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Honors Thesis

CONTRADICTORY SELVES: AN INVESTIGATION OF IDENTITY
PERFORMANCE IN A DANCE LEISURE SPACE

by
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Submitted to Brigham Young University in partial fulfillment of
graduation requirements for University Honors

Sociology Department
Brigham Young University
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ABSTRACT

CONTRADICTION SELVES: AN INVESTIGATION OF IDENTITY PERFORMANCE IN A DANCE LEISURE SPACE

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Bachelor of Science

Identity is a constantly shifting performance of self, occasionally complicated when outward appearance of the self-performer doesn't match the manner (behavior). This contradictory performance of self is most obvious when connected to a racial group identity, such as in dance leisure spaces. However, previous research on identity performance and critical race studies in dance leisure spaces has not investigated contradictory identities. As a participant-researcher in a black dance space at a predominantly white institution (PWI), the BYU Step Team, I investigated how non-black participants navigate contradictory identities. Using a dramaturgical perspective to analyze individual identity performance and a critical race perspective to understand the context within which the group identity is performed, I utilize ethnographic techniques to investigate contradictory identities. Although support for creating a black space within a predominantly white institution is meaningful to the students involved, institutional structures also perpetuate the history of white symbolic power and violence. Non-black students experiencing contradictory identities attempt to mitigate these experiences through spatial awareness, embodying movement, and engaging in "oneness."

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¹ This research would not be possible without the Brigham Young University Step Team and participants. I express gratitude to BYU Step Team student leadership for trusting me as a participant-dancer and participant-researcher. As part of this thank-you, I want to extend my gratitude to the African American HBCU students who created and performed what became known as step—it goes without saying that this thesis would not be the same without this genre of dance, but I find it necessary to celebrate them. Additionally, I want to acknowledge and thank the excellent black creators and practitioners of the many different genres of African American vernacular dance—without them creating and performing their movement as a form of power, resistance, and celebration, I would not be the dancer I am today.

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The performance of self in everyday life is a theoretical perspective that underpins much of interactionist and performance perspective and research (Goffman 1959; Fine 1991, 2001). While exploring the role of identity in sport and other leisure spaces is common in academic study, the reflexive self-performance process is presently understudied in dance leisure spaces (Anderson 2001; Jackson 2001; May and Chaplin 2007). However, dance leisure spaces are spaces in which identity formation and performance occur and are ideal spaces for exploratory research. Leisure spaces often help participants form both group identity and individual identity (Atencio 2008; Scott and Austin 2006), and the performance of group identity is especially strong among step dancers, a genre in which strong ties to blackness remain (Fine 1991, 2001).

Step dance originated at historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) as ritual and performance activity of Greek fraternities and sororities during the mid-1900s. In Greek collegiate organizations, step dancers connect their identity to their fraternity or sorority, allowing white participants to feel comfortable in their role as step dancers (Fine 1991, 2001). In cases of non-Greek organizations, identity formation and performance still occur during step rehearsals and performance, but for non-black participants, individual identity performance must remain separate from a black identity. In many cases, there may be friction between how dancers appear (their racial appearance) and their manner (rehearsal behavior and dance performance), which will lead to them experiencing the formation of a contradictory identity. By conducting a qualitative exploratory study in a non-Greek step dance leisure space, I was able to investigate how identity is formed and performed by both black and non-black participants. Necessarily, I engage a critical race perspective to better understand the context within which this dance

leisure space exists and speak to the realities of white racial domination coexisting with identity performance. However, my ethnographic research (including participant observations and interviews) ultimately investigates how non-black step performers conceptualize themselves in their reflexive performance.

IDENTITY

An entire body of literature is built around the daily performance of self, also called “identity,” as analyzed by Erving Goffman (1959:19): “Everyone is always and everywhere . . . playing a role . . . It is in these roles that we know each other; it is in these roles that we know ourselves.”

The performance of everyday life is rooted in the dramaturgical perspective of sociology and looks at everyday behaviors as though they are performed on “the world’s . . . stage” (*As You Like It*, 1.5.139). Stage performance is typically associated with that which is not real, but Goffman’s performance theory views all persons as performers. Instead of a literal stage, “performance” refers to behaviors that occur in the company of observers over a period of time—or in the daily public behaviors of all persons. The self is constructed through these performances, whether individuals realize they are performing or not. Identity and self are products of the scene in which the performer is acting—different social roles and spaces necessitate different performances and conceptions of self (Goffman 1959; Elliott 2013; Atencio 2008).

At the same time, performance is observed through two measures: appearance and manner. Appearance is a “personal front” (i.e., clothing, rank, posture, racial characteristics, sex, etc.) (Goffman 1959:24). Some appearances remain passively unchanged over time, such as race and sex characteristics, but nonetheless still act as part

of the performance. “Manner” is the behavior that tells the observer what to expect of the performance (i.e., how someone acts) and is generally expected to match the appearance. Goffman considers the ways in which appearance and manner might contradict one another but does not spend significant time discussing the possible contradictions or their consequences. However, a unique self is performed through such contradictions.

By broadening the idea of “manner” beyond individual behavior to group behavior, we create a social space in which individual appearance may contradict group manner. This happens especially when the group manner is associated with a particular social group and some of the performers do not fit the appearance associated with that group. Spaces of leisure are examples of social spaces where such contradictions may occur, and where a unique self—individual who has personally navigated the contradiction in their identity—is performed.

Racial and Ethnic Identities

In this research, I specifically use the genre of step dance to better understand contradictory identities—cases in which the individual appearance does not match a group manner. For the purposes of this study, group manner could also be considered a group behavior that is consistent with a constructed racial and ethnic identity. Cornell and Hartmann (1998) use a constructionist approach to understand the formation of racial and ethnic identity. This approach assumes that ethnic and racial identities are, first, products of actions and interactions within a social environment and variable circumstances, and second, also diverse and shifting. Instead of passively formed, ethnic and racial identities are “products of particular events, relationships, and processes that are themselves subject to change” (1998:77).

Groups play an important role in the construction of their own identity by establishing organizations, promoting research, retelling histories, or reestablishing or creating new cultural practices (1998:79). This is all to say that racial and ethnic identities are contextually and socially formed—unique spaces may lead to constructing unique identities. Identity is never stagnant, and its formation is “never finished” (1998:80). However, in addition to self-creation of identity, ethnic and racial identities can also be assigned. These assignments “can be a powerful force” as individuals navigate, develop, and perform their identities (Cornell and Hartmann 2007:20), which ultimately means that racial and ethnic identity performance can be both a product of self-creation and assignment. I use a case study to understand more about identity performance in one specific context and time; however, I acknowledge that individuals’ constructed identities in a specific leisure space are always developing, and I also acknowledge that how individuals perform their identity is contingent on how they understand their identity according to external and internal forces at any given time.

PERFORMANCE OF IDENTITY THROUGH LEISURE

Leisure studies are a platform for investigating identity (Atencio 2008; Ghandnoosh 2010; Hassrick 2012; Jackson 2001; Kraus 2010; Ribeiro 2017; Scott and Austin 2006), but few studies have investigated the performative relationship between leisure and identity (Dashper 2016; Hasserick 2012; Holliday 1999; Taylor and Kay 2013). And no study has examined contradictory experiences of self in leisure spaces. Identity contributes to individual and group well-being (Harvey et al. 2014), and the lack of research signifies that there is much more to know about how identity is constructed and managed, especially when contradiction in identity is present.

