

Paradoxes to Intersections—Discovering the Invitations  
as a Bharata-Nrityam Teacher in the United States

by

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## ABSTRACT

The Bharata-Natyam student in the United States (US) is challenged by how to effectively translate their dance into contemporary lived experiences. Research reveals that this dilemma is sometimes addressed by transplanting learnt choreographies into a new theme, sometimes adding verbal text to connect learnt choreography to contemporary issues, or sometimes simply giving up the dance form. Years of training in prevalent Bharata-Natyam education methods make students proficient in re-producing choreography but leave them without the tools to create. This is due to emphasis on guarding traditions and leaving interpretation for later stages that never arrive or get interrupted, because students leave their spaces of Indian-ness for college or a job.

This work considers how Bharata-Natyam teachers in the US might support students in finding agency in their dance practice, using it to explore their lived experiences outside dance class, and engaging meaningfully with it beyond the Indian diaspora. The desire for agency is not a discarding of tradition; rather, it is a desire to dance better. This work reinforces the ancient Indian tradition of inquiry to seek knowledge by implementing the principles of Bharata-Nrityam, somatics and engaged pedagogy through the use of creative tools. This took place in three stages: (i) lessons in the Bharata-Nrityam studio, (ii) making *Kriti* with non-Bharata-Natyam dancers, and (iii) designing a collaborative action dance project between senior Bharata-Natyam students and community partners who are survivors of sexual/domestic violence.

The results, in each case, demonstrated that the use of creative tools based in the principles above enriched the teaching-learning process through deeper investigation and greater investment for both student *and* teacher. Students in the early stages of learning thrived, while senior students expressed that having these tools earlier would have been valuable to their practice. These results suggest that when Bharata-Natyam education in the US is refocused through the lenses of Bharata-Nrityam, somatics and engaged pedagogy, teachers can access tools to empower their students in their practice of Bharata-Natyam not only within the context of the Indian diaspora but also beyond.

## DEDICATION

श्री गुरुभ्यो नमः

Naini, championing dance in my life with love & understanding

Prasanna & Kritin, for their patience & quiet attention

Rabeya without whose wisdom, i could not live up to my दिदि-ness

Ma & Baba, Dimma & Thamma, who planted the seeds long ago

Amma, who asks about my dance before her son's well-being

Teachers, who have brought me to this moment, & students, who take me to the next

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  - Swami Ranganathananda, ever-present in his example of tireless striving, faith in humanity & unconditional love that nurtured and spurred me on
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- Magical cohort—Coley Curry, Elisa Reed, Lawrence Fung & Hannah Thomas
- Students at Dansense~Nrtyabodha over the last 20 years
- Collaborators—in *Kriti* (p. 98) & LVHD (p. 119), & Doreen Nicholas; musicians G. Ganesan, R. Sai, G. Nataraj, & R. Selvaprasad—who brought joy to *Kriti*
- Friends & teachers—N. Srikanth and Aswathy Nair, Roshmi Bandhyopadhyay, Dr. Gayatri Kannan, Mahati Kannan, Stage Sanchaar co-artists, Dr. Aruna Viswadoss & Nanda Datta, whose wonder and love of dance arts continually inspire me
- Fellow Bharata-Natyam teachers in the US, who have generously shared their discoveries and goals, & survey participants

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES.....	vi
LIST OF FIGURES.....	vii
PREFACE.....	ix
INTRODUCTION.....	1
What is Bharata-Natyam? .....	1
Bharata-Nrityam, Pushing the Boundaries.....	5
Bharata-Natyam Education in the US.....	8
Evolving Praxis.....	9
PEDAGOGICAL INTENT.....	12
Guiding Principles.....	12
Back to Basics.....	16
Intent.....	17
CHOREOGRAPHIC INTENT.....	20
Guiding Principles.....	20
Intent.....	22
METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW.....	24
Research Questions.....	24
Assumptions.....	25
Delimitations & Limitations.....	27
Methodology.....	29
PROCESS.....	31
Dansense~Nrtyabodha Student Lessons.....	31
<i>Kriti</i> .....	36

	Page
<i>Look into my Voice, Hear my Dance</i> (LVHD) .....	41
The Idea, Participants and Location.....	41
The Process.....	43
Initial Observations.....	54
Success.....	69
CONCLUSION.....	75
Significance of Work.....	75
Collaborative Action Dance Project (CADP) .....	78
Final Reflections.....	79
REFERENCES.....	85
APPENDICES	
A—DANSENSE~NRTYABODHA LESSONS.....	90
B— <i>KRITI</i> INTRODUCTION & PARTICIPANTS.....	95
C—IRB PROTOCOL APPROVALS.....	97
D—IRB-APPROVED SURVEY FORMS.....	102
E—LVHD WORKSHOP FORMS.....	108
F—DANCER WORKSHOPPING GRIDS.....	112
G—LVHD PUBLICITY FLYER, BROCHURE, POSTERS.....	115
H—LVHD FINAL REFLECTIONS, RESPONSE FORM DATA.....	126
I—DEFINITIONS.....	130

## LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Initial Survey Results for “Why Learn Bharata-Natyam?” .....	25
2. Selected Reflections from LVHD Response Forms.....	71
3. Participant Reflections, Post-LVHD.....	72
4. Rasa Workshop.....	91
5. <i>What if...</i> for Sita.....	93

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1 Why do you teach Bharata-Natyam? Responses.....	10
2 Mapping my Pedagogical Thought.....	12
3 Structure 1: Authority of Tradition (created by author, October 23, 2019).....	18
4 Structure 2: Agency in Tradition (created by author, October 23, 2019).....	18
5 Making a Story with hastas (November 10, 2019) .....	31
6 Meaning-Making from Ancient Stories for Kriti (January, 2019).....	37
7 Kriti Performance (photo by Lawrence Fung, September 22, 2019).....	39
8 LVHD Participants & Volunteers (photo by Ri Lindegren, March 1, 2020).....	41
9 Video Abstractions, 1st Dancer Workshop.....	44
10 First Collaboration Meeting (photos by Coley Curry, November 24, 2019).....	46
11 Witnessing& Listening, Partner Exchange (November 24, 2019).....	47
12 Space Set-Up for LVHD (photo by Ri Lindegren, March 1, 2020).....	51
13 Survivor Art Donation to LVHD (photo by Ri Lindegren, March 1, 2020).....	53
14 LVHD Poem).....	54
15 Holding Hands and Joining Hearts (photo by Ziqian Zhou, February 1, 2020).....	56
16 Being Silenced (photo by Coley Curry, March 1, 2020).....	58
17 A Safe Space (photo by Ri Lindegren, February 1, 2020.....	60
18 Do You Love Me? (photo by Coley Curry, February 29, 2020) .....	61
19 Torn Down and Surviving (photo by Ziqian Zhou, February 1, 2020) .....	64
20 Delving Deeper (photo by Coley Curry, February 29, 2020) .....	65
21 Across the Distance (photo by Ri Lindegren, March 1, 2020) .....	68
22 Word Cloud from LVHD Responses.....	70
F1 Pratyusha—Word Score/Thinking Grid.....	113



Figure	Page
F2 Shreya—Word Score/Thinking Grid.....	113
F3 Niveditha—Word Score/Thinking Grid.....	114
F4 Nivedita—Word Score/Thinking Grid.....	114
G1 LVHD Flyer.....	116
G2a LVHD Brochure--Outside.....	117
G2b LVHD Brochure--Inside.....	118
G3 Pratyusha-Melissa Process Poster.....	119
G4 Kate Process Poster.....	120
G5 Nivedita-Blake Process Poster.....	121
G6 Leslie Process Poster.....	122
G7 Niveditha-Sunshine Ray Process Poster.....	123
G8 Manasi Process Poster.....	124
G9 Shreya-Gretchen Process Poster.....	125
H1 LVHD Response Form Data—Q3.....	127
H2 LVHD Response Form Data—Gender.....	128
H3 LVHD Response Form Data—Cultural Identity.....	128
H4 LVHD Response Form Data—Tag Cloud.....	129

## Preface

Tradition is a *box of chocolates*<sup>1</sup>—full of the fruit of foundational expertise but also full of exciting innovations. Growing up in the Indian diaspora in the United States (US), however, tradition can pose a unique dilemma, where it is commonly perceived as a set of rituals and customs that must be preserved and can be showcased outside the diaspora in the dominant culture. This dilemma creates challenges for the Bharata-Natyam student in the US who may begin dance lessons in order to maintain a connection to the Indian culture, yet upon advancing further in the lessons and tasting the creative potential of the art, becomes bound by the same notion of tradition. My own experience as such a student and now as a teacher has led me to autoethnographic investigations into what tradition means and its nature as static or dynamic. While i<sup>2</sup> intuitively understood tradition as the latter, its relation to my dance practice became clear with explorations outside the normative ideas of tradition through Bharata-Nrityam pedagogy, somatic principles and engaged pedagogy, all of which will be explicated in the following chapters. These gave rise to a reflexive teaching practice that (i) supports agency in the Bharata-Natyam student’s practice by making connections to their own lived experiences, (ii) offers opportunities for the student to use that voice in engaging with the community in the diaspora and beyond, and (iii) motivates the student to collaborate with community members and create spaces of transformation. Three decades of investigation have led me to now understand that tradition is not merely dynamic, but incredibly versatile—giving strength in its foundations and empowerment

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<sup>1</sup> Phrase adopted from Prof. Eileen Standley, who uses it to introduce new material in her classes.

<sup>2</sup> I adopted the practice of not capitalizing the pronoun “i” in the middle of a sentence in the 1980s as a teenager, upon consideration of my grandmother’s amused observation in a letter to me that it is only capitalized and so frequently used in the English language. When quoting others in this document, i retain their capitalization of the pronoun.

to those who dive to new depths with its guidance (not its impositions) and emerge with discoveries that both excite and reinforce. The following pages contextualize the research, delineate the process, and touch upon the knowledge gained from the experiences. Several words and phrases that are key and/or originate in languages other than English appear in this document. These are defined or clarified when they first appear, and, for convenience of reading and subsequent reference, they are also listed in Appendix I (Definitions) on pp. 133-136.

## Introduction

### What is Bharata-Natyam?

Bharata-Natyam was known as Sadir before the twentieth century and has been nurtured in the peninsula of southern India, mostly in the regional (*deśi*) style of Tamil culture. Its origins also lie in the common classical (*mārgi*) style of the *Natyashastra*,<sup>3</sup> and the *Abhinayadarpanam*.<sup>4</sup> Yet, Dr. Padma Subrahmanyam, senior dancer and scholar, calls it a “contemporary dance” (Subrahmanyam 1979, 75). While there is overwhelming literary, architectural and epigraphical evidence to testify to its antiquity, Bharata-Natyam, in its present form, is just over two hundred years old. Through the centuries in India, temple dance, as Bharata-Natyam was considered, enjoyed high status as the most pleasing form of worship (Sarabhai 1981, 1) in the temples and benefitted from royal patronage (Kramrisch 1983; Sarabhai, 7, 18; Chatterjea 1996, 80; Kothari 2000, 30-31; O’Shea 2007). Then, amidst political chaos in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Subrahmanyam points out that Bharata-Natyam evolved from the Sadir dance patronized by the Thanjavur (formerly Tanjore) Royal Court into the structure we see in dance classes and on stage today (Subrahmanyam, 87). The foundation for today’s Bharata-Natyam format is grounded in the Thanjavur Court of the late eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries, which patronized the arts, especially dance, even as Victorian imperialism began dictating moral bans on temple and court dancing. Around this time the Thanjavur Quartet, four brothers who were musicians and dancers at the royal courts of Thanjavur and Travancore, developed the systematic foundation that one sees in contemporary Bharata-Natyam as a solo dance form.

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<sup>3</sup> Earliest (c. 800BCE-c. 500CE) extant Sanskrit treatise on Indian dance, drama and music (Definitions, p.134)

<sup>4</sup> (c. 500 BCE-c. 500CE) Sanskrit text on dance technique (Definitions, p. 133)

At its height, the Thanjavur court supported over 400 dancers, their gurus, musicians and children as part of the temple and its community. The dance arts were not just supported by the royal courts, but were also respected as a scholarly pursuit as evidenced by texts such as the *Balarama Bharatam* (used as primer in contemporary Bharata-Natyam to this day), written by Karthika Thirunal Bala Rama Varma, the Maharaja of Travancore (1758-1798 C.E.). The king not only wrote this text as a compilation of previous textual knowledge but also as an adaptation to contemporary contexts of his time. The knowledgeable practitioner or *devadasi* (hereditary female dancer and courtesan in a Hindu temple) was “married” to the temple deity. “Devadasis possessed a degree of social agency... They lived in quasi-matrilineal communities, had nonconjugal sexual relationships with upper-caste men, and were literate when most South Indian women were not” (Soneji 2012, 3). Devadasis and their families were respected members of the community. However, colonial oppression diminished the power of the royal courts and temples by depleting resources and imposing Victorian morals, changing the culture of devadasis forever. Criminalizing their lifestyles, moral activists who subscribed to the Victorian construction of devadasis as “superstitious prostitutes” finally eradicated the devadasi community’s social, religious and artistic roles through the Madras Devadasi Act of 1947 (O’Shea 1998, Soneji 2012).

In the 1920s, Bharata-Natyam, was brought out of the temple as a proscenium art by dancers whom O’Shea (1998) terms “reconstructivists.” In reconstructing the narrative of the dance, they sought to sanitize the dance form, which had belonged to “fallen women.” This was when the name Sadir became *Bharata-Natyam*, referring to *Bharata*, the author of the *Natyashastra*, thus, “legitimizing” it as ancient and clean, by forging a temporal distance from the devadasis. This legitimization may have played a role in preserving some version of Sadir, but it has also been criticized as an

appropriation away from devadasis, the original artists, that has resulted in an exclusivity in how it is practiced today. While some devadasi descendants continued dancing and were even being presented on stage, the systemic structures favored the reconstructivists over the traditional artists. Over the past thirty years, scholars and practitioners have begun to further analyze this legitimizing through intersectional considerations of patriarchy, orientalism, critical feminist theory and Michel Foucault's discourse (Srinivasan 1985; Allen 1997; Coorlawala 1996, 2004; Chakravorty 2000; Lopez y Royo 2003; Chakravorty and Maskin 2004; Meduri 2008; Soneji 2012).

In the *Natyashastra*, Bharata details both the purpose of dance and its technique. He refers to the *Natyashastra* as a fifth Veda<sup>5</sup> (Byrski 1974; Sarabhai 1981; Bharata, Abhinavagupta and Nagar 1994; Bharata Muni and Ghosh 1995; Schwarz 2004) leaving no room for doubt as to the divine origins of the treatise and the knowledge it holds. He acknowledges that dance may fulfill the need for entertainment, but that its true goal is *rasa* (literally: juice, flavor, nectar, essence), “an aesthetic experience” that is akin to the bliss of the enlightened, liberated soul” (Schwarz 2004, 15). It is widely understood that Bharata-Natyam “could perhaps be called temple art, not [only] because it was part of the temple, but because its aim was the perfection of spiritual identification,” says senior dancer Mrinalini Sarabhai in her popular book on Bharata-Natyam (15). “The reference of ‘ancient’ provides a contextual foundation for Bharata-Natyam’s modern existence” (Mandala 2020), since it has been revived in the last century by advocates who “codified, textualized and canonized [it, elevating it] to classical status” (Chakravorty 2000, 113). The result is a perception of Bharata-Natyam “as an important expression of cultural identity, especially for diasporic Indians” (Meduri 1995).

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<sup>5</sup> see Definitions p.136

Since this recent codification in the early 1900s, Bharata-Natyam training in India follows a generally-accepted curriculum of study in a *guru-shishya* or teacher-disciple model of one-on-one training. Changes in financial support of dance and its education from the patronage of a wealthy individual to capitalist structures also shifted the traditional one-on-one imparting of Bharata-Natyam to that of a small dance school structure (Basavarajaiah 2016; Chatterjea 1996), usually in the teacher's home or a public space, such as a school or temple. Although the progression of lessons is generally the same across schools, there are variations in technique, associated with the temple, court and/or region to which a Bharata-Natyam teacher belonged. These are called *baanis*, or styles of Bharata-Natyam that have been passed down from teacher to teacher. This lineage/tradition of teachers holds a prominent place in many training centers of Bharata-Natyam, and the students become fluent in the knowledge of who their teachers are, their teachers' teachers and so on (Kothari; Prickett 2007; Banerjee 2010). This practice also encourages a loyalty to the style and teacher lineage, where teachers might frown upon their students going to learn from a teacher of another *baani*, and where students might be reticent in doing so. This single-*baani* tendency is also changing in India with "small schools...or independent artists...reconfiguring their identities into non-profit companies" (Basavarajaiah, 112) that work with dance artists from various Bharata-Natyam styles.

The Bharata-Natyam curriculum structure itself is similar both in India and in the US, as delineated below. The prevalent training in Bharata-Natyam follows a simplified model of the Indian teacher-disciple tradition. In this method, a teacher begins by teaching the student a prayer to Mother Earth to be performed before and after any dance session. The student is then taught the *adavus* (basic steps of leg and feet actions) that are mostly executed in the characteristic *araimandi* (knees bent, thighs and

feet turned out) posture. These leg and feet actions are combined with arm movements and hand gestures into over eighty *adavu* permutations, depending on the teacher. Emphasis is placed on posture, symmetry and rhythm. The student goes on to learn *abhinaya* (the art of communication) using hand gestures and their prescribed meanings and facial expressions and a traditional repertoire of set choreography, which could lead to a *début* solo performance (usually before graduating from high school in the US). Due to the nature of the way Bharata-Natyam is taught in teacher-disciple mode and in informal settings, a course syllabus is not commonly seen, though some formal institutions do have them.

### Bharata-Nrityam, Pushing the Boundaries

While Bharata-Natyam has evolved into a recognizable structured art, it continues to undergo change as some practitioners seek to preserve its contemporary classical form, others seek to stretch or cross over the boundaries, and still others seek to rediscover what it may have looked like millennia ago.

Among those in the last category, Dr. Padma Subrahmanyam is arguably the most notable. During her doctoral research of sculptures at 3 temples in South India (constructed between the tenth-fifteenth centuries CE), she discovered that the sculptures which showed the 108 *karanas*, and which had been accepted as static poses till then, were actually frozen moments in 108 movement *sequences* or phrases prescribed in the *Natyashastra*. Karana was a movement sequence, not a static pose. Embracing her unique role as both Bharata-Natyam practitioner and scholar, Dr. Padma reconstructed the 108 sequences through meticulous research and embodiment of the *Natyashastra* text. Her research was further validated when scholar Dr. Alessandra Iyer (1998) identified 62 karana sculptures at Indian-influenced Prambanan



temple in Indonesia (ninth century CE) and approached Dr. Padma with her pictures from there for further examination. The frozen movements in Prambanan were different from those in the Indian temples but were present in the sequences that Dr. Padma had reconstructed. Her practical reconstruction of dance—beginning with body part isolations to compounded leg and arm movements and finally to the *karanas*—led to the birth of Bharata-Nrityam, an incorporation of the *karana* technique into the prevalent style of Bharata-Natyam.

Dr. Padma’s practical reconstruction of dance based on the *Natyashastra* and its incorporation into the prevalent style of Bharata-Natyam was a bold move that met with severe criticism. Dr. Padma was questioning what was “traditional,” as well as what was deemed “acceptable” by patriarchal and colonized systems. In response, she argued that she was more “traditional” than the “traditionalists” who criticized her, because she was looking for guidance from the source rather than dictates of the recent past. She discarded the nominative shell of Bharata-Natyam and chose to call her dance Bharata-Nrityam. As Dr. Padma reasons,

“Natyā<sup>6</sup> is too general a term which means the entire theater art. The type of dance that we do is more nrityā<sup>7</sup> in character because it is representational dance and it doesn’t have dialogues. So, I prefer to use a more authentic term for the dance that I do. The second reason for the change of term is, I didn’t want my audience to get confused because I didn’t want them to expect me to perform just something based on the tradition of the last two or three centuries... I deviated from the norms of the last two centuries because I started using products of the research that I’m doing in my own dance.” (Menon 1998)

From Janet O’Shea’s comprehensive discussion of Bharata-Natyam (2007), there are several dancers in the recent past to today, both in India and in the diaspora, who are also crossing boundaries to find ways of translating their Bharata-Natyam vocabulary

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<sup>6</sup> Defined as theater arts, comprised of dance, drama and music

<sup>7</sup> Commonly understood as representational dance that conveys a story/idea, comprised of *nritta* (non-representational dance) and *bhava* (emotions, feelings)

into themes significant in their lived experiences. Among these dancers are the late Chandralekha in India (whose work includes the celebration of the body to political resistance through movement that generates energy not expends it) and Shobana Jeyasingh in the U.K. (whose current works examine the 1918 Spanish Flu pandemic and the shared history of two men rooted in colonial migration and plantation labor).

All of the dancers mentioned thus far are women. And while Bharata-Natyam is practiced by both women and men, the latter still “remain in the minority and are celebrated for their exceptional status” (O’Shea, 104). As it has come down to us from the early twentieth century, Bharata-Natyam is a dance form that emphasizes femininity, specifically a “pure” femininity sanctioned through *sanskritization* (Coorlawala 2004)—a legitimization through association with things ancient—by Indian advocates in response to the colonial discourse. As a result, Bharata-Natyam seems to have come “to function as a symbol of pan-Indian...middle-class femininity” (O’Shea, 109). In fact, when one looks around, it is women dancers who are using their art to negotiate the paradoxes of tradition and its intersection with the idea of womanhood (Chakravorty 2000; Coorlawala 2004; O’Shea 2007), both in the home country and in the diaspora. Bharata-Natyam dancers such as Mallika Sarabhai in India, Chitra Sundaram in the U.K., and the Stage Sanchaar troupe in the US harness agency in their performances, whether this is achieved by discarding elaborate costumes and make-up, finding new movement, rediscovering ancient movement, or re-examining themes of traditional texts. One sees in them women of experience who have had time to grow into their own and found an approach to Bharata-Natyam that is supportive of their quest for voice and meaning.

## Bharata-Natyam Education in the US

As i have previously written, the pedagogy surrounding Bharata-Natyam education in the American diaspora carries a variety of meanings and values. Perhaps the most obvious is being able to learn what has come to be considered *authentic* Indian culture, as Priya Srinivasan notes (2002, 20). This can be further extrapolated: “By learning Bharata-Natyam in the US, children of...immigrants also lay claim to some real or imagined connection with the cultural history of mother India” (Meduri 1995). Maintaining a connection to the home culture is achieved not only by learning the dance technique, but also being exposed to the language, music, mythology, and history. Bharata-Natyam’s influence goes even further as “important to the diasporic communit[y’s] perception of itself as a cohesive community” (Meduri). Being a part of a local Bharata-Natyam school helps the student forge a stronger sense of Indian identity, while giving the family a sense of belonging to an extended network of families of other students that supports and is supported by the dance school. Bharata-Natyam students also have the opportunity to show off their *traditional* dance at schools, local festivals, and other programs. This fosters an appreciation both from outside and inside the diaspora, and enhances the sense of diasporic identity for the student. For those living in the Indian diaspora, learning Bharata-Natyam is a valid way in which to belong to a core community and to create a space to be visible in the dominant US culture.

At the same time, such a pedagogy has significant limitations. As i have observed:

The Bharata-Natyam student (usually a girl of Indian descent), who lives with her parents, finds herself negotiating two separate spaces of meaning-making—one that is marked by *Indian-ness* and the other that is marked by *American-ness*. The former space is found at home, a temple, festival celebrations, and, of course, at Bharata-Natyam class. The latter is any space that does not hold significance for the Indian cultural identity, such as schools, sports practices, and shopping malls. When the student goes off to college or a career and leaves home, she experiences spaces of Indian-ness, including Bharata-Natyam class, less frequently. Outside these marked spaces of cultural significance, Bharata-Natyam

movement vocabulary becomes difficult to translate to the student's personal lived experience. (Mandala)

This difficulty presents a spiritual conundrum: the student spends six to ten years studying and learning an art form that, (i) on the surface, brings her closer to Indian culture and traditions and that, (ii) more importantly, purports to help her more deeply understand her existence in a connected world; yet, she is unable to go beyond the former and explore the latter when she steps outside the diaspora with her art. While the practice of creative agency in Bharata-Natyam seems to be growing among experienced, inquisitive dancers as noted earlier, it does not yet seem to have permeated the pedagogical practice in the US. Here, the dance form has generally come to stand for the performance and demonstration of model Indian-ness in the guise of tradition, both from the dominant culture's viewpoint and the diasporic viewpoint. According to Srinivasan, the Indian diaspora is afraid of the mainstream American culture sullyng the Indian female and her femininity, and that "a viable means of performing [the] model culture is through the dance practice of Bharata-Natyam...and it is the dance teachers themselves who instill this vey model behavior into their young female students" (2002, 20). Yet, as a Bharata-Natyam teacher in the US, i have the unique opportunity, and indeed, the responsibility, to guide the twenty-first-century Bharata-Natyam student in the Indian diaspora from the idea of simply performing a prescribed model culture towards recognizing that her voice has a place in the dance and providing the tools to assist in resolving this conundrum which begs fluidity.

### Evolving Praxis

My own practice of dance has developed over almost three decades of inquiry into the role of Bharata-Natyam in my life as a second-generation Indian in the US. I continued dancing after leaving my known spaces of Indian-ness by seeking out new

ones. Still, this did not satisfy my desire to dance, and i sought ways to bridge these separate spaces of Indian-ness and American-ness. I found myself delving deeper into an exploration of Bharata-Natyam, which led to more questions about where i might find greater movement and creative vocabulary within the framework of Bharata-Natyam. I was directed to study Bharata-*Nrityam* pedagogy with Dr. Padma in Chennai, India. Her meticulous training and enthusiasm to engage in conversation opened my eyes to numerous discoveries, such as the idea that every dancer’s body creates unique versions of the same movement (rather than the cookie-cutter reproductions of dance in many schools) and the appreciation of diverse cultures, even within India, as a way to hear and accept the many perspectives of one story. Discoveries like these increased my appetite to learn more and to understand that my dance practice came alive with my *informed* and *conscious* voice. Two decades of teaching and performing in seven cities<sup>8</sup> across the US reveal the same gap and spiritual conundrum in Bharata-Natyam students’ learning versus practicing dance.

