is just as valuable as mine is with my child. There’s something about the concept of work-life integration that academia, I don’t think, has been built for. But I think it goes beyond academia to the corporate world where you keep your kids out and they have nothing to do with work, which just seems short-sighted. What are we working for and why are we even teaching if we’re not trying to contribute to a larger society that includes children?

(Participant 119)

Overwhelmingly, participants working in tenure-track academic jobs referenced this particular issue most often, underlining the need for transformation of this sector of the dance workplace.

Another of the recurring themes in participant data centers on the commonality among these participants to have their first child later in their lives (as compared with the US average age of 26), and some participants having fewer children than they initially anticipated. When and why people in dance decide to have children and what effects a dance career has on a person’s ability to become a parent are complex topics and, while responses varied somewhat, a majority of the participants discussed their entry into motherhood being delayed or halted by their dance careers.

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Some people choose not to have children or feel that they cannot while also pursuing a dance career. This specific population will be a central focus of my future research. However, upon interviewing Participant 146 in this study, I discovered she had not yet experienced pregnancy nor motherhood. I believe her ‘outlier’ perspective is critical to revealing some of the underlying concerns for people in dance who consider motherhood and then determine its ‘incompatibility’ with a dance career. She mentioned never seeing motherhood ‘modeled’ by her female mentors. Often, she said, she didn’t know her mentors were mothers until many years later, so she did not gain information from them about how to make both parts of a life—dance and motherhood—work in unison. She advocated for a ‘multigenerational class structure’ in which parents bring their children and everyone learns communally, asserting, ‘Our training practices and philosophies of teaching really are laying the groundwork for this idea of compatibility of dance, career, and personal life.’ She also cited an unrealistic trope of the modern US-American mother that did not ring true to her idea of the kind of mother she could be: ‘It seems like this archetype that’s really unpleasant to me. This sort of self-sacrificing woman who doesn’t do anything else except raise her children. I know that’s not realistic, but I still have an emotional reaction to it.’ Another issue Participant 146 and others in this study have discussed is the idea that a dancer’s body has a time limit: ‘As an older dancer, every day is special to me. Every class is special because I am aware that your body doesn’t last.’ The fact that the prime years of a dancer’s physicality align with the prime years of fertility makes decisions about having children even more complicated, she continued. Nevertheless, Participant 146 described feeling a new sense of ‘hope’ because of images she sees on social media of pregnant dancers and dancing mothers who are ‘making it all work’ and she is beginning to think she can have both dance and family.

Overall, the most important factors in participant’s decisions to have children at all were having enough job stability to feel able to raise a child and witnessing others in the field managing both dance career and family life.

Creating and Revising Policy and Law

There is no denying that changes are needed in most areas of the dance field to better accommodate pregnant people and mothers. To create more inclusive environments, it is useful to turn attention to what is already working and what transformations are necessitated at all levels, including in government, organizations, communities, families, and among individuals. Before delving deeper into the participant data, it is worth noting that every participant who discussed necessary changes to accommodate pregnant people and mothers in the United States cited the need for universal or widely available and affordable childcare, paid parental and sick leave, and antidiscrimination laws or policies specific to working parents.

The negative emotional and physical repercussions of lacking or nonexistent parental leave policies are, as some participants described it, ‘heartbreaking’ and

‘devastating’ to their families and their careers, leading many to call for improved federal and organizational policies and advocacy at every level. Participant 39 asserted that this kind of advocacy ‘takes a village.’ She claimed administrators, parents of students taking dance, people who appreciate or attend arts events, elected officials, and arts professionals all bear responsibility for this kind of advocacy for improved positions, programs, and policies: ‘The arts are so embedded in everything we do that I think it’s everyone’s responsibility to advocate for change. And currently in our country, the way to do it is by voting, by advocating through various channels. I think a lot of that falls on the people who already know the value of dance and the arts’ (Participant 39).