Identity performance in leisure spaces include ethnic (Atencio 2008; Cornell and Hartmann 1998; Hasserick 2012), racial (Cornell and Hartmann 1998; Fine 1998, 2001; Jackson 2001), and sexual or gender (Holliday 1999; Ronen 2010) identities. These are all performed through a combination of public behaviors (Goffman 1959), such as speech, movement, clothing, and facial expressions. When identity performance happens in a leisure space, the individual performance of identity tends to begin to match or adapt to the group identity performance. When *behavior* matches the group but *appearance* does not, we see contradictory identities. This research focuses on when non-black participants' identity behavior matches the group identity but directly contradicts the group appearance, which is associated with blackness.

Dance, Leisure, and Identity

The discussion of dance and leisure is important to set the stage for dance spaces as important spaces for research by connecting them to leisure-based research (Atencio 2008; Kraus 2010; May and Chaplin 2007). Additionally, it sets up dance spaces as spaces where group and individual identity are performed and therefore an appropriate site for this research. "Space," in this paper, includes both the leisure activity and the context surrounding the activity but doesn't necessarily include the physical properties of the environment.

In his research on leisure spaces, Atencio (2008) focused on dance and associated spaces as a gateway to performative identity. His study examined the "embodied subjectivities," or multiple identities performed in the body, of young ethnic minority females and described how embodied practices shape young women's experiences and understanding of themselves (2008:312). Atencio found that different dance spaces led to

different performances. Ballet allowed one black woman to “negotiate, assimilate, and resist both black and white coded spaces” (2008:319), while dancing at clubs allowed another woman of color to perform power and resistance, indicating that identity performance is specific to context.

Black identity in dance leisure spaces has a rich literature. In his review of African American vernacular dance—an umbrella term for dance styles founded by and in African American communities that use movement vocabulary for improvisation instead of choreography alone—Jackson (2001) discusses “individuation” as an important feature of vernacular dance. Individuation is when the dancer forms an individual self within a dance style (2001:45). Individuation parallels the performance of self—as it is the development and performance of a distinct personality of an individual—with the performance of group. The use of a common vernacular maintains group identity, especially when participating in a highly organized routine, but individuation allows performers to embody what they consider to be a unique identity.

African American vernacular dance often creates the sort of leisure spaces in which group appearance matches group manner, especially in dance forms that have maintained a sort of ethnic heritage by being less common among other groups, such as step. No dance style remains wholly black. For example, lindy is commonly danced by non-blacks (Hancock 2008, 2013), and hip hop is often believed by practitioners to have no associated ethnic or racial identity (Ghandnoosh 2010). Perhaps the most restricted African American form is Greek step dance, as it was originally formed in the 1950s by fraternities and sororities in HBCUs and remained somewhat hidden and unpracticed by other social groups until the 1980s and 90s (Fine 1991; Samuels 2017). And even though

that leisure space has become increasingly integrated (Samuels 2017; NPR 2010), it remains most common among black groups.

The intersections of race, ethnicity, and dance leisure spaces is rarely researched from a dramaturgical perspective. Most researchers examine the effects of appropriation or expectations of black essentialism as they relate to dance leisure (Chaplin 2007; Ghandnoosh 2010). Other claims include non-essentialist appropriative claims, such as Hancock (2008, 2013), who discusses white lindy hop dancers who unconsciously participate in white racial domination, which is the assumption that structural disadvantage and organization (as it pertains to race) is natural. Hancock uses “white racial domination” to highlight the nature of discrimination as unconscious, and core to his argument is that the white majority in the United States enjoys symbolic power, which is the ability of a group to influence how the world and its groups are organized. Whether intentional or not, Hancock argues that white lindy participants have the luxury of participating in lindy hop without considering the background, an offense Hancock considers symbolic violence. These critical theory approaches to racial and ethnic leisure spaces fail to address the construction and management of identity taking place. As a result, focusing only on conflict theories limits our current understanding of identity formation in this context (Cornell and Hartmann 1998).

While I acknowledge that unconscious power and white racial domination might be at play in this unique context, I choose to focus this research on dramaturgical approaches in order to expand the current literature. However, I also engage Hancock’s concept of symbolic power and violence to understand this dimension of the context within which identity is reflexively performed. By using a dramaturgical lens within a

critical context, I am able to see the ways in which critical race concepts such as symbolic violence and power play a role in the tension experienced by contradictory selves as individual performers navigate their mismatched manner and appearance. I use African American step dance and participation as a case study to explore why and how non-black participants perform self in black dance leisure spaces. I specifically focus on the performance of contradictory identities and when they do or do not occur. What is the experience of contradictory selves (non-black participants) and their peers on a step team at a predominantly white university?

Step Dance and Identity Performance

Step is a “dynamic performance tradition among African American fraternities and sororities” (Fine 1991:39) that consists of a combination of steps, stomps, slaps, and singing in order to make rhythmic patterns with participants’ bodies. Performances maintain synchronization of body percussion, emphasizing unity of sound. Elizabeth Fine (1991:40) states that “fundamentally, stepping is a ritual performance of group identity.” When a non-black participant dances with a historically black fraternal or sororal Greek organization, the predominant identity formed and performed is associated with the Greek organization. This is why non-black participants might not experience a contradictory identity—all participants, black and non-black, rally around an organizational identity. In other words, a white or non-black Delta Sigma Theta stepper would perform her sisterhood rather than blackness.

While stepping is primarily a reflection of HBCU Greek culture, Fine emphasizes the link that participants often make with African and African American roots, and to this day, it remains *primarily* an ethnically black performance. This does not mean that step is

not performed by other people of color or white dancers, but that it commonly attracts black participants. Step dance leisure spaces are therefore “black spaces.” White people get the privilege of self-selecting into black spaces, while black people are required to navigate white spaces as a reality of daily survival (Anderson 2015). When white people join BYU Step Team, they are self-selecting into a black space.

Traditionally, step teams have been associated with fraternal or sororal Greek organizations with individual attitudes and trade steps that help observers know exactly who they are. Greek participants live, work, and dance together; therefore, step is a comprehensive form of leisure. Due to the continued history of step as a performance of black identity (Fine 2000), manner and appearance are sure to contradict with one another when non-black participants are involved. This exploratory case study seeks to understand the multiple embodied subjectivities and intersectional identities that are performed by individual participants, specifically focusing on contradictory selves. Step is used as the representative dance leisure space in this research because of its group identity-forming nature that has historically been so closely tied to blackness.