Surveys of several dance teachers across the US indicated that my initial motivations to teach Bharata-Natyam were consistent with those of other teachers. After some years of teaching, these began to give way to another motivation. I found myself (like my students) seeking to make a connection with my contemporary lived

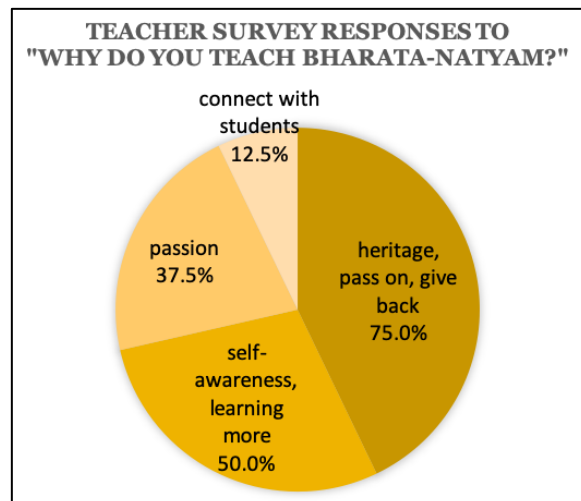


Figure 1. Why do you teach Bharata-Natyam? Responses

<sup>8</sup> Los Angeles (CA), Phoenix (AZ), Charlottesville (VA), San Ramon (CA), Austin (TX), Milwaukee (WI), and Scottsdale (AZ)

experiences and wanting to help my students do the same—not *after* they have spent years learning the foundations, but *simultaneously and gradually* while learning them.

My pedagogical practice began to evolve to demonstrate these values as a dancer and as a member of the mainstream culture in the US to my students. One explicit form of demonstration that followed from my pedagogical intentions is producing works for Austin, TX-based Stage Sanchaar, (a dance troupe of 4 core Bharata-Natyam dancers/teachers and a Carnatic musician). Rigorous practice of dance, creative collaborations and social practice-based performances showed students how this path widened our scope, helped us ask more of ourselves as dancers, and projected our voices meaningfully into our community.

My students and their parents were interested in how our daily lives outside of dance class were being translated into the language of Bharata-Natyam through Bharata-Nrityam. I came to understand the importance of learning by example and learning together, but it was equally important to give students the tools to explicate their knowledge from lessons to explore and share their art in ways that were not just visible in their diasporic lives but also in their lives in the dominant culture. Questions around my purpose in teaching and my success at creating meaningful performances came to the fore, as the seeds for my applied project, *Look into my Voice, Hear my Dance* (LVHD), were planted.

# Pedagogical Intent

## Guiding Principles

Exploring praxes, or practical applications of theory, such as those of twentieth century critical pedagogist Paulo Freire (2009), feminist and pedagogist bell hooks (1994), and physician and educator Maria Montessori (1970) in conjunction with the

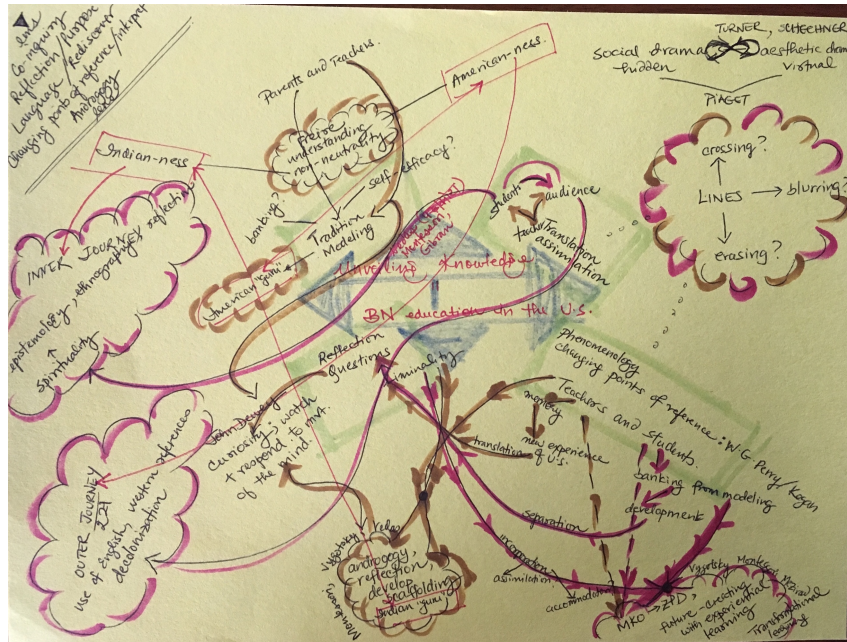


Figure 2. Mapping my Pedagogical Thought

cognitive development theories of the twentieth century, especially that of socio-cultural learning theorist Leo Vygotsky (Mooney 2013, Illeris 2018), in pedagogy classes and taking note of the example set by a majority of my teachers, who consciously created a classroom in which the student's voice is welcome and the teacher regularly re-examines their approach, were instrumental in naming what motivates me as a teacher. This exploration also spotlighted the influences that had already brought me thus far and offered new ones that would facilitate my journey forward. The most invigorating of these constructivist praxes were the principles of somatics and engaged pedagogy, both of which supported the ancient Indian tradition of inquiry.

*Somatics* is a term coined by Thomas Hanna in the 1970s as an umbrella term to refer to several practices of observing the lived experiences in one's own body that developed in the west. As Hanna himself defines it, "Somatics is the field which studies the soma: namely, the body as perceived from within by first-person perception" (Hanna 1986, 1). He derived the term from the Greek word *soma*, which he explains thus: "A soma isn't a body and it isn't a mind; it's the living process" (Hanna and Milz 1991), thus indicating that somatics is an integrated experience of the body and mind (and perhaps more), different from the prevalent Western tradition of seeing them as separate. A number of well-known practices constituted this new field, including Feldenkrais Awareness Through Movement, Laban-Bartenieff Fundamentals, Alexander Technique and Body-Mind Centering (Green 2002, 3).

It is also worthy of note that many of the pioneering practitioners of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries such as Moshe Feldenkrais and Ida Rolf were influenced by eastern practices (Eddy 2002, 2009). Hanna, himself a philosopher, surveys the field of somatics and remarks that the "discovery of the functional and structural integrity of the somatic field...allowed Western scientists and scholars to make the belated discovery that the Asian martial arts and bodily disciplines...were predicated solidly on a somatic theory and not upon a religious pretense" (Hanna 1976). Consider that "there is often a very great difference in how the word 'religion' is used" and "that differing expressions of spirituality are socially and culturally specific" (Williamson 2010, 40-41). Religion carries a sense of authority and regulation while spirituality holds a sense of individual or personal experience (much like somatic theory), which may or may not have roots in religion (Williamson). Non-Eurocentric traditions value this individual quest and experience, focusing on breath, sensing, and strength—both physical and mental—to gain clarity of one's place in the greater existence (humanity,



nature, universe, multiverse...). These values were identified as common threads of various Western practices that are considered somatic disciplines and have developed since the nineteenth century: “time to breath[e], feel and ‘listen’ to the body...gain deeper awareness of ‘self that moves’...while paying attention to proprioceptive signals” (Eddy 2009, 6-7). It stands to reason, therefore, that spirituality, by virtue of its individual and experiential nature, has a place within the field of somatics.

This connection between somatics and spirituality was immediately evident in my phenomenological investigations. The idea of a whole mind-body experience (with an aim for something higher) was not new to me in my personal Indian identity, but its application in my American identity became more deliberate in being in the world and in my daily interactions, including my role as a dance teacher. Somatic principles steered me back to the philosopher Kahlil Gibran and the educator Maria Montessori with renewed attention. Of self-knowledge, Gibran says:

Your hearts know in silence the secrets of the days and the nights.  
But your ears thirst for the sound of your heart’s knowledge.  
You would know in words that which you have always known in thought.  
You would touch with your fingers the naked body of your dreams.  
And it is well you should...(Gibran 1980, 65)

Gibran’s words echo the ideas of listening to the body to gain self-awareness, because the knowledge is within. Maria Montessori also speaks to this: “Our goal [as educators] is not so much the imparting of knowledge as the unveiling...of spiritual energy” (Montessori and Cirillo 1970, 136). Both view knowledge as innate, albeit hidden or latent, and the role of the teacher (be they the individual in process of phenomenological inquiry or a teacher guiding a student) as one who helps reveal or unveil this knowledge. Exploring somatic principles has been reflexive of these philosophies underlying my teaching and study of dance, and at the same time, has served as a new lens through which to consider my art.

Engaged pedagogy presented itself as a viable praxis for my work upon further examination of feminist pedagogy. The latter is grounded in six principles: reformation of the relationship between professor and student, empowerment, building community, privileging voice, respecting the diversity of personal experience, and challenging traditional notions (Webb, Allen and Walker 2002). This enumeration provided clarity in my envisioned teaching. Pursuing different approaches to these principles, I was attracted to bell hooks' praxis of engaged pedagogy, in which she recasts the feminist approach by emphasizing that "teachers must be actively committed to a process of self-actualization ...if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students" (hooks 1994, 15), because a feminist teacher must recognize that their role in the classroom *does* give them power over the student, but that power can be used to enhance the teaching-learning experience. hooks also asserts that students rightfully expect that their teachers will address "the connection between what they are learning and their overall life experiences," (hooks, 19) and clearly advocates a praxis rather than a theory where "[the teacher's] voice is not the only account of what happens in the classroom," (20) but where student expression is inherently valued *and* teachers grow by willing to be vulnerable in sharing *their* experiences (21). Somatic principles are reflected in the teacher's self-actualization, i.e. a self-evaluation and re-evaluation. When the teachers themselves have been through a process of self-reflection and are open to vulnerability, then it is reasonable to ask the same of the student, reforming the teacher-student relationship from authoritarian to collaborative. Perhaps the most significant congruence between somatic theory and engaged pedagogy is *process*. The idea of constantly *striving to perceive* indicates continual activity with the possibilities of shifts, changes and growth. In an authoritarian classroom, there is a finality to learning that

does not allow for reflection or multiple voices, but in a somatically-influenced or engaged classroom, learning is a process that has no beginning or end.

It is also notable that hooks refers to Paulo Freire and Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh as “two ‘teachers’ who have touched me deeply with their work” (14) when she introduces the premise of engaged pedagogy, looking not only to a lineage of Western thinkers but also to one of non-Western thinkers. The lines between philosophy and spirituality are blurred: body and mind cannot be separated from each other, and there is something deeper than the two—an inner consciousness—which takes a step further than somatics. hooks’ own discoveries reflect those of Gibran and Montessori, too. There is no room for an authoritarian approach. Instead, the teacher and student seek together, beginning with the former facilitating the search by the latter, but being ready to slide into an infinity loop with possibilities of role exchange, overlap or intersection.

#### Back to Basics

Learning about and applying these praxes to my work, i gained new knowledge that was transferable to my classes, both as a teacher and a dancer. More importantly, however, they brought me full circle to the foundations in my base practice of Bharata-Nrityam—the notion of tradition, the guru-shishya relationship and rasa.

With respect to tradition, Bharata-Natyam claims roots in a millennia-old praxis of theater arts. It has, however, evolved into what we see as Bharata-Natyam today over centuries of passing through generations of gurus and practitioners, who have each left their mark on it. This tradition, then, is versatile, because it values the individual experience. “Yet, the tradition espoused in Bharata-Natyam education in the US is often static, coming to rest as a showcase of timeless and set rituals” (Mandala). Next, Bharata-Natyam education is embodied in the guru-shishya relationship, a framework

for the Indian teaching-learning process. Vedic texts empower the student and encourage the teacher to keep seeking. “An ideal teacher...questions his students and encourages them to express their opinions... In turn, the viewpoints of the students can stimulate new lines of thought in the teacher...” (Sunishthananda 2005, 453). The call to engage is for both “the talented student (*kuśalo’sya labdhā*) and the wonderful teacher (*āścaryo vaktā*)...This communion of minds helps turn...human relationship into a dynamic educational process...” (Ranganathananda 1993, 325). hooks illustrates this dynamism in several anecdotes from her teaching experience. Finally, it is critical to understand that fulfilling the guru-shishya relationship is a process inherent to mastering dance. It emphasizes the importance of delving deep into oneself and being ready and responsible to engage with the world outside, as the teacher or as the student. This is the big idea behind the deceptively diminutive word *rasa* in Bharata-Natyam. The dancer works through the physical, intellectual and emotional to reach the essence or spiritual experience<sup>9</sup> (Nandikesvara 2006, v. 37), but then she must consciously convey that essence—*rasa*—to those who witness her dance to fulfill her role as a dancer.

### Intent

I developed the flow charts below from my experiences and reflections on systemic structures of authority. Their translation into Bharata-Natyam are shown in Figure 3, where the form of dance (technique, product, etc.), the text (written or understood rules), and the audience (critics, parents, patrons, etc.) direct and influence the teachers. The teacher becomes a preserver of a notion of tradition/identity/culture passing Bharata-Natyam on to the students. The students then re-produce that tradition

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<sup>9</sup> *yato hastastato dṛṣṭīr yato dṛṣṭīstato manaḥ / yato manastato bhāvo yato bhāvastato rasaḥ //*  
(where the hand, there the eyes; where the eyes, there the mind / where the mind, there the feelings, where the feelings, there the *rasa*)

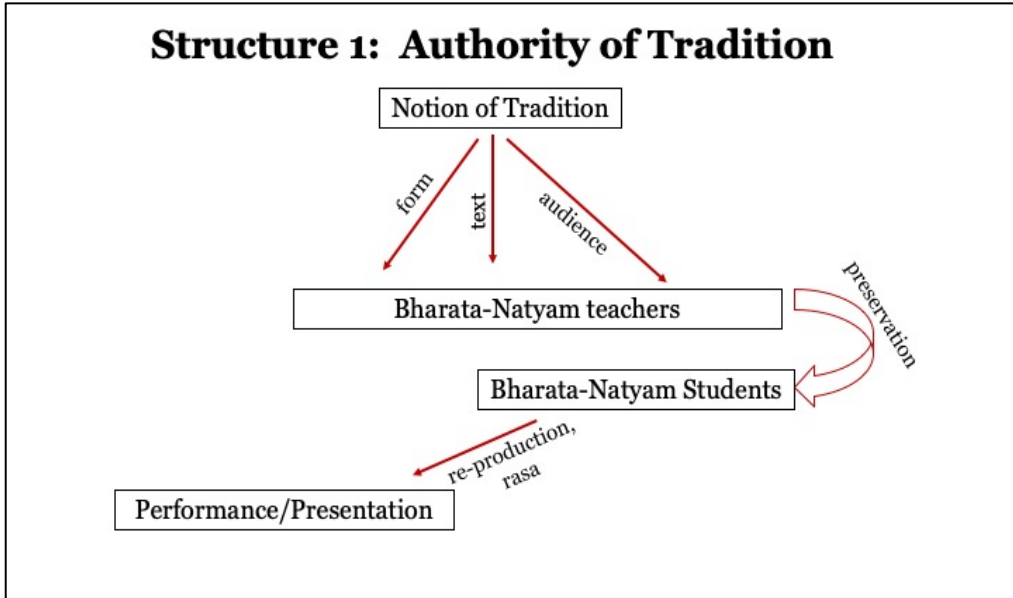


Figure 3. Structure 1: Authority of Tradition

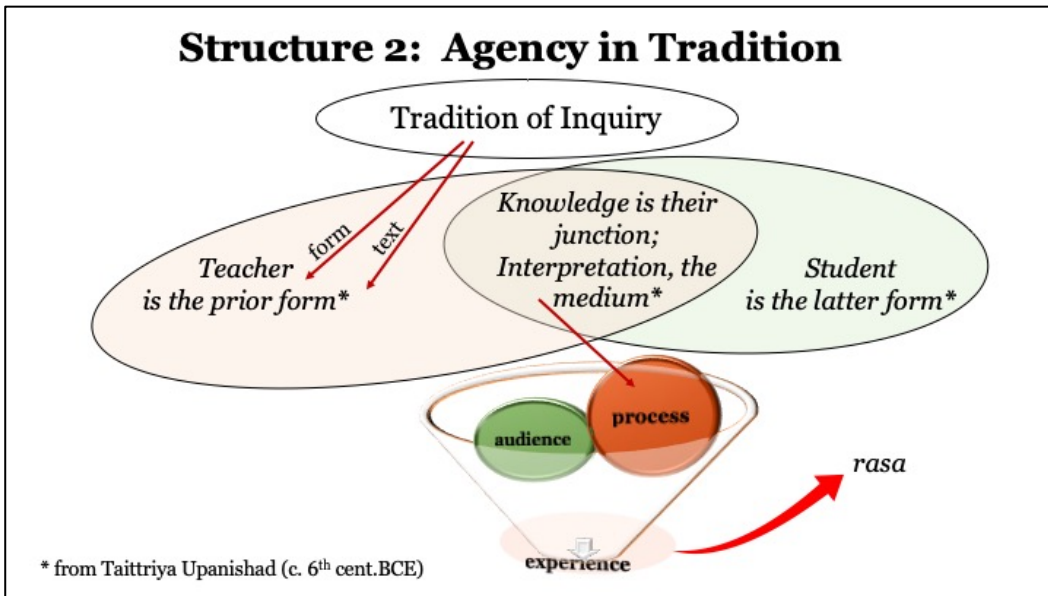


Figure 4. Structure 2: Agency in Tradition

in a performance to support a nostalgia—a sense of belonging—or for approval.

Figure 4 arises out of my experience and reflections on the epistemological foundations of the agency in tradition, recalled through investigations into somatics and engaged pedagogy. The *Taittiriya Upanishad* says of knowledge: “The teacher is the prior form; the student is the latter; knowledge is their junction and

teaching/interpretation is the medium” (Sharvananda 1921, 13). Figure 4 illustrates this: the tradition of inquiry supports the teacher’s handling of the form and text in meeting the student at the junction of knowledge through teaching and interpretation. This knowledge is manifested as a process which, when combined with collaboration of an audience (engaged witnessing or participating), creates an experience that then evokes *rasa*.

My pedagogical intent for LVHD was to move along the spectrum away from the first structure of being a Bharata-Natyam teacher to the second: valuing the student’s voice as collaborative in the teaching-learning process; demonstrating *to* the student that their voice is instrumental in seeking knowledge and in making meaning in Bharata-Natyam; and finding opportunities for the student to project that voice in Bharata-Natyam through civic engagement.

## Choreographic Intent

### Guiding Principles

My desire to make more effective presentations was a significant motivation to return to academia. I needed guidance in aspects of performance that were beyond making the dance, including better communicating my ideas to the audience and also getting more constructive feedback. Research and study foregrounded the use of creative tools,<sup>10</sup> collaboration and the place of social justice issues in my work.

My teachers helped me realize how the refined art of storytelling in Bharata-Nrityam could be further honed to reach an audience beyond the Indian diaspora and beyond the presenter's box-checking for diversity or multiculturalism, using methods and exercises—creative tools—that could be calibrated to my needs in a dance or a project. One such tool was the *Rasaboxes* (Schechner 2001) which extrapolated the art of expression and emotions found in the *Natyashastra* in a concrete physical manner, that is more explicit than what is taught in prevalent Bharata-Natyam training. Exploring creative tools activated a reboot at the physical and intellectual levels (see Footnote 8) of my dance. With these initial stages of dance practice being jolted, i noticed the emotional stage being bolstered for a deeper experience. Seeking feedback took on new meaning with the Critical Response Process<sup>11</sup> (CRP) which was used in most classes when sharing our work. The versatility of CRP helps in finding multiple perspectives to a work and helps the artist discover and return to what excites them in it. CRP, i found, makes revision of the work more exciting and beneficial.

Another aspect of my work that took on greater meaning before i began my MFA studies was collaboration, both with creative partners and with the audience.

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<sup>10</sup> A creative tool is "...a process or method that is repeatable and leads you to create something...to be able to collaborate, to discover..." (Lerman 2019)

<sup>11</sup> Developed by Liz Lerman as "a method of giving and getting useful feedback on anything you make..."

Collaboration with creative partners became more viable as a planned process when i participated in the Collaborative Action Research Network (CARN) Conference 2018. Learning about collaborative action research, its purpose and its methods, gave me a way of seeking out collaborators, working cohesively with them for a shared beneficial outcome, and continuing the relationship after completing work. *The Compass*,<sup>12</sup> an interactive theater performance, was a tangible example of collaboration. Not only did it reflect deep connections between artistic and social collaborators, but it also realized outcomes which were salient to me as a performer, such as an active audience, a spontaneous performance dependent on the audience, and a palpable moment of conscious awakening in the space. The collaboration with the audience presented a direct relationship with rasa, by linking the process from knowledge and interpretation to the experience (Figure 4). Collaboration, as defined in collaborative action research and demonstrated in *The Compass*, meant listening, producing an agreed-upon output, and staying in a process together beyond the output to leave room for more outcomes.

Centering social justice issues has always been important to my work. I was a domestic violence survivor advocate almost two decades ago. My work has since brought me back to advocacy, but in a sporadic and more removed manner. Three incidents changed this. In the first, a survivor, whom i did not know, approached me at a fundraiser in 2017 after sharing her story and said, “You *have* to do something about the courts!” While it felt random, it also felt like she was deliberately giving me a responsibility. The next was in a class on gender-based violence a year later, in which we examined the use of gender-based violence as a tool in colonization and othering. The

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<sup>12</sup> *The Compass*, dir. Michael Rohd, Paul V. Galvin Playhouse, Tempe, AZ, November 18, 2017.



last was participating in the Clothesline Project<sup>13</sup> at ASU in 3 ways—hearing survivors share their stories while we decorated t-shirts for the project together; conducting a workshop with middle school boys and girls who generated collective knowledge around what a healthy relationship looks like; and finally, creating a lesson to challenge my students to think about the feelings and needs of a survivor in Indian mythology (see Lesson 2 in Appendix A) during the Kavanagh Congressional hearings at the time. These incidents brought my focus back to the issue of domestic and sexual violence, giving it prominence in my applied project, via another collaborative method, transformative justice. Transformative justice seeks resolutions within more intimate systems of community or civil society, in which domestic violence is embraced as a community “response-a-bility”<sup>14</sup> (Art as Liberation 2018, Kim 2018, Coker et al. 2020). It naturally lends itself to the use of creative tools to elicit response. The principles inherent to these methods and tools substantially supported my choreographic aims.

### Intent

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), the Indian polymath—poet, writer, composer, philosopher painter and educator—said that art “is the response of man’s creative soul to the call of the real.”<sup>15</sup> The call of the real comes in the form of our lived experiences which clamor all around and provoke response. The lived experiences may be personal, or they may be unfamiliar because the story belongs to another person, time or place.

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<sup>13</sup> “The Clothesline Project honors women survivors as well as victims of intimate violence. Any woman who has experienced such violence, at any time in her life, is encouraged to come forward and design a shirt. Victims’ families and friends are also invited to participate.” (<http://theclotheslineproject.org/history.htm>.)

<sup>14</sup> The term “response-a-bility” is taken from the Art As Liberation Vision Statement

<sup>15</sup> Tagore, Rabindranath. 2018. *The Religion of Man, Being the Hibbert Lectures for 1930*. Franklin Classics Trade Press.

The response is the creative work. In the mode of creation, rasa fills the creator in process, so that they may grow. And that which spills forth when the creator tips over toward their audience is the rasa for the audience to imbibe.

The choreographic intent of LVHD was to guide Bharata-Natyam dancers in a mode of creation that is based in successful collaboration with those whose stories are unfamiliar, so that the dancers' exploration of their Bharata-Natyam practice would go deep and benefit from the use of creative tools. In this case, the dancers' collaborators would be survivors of sexual violence and domestic violence.<sup>16</sup> Though their stories might be unfamiliar, the collaborative process would require both to embrace the role of researcher through creative tooling, deep listening and responding—in themselves and with each other. The choreographic intent included promoting their creative duty to evoke rasa and taking their work to the community, who, by virtue of their presence as audience, are also creators ready to respond (as seen in Figure 4), whatever form the response might take. The choreography led to several recognizable products. Some of the participants created dance for film, while others created a solo live presentation. To set the tone for the space, LVHD also had an introduction, *Calling the Circle*, and a finale, *Uncontainable*. It is critical to acknowledge that the process, the thread stringing together these products with numerous discoveries (for teacher, students, collaborators and audience), was the core of the choreographic intent.

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<sup>16</sup> Domestic violence is broadly and variously defined; it is noted that the experiences of the majority of LVHD participants can be further specified as Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). See Definitions, pp. 133-136, for further information on both sexual violence and domestic violence.

## Methodology Overview

### Research Questions

The current work is reflective of a postpositivist approach at three levels, as described by Green and Stinson (1999): to understand, to emancipate and to deconstruct. Within the postpositivist framework, phenomenological and reflexive investigation lit the path towards a better understanding of what the dancer's voice looks like within their practice. The question at this level is:

How can i teach Bharata-Natyam in the US without confining it to a *notion* of tradition and support my students in giving themselves permission to seek voice/agency in their practice?

At the next level, inquiry takes the form of constructivist and praxis-oriented work, guided by the principles of engaged pedagogy, somatics and Bharata-Nrityam and enhanced by the application of creative tools. The question here is:

How will offering creative tools affect the Bharata-Natyam teaching-learning process and the exploration of agency in dance as students negotiate contemporary lived experiences inside and outside their spaces of Indian-ness?

Finally, the emancipatory and deconstructivist aspects of this research intersect in an expanded praxis with the addition of collaborative action research and an anti-colonial approach. The question here is:

What process might i design to facilitate Bharata-Natyam students' meaningful engagement beyond the diaspora and to empower an amplification of their agency in further challenging notions of tradition and disrupting systems of oppression?