Establishing New Dance Workplace Models and Support Strategies

Many of the participants shared ideas to resolve or better negotiate the tensions between dance workplaces and motherhood. These ideas include innovative dance organization models, employee benefits, workplace culture shifts to benefit all workers, and policy changes that value employees as whole people with professional and personal needs worthy of consideration. Participant 93, the chair of a postsecondary dance department, described that enacting new policies was one of the most critical ways to increase access and equity in dance for pregnant people and mothers in her department:

When we redid our departmental policies, we looked pretty heavily at the National Women’s Studies Association policy statement white paper on women in academia and wrote into the policy some recognition that women are often in the position of doing too much service work or that their own sense of commitment or obligation or nurturance means that they do more service work. We wrote into the document that recognition—that women in general often end up with those roles and fulfill them gladly—and at the detriment to their own research agendas. We also wrote into it that women are more likely to be interested in the intersections of women, gender, sexuality studies, or some sort of cultural studies pursuit that might not be widely recognizable to others and that those kinds of intersections of critical or scholarly interest are acceptable and applauded in dance. I think our policies and the way that you nurture young scholars going through our promotion and tenure processes—kind of familiarizing them with what’s expected in your department—can be very helpful.

The single most cited way that organizations in dance could better support working mothers in it, is for them to make free or affordable childcare widely available during various hours of the days, evenings, and weekends—hours required of people in dance professions. Participant 21, a single mother of two children working in a university tenure-track dance faculty position, described

feeling like ‘nobody gets it’—that mothers have to pay for additional childcare whenever it occurs outside of traditional school or business hours. She continues: ‘A full Saturday of work for a program audition costs a hundred bucks for me to be there. I just find it frustrating that that’s not a consideration—that there’s no sort of daycare option on campus to take care of kids during that time.’ When asked whether inviting children into workplaces could be a viable option, she said, ‘the one time I had my kids at one of those Saturday all-day auditions, it felt like it was just not a good fit. I felt unprofessional. And all of these auditioning students—they want your attention and your kids want your constant attention.’ She described that implementing full-time childcare and supplemental care for special events would go a long way to promote equity, would greatly increase the productivity of mothers in those programs, and would make those universities incredibly competitive. Participant 86 echoed these sentiments, adding that, when faced with the daunting task of finding childcare, she enlisted the help of her students, but she continued, ‘I should not have to make fast friends with my students—blurring the student-teacher boundary—in order to have access to affordable childcare. I should not have to choose between keeping my job and having a child.’ Other participants were quick to dismiss this idea that finding support informally from within institutions is a good solution. Asking people to lower their expectations of childcare and to complicate professional workplace relationship boundaries is unacceptable, according to these participants.

In addition to providing full-time and after-hours childcare, participants called on dance organizations to offer event-specific support for pregnant people and mothers attending academic conferences, intensive workshops, residencies, and dance festivals. Participant 35 expressed a need for childcare at academic conferences, claiming that ‘this support would be huge. Even if the organization [hosting the conference] could just connect people and act as a sort of network. I remember thinking when I was at my last conference, “Look at all these moms!” I’m noticing probably ten people brought their babies. I don’t know any of them, but if [the organization] had asked that question on one of their forums, we could have connected in advance and we could have all shared a babysitter.’ In response to these needs vocalized by scholar-parents, the National Dance Education Organization offered childcare during its 2022 conference, marking an important new phase of parental support in US dance organizations. In addition to expressing how professional organizations could support mothers, participants suggested that organizations offer stipends for temporary childcare needs, allow for research funding and grants to be used to cover childcare costs, and provide family housing for artistic residencies.

A need for parental and sick leave policies emerged as another major theme in participant responses. A large majority of the participants in this study were offered no paid leave benefits after the birth or adoption of their children. Those working in K-12 public education discussed parental leave experiences in interviews most often, though the reason for this is unclear. Perhaps parental leave is more commonly offered to people working in this sector of the dance field.

Follow-up research to explore this topic in-depth is needed. Even those who did benefit from some sort of leave overwhelmingly expressed displeasure or frustration at their organization's parental leave policy or the implementation of it. Participant 38, for example, a middle school dance teacher, criticized her school's policy because her leave was only eight weeks long and was unpaid: 'What new mother can afford to stop receiving paychecks, especially in public education?!' She went on to detail that if a new parent cannot return to work after eight weeks, they must start to pay for their own health insurance on top of not being paid, and are not guaranteed continued employment after taking more than 12 weeks of leave. Also, if employees have not accrued sick leave time in their positions, some employers will not guarantee even one week of unpaid leave after the birth or adoption of a child. These inhumane policies impact employees who have worked in their organization or company for less than one year and in smaller organizations that are not accountable to the standards of the US Family and Medical Leave Act.