A UNIQUE UNIVERSITY

My research is a case study of a specific leisure space at a predominantly white institution (PWI), Brigham Young University (BYU). BYU is 81.9% white, 5.9% Hispanic/Latino, 4% two or more races, 1.9% Asian, 0.6% Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, and only 0.5% Black or African American (the other 6.1% are other ethnicities, including some unknown and some non-residents) (Data USA 2017). BYU provides an interesting context for study because there are no fraternities or sororities at the university and thus no traditional mechanisms for performing a unifying group

identity through step. However, a significant proportion of the student body has lived abroad and/or speaks a second language, and despite a stark lack of diversity on their campus, a number of BYU dance teams are dedicated to the study and performance of cultural and world dance. This includes a robust world dance program (including a world dance minor) and two touring teams. One of those teams is made up of primarily white students performing world dance, and the other is made up of Latinx, Pacific Islander, and Indigenous American students who perform traditional and ancestral dances. Finally, BYU's Multicultural Student Services (MSS) office seeks to create opportunities for multicultural students to celebrate their history and culture. These multicultural spaces reflect a combination of self-creation of identity and assignment of the majority, as multicultural students are assigned an advisor. As a result of these factors, BYU is thus a contextually significant PWI for the study of identity construction and performance (Cornell and Hartmann 1998).

Run by the BYU Black Student Union (BSU) and authorized by BYU's MSS, most participants of the step team are members of the BSU. As a result, step team performance at BYU is nominally linked to black group identity. However, BYU is a PWI with multicultural ties and interests, especially in the realm of dance performance. As white and other non-black participants are not restricted from involvement in the BYU Step Team, when they join, they enter a black dance leisure space. Non-black participants must perform something other than a black identity or Greek identity while preparing to celebrate black history through step dance. Even as behavior matches group identity performance, appearance cannot, necessitating the performance of contradictory selves. Since non-black identity performance in a black space is unstudied, this research

seeks to define and understand what identity non-black participants perform, how they navigate a sense of contradiction in their performance, and the greater consequences of their involvement on BYU Step Team. For these reasons, BYU is uniquely situated as an ideal space to research non-black contradictory identities.

SUMMARY AND EXPECTATIONS

Individual identity performance includes a relationship between manner, or behavior, and appearance; occasionally individual group behavior doesn't match individual appearance, creating a contradictory identity experience. Such contradictions occasionally occur in spaces of leisure, such as when a white or otherwise non-black participant rehearses and performs on a step team. As individuals' constructed identities are constantly shifting and changing, especially as it connects with race and ethnicity, it is reasonable to assume that non-black participants in a black leisure space experience some identity tension as a result of the contradiction between appearance and manner. Step dance, as a dance leisure space, is an identity-forming leisure space subject to individual performative identity and institutional context constraints, like in the case of the BYU Step Team. The fact that BYU is a PWI means that its step team experiences institutional-level constraints. As such, this research engages a critical theory approach to understanding the institutional context within which the step team rehearses and performs while exploring the individual tensions that non-black participants experience between their appearance and their manner.

Generally speaking, most historically African American dance forms have become multicultural and diverse over time, so it is difficult to explore the contradictory selves and subjectivities of non-black participants. Step dance is one style of historically

African American vernacular dance that draws primarily black participants due to its important role at HBCUs. Brigham Young University, as led by the BSU, uses step dance to celebrate blackness, creating the perfect dance leisure space in which to study the contradictory selves of non-black participants. Through observations and interviews, this study focuses on understanding the multiple embodied subjectivities and self-identities of the BYU Step Team participants.

This case study explores the multiple meanings and selves that the dancers identify to motivate their performance and their participation on the BYU Step Team. Specifically, without a racial identity to bind the non-black participants to step dance, what exactly is the motivation behind non-black participation in step dance? Do non-black participants sense the tension between their racial identity and their environment at rehearsal? If so, how do they navigate the internal sense of tension and contradiction? Using a combination of interactionist and critical theory perspectives, I establish that the tension between how dancers appear (their racial appearance) and their manner (rehearsal behavior and individual dance performance) leads to the formation of a contradictory identity.

METHODS

I became aware of this unique space to explore when I was a participant on the BYU Step Team during 2018–2019. As a white participant with past dance experience, I sensed a contradiction within myself and my peers and wanted to explore how other non-black participants navigated the same complex space. From 2019–2020, I spent four months as a participant-researcher on the BYU Step Team. I made my position as participant-researcher known to the student leaders and used purposeful sampling to find

individual interview participants. My ability to gain trust with the participants in this study was impacted by the fact that I had been on the team the year before and some student leaders loosely remembered me.

The BYU Step Team rehearsals typically have 20 to 40 participants, and all rehearsals are led by BSU representatives. As the time of the performance got closer, attendance became more consistent, and dancers were required to be at every rehearsal with few exceptions. The Perspectives cultural celebration happened on February 21, 2020, with twenty-eight step dancers, seven of whom participated the year before, and thirteen of whom were non-black participants. Student leadership, which comes from the BSU, also changed.

From mid-November until the Perspectives performance in February, I attended the weekly two-hour rehearsals, which all took place at BYU's student center, most often on Saturday mornings. Participation in BYU Step Team is voluntary, and most participants learn through friends/word of mouth, booths at the student center, or online at the MSS website. Many participants from the year before had graduated or had other obligations that kept them from attending rehearsals, and at least ten participants on the 2019–2020 team were first- or second-year BYU students. The shifting nature of participation on step team meant that most relationships were formed before step began, or they were temporary, with a couple of exceptions.

At the first rehearsal, I made my role as a participant-researcher known to student leaders. I was an active participant at every rehearsal, recording my jottings during most water breaks or immediately after rehearsal, following the practice of quickly recording notes before returning to observations (Nippert-Eng 2015). Jottings focused on

participant behavior, including individual language, spatial placement, and group socialization. I recorded in-depth field notes of the rehearsals as soon as possible afterwards, as recommended by Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (2011), but the length of time between rehearsals, jottings, and field notes varied week to week, as I occasionally chose to fully participate in the dance leisure space. Field notes included phrases that were said, body language that I observed, and any unique behaviors that indicated identity performance. I also paid close attention to how identities shifted and changed throughout the rehearsal process, noting which participants became increasingly more comfortable with their role as rehearsals continued.

Beginning in early December, I used purposeful sampling to find dancers to interview. Given the short timeline of the leisure activity and the purpose of the research, I interviewed only ten participants, focusing on non-black participants so that I could understand the experience of contradictory identities, or lack thereof. I set up these private interviews with participants at times that were most convenient for them. All interviews were conducted within one month of each other at the Harold B. Lee Library.

I focused on interviewing students who do not identify as black. This includes white, Latinx, Asian, Polynesian, and mixed-race students. Seven of the interviewees were non-black. I interviewed two people of color and five white students who will give insight, although non-generalizable, into the BYU majority population. The specifics of all participants' identities have been changed to preserve the confidentiality of the interview data, occasionally including gender. In addition to interviewing seven non-black participants, I also included the majority of the step team population by interviewing three black participants. Every participant, regardless of racial or ethnic

identity, had different reasons and motivations for participating on the step team. I attempted to interview a variety of participants with varying levels of experience while keeping some variables the same (such as racial identity) to purposefully create a “theoretical” sample group that looked at all of the “key variables” (Luker 2008:104). This purposeful selective sampling approach allowed for the greatest amount of diversity in participant interviews while still remaining within the scope of this research.

