

A Gathering to Address Sexual Harassment in the NYC Dance Community

Meeting Notes Based on Whiteboarding at this Event

On Saturday January 6, 2018 Dance/NYC, Gibney Dance, The Actors Fund and members of the NYC Dance Community came together to talk about sexual harassment and abuses of power. Below is a collective of ideas, questions, and resources that came up during the evening's conversation.

Welcoming Remarks provided by Yasemin Ozumerzifon

Hi everyone, my name is Yasemin and I am the Senior Company and Community Action Manager at Gibney. Thank you so much for being here on this cold Saturday evening. We at Dance/NYC, Gibney Dance, and The Actors Fund recognize this is a defining moment to publicly acknowledge long-existing issues of sexual harassment and abuses of power in the dance field. Tonight's gathering is inspired by the The Public Theater's "Mis(Conduct)," Royal Court's "No Grey Area," and Chicago's "Not In Our House" town halls.

There is a lot of work to be done when it comes to sexual harassment and abuses of power but seeing so many of us choosing to show up today whether to share or hold space for listening is a crucial step forward. Tonight, we aim to:

- Start processing together as a dance community around the topics of sexual harassment and abuse,
- create a space where those who wish to, can share their lived experiences and bring thoughts and suggestions for how to move forward as a field,
- show our support by deeply listening to one another, and
- finally, begin to chart a new path forward.

Before we begin, we wish to thank everyone here who has been focused on these issues in your work. We also want to acknowledge that sexual harassment can happen to all people, regardless of gender, identity, disability, race, culture, age, sexual orientation or immigration status. For those of you who have been impacted, we see you, and believe you, and we thank each of you for joining us today so together we can create a space for everyone.

Once again, welcome and many thanks for being here. Alejandra from Dance/NYC will now share an overview of the evening.

Overview and Rules for the Road by Alejandra Duque Cifuentes

My name is Alejandra Duque Cifuentes, and I am the Programs Manager at Dance/NYC. We are honored to have you join us, on this cold winter evening. Now we will review the format of the evening and some ground rules.

In the room, we have:

- Sydnie L. Mosley, who led us beautifully through our opening exercise and will offer another to bookend the evening,

- Hannah Joo, who will be our note taker for the evening. Please note that individual stories will not be captured in the notes. Those will contain resources, questions, and ideas for how to move forward.
- Catherine Drury, Dancer's Resource Licensed Social Worker with The Actors Fund, and Erin Hiatt, also with The Actors Fund, are available at any time throughout the evening and immediately after, should you wish to connect with them as a resource.
- Finally, members of an ad hoc Dance/NYC committee created to advise and assist on Dance/NYC's activities focused on sexual harassment. Thank you.

With that said, let's review some Rules of the Road

- If you are interested in sharing your personal experience, ideas for how to move forward as a field, story, or present a resource, simply line up at either of the microphones in the circle.
- When sharing, we ask that each person speaks from their lived experience and as the author of their own stories and views. When sharing, please use "I" statements
- No cross talk. Listen for understanding and to hear people's statements, as opposed to respond or defend.
- This space is for sharing ideas and experiences, not individual names. We want to emphasize the importance of anonymity.
- As a confidential space, we ask that folks refrain from sharing on social media, or through any outlet, the stories shared here. While we have invited all of the members of our community, including members of the press, we want to note that this is not a press event.
- To make space for as many as possible, we ask that you please keep your stories to 2 minutes long. I will give you a friendly warning when it is time to wrap up.
- Does anyone have any additional suggestions for our ground rules? We are open to up to three more suggestions.
- Do we all agree? If so, please use your voice or body to express your agreement.

Notes Captured on Whiteboards during this Event

Ideas:

- Being silent contributes to pervasiveness of abuse culture
- Education:
 - Teach children about creating safe spaces for each other
 - Offer courses and trainings that are required for artists, educators, administrators, etc.
 - Empowerment through curriculum- trained professionals
 - Pass on the knowledge to future generations
 - Teach bodily autonomy to kids in classrooms; to teachers to respect students
- Empowering/ Tactics:
 - Empower movers outside of administrative settings
 - Protect artists from backlash
 - Systems and institutions for support
 - HR should be present
 - Accountability

- Anonymous and discrete documentation, then finding trends and building actions
- Consent and comfort
- Address underlying issue after rush of attention quiets down
- Prevent abuse of power and build honest relationships
- Re-evaluating rules and expectations at dance competitions regarding sexualizing children
- Transparency between choreographers and dancers, including having artists providing contact information of fellowship, residence or grant-providing organizations to which collaborators may report or find support/services in case of need
- Encouraging alliances and speaking up instead of being passive bystanders
- Embrace the slowness of change in culture
- Communicate and respect each other's boundaries
- Having conversations to think critically about normalized standards, behaviors, attitudes
- Making people feel okay with talking about abuse without feeling embarrassment or shame
- Not only about reacting- Being proactive and creating environments that are open, comfortable, and trusting
- Have systems and institutions embrace empathy and care
- No shame/blame, love rather than anger/hate
- Educate! Unlearn and relearn, which is important for advocacy
- Positive messaging
- Defining Sexual Harassment:
 - Is it possible to build common language and expectations as a field
 - Defining sexual/ sexual harassment with cultural contexts in mind
 - Clarity with language. Not falling back on filler language
 - Consider bodily, nonverbal language
 - Perceptions and reactions to sexual harassment rooted in gender and race and the body in dance
 - Small situations matter
 - Role of power and authority

Questions:

- What is the Organizational policy?
- What protections do or do not exist for freelancers or non-organizational settings?
- Who can we go to report and share?
- What are the laws and policies for reporting and/or evaluation? How do we make it better?
- Corporate-type policies don't really apply to dance settings- What do dancers need? Specific harassment training for dancers separate from administration and corporate training.
- Systemic Objectification and how it is reinforced?
- Masculinity Complex: How are unacceptable behaviors rewarded or expected in cultures?
- Take the conversation back to our own personal communities beyond movements made popular by media?

- What legally qualifies as Sexual Harassment?
- How do we protect ourselves when the law may not?
- Training: How does it apply to freelancers?
- Positive messaging: How are competitive dancers affirmed or validated?
- What systems can institutions set in place?
- Who can we go to in our field when sexual assault or misconduct happens?
- When working with the body, how can we empower others outside the administrative realm?
- How can we protect dancers from backlash after speaking up?

Resources mentioned by participants:

- [Upcoming Event: Long table @ Gibney Wed 2/7; 6:30pm](#)
- [YPAD \(Youth Protection Advocates in Dance\)](#)
 - Certification programs
 - Education about sexual abuse
 - Health and wellbeing
 - Consultations
 - Connect to professionals
 - Support with reporting
 - Call services
- [Le-Gal](#)
 - Services for queer communities.
 - Located at the The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center in Manhattan.
- [The Dancers' Resource @ The Actors Fund](#)
 - Free Counseling and social services
 - Open to everyone in the arts/ entertainment fields
 - Therapy
 - Help identify the different types of healing and support that best fit each person's need (ex: Friends & Family, Emotional Expression).
 - Confidential sessions with social workers

For a growing list of available resources presented by Gibney Dance, Dance/NYC and The Actors Fund, please visit [Dance.NYC](#).

Dance/NYC staff made a best effort to transcribe whiteboard materials verbatim and to organize content in logical categories. All personal stories shared by participants were excluded.