Other issues arise when new mothers in dance are not supported during the postpartum period. Many public dance educators represent their academic area alone as the only teacher in dance. If, for example, a dance educator's baby is born during the spring, when major decisions are made about budgets for the following academic year, that dance teacher may not be provided an opportunity to advocate for the dance area and may lose future funding and other forms of support while on leave. For performers and choreographers who work on a part-time, project-based, or seasonal basis, their opportunities for future employment may be reduced or eliminated completely as their networks are diminished and their presence is unaccounted for in the postpartum period. The career risks associated with the postpartum period in dance are significant enough to cause some people in dance to retire from the field and others to 'scramble to make up for lost time and money' (Participant 44).

Postpartum needs are not always easy to predict. As Participant 118 states,

While pregnant women can lay the groundwork for life after giving birth, it is impossible to really know how having a child will affect her actual life until after the child arrives. Flexibility for the uncertainty of this time should be accounted for to ensure the well-being of the mother and child, even when inconvenient for the performing/theater world that is used to putting on a show, rain or shine.

Participant 66 agreed, asserting 'I think having more choice in your teaching schedule, maybe being lighter for the first year or so [after childbirth] could be helpful in terms of really honoring what each mother's body needs.' These comments point to a systemic need for greater infrastructure in order to best support working pregnant people and mothers in dance. Additionally, dance organization values must reflect a cultural attitude shift wherein humanity and community are of utmost importance.

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Many participants expressed that having time embedded in the workday to train their bodies would be hugely beneficial to them after having children: ‘Two hours per day would be perfect. Let’s get real. It takes a ton of work to stay in shape and so I think it is vital that women are given time to focus on a safe progression back to dance after childbirth and during motherhood.’ While dancers working in full-time companies often begin their workday with a dance class or training session, dance educators and choreographers in every sector must carve out their own time to prioritize body care and training. Typically, when teachers and choreographers have space in their work schedules, it is so they can plan their classes or rehearsals. Implementing new programs for training their bodies could be hugely important to their health and well-being during pregnancy and motherhood.

In addition to being provided time to train, participants discussed how systems of codified training could be revised to make space for pregnant people, mothers, and their children. For example, Participant 51, an Indian dance performer and teacher, argued that pregnant people should be ‘allowed to modify technique’ and to ‘wear the clothes that fit’ in dance settings rather than adapt to what can, for some, be impossible standards of training. She advocated for inviting children into training spaces for two purposes related to mentorship: 1) to provide an opportunity for teaching the visiting children proper etiquette in public dance spaces and 2) to provide an opportunity for the students and teacher of the class to exhibit focus and professionalism despite distractions around them. She claimed this is good practice for training dancers’ focus in performance, when ‘someone in the audience might be talking or coughing or sneezing.’ Participant 133, a ballet teacher in a postsecondary dance program, discussed ballet training as ‘entrenched in a past era’ and asserted that, by being present in the studio and onstage, pregnant people and mothers could ‘change the dynamic of training environments’ to be more inclusive of women and more ‘democratic’ and ‘less hierarchical.’

One of the challenges of pregnancy is that, for nine months—plus an undetermined postpartum recovery period—working mothers may not be able to put forth the same amount of effort nor with the same physicality as they usually do. For people who have multiple children, this occasional period of time in which they cannot or do not desire to work creates a situation in which the stability of their dance careers is at risk. Participant 25 described a model of employment that she felt was perfect for people during the times in their lives when they could use more flexibility such as the years in which fertility peaks:

If I was ever in charge of creating a new company model, I would do it similarly to Ballet Met because they do residencies in schools and they’re six-week teaching residencies. I could go do these residencies, or if I was pregnant and it would be too much, I wouldn’t do it. And I loved that model. It wasn’t a full year commitment like at studios. Or a full semester like at universities. For five or six weeks, I could get in and really feel fully invested and they have a childcare person here. I loved that model and I wish we saw more of those.