All interviewees were informed of the purpose of the interviews and willingly agreed to participate. Throughout the process, they were provided their interview transcriptions and were given the option to choose their own pseudonym and the opportunity to adjust any statement that they had previously made. I recorded all interviews, with agreement from the interviewees. These interviews averaged 53 minutes. In each interview, I focused on how identity played a role in the motivation to participate in step, their experiences and behaviors at rehearsals, and how they imagined that the Perspectives performance would be. All interviews were informal and were “spontaneous, yet structured—focused within loose parameters” provided by the interview guide (Holstein and Gubrium 1995:17).

The interview guide (Appendix A) was structured primarily around identity and the performance of identity, but each interview was adjusted in response to the interviewee’s responses. After getting to know the participant—including their name and place of birth, or where they identify as home—I asked questions specific to their racial and ethnic identity as well as their experience on the step team. Each interview was conversational, but I always guided participants back to how they experienced the BYU Step Team. I often took notes while I conducted the interviews, and those notes acted as a

resource to help me guide the interview. I made references to words and comments to follow up on later in the interview, seeking to understand the interviewees' perspectives on a deeper level.

For my analysis, I outsourced transcription to a secure transcription service, but I protected the identities of all participants throughout the research process by removing names from the transcriptions and safely storing the recordings. These transcriptions were coded and analyzed according to standard qualitative practices, like grounded theory (Charmaz 2014; Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011). Thematically, my analysis focused on understanding how these participants characterize and understand themselves in the context of step dance. This is based on an interactionist theoretical perspective, specifically the dramaturgical perspective on behavior.

FINDINGS

The point of this ethnographic research is to investigate how non-black selves navigate a contradictory identity performance. However, identity performances, especially those tied to racial and ethnic identity, do not exist within a vacuum. Any racial identity is constantly shifting and changing in response to a given space (Cornell and Hartmann 2007), and these spaces are not neutral. In this study, significant institutional realities formed the environment within which non-black participants formed and performed their identity. For this study, prior to a discussion of individual identity performance, I contextualize the situation within which these contradictory selves present themselves and include in this contextualization an important engagement with symbolic power and violence as it presented itself at BYU.

Institutional Context

Brigham Young University is a predominately white private institution that prides itself on high standards of honor and behavior, with a focus on undergraduate students and research. According to 2019 statistics, nearly 50% of BYU students have lived outside of the United States, and 65% of students speak a foreign language. Seventeen percent of students have traveled abroad through one of BYU's 206 study abroad programs (Johnson 2019), making BYU a PWI with international reach. Additionally, BYU's MSS aims to serve Latinx, Polynesian/Pacific Islander, Black, and Native American/Indigenous American students at BYU, among others. One way MSS does this is through hosting multicultural celebrations similar to Perspectives, including Fiesta (Latinx), Luau (Polynesian/Pacific Islander), and Pow-Wow (Native American/Indigenous American), all of which incorporate dancing.

BYU's efforts through its MSS office is one example of the PWI's attempt to symbolically heal racial tensions by creating safe spaces for multicultural students and promoting opportunities to bridge gaps between white and multicultural students. However, the continued control of BYU as a PWI over MSS activities and events—in this case specifically, the BYU Step Team—suggests continued symbolic power of the white majority and continued symbolic violence by “dehistoricizing” participation in multicultural events and normalizing white control of multicultural events (Hancock 2008).

Multicultural students reflected positively on their involvement with MSS. Alissa, a multicultural student who became involved with the MSS office during her freshman year, stated, “MSS . . . basically became like the only grasp and interaction I have with

multicultural students here on campus,” and remarked further, “I looked forward to Luau practice every week cause . . . I always joked ‘this is my only interaction with brown people.’ But in a way, it really was. . . . I think MSS has definitely opened the door for me.” A Latinx student named Jake who began participating in MSS events in late 2019 stated, “I think [the MSS office] helped me find a place where I can be more comfortable being myself that I don’t have to fit in with this mold of everyone else.” Both of these students, who are neither black nor white, acknowledged the ways in which MSS positively impacted their experience as multicultural students.

The MSS office offers a number of resources on their website, including counselor information, club contact information, and event sign-ups. Every year, the MSS office organizes four campus-wide cultural events celebrating Latinx, Polynesian, Black, and Native American students. Perspectives, the black history cultural event, is one of many black history events held on campus, but it is the only one-day or two-day cultural event that is not ticketed. Months of organization and planning go into each of these events. For Alissa, these events were vital because they offered a shared space with other people of color, and she felt like she could be herself, stating, “I feel like I have to put up . . . a facade around people who aren’t of color.” Around other students of color, she feels like she can laugh louder and make more jokes without “hurting . . . feelings.” In many ways, the MSS office has been successful in creating a safe space where multicultural students can be themselves with their peers.

Despite these successes, students acknowledged the ways in which BYU fell short in achieving complete symbolic healing. Felicity, a white participant on BYU’s step team with an interest in social justice, pointed out that “BYU as an institution is slow to make

an intentional effort . . . people are generally kind . . . [but] that's not what we're talking about . . . we're talking about removing something that's structurally built." By failing to address structural issues, BYU's efforts through the MSS office don't quite meet student expectations. During rehearsals, I watched as black students commented about how a sign saying "reparations" might get through better to BYU leadership, while their peers laughed. This idea was never seriously considered, but it came up more than once, signaling a consistent desire for more to be done by this PWI.

In addition to a need for structural change from the institutional level, students also reflected on their assignment to a racial or ethnic identity by the majority or majority members, often accompanied with expectations of behavior. The year before this research began, I sat with black students as they reflected that it doesn't matter who they think they are, "here" they are black. Additionally, Alissa reflected on the ways in which white students would taunt her when she didn't line up with their expectations of who they thought she should be based on her ethnicity, and she told stories of inappropriate and stereotyped assumptions of her behavior—such as being called "angry" at work when she was not—that were the result of an assigned ethnic identity from the majority and accompanying stereotypes. These assignments and assumptions are evidence of conflicted environment at BYU.

Perspectives is run by the BSU every year with support from MSS. Black students on campus volunteer for performance spots and create their own reflections and representations of blackness through mediums such as dance, spoken word, historical portraits, fashion, music, etc. Though the black students organize and plan the event, MSS provides necessary resources, such as funding. More than just providing essential

services, MSS also sanctions how the event is marketed, when the event happens, and approves the various performances that occur during the event.

In 2019, during my first year as a participant, Perspectives had a turnout far beyond its original expectations. In the middle of the performance, campus employees opened the accordion walls and added chairs to allow for a larger audience. At the time, Perspectives leaders hoped that this meant that we would be able to charge for tickets in 2020 and have two nights of performance. At one of our first rehearsals for the 2019-2020 year, I inquired whether the event would be a ticketed two-day event like the other MSS cultural events. One of the leaders replied that Perspectives had to have a turnout of over 1,000 people in order for the current format to change, as evidence of demand and interest. In this way, the PWI controls the ways in which culture is shared and distributed, an act of symbolic power by the PWI. The normalization and justification for these controls (evidence of “demand”) demonstrates symbolic violence against black students, or, in other words, the PWI chooses when and how students perform their black identity. This is especially important considering that many students of color feel the most comfortable around “black and brown” peers—these performances matter to them. Any white students who enter these performance spaces either know or quickly learn of how valuable these spaces are to their black peers and sense the tension between their white identity and the black dance space.