## Assumptions

The main assumption of this study is that Bharata-Natyam students of the Indian diaspora in the US grow up as I did with complex and often unhealthy messaging about their bodies and their roles in the community. This is further complicated by the burden of superficial cultural guardianship imposed upon them when learning Bharata-Natyam, as most parents' reasoning for this education is a "grounding in Indian culture..., to inculcate a sense of physical and mental discipline, ...practice of spirituality and devotion... [with] A glaring omission...creativity" (Kiran 2013, 16). Surveys conducted for this research across 9 cities in the US of Bharata-Natyam students and their parents yielded similar results, shown below in Table 1.

<b>Table 1. Initial Survey Results for “Why Learn Bharata-Natyam?” (May, 2018-May, 2019)</b>		
Reasons for learning Bharata-Natyam based on key words contained in the free responses	<b>Tradition (Community Context/ re-producing)</b>	<b>Self-expression (Individual context/rasa)</b>
		key words: <i>tradition, heritage, roots, Indian culture, Hindu, religion, ethnic background</i>
<b>Parents of students (n=45)</b>	82.20%	20.00%
<b>Students of Bharata-Natyam (n=64)</b>	73.40%	34.40%

The messaging around the body along with the responsibility of cultural guardianship, present an irony in the proclaimed ideal of an Indian dancer whose body is the vehicle to spiritual elevation. For example, when students who did not begin their dance training with me learn Bharata-Nrityam isolations—such as *uraḥa* (chest), *kaṭī* (hips), and *ūru* (thighs)—there is a palpable hesitation in lifting the chest in isolation,

rotating the hips, or purposefully turning the thighs in and out. How can we expect to utilize the body for spiritual elevation if there are parts of the body that are considered offensive or off-limits, even to ourselves, and if we cannot be comfortable and confident in it?

In my own training, my *Bharata-Natyam* teachers taught me explicitly that raising a leg up while facing an audience and implicitly that lying flat on the ground in class or on stage was inappropriate. This experience is echoed among most of the *Bharata-Natyam* (and other classical Indian dance) dancers and teachers i have encountered. In the latter taboo of lying down, a fellow dance teacher offered that it is considered a “private experience,” which also speaks to that idea being passed on implicitly. I did not even realize that i had internalized this idea, until i was challenged by it in a somatics class on weight sensing. Having to lay flat on the floor was extremely uncomfortable because of this dance upbringing. Upon further investigation, i discovered that the *Natyashastra* actually offers the comfort of “motherhood” in the lying on the ground: “The floor is the mother for exercise. Hence, one should resort to the floor and stretching oneself over it, one should take exercise” (Bharata Muni 1994, 83). This highlighted the irony of beginning and ending every practice with a prayer to Mother Earth (expressing gratitude for bearing the brunt of the footwork) when i began to think constructively about weight—that it is my physical (mass) relationship to Mother Earth’s pull (gravity). If we give Mother Earth all our weight through our feet, why is it difficult to entrust her with our whole body and yield to her embrace? What patriarchal gaze or morality deprived the dancer’s body of this ease on stage (and, by association, in other spaces)? Is this an impediment to the dancer’s spiritual progress?

Another assumption of learning in the diaspora is that students have a limited time to learn from a *Bharata-Natyam* teacher. Classes are usually conducted once a week

and until the student leaves the parents' home. Few pursue or are able to pursue Bharata-Natyam beyond college. This renders lifetime dedication and, in turn, mastery of dance through experience difficult. Moreover, as students grow older in the Indian diaspora, they find themselves on precarious ground trying to bridge the gap between their Indian-ness and their American-ness. Comments rooted in unfounded notions of tradition ("Wow, your daughter doesn't have an American accent!") or reflective of ignorance or condescension ("Oh, you look so cute in your traditional costume!") are eventually recognized as shallow third-person observations. Then, the search for identity and meaning (spiritual seeking) begins. When the Bharata-Natyam student discovers the first-person view of her body, it leads to a consciousness that "bodily experience is not neutral or value free...[but] is shaped by [her] backgrounds, experiences and sociocultural habits" (Green 2015, 7), what is often termed "tradition." This consciousness can spark confidence, curiosity, and creativity in her dance and its relation to her lived experiences.

### Delimitations & Limitations

This work spans two and half years of investigation guided by the preceding research questions. While many of the preliminary procedures and the early experiences were not marked by delimitation, the last process of LVHD, warranted some delimitations. The project, conducted in the Tempe, AZ, area with restricted funding, was limited to local participants. Further, although "civic engagement" and "social justice" can address any of several issues, this work is focused on domestic and sexual violence because of my work on sexual assault and unhealthy relationships in school-age children, my previous role as an advocate, and the call to action i received from a survivor in 2017. I also chose to limit participating Bharata-Natyam dancers to high

school age or older, since they would be hearing/learning about domestic and sexual violence.

Finally, this work was limited to facilitating collaborations between the Bharata-Natyam dancers and the survivors to generate choreography that met both partners' expectations. Advocacy was available to the extent of educating the dancers on what advocacy is and providing participants with resources from Arizona Coalition to End Sexual and Domestic Violence (ACESDV) and the Sexual and Relationship Violence Prevention Program (SRVPP) at ASU outside of the work, while being transparent and flexible based on their needs in the work. Recognizing that though movement therapy is an important and upcoming field of work and scholarship and that the LVHD collaborations and dance-making may have had a therapeutic effect for the participants, the current scope of the project did not extend to therapy. Participants did, however, reflect on and share the therapeutic aspects of their participation to increase our collective knowledge and hold for future research.

The main limitation on the work was recruiting Bharata-Natyam participants. The initial aim was to recruit participants who are Bharata-Natyam students growing up in the US from among the initial Student Survey respondents mentioned in Table 1. However, these respondents did not participate due to several possible reasons: time constraints, dependence on a parent or guardian for permission or transportation, and a belief—explicit or internalized—that participation might be construed as disrespect for their own Bharata-Natyam teacher (recalling teacher lineage loyalties mentioned earlier). As a result, my work was realized with the participation of Bharata-Natyam dancers who had grown up in India (1 had spent some of her formative years in the US before moving back to India) and now live in the US as students or alumna of ASU. Their

Bharata-Natyam education paralleled the assumptions of this work, and their Student Survey responses aligned with those of the respondents' learning in the US.

### Methodology

The process for LVHD grew out of a series of experiences—phenomenological and collaborative, for which Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was granted. The first IRB approval for the initial survey study titled “How might creative tools developed through Bharata-Nrityam and somatic principles affect the practice of a Bharata-Natyam student in the United States?” (STUDY00007809) was approved on April 28, 2018. Subsequent continuing reviews, MODCR00001139 and CR00005794 were approved on March 8, 2019, and February 3, 2020, respectively. The approval is effective until February 2, 2021. A second study titled “LVHD Response Form” (STUDY00011618) was submitted and approved on February 27, 2020, to collect post-LVHD surveys from adults attending the presentation. All images and data in this document are being used with permission. Furthermore, for the purposes of this document, i have obtained consent to refer to the participants using their preferred (first) names.

The experiences that followed the IRB application built upon each other, laying a firm foundation for the process that became LVHD. Three are of particular note—(i) student lessons at Dansense~Nrtyabodha, (ii) *Kriti*, a multicultural collaborative piece based on Bharata-Nrityam storytelling, and (iii) LVHD, the applied project. All the experiences were created with a clear pedagogical and choreographic intent, based on engaged pedagogy. The intersections of Bharata-Nrityam training, somatic principles and creative tools in this emancipatory and deconstructivist approach rendered *process* as the primary intent, while the live presentation was an artifact within a *continuing* process. The next chapter will discuss each of these experiences in terms of the following:



(i) participant population, (ii) creating the environment, (iii) process facilitation and outcome, (iv) data in the forms of documentation, reflection, survey responses, and facilitated audience responses, and (v) challenges.

## Process

### Dansense~Nrtyabodha Student Lessons

The lessons involve my students who are girls of Indian origin, ranging from ages 6 to 15. Students come to the home studio dressed in a uniform of white leggings, maroon *kurta* (tunic), and a white *dupatta* (scarf), and hair pinned or tied and out of their faces. They are invited to feel a degree of agency in the space, also called “feel at home.” They know where to find a glass for water in the kitchen and in which drawers to



Figure 5. Making a Story with hastas

find a sharpener or pencil, when they need one. Their lessons involve practice of technique with contextual background, reflection to check their understanding and unveil discoveries together, prompts to find connections or their own explications, and expression—verbal or physical—of these findings. Three lessons significantly supported the principles of somatics, engaged pedagogy and tradition of inquiry. These are given in detail in Appendix A, while a brief analysis of their impact is outlined here.

In Lesson 1 in Appendix A, I sought to address the prevalent practice of not teaching *abhinaya* beyond the basic use of *hastas* and gestural representation until students are older or more advanced in their training. My experience of this custom is

that it is a limiting approach to Bharata-Natyam pedagogy and is a major cause for the disconnect that students face when trying to explicate their lived experiences outside spaces of Indian-ness with Bharata-Natyam. The abhinaya technique is clearly constructed in the *Natyashastra* so that anyone can explore it at their own pace. It gives infinite scope for storytelling but requires practice, and by keeping it from students until their later training, Bharata-Natyam teachers lose precious time in helping students towards mastery of abhinaya, especially given their limited time as students of Bharata-Natyam. Students learn set choreography based on mythological stories that they then re-produce for performances. However, when faced with a creative task, they find themselves awkwardly transplanting the abhinaya from those pieces into contemporary contexts, or simply re-producing the pieces with a preceding monologue that attempts to link the piece to a contemporary issue.

My explorations of abhinaya have led me to believe that younger novice students *are* capable of understanding emotions and emoting (albeit based on their experiences) and of exploring abhinaya productively when given the tools. I consider the constructivist approach found in ancient Indian thought: knowledge grows as one's experience grows, and it is the teacher's responsibility to meet the student at that junction of knowledge. Thus Lesson 1, detailed in Appendix A, was devised as an introduction to the *Natyashastra* theory of *rasa* ( $\approx$  mood) and *bhava* ( $\approx$  emotion, feeling). The discoveries made by the students were illuminating. Students found that their audiences either understood the bhavas differently from the intention or saw additional bhavas in what was being emoted. Their reflections indicated an experiential understanding of the depth required to be a successful communicator. They said:

- “Well...if you express more and show more movements, then maybe people will get it... what you're trying to talk about.”

- “I also think that...for people who studied their colors...it would be a lot easier to show them than like show someone who’s unexperienced with the colors and everything...”
- “...facial expressions have a lot to do with...the *rasa* that you’re creating...”
- “I think I’ll change my *rasa*.”

Source: Dansense-Nrtyabodha Student Reflections in Rasa Workshop on June 7, 2018.

This experience “gave the students agency to share something important to them in a supportive environment, to reflect on and understand their experience, to accept *both* their successes and their challenges, and to know that the journey of learning is a continuous one” (Mandala). Their realization of the depth and practice required in abhinaya became experiential rather than remaining theoretical, and that increased their motivation to learn and practice more. In learning more about abhinaya and applying it to new choreographies that focus on storytelling, the students have continued growing their experience with careful forethought, becoming more comfortable with expressing without reserve (self-consciousness) and being invested witnesses when others express.

Lesson 2 in Appendix A built upon this concept of witnessing (see p. 94). The victim-blaming of Christine Blasey Ford in the Kavanaugh hearings provided the impetus for this lesson. It related directly to the concepts of engaged pedagogy and the importance of valuing voice, especially in a feminist context. The lesson i had planned was challenging to the parents present (this was a special class celebrating the Navaratri/Dusshera festival) more than the students and was an application of the “praxis cycle,” a combination of tools and principles such as narrative thinking, “reframing,” “making the invisible visible,” and “show, don’t tell” (Boyd 2016). When i invited students to re-examine the traditional story that is held up as a moral compass to many Hindus, the students did not hesitate to share their original thoughts. Older students and adults were wont to perpetuate the patriarchal interpretations fed to us from childhood, asserting for example, that the woman brought the abduction upon

herself because she did not stay within certain bounds. The concept of tradition as a decree seemed to overshadow the tradition of inquiry, somatic reflection and challenging traditional views, until students got to work together to re-write the popular narrative in attempting to bring a sense of justice to Sita (see Appendix A, Lesson 2 and Table 5). In the “*What if...for Sita*” scenario, they could imagine various alternatives, which they shared with joy. This lesson felt especially disruptive, but fostering the student’s voice and encouraging inquiry brought a sense of liberation that can be transferred to future lessons.

Lesson 3 in Appendix A reinforced a foundational principle in the previous lessons—listening deeply and differently—in the sneezing dance created by two of the youngest students. They arrived in class and were rattled by my loud sneezing that day. I channeled their discomfort to a different path of reaction by charging them with *dancing* my sneezes. The students found success in using Bharata-Nrityam vocabulary to depict a universal experience—the sneeze. As a facilitator, I guided the students to discover new movement knowledge in their own time and based on what they had learnt. Their audience, the older students and I, made “Statements of Meaning” about their dance from Step 1 of CRP (see p. 96), building on one another’s observations to notice various details in their unique use of expression and space. This process showed the colors of engaged pedagogy—the youngest students/dancers became teachers through their creativity, and the audience took on teaching through their observations and questions; the dancers learnt from our observations as they made adjustments, and the audience learnt about new possibilities discovered in the dancers’ creation; the paths of the teaching-learning process are numerous.

One challenge that presented itself in the rasa workshop was the tendency to focus on performance and perfection from the first. Helping my students, who ranged

from 9-13 years of age, understand that the process itself was the goal was significant. Their disbelieving and then confused faces reflected the internalization of result-oriented, authoritarian learning. As we moved forward in the lesson step by step, each student became more involved in their work and could see the evolution of their essays. The process paralleled the unwrapping of a gift and evoked a sense of anticipation and fun. Another challenge in the “*What if...for Sita*” lesson was navigating through the quagmire of tradition-guardianship. Was i successful in conveying that it is precisely because i value the story Valmiki wrote for us, that i wish to examine and reexamine it? Did i spotlight that this popular narrative in English or regional Indian languages is but a single interpretation of a 2500-year-old story written in 24,000 Sanskrit verses, and that there are indeed many narratives in India and outside that vastly deviate from this common version that we know? This quagmire not only reflects my fears in challenging notions of tradition, but makes me recognize that my doubts or fears around questioning show that i am inherently taking part in the “Authority of Tradition” structure (p. 20) of Bharata-Natyam education in the US.

## *Kriti*

Making *Kriti* held many valuable lessons. Though there were two iterations, for the purpose of this work, i will focus on the latter with occasional allusions to the first, when it clarifies the information for the other. *Kriti* was the first time i had worked with dancers from varied non-Indian disciplines and cultural backgrounds. There were 8 participants in the first version but 10 (of whom 6 had been in the first) participants in the second, including Coley as dramaturge. The environment for exploration was set in familiar studio spaces on campus and with familiar creative tool exercises to engage in their personal movement practices in a different way. The environment shifted with the inclusion of a music ensemble from India who had agreed to perform live with the dancers. Final rehearsals took place at my home followed by food and interaction between the dancers and the musicians, by which time i had hoped to have created a sense of 'belonging' in the creative work, in the musical interaction and in their new family of dance explorers in uncharted territory. This last remark speaks to the process, as well. *Kriti* followed a similar method outline to the Dansense~Nrtyabodha lessons, beginning with the dancers learning context and technique, reflecting, making connections and interpreting, and finally, collaborating to become the storytellers, themselves.

We began our journey for *Kriti* with story-time. I shared three stories about Ganesha, the elephant-headed god and remover of obstacles (details on p. 98). Then, the dancers used Walk and Talk (Lerman 2019) a creative tool to hone in on the themes that most stood out to them in the stories. Their responses are recorded below in Figure 6. We then began moving, first learning the *namaskaram* or prayer to Mother Earth and then the 5-beat cycle of the song i had chosen for the piece. Coley facilitated the embodiment of the rhythm with somatic exercises that explored the silent beat by

shifting it around in the cycle and that held the rhythm in different parts of the body. This was instrumental to being able to listen to the music, when we would explore hands and arms moving differently from the feet in the rhythm.

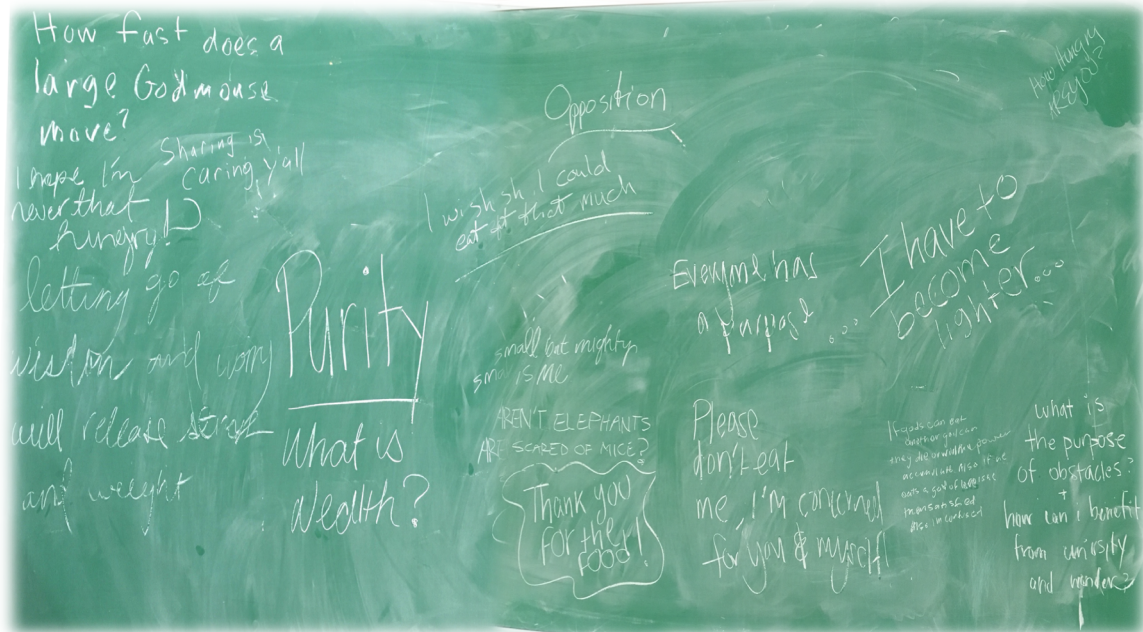


Figure 6. Meaning-Making from Ancient Stories for Kriti

Next, we reviewed the stories and also learnt more about the hastas that could be used in the song and in their interpretations. The dancers discussed their own story interpretations to build further on their understandings and began forming a clearer idea of what they would explicate in their movements. They then paired up with another dancer in the group; these paired collaborations became the confluence of not two but at least three dance forms. For example, a classical ballet dancer was paired with a break-dancer in one duo and a Bharata-Natyam dancer was paired with a ballet/Afro-Caribbean traditions dancer in another. At the same time, everyone was working on three or four common Bharata-Nrityam phrases from the original choreography. Context was reinforced with Indian snacks and food. *Kriti* was an accelerated experience that demonstrated results that were gradually emerging in the Dansense-Nrtyabodha lessons.



The Bharata-Nrityam technique was foundational and the dancers worked hard to learn and practice what they were taught. However, the introduction of reflection and creative tools added a dimension of inquiry that engaged each dancer in the dance at their own pace and through their individual contextual backgrounds. They reinforced their own comprehension of the dance and technique, such as the specific hastas or the position of the feet in a particular Bharata-Natyam step, with further questions; they took responsibility for their own process of learning. When they interpreted the stories, these questions led to deeper investigations and inquiries into using new hastas and steps to enhance the depictions of their chosen motifs within the original choreography. Thus, they found a level of comfort and integrity in the Bharata-Nrityam technique to reproduce parts of the original choreography. They were also able to go beyond reproducing to layer their learning with connections to their own experiences and to find ways to incorporate the newly-learnt technique into those experiences.

A week before the final performance, the music ensemble from India joined us. The collaborations reached new heights, as now the duos would sit with the musicians explaining what their interpretations of the stories were. The musicians' reflections were marked by wonder that so much thought had gone into these stories that they had taken for granted growing up. They saw them in a different light and were inspired to experiment with their own art forms, seeing the dancers' enthusiasm, courage and hard work in this experience. The dancers expressed feeling overwhelmed by the physical, mental and emotional stimuli. To respond, I shared more about the concept of evoking rasa as a dancer's ultimate goal—that the dancer communicates the essence of the piece to the audience so they can experience the same spiritual joy that she has experienced in her process of creating and practicing. We focused on the literal meaning of rasa ( $\approx$  juice, flavor) and the metaphor of taste. When a dancer was hesitant about experimenting with

all the information, i offered that including their personal experiences and movement was akin to adding spice.



*Figure 7. Kritis Performance*

*Kritis* was finally presented to a large audience, including many Bharata-Natyam teachers and students from the Phoenix area, at the ASU Kerr Cultural Center in September, 2019. The work was appreciated and the curiosity around the creation was encouraging. Following are quotes from the participants' post-experience reflections on what they would keep, what wishes they had and what questions they were left with.

- Seeing the way my peers translate the stories and comparing those to the things I thought about when translating the same ideas
- Our voices were distinct due to the creative process
- The musicians...seemed to really care about us as dancers
- I view voice...as something that shouldn't be seen in dance performance, but recently that ideal has shifted...the use of voice can be really empowering
- How can we "bend the rules" of tradition?
- Why is it important to keep traditions in a dance that is not being performed in their country?
- How can I connect with my audience in a way that allows them to understand the story I'm telling them, even if they don't have much prior knowledge?
- I felt I didn't know enough about the meaning of the gestures to be comfortable attaching them to my movement.
- The story telling was powerful in itself because you as a choreographer...are sharing your beliefs in a place where this might be very judged...

(Source: Participant Surveys for *Kritis*, September-October, 2020, at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/M2TNPKT>)

There were two main challenges in *Kriti*. First, how could i fully assure the dancers that they were not appropriating the stories, because experiments were made *after* contextual learning and with permission? Second, how could i have facilitated audience responses about the *Kriti* process on the day of the performance to address the first challenge?

*Kriti* came about for many reasons, but one reason that i shared with the dancers in an effort to remain transparent is reflected in the last reflection quote above. Questions of inquiry (thinking outside the box) and judgement were instrumental in my deliberate choice to work with non-Bharata-Natyam dancers. Tradition has a versatile quality which is the direct result of centering voice in it. That voice, when it reflects deliberation and depth, should not be silenced. To me, a simple iteration of exploring this was taking stories most Hindus grow up with and looking at them through a new lens. In a story where Ganesha wins the fruit of knowledge by circling his parents as a metaphor for the universe, while his brother actually went around the universe, we are taught that the message is respecting one's parents or thinking quickly when at a disadvantage. The dancers of *Kriti* also saw themes around *roots* and *manipulation* (Appendix B), which were valid based on their own experiences. However, one who grows up with the stories might take exception to the idea of manipulation, due to an internalization of "traditional" interpretations or might not be able to recognize alternative interpretations as easily. Speaking to the judgement factor, a *fear* prevented me from trying to navigate the complexities of the notion of tradition and religion (especially after the "What if...for Sita" lesson) with Bharata-Natyam dancers. I looked for collaborators and found a community in the participants of *Kriti*. Though there was some anxiety, curiosity and freedom prevailed, and this gave me courage to start the next experience, LVHD.

## *Look into my Voice, Hear my Dance (LVHD)*

### **The Idea, Participants and Location**

LVHD was envisioned as a collaborative project between Bharata-Natyam dancers and survivors of sexual and domestic violence. It came out of years of listening to dance students struggle with creating dance relevant to their lived experiences and to survivors' struggle with not being heard. The lessons at Dansense~Nrtyabodha, *Kriti*, and other experiences, scaffolded by my research, led to the meticulous progression of LVHD. The goals of LVHD were to share creative tools, Bharata-Nrityam technique and somatic principles to bring out the voice of the Bharata-Natyam dancer, to demonstrate that Bharata-Natyam with voice is a powerful medium for civic engagement, and to empower survivors with new ways of sharing their stories and knowledge.

The original idea for LVHD was to make site-specific films of the survivors' and dancers' partner work. However, the response from the survivors recruited through the S.H.A.R.E. (Strength, Hope, Awareness, Respect, Education) Survivors Advisory Committee of ACESDV was overwhelming. So, the project was adjusted to include several tiers of participation. The core group of participants included 4 female Bharata-Natyam dancers (three ASU students and one ASU alumna, between the ages of 18 and



*Figure 8. LVHD Participants & Volunteers*

30, of whom 2 share a common name though spelt slightly differently) and 9 survivors of sexual/domestic violence (including 1 male, 1 woman of Indian origin, ages ranging from the 20s to the 60s, and from various economic, cultural and social backgrounds, as well as gender and ability).

Two of the survivors participated in the first two meetings and could not continue their participation for various reasons, though their contributions continued being present in LVHD. Because of these numbers, LVHD turned into a project of 4 duos working towards site-specific presentation with film, 3 solos and a group piece for the final presentation. Besides these participants, LVHD also included a dramaturge-facilitator, 2 sexual/domestic violence advocate consultants, a music composer, photographers-videographers, and a choreographic consultant, who were instrumental in its realization.