Another organizational model that supported these participants well, or that would have been beneficial to them, created flexible scheduling for parents with school-aged children. Since their children are only in school Mondays through Fridays, roughly between the hours of 8:00 am to 3:30 pm, and are out of school during the summer months, this flexible approach to work made dance accessible to working mothers.

Ensuring job security is another way employers could make dance workplaces more inclusive and accessible. Participant 40, an adjunct postsecondary dance faculty member and single mother to one child, described her pregnancy and early motherhood experience as ‘problematic.’ She conveyed that when her small private college discovered that she was pregnant, she was removed from the teaching schedule the following semester without being informed of this change in her employment status. The department assumed—without asking her—that she would not want to teach after having her baby. She was left without employment just as she was beginning the very expensive phase of new motherhood. Contingent and part-time faculty members as well as project-based or seasonal performers and choreographers already face challenging circumstances related to job stability. Employers who commit to pregnant people and new mothers by guaranteeing continuous employment would equalize opportunity.

Some participants discussed how human resources departments could be supportive of pregnant people by ‘regularly checking in with faculty who are expecting’ (Participant 242) and this support could extend into the postpartum period as well. Human resources could also ensure pregnancy, parental, and care-giving policy adoption and adherence and could institute additional measures such as lactation rooms and parking spaces reserved for pregnant people and new mothers. The downside to these suggestions is that many dance organizations do not have access to a human resources department so may not be equipped to implement these changes. However, even informally, measures such as these could be extremely beneficial to pregnant people and mothers in dance.

For those participants who worked for themselves, either by starting a business or by working as an independent contractor on a part-time basis, the ability to control their own schedules and set their own goals was instrumental. Participant 43 stated that navigating the personal and professional was made simpler once she decided to start a business teaching private dance lessons through virtual platforms. When faced with what she described as the ‘daunting idea of returning to dancing in a company after giving birth,’ she asserted, ‘I didn’t know whether I’d be capable of the level of subservience that I found to be expected of me in the past in performing structures, choreographer structures, and director structures. I’m not sure how it would feel to go back to the kind of obedience I was trained for.’

In addition to organizational structure and policy changes, participants called on dance employers, companies, and organizations to normalize and empower pregnant and mothering bodies in dance spaces. This could include ‘commissioning artists whose work explores motherhood,’ (Participant 155) ‘creating networks

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for mothers in dance to offer support and advice to each other,' (Participant 92), and inviting people to decide for themselves how involved they want to be during and after pregnancy. Participant 100 argued that pregnant and postpartum bodies should be present onstage, saying that 'the integrity and value of the performer should be worth the cost of adding a few snaps to a costume or a panel to a pair of pants. Buy a new costume and put that woman onstage!' Participant 19 suggested that organizations 'share publicly that they have mothers in the workplace, on stage, and in costumes leading a glamorous stage life as well as dealing with the nursing and pumping and meltdowns between shows. Don't hide what we have accomplished!' And Participant 88 asserted:

Motherhood is not typically viewed as an experience to be mined. But it's such a creative force! I mean, you literally created a human being! You have experienced creativity through your body. What more valuable experience could you have had as a dancer? I don't see that experience being brought to performances. No one's making choreography or making plans for how pregnant women can continue to be of use. Pregnancy just puts you on a shelf.

Based on the participants' fervent responses on this topic, dance organizations would benefit from featuring pregnant and mothering bodies in performance—onstage and behind the scenes. Not only is there a captive audience who is practically begging for it, but evidence from this participant pool suggests that there is much depth and nuance to discover through inviting the visibility of pregnancy and motherhood in performance (Figure 7.1).



FIGURE 7.1 Madeline Jazz Harvey, performing while pregnant with her partner.

Photography credit: Brian Buss

In addition to making more visible the bodies of pregnant people and mothers, changing the structure of production schedules could make for a more inviting, equitable, and practical environment for everyone, including mothers. Participant 111, a university dance professor, contends that ‘two weeks of tech rehearsal is completely unnecessary. I never had to do that when I was performing in professional companies. I get it that, in school and university systems, people are learning to put on shows, but faculty choreographers should not have to bear the burden of overworking to make that happen.’ This participant speaks to an issue of sustainability that pervades the dance field. Perhaps as a culture, we are coming around to the idea that putting on a show—rain or shine, no matter the amount of self-sacrifice it takes—is outdated and exploitative. In addition, the schedule of traditional performances, usually occurring on evenings and weekends, typically excludes or discourages participation from mothers who don’t have childcare after traditional business hours and who want to spend quality time with their children when they are out of school. New models of virtual productions, which largely took hold during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, provide an opportunity for greater access and equity for both performers and audience members.