In addition to limiting when and where culture is celebrated, the institution regulates what can be performed and in what ways. In one of the first rehearsals, we were learning the second half of the group hip hop dance, set to music from an iconic black artist. And in learning a move during which we “blow a kiss,” one of the leaders, Kia,

attempted to describe the move as “sexy but not sexy,” indicating to us that she didn’t want anyone to think we were doing inappropriate movements (implying that inappropriate movements would prevent us from being allowed to perform). Alissa recalled that moment and clarified the movement as “empowering,” but she struggled to identify the correct balance in the movement itself. In this interaction, the control of the institution as to what was deemed “appropriate” was clear. Kia and other leaders responded proactively to the control, checking movements and music before and during rehearsals by providing vocal cues and clarifications (such as the one mentioned above). In addition to movements, we were told not to think too hard about the lyrics. This proactive response to the institution’s control was not necessarily a belief in the correctness of the control, but rather a fear that the event or step team as a whole would be cancelled if the PWI’s standards were not met. As a result of religious affiliation, the PWI’s high standards of “honor” normalize this control and connect the control to religious standards. The faith’s historical connection with whiteness (Reeve 2015) and hip hop’s long history of blackness tied with “rowdy, raunchy, rap rebellion” (Morris 2019; Newkirk 2018) complicates the simplicity of the conclusion that this control is only religious and indicates that it is also cultural.

Maya, a black student, talked about how symbolic power and violence manifest beyond BYU, referring to an event for black college students around Utah. At the event, a sorority from a different college was teaching “a stroll,” which is a classic walk-in/entrance set to popular music performed by step teams. She recounts her experience as follows:

People from a bunch of different black student unions come and meet. And this year it was held at [another Utah university] and they were teaching us a stroll,

and it was like a sorority that they had and I felt wrong about it cause the song that they were using, it was like this kind of . . . the very [electronic sound] type of clubby song. And it was also an instrumental. So, I was just like, “This feels so wrong and this does not feel black.” And we were surrounded by black people, but I was like, this is . . . I’m not participating in this. I tried to learn it and then I was like, this is just so not cute that I was like, “I’m gonna sit this one out.” . . . It didn’t feel like black to me . . . something about it felt like Utah . . . I just didn’t feel like, right. It felt like something had been taken out to make it accessible to [the religious culture] in Utah.

Maya, who identifies as black but not as African American, acknowledges that all of the participants were black and that she didn’t want to “police blackness,” but she also felt like making the stroll “accessible” was a “front” to blackness. Though she was a leader on the step team, she feels that she doesn’t have the “cultural competence” to create a stroll, and yet she felt uncomfortable at the conference, recognizing the clash of black and Utah religious culture. She could tell that something was off, and even chose to sit out. The state of Utah, the institution of BYU, and the predominant religion in Utah are all primarily white institutions. The tendency toward “appropriate” behavior and “accessible” music demonstrates the ways in which the institution of race favors whiteness and sets the standards of practice, even unconsciously.

Leaders in the BYU BSU take proactive action to prevent the institution from shutting them down, a direct response to the symbolic power of the institutional majority. While step team rehearsals are an obvious black space—featuring a majority black participants as well as black student leaders, and as preparation for a celebration of black history and culture—the institutional control of the space demonstrates a contradiction between goals and practices and creates the complicated and significant environment in which non-black participants experience a contradictory identity.

Individual Navigation of Contradictory Identity Performance

Despite some feelings of comfort and confidence in the step team, many white and other non-black student participants sensed the contradiction between their appearance and their manner. This contradiction caused moments of discomfort during step team rehearsals because the students felt that they were invading and were unsure of how to physically behave in order to manage that feeling. Students cited concerns of appropriation, being “too white,” and overall confusion about how to describe their experience, demonstrating contradictory selves. Students attempted to mitigate the tension in their identity performance through increased spatial awareness (or lack of), embodying movement, and engaging in “oneness.” In many ways, these attempts at fully belonging fell short.

These navigation attempts and strategies, which are discussed in more detail in the following sections, also speak to non-black participants’ awareness of the complicated social context within which they perform identity. Their participation demonstrated a willingness to individually engage in symbolic healing, but the limited success of mitigating contradictory identities led to the limited success of symbolic healing.

Contradictory selves. Non-black participants expressed a sense of tension in their identity when they spoke of appropriation, being “too white,” and overall confusion about how to describe their performance. Alissa, a brown student, acknowledged her concern about appropriation. She mentioned that she felt a little “weird” in rehearsals because step was “not my culture and I don’t want them—and I don’t think they do—thinking that I’m appropriating their culture.” In a conversation with two black female participants, she

asked why they chose not to participate in other MSS events, and they acknowledged that it was because they didn't want to "appropriate the culture." This caused some tension for Alissa who, despite her comfort around other black and "brown" students, acknowledged that "I don't necessarily feel like I'm not brown enough in there, but I think sometimes I do feel like I'm a different type of brown." Her awareness of being a "different kind of brown" didn't impact her ability to make friends on the team, however, and for her, "color is color," but she describes one experience when it impacted her own understanding of her dance ability. Alissa recalls one moment where she felt apart because hip hop dance doesn't come as naturally to her as her African American peers before she reminded herself that everyone was welcome regardless of dance experience:

This last practice when we had a dancing groups . . . but there was one group [that] was mainly African American girls and the way that they did it, like you could just tell it runs through their blood and it was meant for them. . . . So, I think for a split second I was like, "Oh, I don't belong because I can't dance like that." But right after that I was like, "I think I do belong, though, because everyone here is inviting." Everyone here is welcoming and accepting with open arms, and you don't see them turning away anyone because they do or don't dance like the way they do.

Alissa felt discomfort in her lack of dancing ability—relying on essentialist claims to explain some reason why it might not come naturally to her—but she quickly brushed off the tension that she felt, while others experienced a heightened sense of tension that—while they continued to practice and rely on dance in order to belong—caused conflicts between their appearance and their identity performance. For Haley, this moment of tension happened while practicing one of the dances at home, when she demonstrated it to her brother. In response to her mini performance, he said, "You stick out your tongue too much, you look so white." While Haley thought that was a strange

thing to connect to looking white, she remembers reflecting on the contradiction she presented as a white participant:

I don't want to look too white, but also, I am white. So, how do those go together? And then also I'm performing a step, which isn't really a part of my heritage. So, how do I do that without appropriating . . . I feel like at practice, everybody's really willing to have other people who don't have African American descent learn these things, which is really cool and accepting. But just. I don't know—I guess him pointing out that I look very white doing it, I was like, “Oh, I don't know if that's really what I'm going for in how I portray this,” but at the same time I don't want to look like I'm trying to be black, because I'm not black, either. So, just kind of figuring out where I fit within performing something that I respect, and I do have a little bit of understanding about the history of it, but not doing it to a point where I've adapted it to my culture because that's not representative of what it actually is.