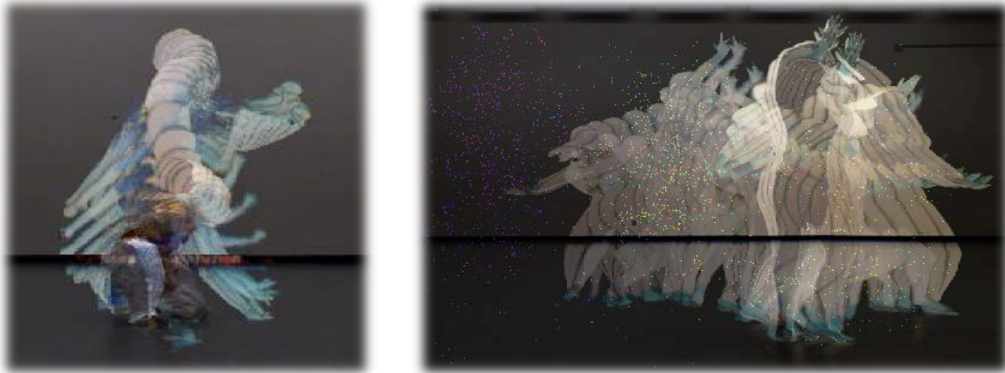
The spaces for the LVHD process had to be accessible (from many areas in Phoenix, for differently-abled participants, without additional cost of parking fees, etc.), feel familiar or, at least, informal, and last, but not least, be safe for survivors to work freely. Workshopping took place on ASU's Tempe Campus, community centers, libraries, and at ACESDV. For the duos' filming, the survivors chose a location in the Phoenix area—where they experienced violence or re-victimization when they sought help—to perform their collaborative work for film. Locations included a strip mall, a downtown office building, an apartment complex parking garage, and a city park. Spaces were made more comfortable with a clear agenda of tasks, with snacks and soft drinks, and with participants' needs being explicitly centered.

## **The Process**

The LVHD collaborative process began in early 2019 with my attending monthly S.H.A.R.E. and other meetings at ACESDV to introduce myself to the survivor group and also to listen and learn with them as they navigated their paths to healing and justice. Several survivors indicated interest in participating in LVHD as early as March, and by August, 10 survivors had returned their consent forms and shared their initial surveys. Starting in August, i prepared a sequence of meetings and plans to begin inviting the participants into a safe, creative space with 4 Bharata-Natyam dancers. On November 3, the dancers attended an introductory workshop with dramaturge, Coley, facilitating.

I clarified my research work explaining the importance of engaged pedagogy, agency/voice and collaboration. The dancers shared their history of dance education and what their questions were as we started this process. Three of them had learnt Bharata-Natyam for several years and when they had left their spaces of Indian-ness (in India) and arrived in spaces of American-ness here at ASU to study in the sciences and engineering, they worked hard to keep up with their dance practice. They put on shows occasionally, but were seeking more. In response to how they view their dance now, Shreya said there is “clarity, blending in my styles...which i really like, but i want to figure out what is right and what is wrong.” Shreya’s comment made matter-of-factly speaks to an internalization of some moral standard in Bharata-Natyam education, which would hinder her voice as a student. Nivedita said that she had been “thinking of making my dance more clear. I want to dance my thesis...learn the nuances and meaning...” Their thoughts reflected common doubts and desires that arise eventually in many Bharata-Natyam dancers, and we would revisit these throughout the LVHD process using the creative tools and guided reflections.

The workshop continued with the introduction and practice of two creative tools—Word Score/Equivalent<sup>17</sup> and video abstraction<sup>18</sup>—I chose based on ease in transitioning from the re-producing education style the dancers had known till then into having to create themselves. These generated movement that was new in their bodies and thinking. After listening to one another’s narratives which they had composed in the



*Figure 9. Video Abstractions, 1st Dancer Workshop*

form of a letter to a friend/family, the listeners wrote down 5 words that stood out to them from the narrative. They then went through 3 iterations of using the words to generate movement. The first was to move spontaneously to each word, the second was to create movement at a low level for each word, and finally, they had to combine the first two iterations and all the words. In the last instance, they took note of the transitions between the movements, as well as between the words. These became mini-dances that we recorded and replayed through the video abstraction tool, which emphasized the physicality of their movements. The subsequent discussion dealt with how the video abstraction refocused our view of *angika abhinaya* (expression in the physical mode) in a way that consciously considered the *whole* body’s movement and the way it takes up space to convey an idea, rather than the smaller and more detailed

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<sup>17</sup> Word Score from Creative Practices DCE 561 (course at ASU) and Equivalent<sup>s</sup> (Lerman 2019)

<sup>18</sup> Available from <https://synchronousobjects.osu.edu/content.html#/VideoAbstractionTool>

gestures of hastas or facial parts. This is not to discard the latter but rather to include the former and therefore, have the option of using it to support the rasa to be conveyed.

Doreen Nicholas, Survivor Engagement & Systems Change Specialist at ACESDV, joined us to conduct an Advocacy 101 training, for the last hour of the meeting. It was important for the dancers to get explicit guidance in partnering with survivors before their first meeting with their partners and to be aware that there are resources to help them cope with any questions or feelings that might arise. Doreen's recommendations included:

- Stand back and listen, witness.
- Let the survivor guide the process; "put them back in the driver's seat;" that's empowerment.
- What might work for you may not work for me, because we are different people.

This helped me highlight that the purpose of LVHD is the collaboration and process; that we as dancers/creators should focus on the present moment from where we would be led to discoveries, rather than on a product to which we would aspire. The discoveries would lead us to create an artifact. Doreen's training neatly reinforced the ideas of engaged pedagogy and somatics, as the dancers readied themselves for the collaborative aspect of the project.

The first meeting for survivor-participants in LVHD was on November 14. During the first half, I met with the 5 survivors who were going to work on solo creations with me as their facilitator. After introductions and checking in, we sat together and held the circle for one another as each survivor shared her story and what some of her aims in participating in LVHD were. I took notes with their permission, while using Spontaneous Gesture (Lerman), a creative tool to share back their own gestures after they talked and to reflect on what those gestures might mean in their storytelling. When this happened, their reactions to this type of listening were favorable.



- Leslie and Kate showed surprise that i had been watching so closely while taking notes.
- Kirstin was moved to talk more about her gesture of self-soothing and offered an additional gesture.
- When i explained to Sandra and Kate that their gestures were equivalent to Bharata-Natyam hastas, they took those gestures back and explored them more on their own.
- Manasi, whose Indian dance form Odissi uses the most of the same hastas as Bharata-Natyam, noted that this space was unique and new in that her art form converged with her survivor experience.

My collaboration with these women had begun. We went on to discuss what part of their stories and what messages they wanted to center and share most through LVHD, as well as any text or props they wanted to include. This gave us a plan to work with till our next individual meeting.

The second half of the meeting continued with the beginnings of collaboration between the dancer-participants and the remaining 4 survivor-participants. After introductions and checking in, the duos went through a series of tasks which included



*Figure 10. First Collaboration Meeting*

listening (as the survivor shared whatever they were comfortable with in their story with the dancer) and then moving (implementing the creative tools which the dancers had practiced in their introductory meeting). Deanna, music composer for LVHD, floated

among the duos listening and observing, while Coley documented some of the exchanges through photography and video. There were moments of apprehension, of pain, of courage and of discovery. I recall moving around the space, finishing a conversation with Niveditha and Sunshine Ray and turning around to remind the next duo, Nivedita and Blake, that the time allotted for that exercise was almost over. I walked up to them and interrupted to let them know. Almost immediately, i realized that i had failed to *listen*: Blake was in tears as he was talking, and Nivedita was overwhelmed. It was a tremendous learning moment, in which i found myself digging deep into the various somatic practices for a way to adjust my presence into something more supportive. The Alexander Technique's principles of breath and intentional inhibition helped me recalibrate. Inhibition is a pause to refrain from responding in one's habitual manner and allow for a change in approach; this helped me respond, not by profusely apologizing or completely ignoring my brashness, but by acknowledging my abruptness and Blake's courage in being there and sharing his story so generously. He reciprocated by revealing that he had learnt, during his own healing, to shed the tears rather than let the anger boil. We were all learners with vulnerabilities, as found in engaged pedagogy, which helped bring us a little closer.

When the base movement had been choreographed, each dancer shared the movement with her partner, while the others sat around them to simply witness the exchange without inserting themselves into their space. This led to further honing of the movement in collaboration, so that both dancers and survivors had something to build



*Figure 11. Witnessing & Listening, Partner Exchange*

upon until the next meeting. After the other participants had left, the dancers stayed on to continue work with guided reflection. I introduced new creative tools to evaluate their movements (Appendix G) from different perspectives and new Bharata-Nrityam movement.

A second official meeting with partnering participants took place, in addition to several more meetings with the soloists, music composer and dramaturge. The duo movements gained more shape by the second meeting, whose detailed agenda can be viewed in Appendix F. Because i was in India conducting research at the time of the second meeting, Coley facilitated it with Doreen present for support. Doreen, who had not seen the interactions between the dancers and survivors till this meeting, commented after the session that “It was wonderful and actually breathtaking.”<sup>19</sup> The participants’ reflections from that day were revealing in many ways. Niveditha remarked that her perception of herself as a dancer had shifted “...it was a lot of listening before i got to start expressing.” By this second meeting, the collaborative action research idea had taken firm root in the dancers. Collaboration is not a single meeting where the dancer hears a story once and then leaves to interpret and choreograph a work independent of the person whose story she is telling. The investment in time to listen and construct meaning together are both reflected in Niveditha’s remark. Pratyusha noted that this work was “speaking to the world rather than to *rasikas*” or connoisseurs (of dance). This observation speaks to our pedagogical sessions for the dancers in which they were constantly challenged to consider their dance from the point of view of the audience who are not fellow Bharata-Natyam dancers or connoisseurs. Did the stylized abhinaya they learnt in choreographies passed down from their gurus serve their audience in this moment? Were they really creating rasa? Melissa, Pratyusha’s partner,

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<sup>19</sup> Nicholas, Doreen. 2019. Text message to researcher. December 14.

also addressed the idea of *rasa* in her response as to whether her goals or message had changed as a survivor participating in LVHD: “Yes, at first focused on my story, but now more focused on the message of the story vs. the story itself.” Melissa had moved from simply re-telling her story to communicating the meaning she discovered in it. This is a first step towards being able to evoke *rasa* in the engaged audience.

Deanna created original music for the duos. In *her* process, she shared the initial compositions with them to get feedback. She would then make adjustments till the participants could feel the clarity of their intention in their work being reflected in the music and also feel they were reflecting the music, themselves. Talking about her creative process at the post-LVHD reflection, Deanna thought about “what is a possible feeling that you could be feeling as a result of something like this, and then taking that emotion and kind of putting that into a piece. It was different for all of them.”<sup>20</sup> Her capturing of *rasa* in the music was evidenced by the fact that when it came time to name their pieces, most of the survivors for whom Deanna had composed music, chose the name Deanna had given to her compositions for their pieces.

Subsequent meetings for the soloists took place at times and venues we would coordinate based on their schedules. The process to develop their performances was tailored based on their aims. These collaborations provided a phenomenological experience for me to investigate the place of agency in Bharata-Natyam coupled with the responsibility of being a dancer engaged in helping someone else tell their story, so that others can experience the *rasa*. The lines of who is a creator, a performer, and a witness were seamless in these meetings, calling for greater awareness in the moment. The collaborations with the soloists will be further explicated in the next section. The

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<sup>20</sup> Rusnock, Deanna. 2020. Post-LVHD reflection meeting on Zoom w/dancers and Doreen. March 19.

participants also met with me outside of the planned group meetings to keep refining their work and followed up each meeting with emails and text messages.

There were two “work-in-progress showings” of LVHD to audiences/witnesses outside our participant group. At the *ASU Symposium on Sexual Violence in Higher Education* on January 24, 2020, Melissa and Pratyusha presented their duet, Manasi her solo, and i shared the LVHD Poem (see p. 56), formed from the words of the participants over the previous two months. Deanna joined us with the final version of *Entrancement*, the music she composed for Melissa and Pratyusha, and Doreen was also present. The work was received with respect and appreciation, and the LVHD participants were able to see that their ideas were being communicated and eliciting positive responses. The second showing was a dress rehearsal on February 25. Here, all the participants were present and able to share their work with the tech crew for LVHD, whom they were meeting for the first time, and with members of the community. The experience was important not only to practice and ensure that all the elements of the performance and presentation were in place, but also to know that the participants’ voices were being heard.

The dancers had taken risks in their practice against the notions of tradition for LVHD using creative tools to explicate emotions unconventionally through nritta,<sup>21</sup> lying and rolling on the ground, unconventional costuming and music. The survivors had also taken risks by stepping out of their normative roles that dictate who can tell their stories, what stories they can tell, and how and when they can tell their stories. While there was a general feeling of validation, some of the participants expressed being overwhelmed at the end of the evening. Although we had created an environment that was meant to be

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<sup>21</sup> Commonly understood as non-representational (of a story, for example) dance today that is performed for simple aesthetic value; but, in the *Natyashastra*, it is the art of using the entire body to convey ideas, to aid in creating rasa (Subrahmanyam 1979)

supportive and safe, “the nature of trauma is that it is ever-present. Trauma triggers appear as a result of systemic oppressions experienced in the spaces around us.”<sup>22</sup> In foregrounding the idea of agency, LVHD aimed to shift any oppressive nature of the spaces to centering the voices of the participants, especially the survivors. Coley held the space in this capacity as facilitator, therefore reinforcing an environment in which the participants’ needs were centered to ensure their well-being, despite triggers that may have seeped through. This strategy would be repeated for the final presentation, where Coley, at least 3 advocates, and i were present to hold the space for the participants and attendees.

The live presentations on February 29 and March 1, 2020, were powerful. The space in which LVHD was held, Hackett House is an intimate space comprised of historical buildings and an outdoor courtyard, off Mill Avenue District, the heart of



*Figure 12. Space Set-up for LVHD*

nightlife at ASU. One of the survivors shared that, after her assault, she would come here

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<sup>22</sup> Sen, Rabeya, Director of Policy (Esperanza Community Housing) and Past Board President (California Partnership to End Domestic Violence) 2020. Phone conversation with researcher. September 27.

with her friends when she finally felt able to go out again. The event was held in the daytime and the neighborhood was filled with students and weekend gatherings, including a loud game crowd at a pub across the street. The circular space we had created was noticed by many for two qualities that are seemingly antithetical—intimacy and boisterousness. As one LVHD attendee wrote in their survey:

“The setting/location was perfect. I like that the event was located in a space outside in the midst of the Mill Ave commotion. A reminder to be aware amidst the noise, to bring awareness in a place a public place where many people may be frequenting that have/do experience domestic violence in some form. I liked the separate stations, hearing all the sounds at each station at the same time. It felt interconnected, although someone may see/focus on a single performance, you could hear them all in unison. It felt synchronistic, though I know it must have been intentional. It’s a reminder that although someone may feel alone in their story, we are not alone!”

Each iteration was attended by at least 75 people, including children. It may be of interest to note that LVHD was presented *before* the restrictions for the COVID-19 pandemic were put in place in Arizona, especially when considering the visual for *Betrayal* on p. 122 and the description of the choreography that follows below. The pieces within LVHD will be discussed further in the next section. After the presentations, the participants filled out a final reflection form, shared more about their LVHD experiences at the next S.H.A.R.E. meeting on March 14 and at a dancers’ meeting, including Shreya from India and Deanna, on March 19.

Several challenges presented themselves during LVHD. I will enumerate the lesser of the challenges followed by the ones that were more serious. The initial difficulty that presented itself was the lack of any volunteers for LVHD from Bharata-Natyam schools in the Phoenix area, despite in-person recruitment and assurances from the teachers. One prospective dance participant had asked whether she could choreograph with her friends once she got the story. This reflected the prevalent misuse of the word *collaboration*, especially in this Bharata-Natyam context in the US. The difficulty of

finding Bharata-Natyam dancers was resolved when Shreya, Pratyusha, Niveditha and Nivedita offered to be part of my thesis work. Another drawback was the number of meetings i had to arrange and attend to ensure that the participants were at ease and satisfied with their work. I had not planned for so many, but it was an expected outcome of having so many participants (for which i am grateful). Funding is a constant obstacle, made more so by the increased scope of the project, but due to guidance during MFA seminars, some of the weight of this was lifted through grant monies. As mentioned earlier, 2 survivors had to drop out, or postpone, their participation due to various



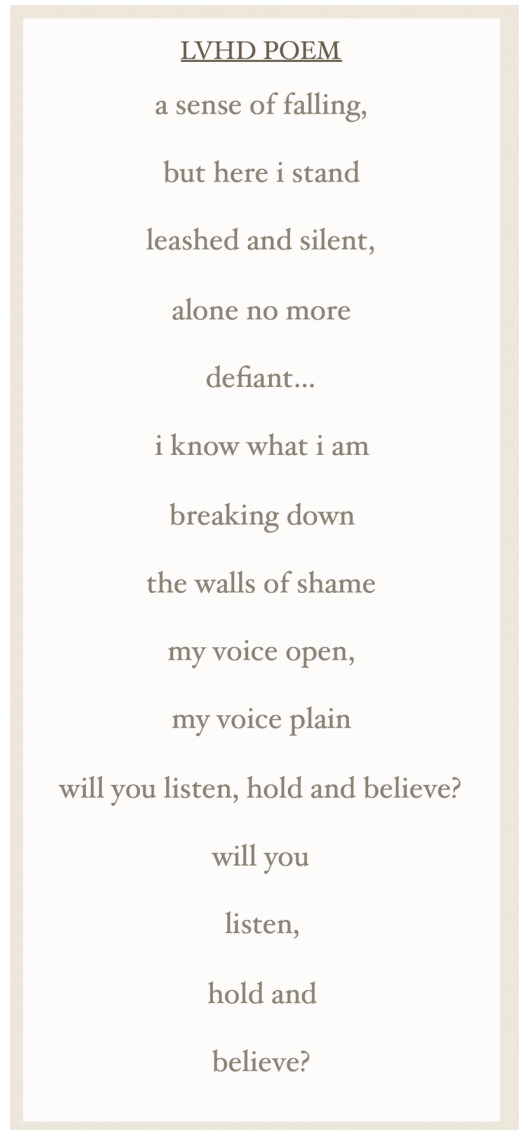
*Figure 13. Survivor art donation to LVHD.*

personal circumstances. Having worked with both of them on their solos, i could see how valuable their work would be to the community, so, instead of completely letting go, i asked them if they would be comfortable for me to keep their work in a “treasure box” for later. They agreed. Kirstin, who was able to attend LVHD, donated a piece of art (Figure 13) in which we collected the LVHD surveys. The most devastating challenge came in the form of Shreya’s accident, in which her leg was broken. This happened while she was visiting home in Bengaluru, India, so she could not return to Tempe, AZ, for the remaining meetings and the final presentation of LVHD. Her project partner Gretchen asked if there were some way to facilitate their continued collaboration, so i arranged for their meetings to be virtual. This was a challenge, but more importantly, it was a transformational inspiration, which will be discussed further in the observations below. The challenges present room for growth and encourage versatility in approach; they are creative tools in their own right.



## Initial Observations

Because the aim of LVHD was to communicate each survivor’s story or message, every participant was concerned with abhinaya to convey their message and evoke a response from their audience. They used each type of abhinaya (body as the physical, text and music as the verbal, costuming and props as the external, and reflection/experience to tap into the internal). The survivors organically embodied this calling as a dancer, while the dancers became more acutely conscious of it in their practice to evoke rasa, “to produce a quality of performance on the part of the actor [dancer], and on the other hand, to produce a quality of response on the part of the observer” (Schwarz, 36). This chapter will consider each piece in LVHD through one aspect that stood out in this process of evoking rasa and discuss it in relationship to the principles and intents of this research. I will follow a pathway laid out in the LVHD presentation brochure (p. 120) and encourage reference to the posters (Appendix G) that were developed for each work in LVHD using the creators’ own words in reflecting on the process.



*Figure 14. LVHD Poem*

### *Calling the Circle*<sup>23</sup>

LVHD began with *Calling the Circle* facilitated by Rabeya (see Footnote 22). The audience gathered and sat around the central space, from where Rabeya introduced LVHD and its intentions, clearly identified advocates and resources at hand, explained the program procedure and set the tone for LVHD by reading the LVHD Poem (Figure 14 above), which was made up of the survivors words as heard during the meetings leading up to the presentation. The dancers and survivors joined in the second and third repetitions of the recitation, converging to the center from the outer edges of the space. The recitation served as a direct invitation to the audience to engage in LVHD.

### Duet 1—*Lovingly Protected*

Pratyusha and Melissa were partnered to create a work that spoke to a part of Melissa's story. One of the main challenges that Pratyusha identified was creating movement based on the story without a frame—of music, rhythm, etc. Though she had depicted stories without music before, she noted that those stories were known to the audience and were commonly depicted with familiar, if not set movements in Bharata-Natyam. She found the Word Score tool very useful as a springboard. After listening to Melissa's story, she wrote down five words that stayed with her (Figure F1 in Appendix F). Then, she made a movement for each of them. Responding to prompts to change her level in space, speed, mode of abhinaya (e.g. from physical movement to verbal or sound), etc. she refined each movement and shared it with Melissa. Melissa "listened" to her and responded with her reactions. This dialogue over 3 meetings helped build their 6-minute piece in which Melissa also danced.

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<sup>23</sup> <http://www.thecircleway.net/lineage>

One of the challenges that Pratyusha faced was finding the right iteration for the phrase “tables turning.” Her initial movement brought out the meaning she read in Melissa’s story of gaining an advantage, so that she depicted a rising above by turning and getting up from sitting to standing. Melissa, though she understood the idea, felt that a different movement that focused more on the turning would be better. Oftentimes in Bharata-Natyam, as dancers gain experience, we are taught to look at the esoteric meanings and forget that the literal meanings might also be important or might be the step we need to reach the higher meaning. I asked Pratyusha to take a step back and look at the words “tables turning,” just as they are, referring back to the famous verse by Nandikesvara (see Footnote 8) that most classical Indian dancers learn during their training, but do not necessarily pay attention to the constructivist approach delineated in it. First, explore the physical, then move to the intellectual and only then to the emotional. Then it is easier to arrive at the essence. She used this approach, which also pointed to the fact that sometimes an idea takes time to formulate through several iterations and approaches.

In this case, although Pratyusha’s initial movement was strong and beautiful, seen through her partner’s eyes, there was more to be discovered. Pratyusha not only tapped into an approach that was written over 2000 years ago for her dance tradition,



*Figure 15. Holding Hands and Joining Hearts*

but she also took the time to center Melissa’s vision and voice in the piece. They found a turning that Pratyusha did standing on a brass plate (an element from another Indian dance form), playing with the

rhythmic cycle of 9 beats, which Melissa beat on her heart leading up to the turning. This collaboration channeled all the stages of movement development towards the moment of rasa.

Melissa chose to film their piece in front of a bookshop/cafe where she had found the “tables had turned” in her favor. She thrived in her equal partnership with Pratyusha. Their piece ended with a movement where they hold hands on one side and take their other hands from touching their hearts to meeting palm-to-palm (“holding hands and joining hearts” movement), which they carried into the live presentation of LVHD. To close their piece, they shared this gesture they had created together with audience members.

#### *Solo 1-Betrayal*

Kate’s first meeting experience was reaffirming: “...I always am a little afraid of ... hearing about other people’s trauma, but...the women in my group had worked through a lot of their trauma and were in an empowered place. It changed the way that I presented my story...left it on a positive note...” After finding the specific story that Kate wanted to make known with movements from her own gesturing that day, we planned to meet again. The next time we met, Kate came to rehearsal on a crutch.

Kate came ready to work but was concerned that she would not be able to dance for LVHD. A leg injury from running prevented her from easily bending her knee, so that going to sitting or coming up to standing was difficult. We worked through this in two ways. First, i had to help her reimagine what dance can be. For many dance is a display of physical strength and prowess. While this has validity, the possibilities of minimal physical movement are extensive, especially in Bharata-Natyam, because the goal is not physical exercise but spiritual exercise. It is exploring the meaning through abhinaya, a

subtle movement of an eyebrow or even speaking, to find the essence and convey it to the audience. Once this idea took root, Kate was able to imagine her dance in a new light. She focused on movement that allowed her to slowly change her level from lying down to sitting to standing. A somatic exercise of miniscule body adjustments adapted from the Feldenkrais method, which i shared in one of our early sessions to help her focus in the present, inspired this idea for Kate, along with hastas i offered back to her after listening to her story.

Once she was standing, we wanted to reflect a repeated “sense of falling” and getting up that she mentioned in her first meeting. Since her injury prevented her from doing this, our solution was to have another dancer (me during rehearsals and Elisa, pictured here in Figure 16, during the live presentation) stand in front of her to mirror the movement she chose from our workshopping



*Figure 16. Being Silenced*

together. This movement of an index finger oscillating in front of the lips emphasized her experience of being silenced on all fronts. The dancer standing in front of her, mirroring this, then fell repeatedly while she remained standing to show her “sense of falling” and still getting up. Collaborating with Kate on this piece demonstrated the power of *small* (in terms of movement and space) in telling a story of such import. Feldenkrais<sup>24</sup> exercises and detailed abhinaya carried a potent story to the audience.

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<sup>24</sup> From the Feldenkrais Method of somatic education (<https://feldenkrais.com>).

## Duet 2—*Blake's Spanish Heart*

Nivedita and Blake connected seamlessly from their first meeting. Blake came prepared with his “message board project,” through which he talks to countless strangers every day to create awareness about sexual violence. These strangers have signed over 300 boards with affirming messages for Blake. In sharing his story with Nivedita, Blake challenged her in her usage of abhinaya to clearly depict his story.

Nivedita’s Word Score (Figure F4, Appendix F) included the word *love*. She found it difficult to translate what *love* might look like in a scenario not usually found in Bharata-Natyam scenarios, where she had to depict the trust between two men in love. Taking a common depiction of two lovers’ interaction in Bharata-Natyam, she showed the two men holding hands and spinning, and then looking at the moon with meaningful glances. It was a confusing expression to those who did not grow up dancing Bharata-Natyam. Again, taking abhinaya as an art form independent of the traditional stories depicted in Bharata-Natyam was difficult, but using Equivalents with additional prompts, Nivedita was able to loosen the reins on stylistic or clichéd abhinaya and explore a more realistic version that would speak to the contemporary story and the audience she would have for LVHD. She chose to hold hands and walk, then sit on a car hood (that was part of the scene when filming) and talk intimately with her “lover;” when she continues to develop this intimacy by leaning on him, she falters as a reaction to his pulling away, thus setting the stage for the betrayal to come.