The amount of time many dance professionals devote to their work is enormous and, as some of the participants argue, unnecessary, because it leaves little to no time for their personal lives: ‘Who do they think is going to raise these children if not their parents? And how can we raise them if we are required to always be at work?’ (Participant 56). Instituting a culture wherein work-life balance or integration is valued starts early, according to some dance educator participants who work with young children. Several mentioned that modeling the prioritization of a personal life starts in early dance education and should continue throughout every educational and professional phase. Making time and space for a personal life benefits everyone in dance—not only pregnant people and mothers. Many participants acknowledged that this task would require considerable reconsideration of organizational policies and annual and production calendars, but all advocated for its ultimate worth for everyone in dance to lead more balanced, enjoyable lives.

In addition to a need for funding support for childcare and travel, many of the women in this study discussed the need for higher wages in order to support their families. Participant 67 stated that ‘dance is at the bottom of the arts economy. Music teachers earn a minimum of \$100 per class or lesson. Dancers earn a minimum of \$15 in recreation departments and the common studio rate is \$25 per class. This is appalling!’ The idea that the arts and dance are undervalued and under-resourced in the United States is nothing new, yet this unique time in history presents a wonderful opportunity for renovating our values, beliefs, and approaches to work. Now, years into the COVID-19 pandemic, employees in every sector have begun to reassess their lives, the ‘great resignation’ and the concept of ‘quiet quitting’ have taken hold. Workers in every field have been demanding livable wages and benefits and are resigning in droves when those

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requests are not met. While the US grapples with ongoing economic challenges and frustrating political gridlock, the country is approaching a pivotal moment in which we can choose to elect officials who will enact better social policy to prioritize the arts, social justice, workers' rights, and basic human rights.

Childcare issues have also been exemplified during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly for mothers of young children, some of whom had to wait for more than two years for their children to be eligible for a vaccine. This pandemic era has broken open longstanding issues of equity and access, shining a spotlight on how pregnant people and mothers in dance are treated and, often, ignored or exiled. According to participants, while this time of pandemic has been exhausting and debilitating, robbing some mothers of their dance careers completely, a few bright spots have emerged from this otherwise dark time. Participant 35 stated, 'During this time of COVID, it has become incredibly obvious that those of us who have children at home are in a very different place than people who don't. And one of the silver linings of everything moving to virtual format is that that has been laid bare. Because from your living room, you can't hide the screaming toddler in the background. And, you know, that's maybe that's a good thing.' This blurring of the private and public during the pandemic opened space for colleagues at work to see and begin to understand what parents in the workforce face and how untenable their working conditions can be. While incredibly challenging for parents and non-parents alike, these moments in which work and life collided during the pandemic provide opportunities for future large-scale transformation of the field and a re-imagining of how parents fit into structures of work in dance and in every sector.

Several participants resonated with the idea that the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic unexpectedly gave rise to some positive changes. Participant 119 described how, after giving birth and then having to work and mother at home during the pandemic lockdown, she got to know both of her children in a way she would not have otherwise: 'We have seen so much of the growth in our children that we would have missed if they were in school full time.' Participant 226 asserted that she could reconnect more with her own physical practice during lockdown because 'I don't have to leave my house while teaching online. Also, the amount of free resources and virtual viewings of work made available during the pandemic have been wonderful for professional development.' Working online also provided opportunities for participants to reconsider their own pedagogical and training approaches to, as Participant 212 stated, 'give myself and my students more grace' and to reconsider 'what presence and learning mean in the classroom and workplace.' Participants described having more flexibility overall, being more present for their children during the lockdown, and, as Participant 220 described it, 'giving myself space to breathe, to live, to be a person, wife, mother, and daughter, in addition to the roles I play at work.' A few participants even credited the pandemic lockdown as the reason motherhood became possible for them. 'Because [they were] not required to be physically present at work at all hours of the night and weekends' (Participant 65)

as they usually were, they felt they suddenly had the time and bandwidth to have a family. This sentiment points to a significant and urgent need for change across dance industries to promote and support equity and access for pregnant people and working mothers.