Haley and other (especially white) participants expressed contradictions in the performance of self, often in the ways in which they talked about the confusion or discomfort that they felt. They were unsure of how to express it and struggled to define their experience. Comments included “But just. I don't know” (Haley), “That's a lot of maybes” (Felicity), and “Sorry, that was kind of all over the place” (Katie). Additionally, participants expressed concerns about their identity performance more directly, like when Katie expressed, “I don't want to overstep my bounds,” and Sawyer stated, “I feel self-conscious.” Multiple comments were concerned with coming off as “too white” during rehearsals. Beyond just a sense of discomfort or spatial tension, non-black participants described feeling like they were performing the wrong identity by their inability to perform blackness because they lacked the group appearance. Participants attempted to navigate their contradictory selves through an increased focus on manner, including spatial awareness, embodying movement, and engaging in “oneness.”

Spatial awareness. Students acknowledged an increased spatial awareness or demonstrated an unconscious tendency toward clustering with others of their race. One

participant, Felicity, a white woman interested in social justice, said that when she joined the step team, she was at times more “spatial[ly] aware” than normal. She thought about who she was “talking to,” where she was “walking,” and how she was “standing.” She says, “Maybe I tried to navigate it by not forcing it, like forcing myself to not force it, which I think would be true in any new social situation. . . . I can also assume that the racial dynamic could have added a complexity. That kind of awareness that not only do I not know these people, but I’m also white.” She attributes part of this tension to the fact that she is white in a black space, and she “valued” noticing her initial discomfort because it’s “important” to her for purposes of personal and extra-personal growth.

In one of the first rehearsals, I stood in the middle of three straight rows, facing Kia as she taught us choreography, and I became aware of an imaginary line seemingly separating the white and non-white dancers. On my right were the non-white dancers, and on my left were the white dancers. As with any unconscious social rule, there were exceptions—there was at least one white woman standing to my right, among her non-white teammates, and two biracial women standing in the back-left corner with a white friend. Unsure of where they belonged, the white participants stood with the other white participants. Felicity remarked on her own discomfort as a white person in a black space like the BYU Step Team, stating that, “whether it’s in your head or it’s real . . . it’s gotta be real,” and corroborated my observation with her own by continuing: “Even in integrated environments with a very diverse group of people . . . people still . . . naturally cluster based on race.” Despite the open acceptance of non-black participants, the white participants struggled to align their identities in their racial appearance and manner, as expressed by rehearsal behavior and dance movement.

Embodying movement. Maya, a black student leader, also expressed her own sense of discomfort as a result of performing a dance style that is distinctly African American when she is ethnically not African American. She did step in high school, but she always felt like she lacked the “cultural competence” to fully belong on the team. What grounded her to step, and why the BYU Step Team has become her favorite part of every school year, is her love for dance. “There’s no other time throughout the year . . . where I’m dancing as much. I just love the opportunity to dance. I don’t know if there’s anything racial tied to it. . . . I’ve always loved dancing.” She points out that the step team is an opportunity for black students at BYU to “bond” at their PWI, but her love for dance drives her love of being a part of the step team.

Maya is not alone in feeling more comfortable at step due to her past experience with dance, and when discussing how they fit or belonged on the step team, participants almost always referred to dancing, even if they did not consider themselves to be dancers. Sawyer, who is white, expressed feeling more comfortable at rehearsals as a result of having had ten years of dance training, despite not doing much hip-hop or any previous experience with step. She used her “skill level” in dance to justify her presence at step team. “I felt a little more . . . included because, even if it’s, ‘Why did she join the team?’ It’s like, well, I like dance.” Despite not having any experience with step specifically, Sawyer relied on her experience as a dancer to justify her presence at rehearsals and in the performance as well.

Haley, one of the white dancers, who was also a trained dancer before high school, felt motivated to join the step team because of her interest in African American history and racial issues. She recalls struggling a bit with step when she first tried it in

high school: “Step is very different [than my previous training] and it took me a second to . . . get more familiar with how I moved my body like that.” She decided to try again because there likely weren’t many people on campus who were “good at step,” so she would have more time and space to learn. Step, as a very rhythmic and synchronized form of dancing, required a different set of skills than these women had used in dance before, but the combination of dance and a desire for racial solidarity drew them to joining the team. Emery grew up making up her own step routines in her African American home, dancing with her family and practicing unique rhythms with her brother: “Music is so incorporated into my family’s life, and we always think in beats . . . one time I was walking up the stairs with my brother and we started walking to a rhythm and we started making up a beat from the rhythm.” For her, the unique rhythmic nature of step comes naturally, in part because of the community created in her home.

For other participants with less rhythmic exposure, or for participants who are “uncoordinated,” or at least, “not coordinated in that way,” as Haley put it, step is difficult. Katie also pointed out the learning curve that happens in step: “For people that haven’t . . . danced in that kind of way before and like moved their bodies that way . . . or had to test their rhythm in that way,” step feels “awkward.” In Emery’s mind, “step is more than just doing step . . . it’s [choreographed] beats that we made with our body.” She pointed out that her continued exposure to step while growing up had impacted how she learned the style later.

Step team participants relied on their dance ability and extensive practice to perform their unity and solidarity with the step team, and others reflected that dancing was a key element of feeling like they belonged on the team. Jake, a non-black student,

recalled feeling uncomfortable when he came to his first step team rehearsal, because none of the friends who he expected to be there were there, but also recalled that he decided to “just jump into [dancing],” hoping that people would eventually show up. As people arrived, the discomfort lessened, but it was dancing that he turned to for initial comfort. Lil Bill, an African American participant, pointed out that he made a “character out of [himself] and dancing and stuff,” telling others to follow his “lead,” even though he didn’t dance very well.

Male dancers also pointed to the togetherness that they felt in the male dance, saying that it was “powerful,” “really cool,” and a way to bring out the “inner animal,” referencing the fact that their portion was more energized and aggressive than the women’s part. Jake acknowledged that some of the male dancers struggled to learn their choreography but also that “it was just cool seeing that, no matter who it was that struggled, everyone was still very patient with each other.” As the dancers worked together to establish unity in dance, they sought to “bridge the gap.” Haley expressed a willingness to be corrected if her facial expressions during rehearsals (which were supposed to be animated and “like someone in the audience owes you money”) were off, or otherwise too “cheerleader-y.” This particular concern came because of her experience with cheer and associated facials and her lack of experience with hip hop and associated facials. For Haley (and others), unified dancing and performance were essential, as they would help her accurately perform an identity as a participant–step dancer despite a contradictory self in relation to her white identity. Essentially, a focus on dance performance mitigated the effects of being unable to perform blackness.

Felicity remarked that the discomfort she felt would likely have been lessened if she were actually a trained dancer. She clarified, “It’s not like, because—it’s not some black stereotype about dancing. It’s just because it’s dancing. That’s what we’re doing.” If dancing were a “talent” or “activity” that she were “more familiar with,” then she felt like she may have felt more comfortable. For Jordan, who is non-black, the sentiment was similar, except that he was comforted by the fact that there were others who struggled with the choreography. Since he knew he was not a dancer, he was comforted that others were in a similar boat when attempting to dance, though he did acknowledge that some of the comfort he derived from the other bad dancers came because he had danced with black peers in the past, and they had all seemed to have at least some sense of rhythm. Student participants navigated their contradictory identities by either a commitment to the movement or finding comfort in the fact that others were not dancers. Some acknowledged that they wished they could rely more heavily on this skill.