A second challenge she accepted was to look her audience in the eye while performing, especially during *Calling the Circle* and *Uncontainable* when the participants ask the audience in the poem recitation if they will “listen, hold and believe.” It is common for performers on a stage to stay behind the proverbial fourth wall while performing. This is true of Bharata-Natyam as well, especially since its advent to the

proscenium stage from the temple in the early twentieth century. The anonymity of the audience gives them an all-seeing advantage. By making eye contact, the dancer takes away some of that advantage by purposely involving the audience in the creative process. The dancer harnesses some level of control or agency over how the audience receives the performance, rather than the audience *taking* without being aware of the *giving*. In this version of activist performance, the audience is held accountable. Nivedita remarked in the post-LVHD reflection: “Making eye contact...it was a *different* feedback while dancing. Initially it was hard and then...it got easier. It probably made my movements stronger. It amplified everything that i was feeling while dancing.”<sup>25</sup> Nivedita’s experience is one of finding her voice in her own dance practice, beyond the “traditional” ways of moving or expressing, and then, being able to claim a sense of agency in the performative aspect of her dance, as well as in her participation as a member of the community.

Blake chose to film their piece at an apartment parking lot on the roof facing the



*Figure 17. A Safe Space*

apartment in which he was abused. Though he did not plan to be in the piece, he helped bring it to a close by carrying some of the message boards he has been collecting to Nivedita who lay them down as if to create a deliberate border to a space of joy.

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<sup>25</sup> Mahesh, Nivedita. 2020. Post-LVHD reflection meeting on Zoom w/dancers and Doreen. March 19.

## Solo 2—*The Lioness and the Sacrificial Lamb*

The opportunity to work with Leslie afforded me many moments of learning and recognizing. Leslie has a blog and chose to use her first post as the text for her performance. On the first day that we started working on the choreography, she read the piece, while i took notes on her hand gestures and inflections. The words were sprinkled with incisive imagery and filled with poignant emotion. Then, we stood in front of the mirror together, and i read the blog piece and replicated her movements, filling in spaces with stillness or more movement, while she watched and focused on physically re-embodiment her own gestures. This iteration of Spontaneous Gesture saw an evolution of Leslie’s original gestures through my reflection of them and then through *her* twice-removed reflection of her own gestures. For example, she had reached out to her right side with her right hand when she asked her abuser, “Do you love me?” She also made a circular movement with her palm when she talked about cleaning. We put the two together with some additions to make a movement phrase for her text:

- a. “I just want you to love me I would say [*movement: extend right “alapadma,” “open flower” hasta to the upper right side with head and eyes turned imploringly up towards it*].
- b. And that is what I would think as I cleaned [*movement: lower head with chin right towards chest, bring right hand back to center in “pataka” or “flag” hasta, circle clockwise on a horizontal plane at mid-level, as if wiping*],
- c. cooked [*movement: change pataka to “mushti” or “fist” hasta and circle counterclockwise, as if stirring*],
- d. gave birth [*movement: use two pataka hastas pointing downward with palms facing away from body to show the flow of the baby from belly down and out from vagina and scoop up as if holding a baby*].



Figure 18. *Do you love me?*



e. Do you love me now? Please love me! [*movement: repeat movement in a*].”

As we moved through the words and the movement, Leslie would exclaim softly or gently shake her head looking downward and continue. She stopped to take a few deep breaths at one point, and it reminded me of breathing techniques used in yoga and qigong. After checking in with her about whether she would like to continue, we practiced some big breaths using the whole arms and body. These became part of the opening choreographic movements. I constantly remind my students about noticing the breath, but had to take a moment on cue from Leslie to remember this in my own practice with my partner. In the choreography it served in finding ease and in preparing the body for the emotional journey to come.

Once again, Deanna worked with Leslie to find the moments of emphasis in her story where the breath was held and released with control, till the end when a true release is found. Leslie’s dance emphasized her text in the aim to communicate with her audience, but it also brought her comfort, as she wrote, “I have done years of hard core therapy but [dance] has helped me move some of my healing to a different stage...” Although, the aim of LVHD was not one of therapy, from Leslie’s account, it was a product. Leslie joined LVHD with two major goals in mind: to create more awareness of domestic violence through art and to explore the possible healing aspects of sharing through art. She embraced her agency both as a performer and as her own healer in LVHD.

### Duet 3—*Dance of Flames*

Niveditha and Sunshine Ray created a powerful work for film, which carried into their presence for the days of the live presentation. Sunshine Ray’s ideas for performance included “isolated, can’t trust..., not comfortable with my body and low self-esteem, how

I was torn down but survived abuse by speaking up” while one of her expectations was to find “movement, healing in mind, body and soul.” Niveditha’s Word Score (Figure F3, Appendix F), gathered from listening to Sunshine Ray, added to these details: *survivor, healing, meditation, bridge, forest* and *possibilities*, and offered interesting starting points for movement. Yet, at a third (informal) meeting with the duos, there seemed to be a crisis.

After the meeting, when i met with the dancers separately to work through any questions they had in their dancing, Niveditha approached me in tears, saying she needed help with her dance, that “it’s so raw... I don’t have any information.” Two thoughts came to mind immediately: (i) there was a focus on the product more than the process and (ii) there was a need for tools to understand the wealth of information that she *did* have based on what Sunshine Ray was willing to share. Both of these spoke to why i am reexamining my teaching goals. This frustration on the part of the student is a disquieting result of our dance education culture. Both rest on the premise of re-producing notions of tradition as discussed earlier with regard to the structure of Authority of Tradition (Figure 3), emphasizing performance over exploration. Niveditha concurred<sup>26</sup> with this adding that Bharata-Natyam is taught with a “bottom-up” approach, where the movements and metaphors are given to the dancer so that they can present them in service of the big idea or *rasa*. LVHD turned this around by starting with the big idea or *rasa*, and suddenly, the dancers were charged with finding those movement and metaphorical factors for themselves. This is where new perspectives via creative tooling enter to help the dancers explore methods of communication through their bodies which are already available in the theories of *abhinaya* and *rasa*. Deep physical explorations of *bhavas* found in the metaphors of the Word Score using

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<sup>26</sup> Muthukrishnan, Niveditha. 2020. Personal phone conversation. September 28.

Rasaboxes and adopting a view of the stage as a 3-D canvas,<sup>27</sup> reinforced the possibility of Niveditha having agency to generate her own metaphors with the information Sunshine Ray had chosen to share.

Niveditha had chosen to elaborate the word *forest* which was common in Bharata-Natyam, depicting the usual vines, trees, flowers and rivers. But she did not know how to progress further. I prompted her to think of Sunshine Ray’s ideas for the performance, and she chose “I was torn down but survived abuse by speaking up.” I



Figure 19. Torn Down and Surviving

asked her to think of what torn down could look like from her last movement showing *river*. She chose to show being pushed in and drowning. We worked on perspectives of being the one who is pushed in and the ensuing panic, moving away from stylized and pre-set movements from previous Bharata-Natyam choreographies to the

survivor experiences that had been shared with her. After this movement began to form, I prompted Niveditha again to find what “survive” meant to Sunshine Ray and how she helped herself. Niveditha organically turned to the seated Sunshine Ray and grabbed her legs to pull herself out of drowning. This was a beautiful gesture that centered Sunshine Ray as strong and resilient, while advancing the narrative of healing. Niveditha found a way to successfully evoke *rasa* using Bharata-Natyam *abhinaya*, while respecting her project partner’s boundaries in sharing her story.

Sunshine Ray chose to have her film taken in the building that ACESDV is housed in because of the significance of some of the surrounding buildings. She was very

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<sup>27</sup> Theater Grottesco. 2019. Workshop at ASU. Fall.

nervous to be part of the piece, even though she was prepared with her costuming and her diary as a prop. Once we adapted her script so that she was more comfortable with it, Sunshine Ray found the moments of confluence between speaking her words and Niveditha's movements.

### Solo 3—*Uttarajivin—The Power to Rise*

Manasi is a professional Odissi<sup>28</sup> dancer, who is also a survivor of domestic violence. I invited her to participate after i met her at a fundraiser for the Arizona South Asians for Safe Families (ASAFSF). We began our collaboration to create her solo piece with the tool Walk and Talk, which all LVHD participants used to begin their process and hone in on the specific aspect of their story or message they wished to convey. Manasi's imagery was vivid, but, when choosing a Word Score from which to work rather than from a narrative as a survivor, the task became challenging.

As in prevalent Bharata-Natyam education, Odissi follows a similar style of training with its unique movements and the common theory of abhinaya and communication. The Word Score, which included *my child, power, blessing, dance career, and life experience* was disjointed without the narrative. While she developed movement based on the first three words, honing them into a dance piece



*Figure 20. Delving Deeper*

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<sup>28</sup> Indian dance form from the eastern state of Orissa which has a similar performative history to Bharata-Natyam and also has origins in the *Natyashastra*

would take time, which she did not have based on her responsibilities, including making tops for the costumes of all the participants.

The intersections of Manasi being a dancer and also a survivor (clearly indicated in the last 2 phrases of her word score) in LVHD made our collaboration complex. When she indicated a desire to create dance (she had been a company dancer who was taught choreography) that did not depend on transplanting movements from other learnt choreographies, i urged her to use the creative tools. In her creation, however, she chose to re-produce prescribed Odissi movements to convey her narrative in a *polished* performance. Her responsibility to her audience included a sense of attractiveness even if it meant making the intended message secondary. To address her desire to create differently but also respect her idea of performance, i offered her alternatives in using abhinaya. We worked on her narrative to move away from (once again) the stylistic to the realistic mode of abhinaya. In this case, Manasi was depicting both characters in her story, the abuser and herself, turning one way and then the other. I asked her to try focusing on emoting as just one character—her own—who *reacts* to the other whom she places in the space using her eyes and focus. Adopted even in a small way, this led to her delving deeper into her own reactions and emotions as a survivor and being able to evoke the *rasa* in her audience fulfilling her role as a dancer, as well.

Post-LVHD, Manasi reflected that she had very “strong and powerful feelings,” but that her wishes for the next time would be to “practice more, [that] our dance floor will be good and audience will be little far.” It can be inferred from this that she would have preferred more time to practice and perfect her dance, that the floor/space she had were more like a stage, and that the performance were not so intimate, but rather more closely resemble a conventional proscenium setting. She also mentioned that this was

the first time she had to marry her identity as a dancer with her identity as a survivor. The struggle in finding the space where the two can coexist is palpable in her thoughts.

#### Duet 4—*The Light in the Dark*

Gretchen came to LVHD as a way for her to investigate trauma and healing for herself and for others. Shreya listened to her story and chose the key phrase “Even in the darkness, the light shines through” (Figure F2, Appendix F). At their first meeting, Shreya and Gretchen worked extensively on finding and sharing movement. One of the words that Shreya had chosen from the story Gretchen told her was *sirens*, and as they spun with their hands over their ears in the Nelson Fine Arts Center courtyard, it was uncanny to hear the real-time wail of sirens going past. Several times during these sessions, there would be a need for a brief hiatus for release from a trauma trigger. Gretchen, herself studying trauma-informed practices, was helpful in being open about what she was feeling and what she needed to take care of herself. Gretchen also noted, “There were so many synchronicities like the sirens in the courtyard, mating ducks at the site (where she had been raped and where she chose to return to film her piece), the police lights during the filming... This is what has been transforming.”<sup>29</sup>

One of the biggest challenges of the project was in this collaboration. Shreya was hit by a motorcycle and broke her leg in two places, when she was visiting home in India. So, she could not return for LVHD. Our partner meetings moved to Zoom and choreography was set through discussion over cyberspace. Gretchen was instrumental in foregrounding healing in our conversations about the process of LVHD. After we filmed their piece, with me filling in for Shreya, she highlighted that this process “opened me up. There’s this stuck person; i can honor her and give her a better story. You shared the

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<sup>29</sup> Gretchen. 2020. LVHD Final Reflection.

pictures of all of us afterwards and you know, i felt we changed it...and we took back that night, that experience with good.”<sup>30</sup>



Figure 21. *Across the Distance*

For the live performances, the presentation was adapted to include Shreya through a WhatsApp video conversation with Gretchen that the audience could witness. She filmed a video at her home in Bengaluru using the original choreography, which was incorporated into the film made here

for the live presentation. Shreya chose two particular movements to coordinate between the films: (i) a movement as if brushing off something unwanted to represent Gretchen’s word *yucky* and (ii) a movement of bringing their palms facing outward to touch each other’s as if in a mirror reflection (which they had planned to perform after a Bharata-Natyam step with *pataka*, hasta, looking away from their palms, to express Gretchen’s word *dissociation*). Despite the distance, they were able to perform the palm-touching movement live at LVHD when Gretchen brought her palms to meet Shreya’s on the screen. As one attendee noted: “Real. Magic. Relationships between dancers/survivors.”<sup>31</sup> Gretchen and Shreya’s collaboration demonstrated the power of abhinaya that resulted from an intellectual and emotional connection and was performed in a very physical manner to evoke the rasa in their piece. Also, that Gretchen felt comfortable enough to ask for Shreya to be present with her at LVHD spoke to specific

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<sup>30</sup> Gretchen. 2020. Zoom workshopping conversation. February 13.

<sup>31</sup> LVHD Response Form Data-Additional Comments

principles within engaged pedagogy, an empowered process as well as the success of building community through the collaboration.

### *Uncontainable*

When the audience had experienced all the performances, they returned to the center space. A final dance piece, *Uncontainable*, brought the program to a close. Using nritta, live flute music by Deanna and singing by Varty, the choreography sought to embody the LVHD Poem in three parts. The dancers danced around a pot filled with pebbles that the participants had placed in it, symbolizing things they wanted to let go (trauma, shame, harmful social norms, etc.). *Uncontainable* ended with Varty singing the LVHD Poem, while the dancers danced the poem, reminding the audience of the invitation to listen and believe survivors, a first step to transformative justice. The survivors then joined the dancers in the center to topple the pot in a final gesture of release. The space was then opened to a facilitated opportunity for audience reflections and affirmations.

### **Success**

Success can be measured in numerous ways. I will consider success by referring to Figure 4, the structure of Agency in Tradition, and Tagore's iteration that art is the response of the creative soul to the call of the real. In the case of LVHD as art, the call of the real was sexual and domestic violence in our community. Its effect, felt by the attendees from the community, is depicted in Appendix H. Figure H1 records that out of the 139 responses received, 92.81% indicated strong agreement or agreement that their awareness about sexual and domestic violence had increased after the LVHD experience,



while 95.68% strongly agreed or agreed that they would be willing to help. To supplement this information, the Tag Cloud (Figure H4) shows the occurrences of key words or ideas in attendees responses to open-ended questions on the response form, including recording the words or moments they remembered from the performances and films. Among these *dance, powerful, survivors, courage, strength, performance, thank, emotional, healing, and moving* stand out. Figure 22 below offers a visual of the key words from the Tag Cloud in Appendix H, making a words size directly proportional to the number of times it appeared in the LVHD responses. Table 2 below lists select comments from the attendees that represent a majority of the opinions regarding how

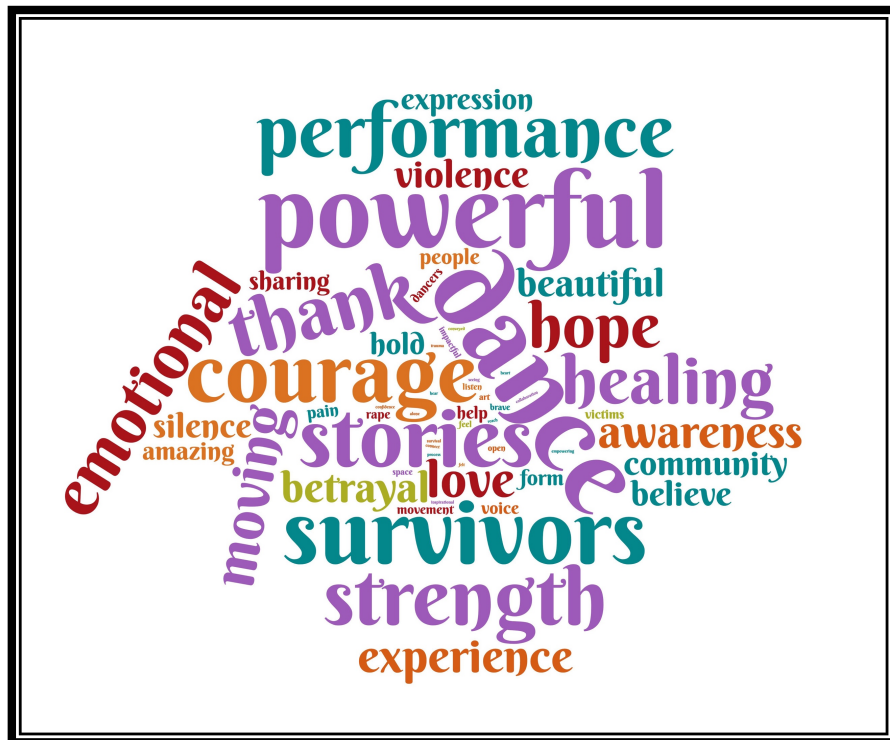


Figure 22. Word Cloud from LVHD Responses  
(refer to Tag Cloud on p. 131 for details)

the audience responded to the call of the real in the LVHD experience, thus becoming an integral part of the process. The audience response, including a single negative

<b>TABLE 2.</b> Selected Reflections from LVHD Response Forms	
1	Bharata natyam is an 'art form.' Every art needs to be aggressively and assertively change and proceed.
2	This event brought so many different people and mediums of expression together. I'm curious is this the future of performance, art, and/or expression. Appreciated it all! Congratulations!
3	I was grateful for the final dance, the quartet, the repetition of the poem
4	I was thrilled to see that how dance can be the language to express difficult things that are sometimes not encouraged by the society. It was so fantastic to witness such dance performances and vocality [sic] of individual survivors (I would not call them victims anymore)
5	I saw Bharata Natyam and recognized how it can be used to tell story in a way that words simply cannot.
6	Issues can be addressed by talking out to people and knowing your inner voice, Dance forms can be used as a medium for physical and emotive communication
7	Breaking the "expectations" & using dance as a medium & a voice, vs performance
8	Emotionally overwhelming performances; amazing how dance can amplify the stories, their impact + help the audience connect at a much deeper level
9	I am taken by the survivors' resilience and their courage. Nearly cried at each survivor's story - from sadness, then at their journey for hope and strength. Humbled by this performance and grateful for the opportunity to be here.
10	So inspired by this intersection of dance + true life. I want to see more interpretive, creative expression of issues thru the [?] of dance
11	Cathartic experience
12	It was a very powerful and extremely emotional performance. Manasi's dance was the most striking to me. This even helped me to understand the power of dance especially a traditional form like Bharata Natyam which I have only witnessed in stage/mythological setting. Please continue this amazing project with the same energy and strength as now!
13	Moved & cried & evaluated myself & others' experiences; LOVED how Bharatanatyam used to respectfully tell others stories; SO POWERFUL the last dance in front of the urn & its being knocked down
14	It stands out to me how the survivors overcome the separation and share with us, integrate us listeners; I admire the dancers for the strength to embody someone else's trauma; through this beautiful and welcoming event I feel more confident to approach victims
15	This was a moving & beautiful, educational experience. I learned Bharata Natyam as a child & only today witnessed how impactful & empowering of an art form it is. Amazing job! Thank you!

response,<sup>32</sup> indicated a clear evoking of rasa that arose out of the process and audience coming together to create an experience. This is success.

<sup>32</sup> "I was not aware of the nature of the topic and was disturbed by not knowing. I am not familiar with the culture presented so the movements did not resonate. I felt more alone because of it. Having been assaulted by Christian culture I wish *Jesus* was warned as the word *rape* was."

With regard to the participants, their reflections throughout the learning and creation, right after LVHD, and into the present have shown that the creative soul was not only activated by the process but continues to brew with continued contemplation and analysis. The participants also expressed desires to repeat or grow the LVHD work into new experiences. Table 3 charts some of the final reflections from the participants. I have included both the positive and the challenges that they expressed, because success is not only in that which is good, but also in that which is learnt from the experience in order that we may grow. This reflects the process of coming to knowledge via interpretation or teaching and that learning has no beginning or end as in the principles of engaged pedagogy.

<b>TABLE 3.</b> Participant Reflections, Post-LVHD		
	Success	Challenge
Dancers	When I first choreographed the word "betrayal" and Blake said "this is as close as i felt that night"	Having to change the whole performance due to my injury and not being in the country; the struggle part was difficult emotionally; my inability to have presence physically with the audience
Survivors	Movement speaks louder and more gentle. Less trauma through movement and a space was opened up to allow healing and a bridging between me and the audience	I need some down time to just process what just took place and gather my wits and strength to move forward.
Dancers	The process was well-structured along with including plenty of creative elements. It was surprising to me as to how what we needed next was well thought-out by our director and it was made available either as a resource or an answer.	[Need] More practice, more clarity, more creativity on how to include more steps
Survivors	it is easier to express emotions with movement than with words, because a movement doesn't have to be 'perfect' or 'right', it just has to be felt	I was really sad that many of the people I invited didn't go.

TABLE 3. Participant Reflections, Post-LVHD		
	Success	Challenge
Dancers	emotionally demanding, satisfaction, connection	holding myself together after live performance with Melissa during interaction with audience
Survivors	From the dance Pushing the pot, this coming together collectively in the circle being held and seen by one another and community.	When I had three young girls sitting to watch my film during my opening I could not say the word rape. I did feel their innocence stop me from saying the word rape, I chose to say assault instead.
Dancers	I think a major role I played was a supporter and motivator to Gretchen in the performance through my movements	The days following my performance was emotional but I had a bunch of friends and family who respected and supported my feelings. The feeling that it was over was difficult too.
Survivors	They listened. That is powerful. It was amazing to see how much the audience embraced our art by watching and listening.	The fear of the unknown, such as the reaction of the attendees.

I finally return to the students of Dansense~Nrtyabodha, with whom this process began. All of them were in attendance at LVHD, and a few of them participated as volunteers. The latter group of girls, ages 9 to 14, was asked to share their definitions of success for LVHD. Practice of reflection and expression in their dance lessons contributed to their articulations in class, given below.

- “I think the participants were relieved to share their dances because they had it inside of themselves for such a long time without telling anyone and I also thought that they had confidence in us so we can change our future, stop any kind of violence and that other people didn’t have to experience it. When they opened the floor some of the speakers were crying others kept stopping in the middle.”
- “Success to me means...that the dancers were happy to do the dance...were happy to show the audience. What I saw was that on Sunday when people were given the microphone some people started to cry or they had many voice cracks. People also enjoyed the performance by filling out many response forms. To me this performance was not only educational but a very open place where people can talk about their feelings.”
- “It was a learning experience. When I was passing out the forms I saw people whimpering and some even crying. Success in this performance was that the audience really listened and was planning and trying to go make an impact.

Since this was not a topic many people talk about it gave some people an eye-opener. As the survivors shared their story, people were crying because they might have experienced it. I also noticed that the survivors were talking about the ways of how they stood up for themselves.”

- “I felt that the success in this program were the sharing of the stories of all the survivors that performed as well as the performers in the audience. The sharing of these stories in a community are important because it gives a sense of how much domestic violence is rampant in society nowadays. Towards the end of the program, when the audience had cycled through the various live and video performances, a handful of audience members managed to speak up about their own personal experiences with domestic violence. I saw certain emotional baggages [sic] being carried through their voice as they spoke. That emotion or connection is what makes the impact in society.”
- “I think the emotions people showed and the amount of forms returned showed success because of the emotional connection of people who had experiences this like that. I saw people crying and looking sad, sympathetic and the audience appreciated it very much with the comments they said on the microphone.”

(Source: Dansense~Nrtyabodha Student Reflection on  
“What was success in LVHD?” March 3, 2020)

The students’ reflections both as dancers and as audience members emphasize the importance of rasa, not as a separate outcome of a presentation from the creators to the onlookers, but as an experience in which the audience participates. This thinking is part of the tradition of inquiry with which i embarked on this pedagogical and choreographic endeavor to demonstrate the value of voice in Bharata-Natyam education and its role in Bharata-Natyam students’ engaging meaningfully in the community even beyond the diaspora. This level of reflection and inquiry is possible with almost any student at any level of learning. As the teacher, however, it is up to me to bring it out in them using prompts and questions that reflect this tradition of inquiry and, equally important, giving them the time to practice this kind of reflection.

## Conclusions

### Significance of Work

The current research has solidified over three years of investigation, design and implementation. Answers to the questions have been unveiled. The layers, however, continue to peel, back revealing more knowledge in the spirit of the ancient Indian teaching-learning process that is reflected in engaged pedagogy and somatic practices.

The initial survey of students of Bharata-Natyam in the US and their parents indicated an interesting trend (Table 1) which is significant for this research. The percentage of students who show an appreciation for the expressive or creative facet of the prevalent mode of Bharata-Natyam education (34.4%) markedly exceeds the percentage of parents who do so (20%). Most of the student respondents had 6+ years of dance training when they participated in the survey. This indicates (i) that practical experience in Bharata-Natyam exposes a student to the possibilities of dance, and (ii) that continuous practice opens the door to the creative aspect of dance, once students have explored the re-productive aspect of set choreographies. Based on the experiences recounted in this document, the percentage of students who recognize the creative or expressive facet of Bharata-Natyam would easily exceed the 34.4 %, not *years* into their training, but just months into it, with the addition of creative tools in their learning.

While it may be that Bharata-Natyam teachers are aware of or desire to use their privileged platform of teaching in order to guide students towards greater agency in their dance and toward a more transformative impact in their engagement using dance, it might be challenging to implement changes without resources or experience of practices that focus on creative tools to harness the possibilities of Bharata-Natyam. Guiding students through inquiry and exploration is a deliberate process that requires thought

and practice, as with any other discipline. Without these, the students could be left confused or disillusioned and be adversely affected in their pursuit of Bharata-Natyam.