Interpersonal and Individual Transformations and Approaches

As all dance professionals in the United States jockey for what few resources are available (i.e., funding, commissions, partnerships, gigs) and the culture of overwork continues to be stressed in dance, the mothers in this study described an added layer of tension in dance workplaces between them and their childfree peers. Some believe this tension relates to fairness and equity. For example, some participants described their colleagues as hostile because of the perception that mothers were provided more time off than were childfree employees. According to these participants, they ‘legitimately have more responsibilities than someone without kids’ (Participant 212). Participant 95 contended that ‘we [mothers] spend some of these “days off” caring for sick children ... and taking them to medical appointments.’ The idea that mothers are not working when they are with their children is ludicrous, according to the participants, and they expressed wishing that their colleagues could understand the pressures they face as working mothers. This misperception presents an opportunity for dance organizations to educate all employees and to operate in a clear, transparent manner with equitable policies and practices in place. Equity is not the same as equality, so providing information for childfree employees about creating equitable workplaces for parents could help bridge this divide.

Another important way to absolve tensions around workload equality and work-life integration is for dance organizations to make responsible choices for protecting their employees’ well-being and managing reasonable expectations of them. Participant 211 asks,

How do we get to a place where we’re not pointing fingers at each other? I mean, I shouldn’t expect my colleagues without children to work more hours than I do. No way. Where do those hours come from? Does that mean that I should expect them to have something else in their life that is equivalent to a child? I feel like there needs to be more work-life balance for everyone. Having kids was like a natural antidote to the insanity of my career before having children that was not sustainable.

In addition to the misperception that mothers aren’t pulling their weight in the dance workplace, some participants cited a ‘feminist backlash’ from childfree peers and supervisors who take a stance akin to: ‘Well, you chose to have kids and I didn’t, so that work conflict, physical limitation, unavailability, or sick

day is not my problem and you should be constantly working' (Participant 118). Participant 21 articulates this tension well:

I don't know how you can work so much and have kids. I just think that's insane. Before I had kids, I used to work 24/7, always made everything happen, worked many, many all-nighters, trying to get productions and grants and all kinds of stuff out. And now I'm just not willing to do that. These kids are bad-ass and I'm so happy that I have them. And if you don't get that, I'm sorry, but, you know, these little humans are going to change the world. So, this work that I do here as a mother is important. The idea that feminism is only equated with the workplace and that being radical-making radical progressive decisions—only involves career, is myopic.

This participant's attention to the paradox of modern feminism as being strongly associated with patriarchal standards of the workplace and the stereotypical 'ideal worker' is astute. Her perspective points to larger cultural norms that uphold this fallacy, making necessary broad systemic reconfigurations to rehumanize contemporary feminism essential. Additionally, benefits offered to any population should be offered to all in some form or another, so that no one population is privileged over another. To that end, participants' calls for higher wages, affordable care options, paid time off and leave time, reduced and flexible work hours, healthcare and retirement benefits, and paid time for training should be applied to all employees, not just pregnant people and mothers.

According to participants, one of the best ways to integrate parents and child-free colleagues in an inclusive dance workplace is to develop an organizational policy that is inviting to children in workspaces such as studios, theaters, and offices. Some participants described the challenge of taking a class or rehearsing with the noise and space distractions of children as 'just real life. No different than the sound of traffic going by. We should not relegate our children to dark corners of society because they are inconvenient to us' (Participant 170). Of course, because dance can be physically strenuous and dancers move with speed and force, issues of safety arise if environments are not controlled. Children and dancers could be injured if sharing certain spaces together. As an idea to mediate this concern, participants discussed on-site childcare as being incredibly helpful. In this model, children may be in a studio with their mothers but are kept safe by a sitter who is in the space, too, monitoring the sound and movement of the children. Even informal policies from dance educators inviting mothers to bring children to class were cited as helpful in strengthening relationships between dancing mothers and their childfree peers.