Engaging in “oneness.” Non-black participants, especially white participants, attempted to navigate their contradictory identities by embodying “oneness.” They ended up using dance and the performance of dance to substitute for their inability to embody blackness in this uniquely black space, relying on the “oneness” established in step to feel like they belonged. Dance leaders constantly expressed their desire that the dancers not add their individual flair to the dancing, but rather to do it “exactly” like the teacher. In a conversation with a participant who later dropped out, she expressed that she felt this lack of freedom was stifling. As rehearsals continued, uniformity became a constant expectation:

Maya soon starts working with the menfolk. “Uh huh,” she says, correcting the guys. She taps out a beat against a wall. “Do you hear it? [The rhythm is] always

there.” [She’s] speaking of the rhythm as though it exists beyond the wall and exists within us. The guys practice multiple times, and eventually Erika takes over leading the hits. If they go too fast, or start speeding up, they try again.

Eventually we get to “Everybody,” which is [the girls’] cue to come in. “Ladies,” Maya calls, and bodies roll to attention. We begin to go over the step. If we speed up, we are called out. I’m reminded of the dress rehearsal, where we were told that the step “actually sounded good” and everyone was in sync. (Field Notes 2.1.20)

Participants are slowly socialized into the expectation of “one sound,” not “one noise,” which refers to the notion that the sound should be “crisp,” not chaotic. The team feeling is built through Maya’s use of metaphors to “clarify [and] focus” for the step team, including: “You’re a team, you’re an ensemble,” or “all instruments in the orchestra.”

She invites us to breathe together. We take three deep breaths together. Maya begins to talk again. “You’re a team, you’re an ensemble,” she says [again], her voice softer than usual, reminding us of unity. At that, she begins hitting the wall and we begin stepping again. (Field Notes 2.1.20)

Unity was practiced over and over among the dancers. All dancers wanted to dance well—on the day of the performance, dancers backstage prepared not only by putting on make-up and costumes but also by rehearsing routines in small groups. I noticed Haley, Alissa, and another non-black participant, Tiara, rehearsing quietly backstage with teammates throughout the evening until the performance.

During rehearsals, Emery would help lead small group and group practices. In my field notes, I wrote about overhearing a conversation about Emery from other step team participants who expressed that “she teaches well,” and that they “like her style.” Her explanations to her small group were distinct and clear. Counting out the rhythm against the wall, she encouraged participants not to speed up and to always stay together. The unique coordination and rhythm of step dance required a significant amount of time to

practice, so we repeated the sounds and the steps of our step dance over and over again. “Repetition” was “key” to “uniformity.” Many students worked to align their manner with others on the team by working toward uniformity and oneness.

Dance as a limited measure of symbolic healing. Contextually, non-black dancers recognized the complicated space they were entering, demonstrated in the way participants described a sense of tension. Student participation often served as individual attempts to symbolically heal. Despite many white participants using dance as a way of navigating their contradiction and gaining a sense of belonging, the wholesale reliance on dance failed to fully demonstrate symbolic healing and was instead interpreted as an interest in dance or wanting to be cool.

At the beginning of her freshman year, a white student named Sawyer “learned a little more about . . . racism” and felt “motivated” to talk to African Americans on the BYU campus and “learn about their experience, but also . . . be friends with them.” She recognized that approaching one of BYU’s black students for the sake of their skin color would be “awkward,” but she still hoped to find ways to bridge gaps. She considered attending BYU’s BSU, but hesitated because she wanted “there to be a place where [the black students] can go to just be themselves,” acknowledging that she felt like black spaces for students on campus are important because “I don’t have to deal with everyone being different than me all the time.” She decided to join the BYU Step Team when she and other students in her dance class were invited by one of the student leaders.

Sawyer was proactive in her attempts to make connections: “I wanted to make sure I learned everyone’s names. Especially if they were African American or African because that’s why I’m there . . . to meet people. I’m not here to crash [their] thing,

[saying] ‘look how cute I am doing hip hop.’” Instead, Sawyer was “intentional” about learning names and introducing herself to people during and after rehearsals, engaging in conversations, and asking for advice from black students. Alissa even acknowledged that participants on the step team were generally more willing to introduce themselves than when she participated in another MSS cultural event, Luau. She recalls, “People go out of their way to introduce themselves . . . someone will come up and be like, ‘Hey, what’s your name?’ . . . And then I’ll talk to them for a little bit.” As the step team this year was pretty evenly split between black and African American participants and non-black participants, these interactions were diverse. Participants Jordan and Katie both acknowledged that they were working toward “bridging a gap” in both the society at large and at BYU. These efforts were aimed toward symbolic healing from racial injustice.

In Jordan’s mind, this was one success of the BYU Step Team. At other cultural events, he says, “There’s so many white people on stage. They’re over here trying to express these cultures, but it’s not their culture.” Acknowledging his own place on the step team as a white male, Jordan amends, “If it’s all white people, that’s a problem. But if there are a few white people and a majority [of the represented culture], then it’s like, ‘okay.’” According to Jordan, “At least in the step team . . . white people are in the minority.” BYU’s step team is unique for having so many white participants, but, when compared to the rest of BYU, Haley believes that it is “racially, ethnically . . . more [representative].” As a result, Jordan says, “You can see the unity.”

Emery, an African American student leader on the team, acknowledged BYU Step Team’s unique demographic by saying, “I just think [the step team] brought so

many people together and I really like that. Like it's not just limited to one race of people. . . . I think it's just helpful here at BYU because the black community is so small. . . . I think it's been good to have other people of different races be in it and . . . it's just been super fun." Many students echoed this sense of community and fun, mentioning that they felt like they could "be themselves," according to Alissa, who also stated that they felt less restricted in laughter and in their language, which was confirmed by both Jordan and Jake.

However, these attempts to heal symbolically fell short. Jordan, who was invited by friends from the BSU to join step (which set him apart from the other white participants) noticed this in his remarks about other dancers:

White [participants] are better than I expected . . . because obviously they're there because they like to dance. Because that's not really the reason that I initially went. . . . But that's not the case for most people. I think a lot of people went just because they want to be a part of step team.

Having danced with his friends from the BSU in the past, and recognizing that they had more skill and practice than he did, Jordan was surprised that white students could dance as well, having associated whiteness with his own inexperience. White participation was interpreted as an interest in dance, rather than an interest in social issues. Additionally, white participants were viewed as "just supplemental, just kind of like more bodies, you know, to, to create that sound that we want" (quote from an unnamed black participant). Additionally, when the white dancers attempted to perform, their facial expressions often looked like a "grimace," and dancers failed to "[make] it their own." While it was cool to have such a diverse group, step rehearsals were the "only time" that black participants really saw their white team members. Emery expressed that step this year was "more inclusive," and that everyone was "very encouraging to each other," but Maya and Emery

both expressed that they had “too many friends,” and that while they cared about the other participants on the step team, they were the closest to other black participants who they consistently saw socially outside of rehearsal. This response, and the assumptions that white participants only came to dance because they wanted to participate in something “cool,” is evidence that the white participants’ attempts at symbolic healing fell short.