When Bharata-Natyam education in the US is refocused through the lenses of Bharata-Nrityam, somatics and engaged pedagogy, teachers can more easily access tools to empower their students in their Bharata-Natyam practice. With the use of creative tools among beginner students as seen in the Dansense~Nrtyabodha lessons and *Kriti*, students asked more questions and made critical observations about the techniques they were learning. That is, instead of simply re-producing a step or a gesture for abhinaya, they sought to know more about them and even tried to make up their own. This deeper investigation leads to a deeper investment by the students in their own Bharata-Natyam education, no matter what the age. The tradition of inquiry set a foundation for agency at the early stage of training—an agency in learning that motivates, as well as generates responsibility.

Introducing creative tools from the early stages also demystifies the notions around tradition being static or something to be guarded, as well as notions around what creation means. It is also necessary for students to practice using the tools, building up from small exercises. So, when they reach more advanced levels of training, they are not hindered by a rote or authoritarian approach to dancing that can inhibit questioning and creativity. It was notable that in *Kriti*, though the non-Bharata-Natyam/non-Indian dancers had experience with creative tools, their notions around tradition as being sacred (from their own experiences) deterred them from interpreting the Ganesha stories despite the valuable knowledge and experience from their own cultures. The dancers had to find the permission—the agency—within themselves and were helped by an explanation of the theory of rasa in Indian dance, which puts the responsibility on the dancer to convey the mood or message of a story and include the audience in the

experience. On the other hand, in LVHD, the Bharata-Natyam dancers, though aware of their responsibility to communicate and evoke rasa, were straitened by time-limits and unfamiliar themes such as same-sex rape and various forms of domestic violence. Using Bharata-Natyam to create new choreography to tell the stories of their partners on their partners' terms did not allow for transplanting choreography from previously learnt dances. In listening and reflecting sessions, their non-Indian community partners did not relate to the transplanted choreography. When i introduced the creative tools in the dancer meetings before the partner meetings, it took some practice and specific guidance before the Bharata-Natyam students were able to apply them. When it came time to partner, however, the tools were easier to use and led to original Bharata-Natyam choreography that spoke to a contemporary audience because of its focus on rasa. The situations in *Kriti* and LVHD can be resolved by ensuring that quality training in Bharata-Natyam technique is complimented simultaneously with creative tooling based in the principles earlier mentioned.

A re-imagined approach to Bharata-Natyam education in the US resulted in proportionally substantial outcomes for both the dancers and the dance in *Kriti* and LVHD. With more knowledge and training in Bharata-Natyam, the same creative tools led to heightened explorations that turned inward in order for dancers to voice, in their dance, something that arose out of their own experience. This may be construed as a transgression because hastas or nritta may be used unconventionally in terms of the contemporary tradition of the last few centuries, but carefully considered, one can discern the foundations of rasa—the very goal of dance—being laid. The evoking of rasa was clear in both instances. In *Kriti*, the dancers and the musicians both assumed the role of artist and active audience. This collaborative relationship in the creative process yielded a transformative experience of community and aesthetic satisfaction—a



manifestation of rasa. In LVHD, the various collaborations—dancers with one another, dancers with survivors, dancers and survivors with musicians, and all the participants with the LVHD audience or responders—catalyzed the experience of rasa through each layer of the process, letting the rasa soak in, as rasa (nectar, syrup) does in *pantua*<sup>33</sup> or *tres leches* cake.<sup>34</sup>

### Collaborative Action Dance Project (CADP)

This research began as a pedagogical inquiry, but there was a need in the Dansense~Nrtyabodha classes to also exhibit the results of lessons that appeared to be chaotic and devoid of technique for the parents. This led to the addition of the choreographic component. As this chapter of research comes to a rest, it has furnished valuable lessons and beautiful products to cherish and cultivate. The culmination of LVHD, in particular, has birthed an extraordinary product—a concrete process by which teachers can guide their students in using their voice in Bharata-Natyam to create work and spaces not only of personal growth, but also of engaged community.

I name this process the *Collaborative Action Dance Project* or CADP. Its three components can be used independently or together and can be adapted, depending on the goals of those who avail of this method. The first component brings awareness of the dancer's body to the fore and engenders exploration of movement that goes beyond reproducing choreography—perfecting her technique. The second component is an immersion into collaboration both for the dancer and the partner in civic engagement. For the former, it is an exercise in listening, empathizing and honing her skills to be an effective communicator, a conduit of rasa. For the latter, it is gaining a new perspective

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<sup>33</sup> Oblong Bengali sweet made from paneer (Indian cottage cheese), fried to a reddish-brown hue and soaked in a spiced sugar syrup.

<sup>34</sup> Sponge cake soaked in condensed milk, evaporated milk and heavy cream

to their story and engaging with a powerful art form. The third and final component is true collaboration, which necessitates the investment of time and heart. It aids the Bharata-Natyam dancer in the US to engage more fully with the community outside the diaspora, sharing her art with them while generating a conversation about community issues. It also aids the partner in reaching a greater audience using an unique mode of communication that is at once inviting and provocative. CADP is a manifestation of Tagore's explication of art as the creative soul's response to the call of the real. It hones in on *rasa* as the goal—an engagement arising out of call and response. It is a deliberate process that mirrors the celebration of community by means of dance. Just as Bharata-Natyam helped bring about gathering in a sacred space to share beauty and nurture uplifting contemplations by its presence in temples and other similar spaces, CADP, as seen in LVHD, parallels this in a contemporary setting.

## Final Reflections

### **Issues of Gender & Oppression**

Many questions beyond the original scope of this work have arisen in the process and call for further investigation. Among these are the case of directly disrupting notions of tradition or colonized mindsets that affect the way Bharata-Natyam students in the Indian diaspora learn and practice dance. I skimmed the surface of this with the “*What if...for Sita*” re-write lesson, but have, in recent weeks, been challenged by a similarly charged notion around wearing the common “practice sari”<sup>35</sup> for dance class. Fear and discomfort of parents around the wrapping of a sari and colonized views that sexualize this garment, traditional to many parts of South Asia, have once again created obstacles in the tradition of inquiry that Dansense-Nrtyabodha aims to foreground for its students.

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<sup>35</sup> Cotton sari woven shorter in width that students of Indian dance commonly wrap to practice dance.

How will the mostly young Indian girls growing up learning a “traditional” dance form that brings them closer to their Indian culture (as indicated in Table 1) understand their parents’ refusal to let them learn to wrap a practice sari for dance class? What ideas are being projected on to them regarding their culture’s traditional garment and how their bodies are being perceived?

These questions explicitly relate to the patriarchal and colonized systems that inform our notions of tradition. They are implicit in my evolving pedagogy, because these gender norms lead to harmful and traumatic experiences. As i have observed:

The evidence that most girls/women have to deal with violence at some point in their lives is overwhelming. One study indicates that over half the students from seventh to twelfth grades sampled in a Michigan school had been sexually assaulted. Another study of a wider sample of students in 26 high schools showed that 1 in 3 females and 1 in 5 males had reported being sexually harassed. Finally, data surveying over 1,000 female college students found that over 88% had been victims of dating violence. (Agnich, Hong and Peguero 2018). (Mandala)

I have experienced sexual harassment and assault from childhood into adulthood, not only in the US, but in every place that i have been a female body—India, Japan, the U.K., France, and even between countries on airplanes and trains. That i am not alone in this experience is evident from studies such as the one above and from endless news reports of gender-based violence, especially in the US and in India (the two countries to which my students have a connection). That my students will probably be among those who experience some version of gender-based violence impels me to control the hidden curriculum—that which students are learning besides what is being explicitly taught by the teacher (Stinson 2005)—i foster in my dance classes.

Lessons (such as “*What If...for Sita*” and “Context of the Sari”) that i design in addition to and complementing the dance lessons must increase awareness of the body as early as possible in their development as girls. Such lessons lend themselves well to creative tooling and reflection and foster agency in their dance practice—physically,

intellectually and spiritually. Presenting works such as LVHD, where my students participate, also play an important role in generating awareness. I hope to translate an increased awareness of their bodies and selves in the dance class into greater confidence when they are outside the class and navigating social interactions that may reflect harmful gender-based norms and into creating a safe space in which they (and others they may invite) can be supportive and be supported, should the need arise.

### **Pedagogical Discomfort**

The process leading to the culmination of LVHD was a roller coaster, filled with anticipation, fearless action, anxiety, reevaluation and satisfaction. This process warrants greater analysis with specific attention to the pedagogical aspects in the studio classroom with young learners, in the performance spaces with adult dancers, and in civic engagement projects with dancers and community partners. The principles of engaged pedagogy combined with those of collaborative action research provided guidance through the discomforts that arise during the practice of teaching.

In the case of teaching Bharata-Nrityam to students, beginners to seniors, the tradition of inquiry between a teacher and student was central to my work. The contemporary guru-shishya relationship focuses on an authoritarian method of transmitting dance where the student follows the teacher without questioning or receives knowledge, then practices and retains it, and finally, with time, may attain spiritual realization through reflection (Chatterjea, Banerjee, Kiran). As Kiran further indicates, the focus, however, has gone from process-oriented to production-oriented, so that the last step of reflection over time, may not be reached. Moreover, the *time* that is required for reflection to manifest in the student *after* knowledge transmission makes Bharata-Natyam education in the US problematic when students attempt to relate their dance

practice to their contemporary lived experiences, as they usually leave their spaces of Indian-ness (and learning dance) before reflection can set in organically. With support from the idea of inquiry in the ancient Indian teaching-learning process, i have focused on how to encourage reflection simultaneously with learning so as to open the path to critical thinking and creativity.

The seeming dichotomy of being the teacher who has the knowledge that the student seeks and is therefore in a position of authority with being the teacher who joins in the symbiotic teaching-learning process is one that bell hooks addresses. The first part is found in the principles in Vygotsky's learning theory that learners learn from "more knowledgeable others" (MKO) in their social surroundings (Mooney). However, rather than the MKO simply transmitting knowledge, they provide assistance to the learner; they guide or facilitate. hooks similarly recommends that teachers recognize the power they have, but instead of resisting it "for fear of exercising domination...use [it] in noncoercive ways to enrich the learning process" (Buffington 1993). In the classroom and performance instances, this means my taking on the both the role of a teacher and a facilitator. It is my duty to share my knowledge, and when students are hesitant or uncertain (as seen in many instances in this work) but capable, it is also my duty to facilitate a successful navigation through the lessons or experiences for them. This work explored the latter role through reflection and creative tooling. In the case of performance and civic engagement, the role of collaborator also became more apparent, as my own learning became more explicit. The infinity loop of teaching and learning became a well-worn path, as i maneuvered through the LVHD process, sometimes with ease and other times with clumsiness. Accepting the vulnerability in the latter situations was made easier by considerations of somatics and engaged pedagogy and by observing examples set by teachers with whom i learnt. This vulnerability combined with a sense of

responsibility actually makes the process transparent and more meaningful between teacher and student, or, i may venture to say, between collaborators in the teaching-learning process.

### **Other Areas of Investigation**

I hope to pursue two other paths for further investigation which have become evident in LVHD. First is to delve deeper into an analysis of the dynamics of creative tooling and collaboration. This may find form in (i) sharing CADP with other Bharata-Natyam teachers in the US and/or (ii) continuing to develop LVHD in its current shape and in new iterations, as requested by participants and production partners. The second is to examine and better support the therapeutic aspect of the LVHD process, which several participants identified and drew upon both during our collaboration and since the presentation. Several possibilities have been offered by the participants themselves, as well as ACESDV staff. The suggestions include regular dance/movement lessons, other performative iterations, participants themselves becoming facilitators using some of the tools for their own projects, and simply staying in touch.

### **In Closing**

“Innovation is an act of remembrance.”<sup>36</sup> This is especially true of my praxis of Bharata-Nrityam intersecting with somatic principles and engaged pedagogy to deliver Bharata-Natyam education in the US. The praxis reaches full potential with the simultaneous implementation of creative tools, while the student is learning the foundations of the dance and its technique. This, in turn, supports the tradition of

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<sup>36</sup> Liz Lerman quoting Carlton Turner, Lead Artist/Director of Sipp Culture. 2020. Zoom conversation with researcher. September 29.

inquiry around the teaching-learning process of the guru-shishya relationship in ancient Indian thought and leads to an acceptance of greater responsibility, not just for the teacher, but also for the student. When greater responsibility is embraced, the praxis then reveals the potential of Bharata-Natyam when agency is fostered, as has been clearly evidenced in Bharata-Natyam's evolution—and thriving—through past generations of gurus and practitioners. My praxis for Bharata-Natyam education in the US, as developed in this research, is an innovation; and while some may see innovation as an upheaval or a disregard for tradition, i have found that it is simply a memory waiting to be rediscovered.

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APPENDIX A

DANSENSE~NRTYABODHA LESSONS

## LESSON 1—RASA WORKSHOP

The students were first introduced to the 8 rasas (moods) delineated in the *Natyashastra* and then explored the various bhavas (emotions/feelings) that can evoke the rasas. These emotions be expressed using their bodies, including prescribed movements of the parts of the face. For example, *raudra* (fury) rasa arises from the main feeling of anger. After some practice time, each student chose one rasa on which to focus and then prompted to think of a recent incident in their life outside dance class that might evoke the rasa they had chosen. After delving deeper into their chosen personal stories with the help of additional prompts, each one wrote their story down as a short paragraph. They then identified various emotions within it and developed a short

<b>TABLE 4.</b> Rasa Workshop Source: Dansense~Nrtyabodha, June, 2018.			
	<b>Story summary</b>	<b>Audience reactions/ bhava felt</b>	<b>Intended rasa/bhava</b>
<b>Student 1</b>	A boy gives a girl a flower which makes her happy, and she gives him a hug.	interesting, surprised, loving	<i>shringara</i> , the romantic, attractive/love
<b>Student 2</b>	Her pet bird got out of its cage and flew around wildly till it hit something and was stunned. She put it back in the cage where it sat up calmly again.	humorous, interesting, surprised	<i>adbhuta</i> , the wondrous/surprise
<b>Student 3</b>	Her sister wanted the ball she was playing with, and when she gave it to her, she tried to eat it.	confusing	<i>hasya</i> , the comical/mirth
<b>Student 4</b>	Her younger brother had a bad case of hives all over his body.	sad	<i>bibhatsa</i> , the odious/disgust

choreography to tell their story using Bharata-Nrityam movements and their new knowledge. They took turns sharing their work with fellow students, who had to respond by naming the emotions they felt or saw. The performing student then revealed her story and the rasa she had intended to convey.

LESSON 2— *What-If...* for Sita (adapted from Mandala 2020)

All my students and many parents were in attendance for this class in celebration of a major festival celebrated in different ways around India. Some parts of India base their celebrations on the story of *Ramayana*, which most Hindu children hear from a young age. Most Bharata-Natyam dancers depict the story in their dances at some point, as well. The epic story includes the following incidents:

Sita accompanies her husband Rama in exile to the forest. One day a beggar approaches her for food when Rama is away. When she comes forward to give him food, the beggar throws off his disguise to reveal the demon King Ravana and abducts her. Rama wages war against Ravana and is victorious, but rejects Sita because she has lived in another man's home. She tries to assure him, in vain, that she is blameless and chooses to immolate herself rather than be humiliated. The fire god brings her out unscathed, assuring Rama of her purity.

Everyone in the room knew the story, but I called attention to Valmiki as an *author* whose work we might honor by critically considering the reasons for his writing a story like this? I chose to read from a word-to-word translation of the original Sanskrit text, which, unlike popular/abridged narratives, delves into Rama's motivations and Sita's own defense:

Rama on why he waged war: "This was done by me in order to keep up my honor. Go wherever you like. Which noble man...will take back a woman who lived in another's abode...?"

Hearing Rama's words in front of a crowd, Sita spoke the following words slowly: Why are you speaking such harsh words, which are violent to hear for me...? Have faith in me...It was not willingly that I came into contact with him. I was helpless. I will enter the fire and take the only course appropriate for me, who has been abandoned amidst an assembly of men, by my husband who was not satisfied with my traits." (*Valmiki Ramayana-Yuddha Kanda* 1998)

What did they hear in the above exchange and how did they feel about it? Students and parents responded.

- Most responded that Rama did not believe Sita.
- One 5-year-old piped up that she had met one of her dance classmates at school and told them that a common friend was sick at the nurse's, but they did not believe her. She felt sad.
- Another student said that her brother never believes her, and that feels frustrating.

- A parent offered the reasoning that Sita’s rejection was necessary to show that our actions have consequences. This was a reference to Sita’s being abducted because she stepped over a boundary line that was drawn around her hut to keep her “safe.”
- Another parent shared that her grandmother told her that when Sita entered the fire, the fire god took her away from Rama because Rama did not deserve her and instead produced an “illusory” Sita whom he presented to Rama as his wife.

<b>TABLE 5. What-If... for Sita</b> Source: Dansense~Nrtyabodha, January 3, 2019.	
<b>Duo 1</b>	“Well...what if the deer never came? And then Rama... I mean Sita would never have... well... Lakshmana and Rama would never have ever left Sita...”
<b>Duo 2</b>	“What if Lakshmana didn’t cut off Ravana’s sister’s nose and ears...and um, Ravana didn’t have to capture Sita?”
<b>Duo 3</b>	“When Ravana brings Sita to Lanka, she meets a man who tells the future...they realize that Rama was going to tell Sita that he didn’t love her at all...So, Sita asks Ravana to marry her. Ravana is delighted. Rama goes to Lanka and begs Sita, but Sita explains and refuses and says, “no,” and so they were married and Rama goes to the Himalayas and meditates for Sita to come back. When Ravana hears that he’s trying to get Sita back, he locks Rama into a dungeon...”
<b>Quartet</b>	“When Rama gets back to the palace with Sita [after getting married and before being exiled] and gets talked to by Kaikeyi, instead of [sending him away], she asks Rama to stay [as] a prince under Bharata.”

This exercise left me overwhelmed and confused as to how to continue. Some of the students, however, returned to the next class asking about Sita. To address this in a lesson, I used another creative tool—rewriting a story to empower the oppressed voices. When i offered it to my students, many of them needed permission to change events in a story that they “know” to be sacred. To create a safe environment in doing this disruptive work, i turned to notes from a presentation at CARN Conference 2018 on Future Creating Workshops (FCW), “a method for creating action or social activism [to] create changes that draw upon people’s own discomfort, ambivalence, critique, and utopian ideas.” I asked them to respond to the prompt “*What if...*” and change some part of the *Ramayana* that might then change the outcome for Sita. By this time we had established that actions (though not necessarily hers) resulted in her plight in the end. The students worked in pairs and small groups to share the results in Table 5 above.



### LESSON 3—CRP & THE SNEEZING DANCE

I have also used the first step of CRP, Statements of Meaning, to demonstrate to students that their observations, no matter how “small,” are valuable and help make meaning for everyone. A lesson to demonstrate grew out of my youngest two students hearing me sneezing rather loudly. They were taken aback so i suggested they help me by making a “sneezing dance.” Smiles appeared, and they began moving. I prompted them with questions like “how does a sneeze start” or “what could my sneeze look like.” They would think and add movement accordingly. The older students watched the video later, and their initial reaction was to laugh indulgently. When asked to make non-judgmental observations (CRP Step 1), however, they recognized the deliberate choices and the scope of the movement, and even thought about what a sneeze feels like for themselves. The observations of the 36-second dance made in May, 2019, by Dansense~Nrtyabodha students are listed below:

- They went from rest to being active
- Their sneezing seemed constant like a bad cold.
- There was a pattern in how they moved from one side to another.
- It seemed like one sneeze followed the other like they were catching.
- They included running in a sneezing dance!
- The first sneeze burst them apart which was like a surprise.
- The sneezes seemed to blow them down.
- Tanvi had a very specific form in her floor pose.
- There was humor.

~Source: Dansense~Nrtyabodha, May, 2019.

APPENDIX B

*KRITI* INTRODUCTION & PARTICIPANTS

**Kriti—for Dansense Symposium (September 22, 2019)**

What is a story? How do we listen?

My research as a student of dance specifically at ASU has me asking these seemingly simple questions. As i began looking for the answers, i found my co-conspirators who are with me today—Shreya (trained in BN) and Zakia (trained in Ballet & Afro-Caribbean traditions), Ella (trained in PMC dance) and Alexis (trained in Contemporary dance), Caroline (trained in classical Ballet) and Zeeshan (trained in urban dance forms) and finally, Jazmín (trained in Ballet and Modern dance) and Michelle (trained in Modern & Contemporary dance).

I love our stories and learn something new from them with every retelling. Those who made them gave us so many different ways of seeing wisdom. Perhaps *that* is part of the wisdom— to keep looking from different perspectives. So, with the help of dramaturge Coley Curry, we share an exploration of the stories that evoke Ganesha and the ideas we gleaned from them, utilizing our varied, yet collective approaches. The original BN choreography by N. Srikanth appears as a reminder to recognize our roots and foundations, even as we set out to explore new frontiers.

Shreya and Zakia represent the story teller, a universal character who guides us without our knowing (being conscious of) it. The ideas that they focused on with their dance are: **communicate, intergenerational, empathy.**

Ella and Alexis explored the story of Ganesha winning the fruit of knowledge. When Ganesha and his brother were challenged to race each other around the universe, he won by going around his parents—*his* universe—while his brother took the challenge literally. Ella and Alexis focused on the themes of **perspective, manipulation, roots.**

Caroline and Zeeshan present their understandings from the story of how the little rat became vehicle to the pot-bellied Ganesha. Their themes are **getting lighter, salvation and grace.**

Finally, Jazmín and Michelle bring us ideas from the story of Ganesha’s insatiable hunger at the feast of the arrogant god of wealth. They focused on: **ravenous, greed, and acceptance.**

Putting these ideas together at the end, they also developed a choreography of hand gestures inspired by the urban dance of tutting: grace, intergenerational, perspective, ravenous, getting lighter, empathy, greed. What will our experience of Ganesha be as we listen to another’s telling of his stories?

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*KRITI* participants over two iterations: Ella Alzua, Coley Curry, Shreya Dabeer, Alexis Green, Zeeshan Jawaid, Tremayne Manahane, Sumana Sen Mandala, Michelle Migliaccio, Antoinette Martin-Hanson, Zakia Johnson, Jazmín Parker, Caroline Williams

APPENDIX C  
IRB PROTOCOL APPROVALS

APPROVAL: EXPEDITED REVIEW

Naomi Jackson  
Film, Dance and Theatre, School of  
480/965-4251  
NAOMLJACKSON@asu.edu

Dear Naomi Jackson:

On 4/28/2018 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title:	Understanding how the Bharata Natyam student, the student's parents and the teacher perceive the role of Bharata Natyam in the student's life and developing a workshop model to introduce basic somatic and Bharata Nrityam tools to compare any change in the perception or practice of Bharata Natyam as a personal movement practice and a means of achieving agency in body and mind
Investigator:	Naomi Jackson
IRB ID:	STUDY00007809
Category of review:	(6) Voice, video, digital, or image recordings, (7)(b) Social science methods, (7)(a) Behavioral research
Funding:	None
Grant Title:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protocol-Sumana Mandala, Category: IRB Protocol;</li> <li>• SURVEY for students.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);</li> <li>• Adult Consent Form-BN Teachers.pdf, Category: Consent Form;</li> <li>• Interview Questions-Students.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);</li> <li>• Adult Consent Form-Parents of BN Students.pdf, Category: Consent Form;</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adult Consent Form-BN Students.pdf, Category: Consent Form;</li> <li>• Adult Consent Form-BN Teachers.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;</li> <li>• Child Assent Form.pdf, Category: Consent Form;</li> <li>• Adult Consent Form-Parents of BN Students.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;</li> <li>• SURVEY for teachers.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);</li> <li>• Parental Permission Form-Sumana Mandala.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;</li> <li>• Adult Consent Form-BN Students.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;</li> <li>• Parental Permission Form-Sumana Mandala.pdf, Category: Consent Form;</li> <li>• Interview Questions-Teachers.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);</li> <li>• Workshop Sessions Plan.pdf, Category: Technical materials/diagrams;</li> <li>• SURVEY for parents.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);</li> <li>• Focus Group Questions-Parents.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);</li> </ul>
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The IRB approved the protocol from 4/28/2018 to 4/27/2019 inclusive. Three weeks before 4/27/2019 you are to submit a completed Continuing Review application and required attachments to request continuing approval or closure.

If continuing review approval is not granted before the expiration date of 4/27/2019 approval of this protocol expires on that date. When consent is appropriate, you must use final, watermarked versions available under the "Documents" tab in ERA-IRB.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Sincerely, IRB Administrator

cc: Sumana Mandala  
Sumana Mandala

APPROVAL CONTINUATION

Naomi Jackson  
 Film, Dance and Theatre, School of  
 480/965-4251  
 NAOMI.JACKSON@asu.edu

Dear Naomi Jackson:

On 3/8/2019 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Modification and Continuing Review
Title:	Understanding how the Bharata Natyam student, the student's parents and the teacher perceive the role of Bharata Natyam in the student's life and developing a workshop model to introduce basic somatic and Bharata Nrityam tools to compare any change in the perception or practice of Bharata Natyam as a personal movement practice and a means of achieving agency in body and mind
Investigator:	Naomi Jackson
IRB ID:	STUDY00007809
Category of review:	(7)(b) Social science methods, (7)(a) Behavioral research
Funding:	None
Grant Title:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adult Survivor Consent Form.pdf, Category: Consent Form;</li> <li>• Adult Consent Form-BN Teachers.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;</li> <li>• Adult Consent Form-Parents of BN Students.pdf, Category: Consent Form;</li> <li>• Adult Consent Form-Parents of BN Students.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;</li> <li>• ACESDV Letter of Support.pdf, Category: Other (to reflect anything not captured above);</li> <li>• SURVEY for students.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);</li> <li>• Adult Consent Form-BN Students.pdf, Category: Consent Form;</li> <li>• Workshop Sessions Plan.pdf, Category: Technical materials/diagrams;</li> <li>• Updated Protocol-Feb 26, 2019, Category: IRB</li> </ul>

Protocol;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adult Consent Form-BN Students.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;</li> <li>• SURVEY for teachers.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);</li> <li>• SURVEY for parents.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);</li> <li>• Adult Consent Form-BN Teachers.pdf, Category: Consent Form;</li> <li>• Interview Questions-Teachers.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);</li> <li>• Child Assent Form.pdf, Category: Consent Form;</li> <li>• Focus Group Questions-Parents.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);</li> <li>• Protocol-Sumana Mandala, Category: IRB Protocol;</li> <li>• Adult Survivor Consent Form.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;</li> <li>• Parental Permission Form-Sumana Mandala.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;</li> <li>• Interview Questions-Students.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);</li> <li>• Parental Permission Form-Sumana Mandala.pdf, Category: Consent Form;</li> </ul>
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The IRB approved the protocol from 3/8/2019 to 3/7/2020 inclusive. Three weeks before 3/7/2020 you are to submit a completed Continuing Review application and required attachments to request continuing approval or closure.