Benefits specifically for working mothers can go a long way toward demonstrating an organizational commitment to equity and provide the support needed for working mothers to propel their work forward and, by default, ensure greater career sustainability and employee retention. Childcare coverage was

cited as a critical need by almost every participant, and other benefits could provide mothers with a more equitable, safe, and inviting environment in which they could better focus on professional goals and meet expectations. For example, Participant 39, a K-12 public dance educator, described not being provided time nor adequate facilities for pumping breastmilk during the workday after the birth of her two children:

We don't have a scheduled break time. When one class ends, the next one is supposed to be starting. You don't have time to pump or even use the restroom in between unless you're tagging somebody else out to cover your class. And being the only one in the school that's a dance teacher has really affected what I could and couldn't do because no one else could come in and cover the class like they might for a math or science class—subject areas that have multiple teachers working together.

Providing breaks throughout the day and class coverage options for public school dance educators, she claimed, would have allowed her to breastfeed her babies longer and would have lessened her stress level in early motherhood. Participant 43 relayed a positive experience she had in early motherhood working for a well-known modern dance company which could provide helpful ideas for other company directors:

The company got in touch ahead of time before the project started and were like, 'We don't know what breastfeeding mothers need. What do you need? How often do you need a break and how long does it need to be?' And they scheduled around my needs. It helped that the project was sort of scene-based because it was for a film. And, you know, it was easier to kind of truncate the rehearsals for a project like that. But just being asked what I needed without prompting was so meaningful to me.

Participant 21, who pursued a tenure-track job specifically so that she would feel stable enough to become a parent, asserted that tuition benefits for dependents would be very helpful since 'most dance faculty are paying off their own student loans and cannot afford to save for their kids' college education.' Participant 66 agreed, adding that the ability to work from home during the pandemic was a 'game-changer' in terms of 'establishing a healthy work-life balance.'

Many participants shared that one of the best sources of support they experienced was other people with children—via informal mentorship, friendships, support groups, or therapy experiences. These supportive friends and colleagues provided solidarity, advice, and practical help to the participants in their daily lives of working and mothering. If organizations and companies could provide access to these support structures—through employer-provided therapy, support groups, or targeted mentorship approaches—mothers would not have to struggle to find or, in some cases, pay for these resources.

Based on data gathered from this pool of participants, it is clear that individual approaches and responses to pregnancy and motherhood vary widely.

As the participants described growing in their motherhood journey, some became more direct and vocal about their needs and took more initiative in requesting support and/or taking action to integrate the professional and personal parts of themselves. Many participants described the perceived ‘scarcity mentality’ of the dance field as keeping them silent, asserting, ‘We are churning out master’s degree students at a rate that is 100 times higher than the available jobs. That is the same in the professional dance world as well. We’re turning out BFA students at a rate far, far higher than the number of dance jobs available’ (Participant 49). According to participants, this creates an environment in which ‘dancers don’t feel empowered to speak up for themselves. They feel lucky just to have any job,’ (Participant 92) so are hesitant to vocalize or make known any organizational mistreatment or inequity. However, some noted that recent scholarship and journalism which speaks to these issues has helped them recognize biases and marginalization and to advocate for themselves and others. For example, Participant 35 noticed that ‘some people take their kids to rehearsals and some people don’t. I’ve been somebody who has not taken my son to rehearsal. I would like to do that more and integrate those two parts of my life. I’ve kept them very separate, but I am curious about more ways that these two parts of my life can intertwine.’

Dance organizations and workplaces should share the responsibility of training every employee about how to work effectively with colleagues who have children. Helping childfree employees to understand the specific complexities of being a working parent could go a long way toward developing more positive and proactive workplaces. For example, many parents with school-aged children must be present at school pickup in the three-o’clock hour every weekday, so avoiding this hour of the day as a standing meeting time or for scheduling a mother to teach would help parents juggle this task. Participant 182 endorsed the idea of ‘showing compassion to colleagues at work. Many of my colleagues have partners who are involved with raising their children. I do not. I was, and still am, “voluntold” to do things because people make assumptions about my time.’ According to Participant 96,

Given that dance is such a physical job, I probably would have felt a lot better during pregnancy if I was confident that the people who were around me knew how to react to a medical emergency. If they had some concept of what kinds of things might happen to a pregnant person in a relatively high-risk environment in terms of exercising. If I fainted, would they have any idea what to do beyond call my mom? Maybe having standards, such as: If you’re running a company, you need to have CPR and first aid and training.

(Participant 96)

One of the most important actions that pregnant people and mothers in dance can take, according to multiple participants, is to model the behaviors and workplace interactions they wish to experience themselves. Now, as a disclaimer, the notion that pregnant people and mothers should bear the full weight of responsibility for the inequities they themselves experience in their workplaces is unacceptable. However, the participants offer several ideas and suggestions to bolster

understanding, respect, and empathy between colleagues with and without children. Participant 43, for example, asserted,

I ended up just sort of being the model for what to do while you're pregnant and in postpartum. I work in a university, and I would just bring my baby to meetings with me. I would breastfeed in the meetings. At first, it was uncomfortable and, depending on who was in the meetings, very uncomfortable. But I thought, "you know, if no one else is going to do this, this is never going to be normalized."

Participant 66 described changing the way she communicated after having a child in order to model honoring her colleagues' and her own personal lives and schedules, saying that 'sometimes the only time I can send that email is at 3:00 in the morning.' She stated that she now includes a message in her automated signature line that encourages colleagues to respond only when they have returned to their own working time period.

Prioritizing a new hierarchy of tasks and needs and saying 'no' were referenced by participants as key to their success in juggling their personal and private lives. Learning how to decline offers and say 'no' to colleagues and supervisors was especially difficult for many of them. Participant 66, a postsecondary dance faculty member who was nearing her tenure bid, stated, 'There's more I would like to say "no" to. Whether it's real or perceived, that threat of either being denied tenure or the sort of power dynamic that exists in academia ... I think it's something that I project onto myself more than really exists. However, I think that fear often makes me choose not saying "no" when I want to.'

On a larger scale, a change in mindset 'that dance careers are improved and enriched by motherhood—that "gaps" around maternity do not mean lower quality work—would sure make for the inclusive environments that so many dance departments and companies are working to uphold' (Participant 146). This philosophy, participants stated, would benefit all employees, not just parents. This is because it implies that having a full life and being a whole person can include priorities that exist outside of the bounds of work. Having the freedom to explore outside interests and develop relationships outside of dance—including, but not limited to spouses, partners, and children—could improve the quality of life for all dance professionals.

Making clear the expectations of all workers—parents and non-parents—is one strategy companies and organizations could prioritize. While participants who brought this idea forward most often were those holding tenure-track postsecondary dance faculty positions, making expectations clear would benefit mothers in every sector of the dance workplace. Participant 66 asked, 'How much is enough to achieve tenure?' and stressed that the ambiguity of service and research work, in particular, was frustrating and prevented her from being able to create an ideal relationship between work and life. She went on to contend that 'equal is sometimes inequitable' and that organizations, colleagues, and

supervisors could reassess employees' expectations once they become mothers. For example, she said, mother-employees could potentially be assigned to work primarily in their home communities rather than traveling extensively in order to accommodate the financial, health, and childcare needs.

Conclusion

Many of the women in this study discussed advocating for themselves in order to educate colleagues and supervisors, to negotiate their needs, and to receive the compensation, benefits, and opportunities they deserved. While I do not uphold the notion that the responsibility lies solely with pregnant people and mothers to express their needs in the workplace, it seems clear from the participants' responses and from my own experiences that mothers are their own best advocates. Their lived experience provides a rich source of anecdotal information from which organizations and businesses can draw in order to transform their workplaces and to establish equitable practices and policies. When mothers express their needs, it is critical that organizations be willing to actively listen and to make changes to uphold the values of equity, access, inclusion, and equality in the dance workplace. Further, federal, state, and local governments have a responsibility to validate mothers' experiences and better meet their needs by enacting legislation to specifically support pregnant people and mothers in all workplaces. New legislation would also have the effect of legitimizing the significant economic impact and importance of the dance sector in the United States. Finally, it is imperative that individuals in dance lean into the possibilities for dance to become a more communal, just, humane, loving space for all.

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