If continuing review approval is not granted before the expiration date of 3/7/2020 approval of this protocol expires on that date. When consent is appropriate, you must use final, watermarked versions available under the "Documents" tab in ERA-IRB.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator

cc: Sumana Mandala  
 Sumana Mandala



APPROVAL:CONTINUATION

[Naomi Jackson](#)  
[HIDA, Film, Dance and Theatre, School of](#)  
480/965-4251  
NAOMI.JACKSON@asu.edu

Dear [Naomi Jackson](#):

On 2/3/2020 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Continuing Review
Title:	Understanding how the Bharata-Natyam student, the student's parents and the teacher perceive the role of Bharata-Natyam in the student's life and developing a workshop model to introduce basic somatic and Bharata-Nrityam tools to compare any change in the perception or practice of Bharata-Natyam as a personal movement practice and a means of achieving agency in body and mind
Investigator:	<a href="#">Naomi Jackson</a>
IRB ID:	STUDY00007809
Category of review:	
Funding:	None
Grant Title:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	None

The IRB approved the protocol from 2/3/2020 to 2/2/2021 inclusive. Three weeks before 2/2/2021 you are to submit a completed Continuing Review application and required attachments to request continuing approval or closure.

If continuing review approval is not granted before the expiration date of 2/2/2021 approval of this protocol expires on that date. When consent is appropriate, you must use final, watermarked versions available under the "Documents" tab in ERA-IRB.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator

cc: Sumana Mandala  
Sumana Mandala



Sumana Mandala <smandal@asu.edu>

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**STUDY00011618 has been approved**

1 message

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research.integrity@asu.edu <research.integrity@asu.edu>  
Reply-To: research.integrity@asu.edu  
To: sumanadances@asu.edu

Thu, Feb 27, 2020 at 1:19 PM

Template:IRB\_T\_Post-Review\_Approved

**Notification of Approval**

**To:** Sumana Mandala

**Link:** [STUDY00011618](#)

**P.I.:** [Naomi Jackson](#)

**Title:** LVHD Response Form

This submission has been approved. You can access the correspondence letter using the following link:

**Description:** [Correspondence\\_for\\_STUDY00011618.pdf\(0.01\)](#)

To review additional details, click the link above to access the project workspace.



APPENDIX D  
IRB-APPROVED SURVEY FORMS

Sumana Sen Mandala MFA STUDY:

"How might creative tools developed through Bharata-Nrityam and somatic principles affect the practice of a Bharata-Natyam student in the United States?"

Student Survey

Online Option: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/893N8PD>

*[Remember: There are no right or wrong answers, and your answers will be anonymous. ☺]*

1. How many years have you been learning or learnt Bharata-Natyam? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Why are you learning Bharata-Natyam? Please list reasons in order of importance.
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
3. Do you enjoy Bharata-Natyam? Please circle based on the scale below, where 1 is "hate it" and 10 is "love it".  
(Hate it) 1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10 (Love it)
4. What are your 3 favorite Bharata-Natyam steps?
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
5. What is your favorite Bharata-Natyam dance out of the ones you have learnt so far? (Write n/a, if no items have been learnt yet.)
6. Do/did you want to perform an arangetram? Why?
7. How many years did you learn Bharata-Natyam before performing your arangetram? Or, in how many years do you plan to perform your arangetram?  
Completed \_\_\_\_\_                      Planning to Complete \_\_\_\_\_
8. What 3 things are important for you to successfully dance Bharata-Natyam? (i.e. in your body, mind, environment, resources, etc.)
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
9. Think of a difficult situation you faced in school or at work recently. Think of how you would use Bharata-Natyam to show this situation and try it out. How easy was it to show the situation?
  - No Problem
  - Easy
  - Done with some thought
  - Difficult
  - Very difficult

Is there anything else you would like to say? Please write or draw below.

Sumana Sen Mandala MFA STUDY:

"How might creative tools developed through Bharata-Nrityam and somatic principles affect the practice of a Bharata-Natyam student in the United States?"

Teacher Survey

Online Option: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/8LHKN9S>

1. In 3 sentences, how would you describe Bharata Natyam?

2. Why do you teach Bharata Natyam? (Please list reasons in order of priority)

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

3. If a Bharata Natyam student attends Bharata Natyam classes 1-2 times a week for 4 years, what practical and theoretical knowledge should they demonstrate about Bharata Natyam?

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

4. How do you measure a student's progress?

- A. Internal examination/evaluation      B. External examination/evaluation  
C. Number of items learnt                D. Other (please specify)

5. About how many times did you and/or your school perform for audiences outside the South Asian community last year?

- A. 1-2      B. 3-5      C. 6-10      D. None

6. Would you be supportive of a national standards for Bharata Natyam in the US to help ensure a base quality of Bharata Natyam education without compromising or limiting individual teachers and their *baani*?

- A. Definitely would                              B. Probably Would  
C. Probably would not                            D. Definitely would not

7. Please share any further comments or suggestions on the back of this page.

Sumana Sen Mandala MFA STUDY:

"How might creative tools developed through Bharata-Nrityam and somatic principles affect the practice of a Bharata-Natyam student in the United States?"

Parent Survey

Online Option <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/KF95DMK>

1. How many years has your child learnt Bharata-Natyam? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Why did you enroll your child in Bharata-Natyam lessons? List the reasons in order of "most" important to "least" important.
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
3. Did you consider enrolling your child in non-Indian dance lessons?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What are the tangible goals of your child's Bharata-Natyam lessons?
  - a. Arangetram
  - b. Stage performance
  - c. Certification (specify below)
  - d. Professional career
  - e. Other \_\_\_\_\_
5. Do you consider it an advantage or disadvantage learning Bharata-Natyam outside India?
  - a. Advantage
  - b. Disadvantage
6. If you have any comments or clarifications, please use this space and the back of the paper.

Sumana Sen Mandala MFA STUDY:  
"How might creative tools developed through Bharata-Nrityam and somatic principles affect the practice of a Bharata-Natyam student in the United States?"

**INITIAL SURVEY FOR SURVIVOR**

1. Please share up to 3 expectations or goals that you have in participating in the Project Presentation for this MFA Study.

\* \_\_\_\_\_

\* \_\_\_\_\_

\* \_\_\_\_\_

2. Please share up to 3 ideas/feelings/stories/memories that support the message you wish to get across in this project. These might become a springboard to develop your message into a dance.

\* \_\_\_\_\_

\* \_\_\_\_\_

\* \_\_\_\_\_

3. If we cannot match you with a student for the Project Presentation in April, 2020, which alternative(s) would you prefer?

- Participating in a group movement performance
- Developing a mini solo performance with me for the Project Presentation
- Preparing for the next opportunity to perform with a dancer in Fall 2020 or Spring 2021
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Sumana is a Master of Fine Arts student under the direction of Professor Naomi Jackson in the School of Film, Dance & Theater at Arizona State University. She is conducting a research study through a response form that we invite you to fill out if you are an adult 18 years or older. There are 7 questions that will take approximately 5 minutes to respond to, and your participation is voluntary. If you have any questions concerning the research study, please talk to Sumana.

**Look into my Voice, Hear my Dance (LVHD) Response Form**

Thank you for joining us today. Please share a little bit about your LVHD experience.

1. Please tell us your AGE: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Please indicate your GENDER:

- female       non-gender conforming       non-binary       trans-male  
 male                       trans-female       gender queer

3. How much would you agree with the following?

	After the LVHD experience...	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
A	I am willing to help or ask how to help stop the violence					
B	I am confident that i can help or ask how to help stop the violence					
C	I have to tools to take the next step in stopping the violence					
D	I have more awareness about how the violence affects survivors and our community.					

4. Please share some words/moments that you remember from your LVHD experience today:

A. \_\_\_\_\_ B. \_\_\_\_\_ C. \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

5. What brought you to LVHD today?  
 \_\_\_\_\_

6. What culture(s) do you identify with? \_\_\_\_\_

7. Check all that apply. I'm curious which of these statements rings most true for you.  
 I saw Bharata Natyam, and what did you do to it?!  
 I saw Bharata Natyam and how it can be used beyond a stage performance.  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Comments:

APPENDIX E  
LVHD WORKSHOP FORMS

**Look into my Voice, Hear my Dance (LVHD)  
Creative Workshopping Agenda—November 24, 2019**

ITEM	TIME	DESCRIPTION
Welcome	5 min	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>sign-in each time for honorarium of up to \$200/participant for at least 4 meetings</li> <li>1 workshop, 1 dress rehearsal/site performance, 2 performance days</li> <li>pick up agenda—review</li> <li>food &amp; water</li> </ul>
Introductions, check-in	5 min	Sumana, Coley, Deanna, Survivors, Dancers, Committee
Future Meeting Dates	10 min	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dec 14 after SHARE meeting at ACESDV—Thanks, Coley! Dancer transport?</li> <li>WhatsApp, Zoom, F/T</li> <li>January ASU Symposium?</li> <li>Photo Shoot/Dress rehearsal</li> <li>Week 1 or 2 of February for site performances, w/A/V recording (separate reimbursement)</li> <li>Performances: Feb 29 (10am-2pm) and Mar 1 (6pm-10pm)</li> </ul>
Costumes	10 min	Order online/Manasi may tailor
Partnership, Creative Workshopping	10 min	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>sharing what you're comfortable with (let us know your confidentiality needs)</li> <li>setting goals together, but remembering not everything will make it through—treasure box holds the ideas we don't use now for later</li> <li>holding space for one another</li> <li>staying on time</li> <li>remembering that Sumana is the curator and may edit</li> <li>Coley, Doreen and/or Sumana are here to facilitate</li> </ul>
Work Time	60 min	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Survivor shares story, site, thoughts</li> <li>Dancer gathers words &amp; gestures—Initial Word Score</li> <li>Survivor does “walk and talk” to hone key phrase, while Dancer walks along</li> <li>Dancer uses BNR elements—hastas, karanas, adavus or abhinaya of face—to create a dance phrase.</li> <li>Use Survivor's key phrase and/or 3-5 words for a total of 5 “texts” and make a movement for each—Equivalents</li> <li>Next, use levels, time, survivor's gestures and elements not used in each text to find 5 other ways to do the same word—Movement Metaphor</li> <li>Deanna will float</li> <li>Share with survivor and build together into 1 big phrase</li> <li>Do you want to add spoken text? how do you want music to appear?</li> </ul>
Wrap-Up w/ Survivors	15 min	Show, exchange contact info, next meeting on Dec. 14 (Gretchen & Shreya??)
Dancer Meeting	45 min	self & peer reflection, karana practice with music

**Look into my Voice, Hear my Dance (LVHD)—Dance-Making Agenda—December 14, 2019**

ITEM	TIME	DESCRIPTION
Welcome	5 min	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>sign-in sheet, pick up agenda</li> <li>sit in circle on chairs: say your name, make 1 gesture that reflects what you bring to the session today &amp; offer it into the center, stand and do tai-chi breath 3x</li> <li>goals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Make 4-7 minute dance.</li> <li>Video record them &amp; send to Sumana, Deanna, Ri</li> <li>Manasi will take measurements for kurtas as you are working, if not during the brunch</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Reminders	10 min	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>remember not everything will be in final dance—treasure box holds ideas we don't use now for later</li> <li>holding space for one another; if you need to stop while moving, decide on a word or phrase to indicate this— Which one? “Break,” “Time Out,” “Breath” other</li> <li>staying on time with each portion</li> <li>Coley, Doreen are here to facilitate; Coley might offer feedback; Sumana is the curator; Deanna—musician, Ri—videographer</li> </ul>
Dancer Reminders	ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Keep the physical and some mental, let go of the bhava and hasta abhinaya as you evolve/reorganize/adapt your movements</li> <li>word score is left unspoken for this meeting—it supports but doesn't guide</li> <li>use other tools to move forward—doodling, tracing letters, adding more categories to grid, prop (aharya) usage, movement metaphor (using these tools) with survivor watching; “keep” for ones they like as you go through 25 or 30 “start/freeze” cycles</li> <li>think of your audience; what will they understand as you communicate; perhaps the dominant <i>rasa</i> is your goal and that can be conveyed through physical movement (imagine a mask on) from your previous work (later layering in some bhava)</li> </ul>
Dance-Making	70 min	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2 minutes to answer: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 person is standing and watching; what do we want them to leave with?</li> <li>Will survivor join in dance, by text (speaking or music), a combination?</li> <li>Where will you perform? Decide site.</li> </ul> </li> <li>Dancers share Beginning-Middle-End dance they made after 2nd meeting with Sumana-time these</li> <li>Fill in with transitions (other dance movements from BN that come naturally/repetition/time manipulation/moments of stillness)</li> <li>make notes and practice the final draft together, Coley will give feedback during process</li> </ul>
Wrap-Up w/ Survivors	20 min	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Show &amp; record (Dancers' own devices, Coley?)</li> <li>E-meetings on WhatsApp, Zoom, F/T—ALL COMMUNICATION MUST INCLUDE SUMANA, COLEY &amp; DOREEN</li> <li>(Dress) Rehearsal—Jan 12 or 18 or 20?</li> <li>ASU Symposium on Jan. 24 (email sent on Dec. 5)</li> <li>Week 1 or 2 of February for site performances, w/A/V recording (Blake &amp; Nivedita after Feb ____)</li> <li>Performances: Feb 29 (10am-2pm) and Mar 1 (6pm-10pm)exchange contact info, next meeting on Dec. 14 (Gretchen &amp; Shreya??)</li> </ul>
Dancer Meeting	15 min	self & peer reflection



**Look into my Voice, Hear my Dance (LVHD)—Dress Rehearsal—February 25, 2020, 6pm-9pm**

ITEM	TIME	DESCRIPTION—For LVHD Participants & Staff
Welcome Coley	5 min	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>sign-in sheet, pick up agenda</li> <li>circle up to energize &amp; meet any new staffers (Vi, Matt, Ri, Ziqian, Naini, Ganesh, Jaya, Rakshith, students...); practice poem for calling the circle, name your piece for the program that will be handed out</li> <li>ASU State Press will be here, taking photos and talking to some of you for an article</li> <li>goals:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Perform as close to what you will on Feb 29 and Mar 1.</li> <li>Try on Costumes—if you would like to keep your kurta/shirt after March 1, let Sumana know</li> <li>Know what to expect at the final presentations (parking, call-time, honoraria, food, self-care/support)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Set-up of space Naini	30 min	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>First</b>, take care of your space...props, sound, video, costume, lighting, partners</li> <li>Then, If you can help, talk to the staffers, take a look at the layout map to see what task suits you, help check the program, set up dinner,</li> <li>practice/gather your thoughts</li> </ul>
Run-through w/ videos	60-70 min	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>calling the circle</li> <li>rough dress rehearsal</li> <li>not a performance, but a sharing: posters by each performance</li> <li>when circle done, there will be 7 cycles of 7 minutes (1st, 3rd, 5th &amp; 7th-videos; 2nd, 4th, &amp; 6th-solos); each time the bell rings, move to another; feel free to participate when prompted</li> <li>hold your thoughts until the end when Matt will facilitate a CRP session;</li> <li>when bell rings after the poem is recited, go to a video performance for the 1st 7-min cycle</li> <li>poem—1st time Coley, 2nd time Coley &amp; dancers, 3rd time Coley, Dancers, Survivors</li> <li>bell rings at the end to start the 7 cycles</li> <li>Uncontainable—with poetry movement</li> <li>final namaste (CRP for artist; survivors and dancers will return for you to talk to them after, if you like)</li> </ul>
CRP—Matt State Press Interviews	30 min	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>facilitated by Matt Nock, will be recorded (audio/video—just for me and the work, not for publication)</li> <li>participants will meet with Vi for Info on Take Back the Night, with reporters/Coley during this time</li> </ul>
Dinner	8:30 pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participants &amp; Staff only</li> <li>Reflection                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Possible practice on Friday the 28th—with Rabeya &amp; Niru?</li> <li>To-do's for the presentations—                                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>collect honorarium and sign for receipt</li> <li>return black salwars to Sumana, before leaving for home</li> </ul> </li> <li>Date for follow-up meeting of survivors with Doreen, date for picnic to wrap up this iteration of LVHD</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
“KIRTANAM” see movement at: <a href="https://drive.google.com/open?id=1wj1_owLMzuY6rqdGLOY=B53F6Yi98xJ8">https://drive.google.com/open?id=1wj1_owLMzuY6rqdGLOY=B53F6Yi98xJ8</a>	before meeting on February 25	<p>A sense of falling, but here i stand Leashed and silent, alone no more Defiant... i know what i am Breaking down the walls of shame My voice open, my voice plain Will you listen, hold and believe? Will you listen, hold and believe?</p> <p><i>This is a poem/litany that i put together from words and phrases that you all shared over the course of the LVHD project. I took some liberty with the 5th line only. The idea, if you are okay, is to recite this in the beginning of the program during calling the circle, before breaking out for the mini-dances. It will return as the refrain for the final dance "Uncontainable," where we will add movement so the audience can join in.</i></p>

**Look into my Voice, Hear my Dance (LVHD)  
Creative Workshopping Grid—November 24, 2019**

ELEMENTS	TEXT 1	TEXT 2	TEXT 3	TEXT 4	TEXT 5	KEY PHRASE
ABHINAYA OF FACE						
HASTAS						
ADAVUS						
KARANAS						
TIME						
LEVEL						
SURVIVOR GESTURE(S)						

**LVHD Dancer Reflection**  
**Workshopping with Survivor**  
 December 14, 2019

Your name & 5 words to describe yourself:

Your partner's name & 5 words to describe them:

During collaboration, did your perception of yourself as a dancer change? How?

Were the creative tools useful? Which ones? Why?

List the steps in order of how you developed your dance since Nov 2-4

Thoughts before we go to perform:

(Quote or draw a picture(s) to reflect your 2 partner sessions.)

From your partner meetings, what is/are a:

- Memorable Moment
- Difficult Moment
- Wishes for another day

**LVHD Dancer Reflection**  
**Overall Experience**  
 ASU Symposium, Site Specific, February 29 & March 1, 2020

Your name & 5 words to describe your experience at the performance(s):

What other community/social issues would you like to consider through dance after the LVHD process?

Besides "dancer," what other roles did you take on as you performed with your partner?

How did you decide what to present as your process for the process posters?

Thoughts after performing:

How did you interact with your audience or they with you? What was 1 thing that they said or asked you that really stood out?

List specific elements that added to the experience from your performance. Think set design, costume, light, sound, props...

From your performances, what is a/an:

- Memorable Moment
- Difficult Moment
- Wishes to make a perfect next time

**LVHD Survivor Reflection**  
**Workshopping with Dancer**  
 December 14, 2019

Your name & 5 words to describe yourself as a survivor/organizer:

Your partner's name & 3 words to describe them:

During collaboration, have you had to change your message/goals? How?

Does dance support your voice? How?

What role have you chosen in the performance? Why?

Thoughts before we go to perform:

(Quote or draw a picture(s) to reflect your 2 partner sessions.)

From your partner meetings, what is/are a:

- Memorable Moment
- Difficult Moment
- Wishes to another day

**LVHD Survivor Reflection**  
**Overall Experience**  
 ASU Symposium, Site Specific, February 29 & March 1, 2020

Your name & 3 words to describe your experience at the performance(s):

Anything else?

What did you discover in projecting your voice through movement?

How did you decide what to present as your process for the process posters?

Thoughts after performing:

How did you interact with your audience or they with you? What did they say or ask you that stuck with you?

List specific elements that added to the experience from your performance. Think set design, costume, light, sound, props...

From your performances, what is a/an:

- Memorable Moment
- Difficult Moment
- Wishes to make a perfect next time

APPENDIX F  
DANCER WORKSHOPPING GRIDS

Look into my Voice, Hear my Dance (LVHD)  
Creative Workshopping Grid—November 24, 2019

ELEMENTS	TEXT 1 <i>Cheating</i>	TEXT 2 <i>* Renaissance painting</i>	TEXT 3 <i>Serious</i>	TEXT 4 <i>Friends</i>	TEXT 5 <i>* Table turned</i>	KEY PHRASE <i>Still feel unprotected</i>
ABHINAYA OF FACE	x	x		x		
HASTAS			x			
ADAVUS						
KARANAS						
TIME						
LEVEL	x				x	
SURVIVOR GESTURE(S)						

Figure F1. Pratyusha—Word Score/Thinking Grid

Look into my Voice, Hear my Dance (LVHD)  
Creative Workshopping Grid—November 24, 2019

ELEMENTS	TEXT 1 <i>struggle</i>	TEXT 2 <i>frozen</i>	TEXT 3 <i>disassociate</i>	TEXT 4 <i>screens</i>	TEXT 5 <i>yucky</i>	KEY PHRASE <i>Even in the darkness, the light shines through</i>
ABHINAYA OF FACE				X	X	
HASTAS			X		X	
ADAVUS						
KARANAS						
TIME		X				
LEVEL	<del>scribble</del>					
SURVIVOR GESTURE(S)	X					

Figure F2. Shreya—Word Score/Thinking Grid

Look into my Voice, Hear my Dance (LVHD)  
Creative Workshopping Grid—November 24, 2019

ELEMENTS	TEXT 1 <i>Survivor</i>	TEXT 2 <i>Healing</i>	TEXT 3 <i>Bridge</i>	TEXT 4 <i>Meditation</i>	TEXT 5 <i>Forest</i>	KEY PHRASE <i>Possibilities</i>
ABHINAYA OF FACE	X			X		
HASTAS			X		X	X
ADAVUS						
KARANAS						
TIME				X		
LEVEL	X	X			X	
SURVIVOR GESTURE(S)						X

Figure F3. Niveditha—Word Score/Thinking Grid

Look into my Voice, Hear my Dance (LVHD)  
Creative Workshopping Grid—November 24, 2019

ELEMENTS	TEXT 1 <i>Nightmare</i>	TEXT 2 <i>dove</i>	TEXT 3 <i>Betrayal</i>	TEXT 4 <i>Hope</i>	TEXT 5 <i>forgiveness</i>	KEY PHRASE <i>Happiness &amp; sadness have to co-exist</i>
ABHINAYA OF FACE	X					
HASTAS		X		X	X	
ADAVUS			X			
KARANAS						
TIME						
LEVEL	X		X			
SURVIVOR GESTURE(S)						

Figure F4. Niveditha—Word Score/Thinking Grid

APPENDIX G

LVHD PUBLICITY FLYER, BROCHURE, POSTERS

# LOOK INTO MY VOICE, HEAR MY DANCE

A Dansense-Nrtyabodha Event & MFA Applied Project by Sumana Sen Mandala

## The Hackett House

95 W. 4th Street, Tempe, AZ 85281

Saturday, February 29, 11:30am (start)

or

Sunday, March 1, 4:30pm (start)

<https://LVHD.brownpapertickets.com>

to register for free admission

or

buy VIP Tickets (\$10) for reserved limited seating

(tea & snacks available for purchase)

Come, join the conversation in this gallery walk of family-friendly mini-performances created for you by 5 Bharata Natyam dancers and 9 survivors of sexual/ domestic violence. LVHD runs about 90 minutes. Experience the power of dance in telling stories and building community.



Dansense-Nrtyabodha  
2020



For more information:  
[www.dansense.org](http://www.dansense.org)  
[dansense@gmail.com](mailto:dansense@gmail.com)  
512-450-8344



The Sexual and Relationship Violence Prevention Program at ASU

Figure G1. LVHD Flyer (original design by Coley Curry)



Figure G2a. LVHD Brochure--Outside



**YOUR NOTES**

a sense of falling,  
but here i stand  
leashed and silent,  
alone no more  
defiant...  
i know what i am  
breaking down  
the walls of shame  
my voice open,  
my voice plain  
will you listen, hold and believe?  
will you  
listen,  
hold and  
believe?

*LVHD* is a collaboration of Bharata Natyam (BN) dancers and survivors of sexual and domestic violence to bring their stories to the community. The project began with my introducing and exploring different approaches to dancing and creating with BN, including Bharata Nrityam, with 4 BN dancers at ASU. With these additional creative tools and an introductory advocacy training by ACESDV staff Doreen, the dancers paired up with 4 survivor-members through ACESDV, while 3 survivor-members worked directly with me to generate their own pieces. We have been actively sharing, creating, thinking and dancing together for the past year and strung this garland of mini-performances for you to experience. *LVHD* is a multi-layered collaborative action project: it is dance as a language of empowerment; it is joining a movement to end violence in our communities; it is awakening a collective consciousness. It seeks to do what dance has always done—build community for everyone.

**TAKE ACTION, NEXT STEPS:**

<a href="https://www.acesdv.org/take-action/">https://www.acesdv.org/take-action/</a>	<a href="https://socialwork.asu.edu/gender-violence/research">https://socialwork.asu.edu/gender-violence/research</a>	National DV Hotline
Helpline: (602) 279-2900	ASU Victim Advocate: 480-965-0107	1-800-799-SAFE (7233)

Figure G2b. LVHD Brochure--Inside

LVHD  
In  
Our  
Words



Preparations

M: I began writing...the message I wanted to share. There was an incident with my children's father. I cried in the bathroom praying to God that I could feel the protection I thought I lacked.

P: ...we got a pre-training from Doreen on talking with survivors.

First Meeting

M: Each meeting was special, and it was really amazing to see the dance evolve at every meeting.

P: Smooth because of the training...otherwise i would have been more occupied in checking myself if i was making my partner uncomfortable with my gestures/words.

Tools

M: New forms to help myself and others defeat Domestic Violence. Changing my perspective of dance skills from being rhythmic and impressive to telling a story and being communicative.

P: "Word Score" was great to get the important parts of the story. "% physical and % emotion" helped me widen the canvas. Constantly thinking about "tables turned" subconsciously led me to use the brass plate.

Outcomes

M: Immediate answer to my prayer—feeling protected, growing stronger. Learning a new form of communication and discovering a new talent in me. New friendships, new opportunities, new confidence in myself. Eyes opened to others' struggle. Completing a part of my legacy.

P: This partnership helped me to empathize and use my art skills for a social cause which makes me feel contented at the end of the day.

Hopes

**M: When people outside the DV community speak about victims of DV, I feel they think that single moms are needy, a burden and many other negative things. But I wish to share another narrative. My accomplishments are: leaving and staying away, finished my BA at ASU, got my own car, got my own apartment, order of protection and winning child support hearing, served on policy committee & board of directors at Child Crisis Arizona, started my own business...**

**I couldn't do without: my mom, my friends, LVHD Project, my ASU professors who understood my situation, flexible employers, WIC, SNAP, DES, Family Court Assistance, Sojourner, JFCS, ACESDV, Child Crisis AZ, Women's Fresh Start Foundation, Head Start, SCORE Assoc. and more.**

**My wish is that you, standing here, keep protecting & investing in people who have been hurt and need a little help, whatever form that may take.**

**P: I just want everyone to return home with some positive thought.**

Figure G3. Pratyusha-Melissa Process Poster

LVHD  
In  
My  
Words



Preparations

To prepare, I looked through a few things from music, reading and writing that have stuck with me...I made a list of some key words and the word I kept coming back to was "betrayal." I chose to build off of that word and explain how each part of this trauma for me is rooted in betrayal of many forms and impacted the way I view the world now.

First Meeting

The first meeting was so great. It was interesting to hear others tell their stories. The women in my group had worked through a lot of their trauma and were in an empowered place. It changed the way I presented my story and I feel I left it on a positive note. It was so cool to hear how Sumana viewed us and what movements we were making while telling our stories. It was powerful to not know she was taking note of that, and then finding out at the end.

Tools

One time we did a body awareness drill (I doubt that's what it's called). It helped to connect my mind and body but also was actually very relaxing. We did the walk and talk (or for me, sit and talk), which was a great stream of consciousness exercise. It helped since my performance is less movement-based now that my leg is a bit broken.

Outcomes

The outcome of the storyline is clear and concise. I am surprised at how long it is yet how quickly it goes by, and am amazed that it covers so much of my story and how I feel in such small, few movements. With my leg not being healed yet, I have doubts about it coming together in general.

Hopes

**Not to mess up really horribly.  
To feel confident in myself since I get very nervous in front of others.  
That even though mine is less dance and more performance-based, it will still resonate.  
I just hope the message comes across well.**

Figure G4. Kate Process Poster

LVHD  
In  
Our  
Words



Preparations

B: I simply prepared myself to go on a journey. There is fear of the unknown...but also excitement that will come with engaging in new experiences and meeting strangers.

N: The session on the tools that Sumana introduced us to was so useful! And knowing what to expect when we meet our survivor was indeed helpful.

First Meeting

B: The first meeting helped us both overcome our fears...That is where all the magic happens...when we move beyond the fear.

N: B was so easy to talk to. He was telling me a difficult story but kept making sure I was comfortable.

Tools

B: Vulnerability was the best tool. Just trusting we can share with each other. That tool unlocks so much that we can then work with.

N: Word grid, equivalence and finding all the relevant analogies that one could show while conveying love, betrayal was a good experience and made the piece more clear.

Outcomes

B: Silence holds secrets and pain. Vulnerability begets creativity and healing. We have released those secrets and pain. That release is our inner voice speaking aloud now.

N: Every meeting saw a growth in the choreography. He stressed what the important parts of the story were and what he would like the audience to clearly take away from our creation.

Hopes

**B: Each emotion—good or bad—is part of our recovery. EMOTIONS**

**I hope this process allows people to understand a survivor. Each performance is a story. A chance to learn more. LEARNING**

**This performance represents we are indeed survivors. We are triumphant by participating in this process. TRIUMPH**

**This process involves so many of us working together to make this happen. TOGETHER**

**N: First, I hope that you felt something, anything. Second, talk to us about any of it. Third, that i do justice to B so that people may relate to the roller coaster of emotions that he felt and still feels.**

Figure G5. Nivedita-Blake Process Poster

LVHD  
In  
My  
Words



Preparations

I didn't do much preparation before meeting up with Sumana. I did already have some of my own writings that I had ready that I wanted to use. I had started a blog just to share my stories...and i chose to use my first post as my inspiration for my dance!

First Meeting

It was great. I was really excited to learn some dance moves and just get together with other women. What I did not expect was that by explaining more of my story and reading it out loud and seeing my natural movement come into play, this dance of my feelings and life experience could be seen and, I hope, felt by the audience.

Tools

The best part is the dancing and just moving my body. Putting movements to my words has allowed me to move some of that negativity energy that was trapped and has opened me up to receive the love that i deserve.

Outcomes

I struggle with a lot of shame and I still communicate with my ex since we do have children together. So after each practice, that daily battle felt lighter and the burden of shame was not so heavy. There are parts in the dance that almost two stories are being told—the one you hear and then my movements.  
Doing this project with Sumana has been like therapy. I have been able to see how far I have come and how much I can still do to spread awareness and hope.

Hopes

**I hope that I don't freeze and forget to move.**  
**I hope the audience comes with open minds and a willingness to learn.**  
**I still care for him, I love him...probably will forever, but I believe in someone bigger than both of us who never shamed me and loved me unconditionally. That is my God, Jesus.**

Figure G6. Leslie Process Poster

LVHD  
In  
Our  
Words



Preparations

SR: I did a lot of reflection, quite a bit of meditation, just knowing that this is my voice that i have.

N: Our Bharata Nrityam classes and mostly nrta and abhinaya is how I prepared.

First Meeting

SR: It went in 3 phases—Nerve-racking & mind-boggling that i actually get to speak up; Sense of Freedom after that because someone is actually acknowledging me; Shock: people are actually listening?! It's an honor to work with N. She's so intuitive.

N: Meeting & getting comfortable with SR was a new, exciting experience with responsibility. The collaboration is a combination of professional, artistic and very emotionally connected relationships.

Tools

SR: The biggest tool is transcendental meditation to keep my wits about me; self-love/care...acknowledging what i need in the moment; acupuncture to take care of the pain.

N: Finding multiple metaphors of an expression to depict a word; meeting with project creator to structure the flow of choreography.

Outcomes

SR: Realization of what's at hand, that i'm being honored and assisting in the project. Actualization—I'm taking a stand to help the community acknowledge what needs to change.

N: A collaboration that is close to my heart because of the involvement of people, depth of stories, exploration into aspects of dance I never imagined, dynamics of collaborations, power of dance to overcome.

Hopes

SR: I want people to ask me questions. Ask questions because that is the gateway of communication and a deeper level of understanding.

N: I hope that my partner feels connected and can look back at it with good memories. I hope I'm doing justice to what i heard; hope for an experience of how much is possible with just so much.

Figure G7. Niveditha-Sunshine Ray Process Poster

LVHD  
In  
My  
Words



Preparations

I just brought out my own experience. I want to give a message to others and thought about what that is and how to do it.

My experience as a victim and constant thinking about how victims are blamed and restricted from their community and neglected ... How can I express that? This project is a medium to do that.

First Meeting

I didn't feel alone. Others are also going through similar experiences. It gives me courage to share my experience. It was also learning and keeping me strong, because there are other people who have more difficult situations than mine.

Tools

Meeting with other survivors and dancers gave me some ideas that helped me start making my dance. Also, my own dance experience learning since I was 7 or 8 years old and working with renowned gurus and choreographers at Nrityagram and Srjan helps me bring out my emotions. Working with Sumana who asked me questions as I tried to find movement was also helpful.

Outcomes

**It gives me satisfaction** that at least i'm telling people.  
**It is a kind of release**, because it was burning inside and I can now take it out. When you speak, your emotions come out and gives you a relaxed feeling. I couldn't do this much before, and now I have the way to let it out. When you tell alone, no one listens; when you speak together through a project like this, it is more effective.  
**I feel happy** if my story reaches other victims that if I'm a survivor today, you can also be a survivor. You can also raise your voice against it. You don't have to keep taking the pain silently.

**HOPES**

**I hope that my story reaches other victims and gives them courage and strength to come out of that situation.**

**I hope that people change their views about victims. They should not shun them, but believe that it is not the victim's fault.**

**I hope that they do not blame the victim but blame the perpetrator who creates this violence.**

Figure G8. Manasi Process Poster

LVHD  
In  
Our  
Words



#### Preparations

G: I discussed participating with my therapist & came up with a plan to use if I became triggered. I was able to talk about my dissociation experience during the assault which I had not yet processed in therapy.

S: I prepared myself with the informational meeting we had with Doreen & that helped me understand how to provide a safe space for my partner.

#### First Meeting

G: It felt nice to be heard. It was validating to see her movements to my words. We smiled and laughed a lot. After learning the movements, I felt excited and more empowered to share my story.

S: I was preparing to be cast down...but it was a really open, warm, safe space filled with appreciation and understanding for each other. It made me realize how I am helping in my own way.

#### Tools

G: Improv movement outside in a courtyard—a lovely space for creative expression. Due to S's injury, we used Zoom to create our international performance. Using the mirrors at my gym's yoga room allowed me to see the movements and become more confident.

S: The movement grid was a major tool. Instant composing where we just let the word embody us. Walk and Talk.

#### Outcomes

G: The gym gave me a safe space to reclaim my body & see myself as a dancer. Going back to the site helped to piece some of the broken memory. The dance allowed me to integrate my assault into who I am today. Supporting one another through trauma no matter how far we are from one another.

S: Having to change course with my new limitation of being unable to walk and in a different country. I am able to empathize rather than sympathize because I have a more concrete idea of trauma.

#### Hopes

G: I hope people will take away these three things from the performance:

- In the dark the Light remains, pulling you back to source.
- When you are at the end of your rope, tie a knot and hold on.
- Dissociation is the body's defense against trauma.

S: I hope my injury doesn't take away from the performance. I also hope that at least one person will be moved by the overall project. I wish that G truly does find healing with our work.

Figure G9. Shreya-Gretchen Process Poster



APPENDIX H

LVHD FINAL REFLECTIONS, RESPONSE FORM DATA

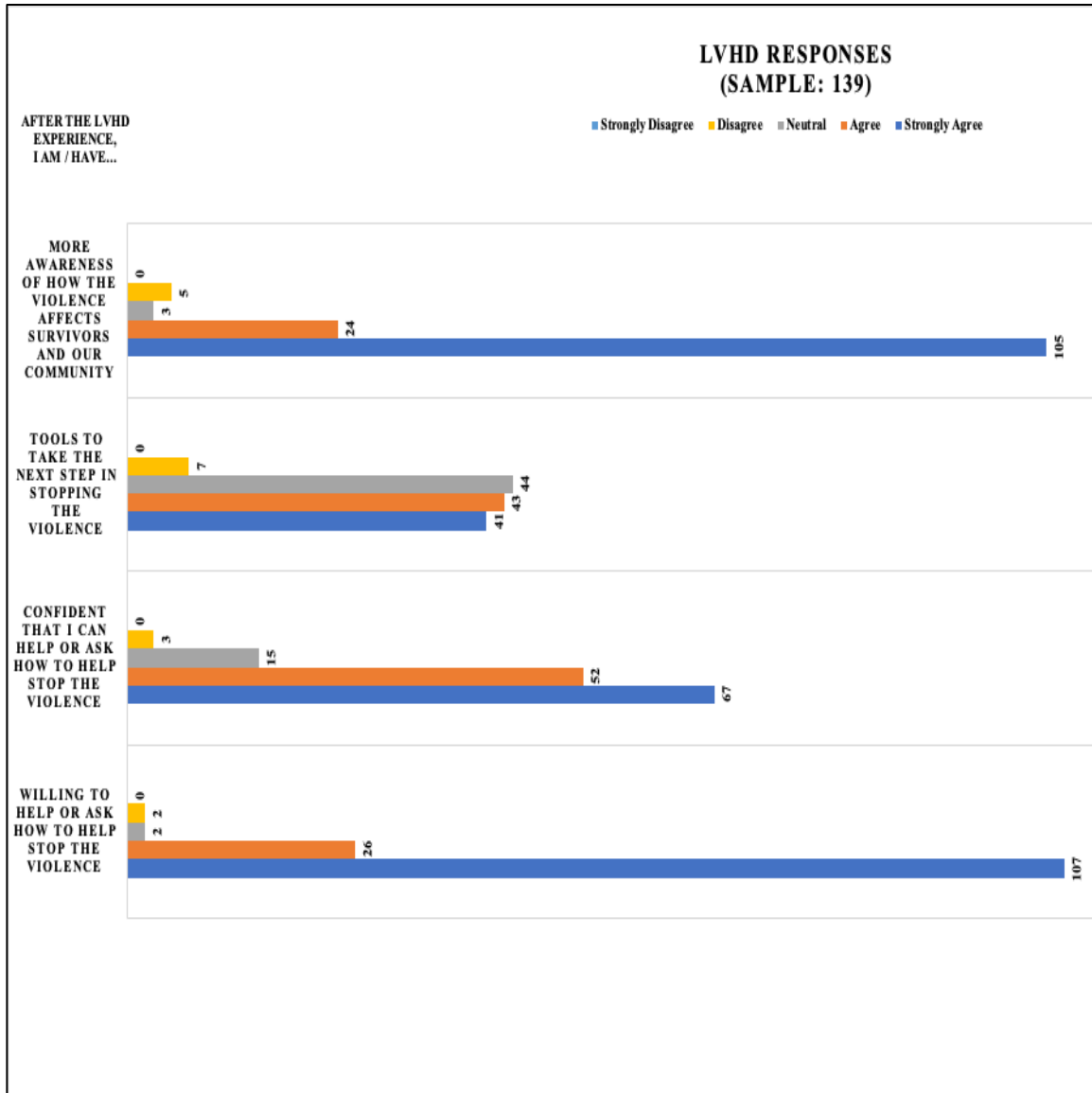


Figure H1. LVHD Response Form Data—Q3

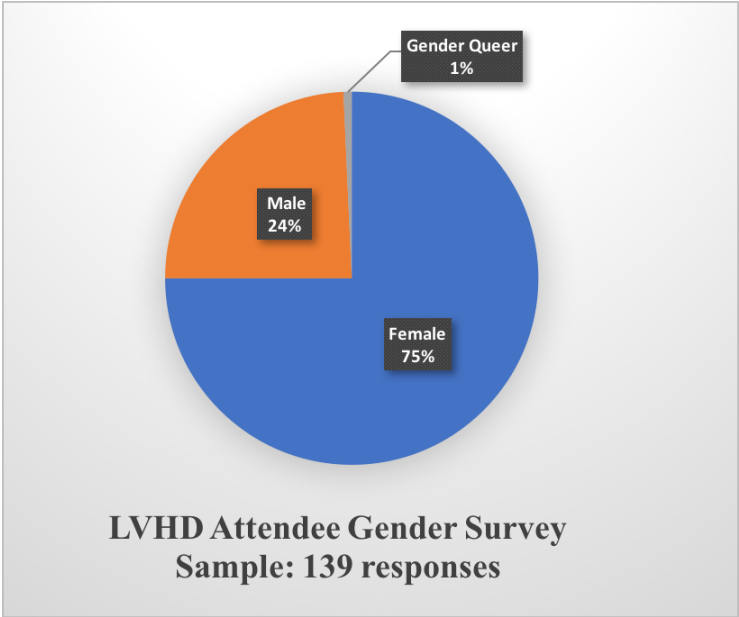


Figure H2. LVHD Response Form Data—Gender

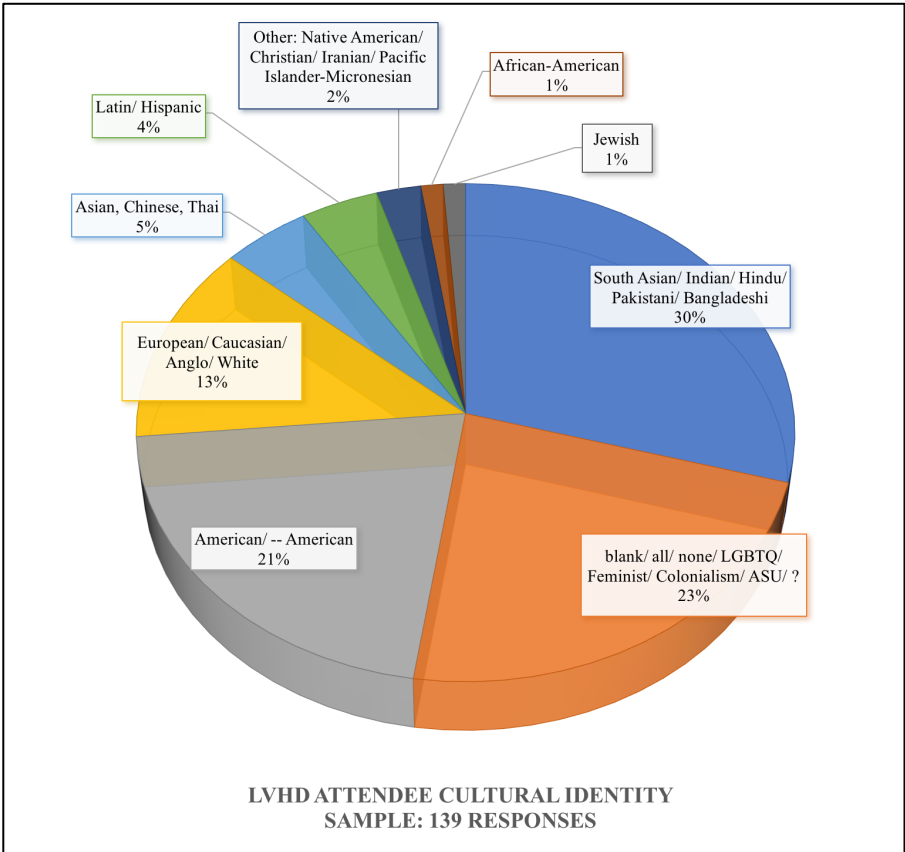


Figure H3. LVHD Response Form Data—Cultural Identity



Figure H4. LVHD Response Form Data—Tag Cloud

APPENDIX I  
DEFINITIONS

TERM	DEFINITION
abhinaya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Sanskrit derivation: <i>abhi</i> (towards) + <i>ni</i> (to lead/carry);</li> <li>○ the art of communication in dance, which uses <i>āṅgika</i> (physical), <i>vācika</i> (verbal/aural), <i>āhārya</i> (external) and <i>sātvika</i> (internal) modes;</li> <li>○ when abhinaya is successful, only then the audience can taste the <i>rasa</i></li> </ul>
<i>Abhinayadarpanam</i>	(also transliterated <i>Abhinayadarpana</i> , <i>Abhinayadarpaṇam</i> ) c. 500 BCE-c. 500CE; Sanskrit text composed by Nandikeśvara after <i>Natyashastra</i> exclusively dealing with the technique of Indian dance
action research	Action research seeks transformative change through the simultaneous process of taking action and doing research, which are linked together by critical reflection. ( <a href="https://arnaweb.org/action-research/">https://arnaweb.org/action-research/</a> )
Bharata-Natyam	(known as Sadir till the 1930s; also transliterated as Bharatanatyam, Bharathanatyam, Bharata Natyam) the prevalent practice of the South Indian dance of Tamil Nadu, commonly recognized as codified by the Thanjavur Brothers in the 18 <sup>th</sup> century CE and revived for the stage in the early 20 <sup>th</sup> century CE
Bharata-Nrityam	(also transliterated as Bharatanrityam or Bharata Nrityam) the specialized pedagogy of Bharata-Natyam which includes additional vocabulary delineated in the ancient foundational text <i>Natyashastra</i> (see definition below) as developed by Dr. Padma Subrahmanyam
bhava	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ (also transliterated <i>bhāva</i>) in Sanskrit, literally “state of being”</li> <li>○ in dance/drama, refers to the emotions, sentiments, feelings that underlie a mood</li> <li>○ bhava needs to be communicated for <i>rasa</i> to be evoked</li> </ul>
creative tool	“...a process or method that is repeatable and leads you to create something...to be able to collaborate, to discover...” (Lerman 2019); may be unconsciously created over time, may not be named, or may be learned and practiced, but always adaptable

TERM	DEFINITION
domestic violence	a pattern of abusive behaviors that are used to gain and maintain power and control over a spouse, partner, girl/boyfriend or intimate family member (including children, elders, etc.), related by blood or law; not limited to physical violence ( <a href="https://www.acesdv.org/domestic-violence-graphics/">https://www.acesdv.org/domestic-violence-graphics/</a> )
guru-shishya	(also transliterated gurū-śiṣya) in Sanskrit, literally “teacher-disciple,” referring to the teaching-learning process between the two; contemporary versions of this have often come to mean authoritarian teachers who might abuse their power by forcing students to do chores/menial work or withholding knowledge; in this document, it mainly refers to the mode of inquiry between the two, as exemplified in Vedic (see definition below) narratives
hasta	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Sanskrit word meaning <i>hand</i>;</li> <li>○ in dance/drama, refers to the system of hand gestures used symbolically in <i>abhinaya</i> to communicate an idea/story (distinct from yoga hasta <i>mudrās</i> which are used specifically to direct/redirect the energy within)</li> </ul>
<i>Natyashastra</i>	(also transliterated as <i>Natya Shastra</i> or <i>Nāṭyaśāstra</i> or <i>Nāṭya Śāstra</i> ) c. 800 BCE-c. 500 CE; earliest extant Sanskrit treatise on Indian dance, drama and music; attributed to author Sage Bharata; “Defining itself as a ‘Theory of Praxis,’ in the opening line of the <i>Natyashastra</i> , the author says, ‘I am creating a theory and text on performance, of practice and experimentation’” (Kiran 2013, 14)
praxis	(plural: praxes) “practice, as distinguished from theory; application or use, as of knowledge or skills” ( <i>The Random House Dictionary of the English Language</i> 1987); “action and reflection upon the world in order to change it” (hooks, 1994, 14)
rasa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Sanskrit word meaning <i>juice, flavor, essence, nectar</i></li> <li>○ Rasa is the enjoyment of an aesthetic bliss derived through witnessing [dance]” (Subrahmanyam, 4)</li> <li>○ “an aesthetic experience that is akin to the bliss of the enlightened, liberated soul” (Schwarz 2004, 15)</li> <li>○ a result of the quality of abhinaya</li> </ul>

TERM	DEFINITION
reflective practice	“the ability to objectively reflect on habits, actions and choices to establish a cycle of constantly learning about oneself in relation to the larger world” (Schupp 2017, 166)
sanskritization	term coined by sociologist Dr. M.N. Srinivas in the 1950s with regard to caste mobility in Indian society; in the case of dance, “a legitimizing process by which dance forms designated as <i>ritual</i> , <i>folk</i> , or simply insignificant, attain social and politico-artistic status which brings the redesignation, <i>classical</i> ” (Coorlawala 2004, 5); rooted in the word <i>Sanskrit</i> , the ancient liturgical language, parent to many modern languages of the Indian subcontinent
sexual violence	whenever a person is forced, coerced, and/or manipulated into any unwanted sexual activity (rape or sexual assault, child sexual assault and incest, unwanted sexual contact/touching, sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, etc.) including when they are unable to consent due to age, illness, disability, or the influence of alcohol or others drugs ( <a href="https://www.acesdv.org/about-sexual-domestic-violence/">https://www.acesdv.org/about-sexual-domestic-violence/</a> )
somatic principles	principles common to various somatic practices, where “Somatics is the field which studies the soma: namely, the body as perceived from within by first-person perception.” (Hanna 1986, 1). These include: “time to breath[e], feel and ‘listen’ to the body...gain deeper awareness of ‘self that moves’...while paying attention to proprioceptive signals.” (Eddy 2009, 6-7)
spiritual	of or pertaining to the spirit or soul ( <i>The Random House Dictionary</i> ); the word “spirit” derives from the Latin word for “breath,” breath being the common life-force for all living beings; for the purpose of this inquiry, “spiritual” connotes <i>seeking to know or understand the essence of one’s being through intense experience in a connected existence</i>



TERM	DEFINITION
tradition	derived from the Latin <i>trans</i> (across, beyond) + <i>dare</i> (to give); the handing down of statements, beliefs, legends, customs, information, etc., from generation to generation, esp. by word of mouth or by practice; a long-established or inherited way of thinking or acting ( <i>The Random House Dictionary</i> )
Vedic	<p>of the <i>Vedas</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Sanskrit word <i>veda</i> means <i>knowledge</i></li> <li>○ authorless Hindu texts in ancient Sanskrit, passed down orally &amp; committed to writing between c. 1500-c. 500 BCE, containing hymns, guidance on ritual &amp; philosophy</li> <li>○ in this document, specifically, of the <i>Upanishads</i>, late Vedic texts dealing with philosophy &amp; ontology</li> <li>○ “Vedic” &amp; “ancient Indian” are used interchangeably in this document</li> </ul>
voice/agency	based in sociological study of resistance to structure; from <i>Voice and Agency: Empowering Women and Girls for Shared Prosperity</i> , a World Bank report from 2014 ( <a href="https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/19036">https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/19036</a> ): <b>voice</b> is being able to speak up and be heard, to shape and share in discussions and decision-making & <b>agency</b> is being able to make one’s own choices and decisions without fear; they is used interchangeably in this document