CONCLUSION

Through an interactionist lens, identity performance is a consistent experience, as individuals attempt to portray a sense of who they are. Occasionally, their outer appearance contradicts with the ways in which they behave, causing a tension within individual identity performance (Goffman 1956). These contradictory selves are not often studied, but they present an interesting area of exploration in relation to group identity. In this paper, I present a step dance team at a PWI as an ideal space for a case study of understanding contradictory identities that are both experienced and performed by white and other non-black dancers in a historically black dance leisure space.

Racial and ethnic identity are shifting and context-specific constructions (Cornell and Hartmann 1998). One specific racial context in which identity is performed is in leisure spaces associated with race. For example, African American vernacular dance has long been tied to group and individual identity performance (Fine 1998, 2001; Jackson 2001). This study contributes to identity academic literature that focuses on identity performance in leisure spaces but paves a unique case study exploring how individual actors negotiate spaces within which their manner may not match the group identity. Identity performance is shaped by leisure spaces (Atencio 2008; Fine 1998, 2001;

Jackson 2001; Scott and Austin 2006), and BYU's step team is an identity-forming dance leisure space, within which individual actors perform identity in unique ways and navigate complex experiences with racial domination. As such, actors perform contextually significant racial and ethnic identities.

The context of BYU matters very much for both black and white participants in terms of the individual performance of contradictory identities, as attempts at symbolic healing at BYU are limited by the continued institutional control over movement and performance—continuation of symbolic power and violence over multicultural students and student groups. Although welcomed into the step dance group, within this context, non-black students experience contradictory identities and attempt to navigate those identities through spatial awareness, embodying movement, and engaging in “oneness.” However, these attempts fall short of aligning non-black students to the step group identity, and they also fall short of allowing non-black students to participate in successful symbolic healing. Instead, many non-black students are seen as wanting to be cool or wanting to simply dance, since they cannot fully embody the group identity so closely connected to blackness.

My own participation as a white woman complicated—but did not diminish—these results. As an experienced dancer-researcher who had participated on the step team a year before this research, I was aware of the privilege I experienced entering and exiting the dance space—step team was only “leisure” and not related to an essential and unchangeable aspect of my identity—and experienced a sense of contradiction in my participation. Rather than internally evaluate my embodied self, I chose to conduct rigorous research to understand how my experience was similar to and different from the

experience of others with similar privilege. Rather than causing a limitation in the research, this allowed me deeply explore and understand what fellow non-black participants meant when they described their parallel comfort and discomfort on the team. I interviewed and observed through a critical and analytical eye, without vilifying the non-black participants.

Significant to this is the acknowledgement that white participants experience a particular privilege entering and exiting the space, which was one of the driving factors in conducting this research. As discussed in Kraus's (2010) study of belly dancers, white participants in racial or ethnic dance spaces are able to manage stigma because they remove associated stigma when they leave the leisure space. At BYU, white participants were never turned away despite being (albeit accidental) contributors to white symbolic violence, and when they left, they left behind the stigma associated with blackness and black dance—a privilege most acute in the lives of white participants, including myself

With this acknowledgement of inherent white privilege, it would be easy to cry “appropriation.” I wouldn't necessarily argue that BYU Step Team is appropriation, but I would point out that, if considered appropriation, then it is appropriation on many fronts, but the negative impact is mitigated through intentional practice. BYU step team might be considered a form of institutional or group level appropriation, because not only do non-black participants participate, but BYU is a non-Greek organization performing the step when many African American fraternity and sorority steppers would argue that step should not leave Greek-incorporated organizations (Fine 2001). Significantly, however, the negative impact of appropriation is mitigated because the intention of BYU's step

team is to celebrate black culture and creations, and step is historically contextualized at the performance itself.

While that addresses the possibility of appropriation at the group level, I also suggest to future white and non-black participants that they individually counteract appropriation through proactively seeking more information about the history of step, aligning themselves with BSU goals, and being clear about their intentions as a participant to team members, friends, and family who might come to watch the performance. For example, if white students are there to celebrate black culture and stand with black students on their concerns, it is necessary to say so. It is also necessary to avoid centering themselves in the dance space. I acknowledge that I did not perfectly implement these suggestions myself. Appropriative practices force us to question the authenticity of performance, but by consciously seeking out history and seeking to be clear about alignment with the goals of black students, I argue the performance of self is as authentic as it can be given a contradictory identity.

Research Limitations

There were some limitations to the research presented. First, exploratory case study research is not intended to be generalizable. Though this research will provide insight into the contradictory selves and attempts for symbolic healing performed by the non-black participants on the BYU Step Team, the findings cannot be generalized beyond the scope of this case study; however, this knowledge is transferrable. While the insight is important and valuable to future research, it cannot be assumed that every non-black participant would perform their identity in the same way. One aspect of this research was working toward acknowledging the tensions that existed where symbolic power,

violence, and healing meet—this is some of the transferrable knowledge. Another transferrable aspect is the exploration of ways in which individuals navigate contradictory identity.

Second, my role as participant-researcher limits the accuracy of my field notes. I recorded quotes as they happened as often as possible, but my records relied heavily on memory, as I was dancing throughout the rehearsal process. I acted as I deemed most appropriate and wrote direct quotes when necessary (even if it meant that I had to take a break from dancing). This was an anticipated limitation, but it served to be an even greater one than expected. While I originally planned to rely more heavily on observations to develop my conclusions, I found that the combination of observations and interviews was essential to my final analysis. Another limitation of this study was that many field notes were not recorded within 24 hours because of a hectic school and rehearsal schedule. When this occurred, many field notes were typed straight from jottings, with little elaboration on the context. This minimization of field notes was done to ensure accuracy.

Lastly, it might be assumed that bias would creep into the research. As a white researcher, I could not erase my own experience of whiteness as it relates to my participation in the step team. I mitigated these effects through the use of traditional and analytical ethnographic field techniques and analysis. Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (2011) propose that personal experience is impossible to fully extricate from ethnographic research but that the personal experience and growing understanding of the researcher is actually essential to the work of ethnography. These limitations do not hinder the overall effect of the research, as they are common to both qualitative and ethnographic research.

Further Research

This article almost completely focuses on the non-black, and specifically white, identity performance in a black space; however, as this is a case study, the exploration is limited in scope. Further opportunities for research include dance as symbolic healing, continued exploration of dance as a space within which symbolic violence is a contextual factor in performative identity, and black contradictory identities in the same space. This research skims the surface of exploring symbolic healing—more research into its limitations, its successes, and its possibilities is necessary to understand how it might be implemented as a practice, or alternatively, how it is actually impossible to do successfully because of the nature of symbolic violence. More research with symbolic violence being a contextual factor in dance spaces has limitless opportunities for study given that many (if not most) dance genres practiced in the United States came from other cultures before practice by white dancers. Finally, more research could be done in regard to the black students' participation on the step team at BYU. Given that step team, as a black space, happened within the context of a PWI, many students expressed both comfort and discomfort depending on the moment of reflection. Some black students felt like Maya in that they did not quite fit perfectly into the space despite their blackness. Exploring both black and non-black identities was beyond the scope of this research, but much could be researched based on what was learned from black performers and participants.

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APPENDIX A

Interview for step dance participants:

Background

- Can you tell me a little about yourself—where you grew up, about your family, your major, etc.?
 - Try to learn/estimate: gender, age, family situation, whether they have family around, length of time involved in step.
- Growing up, what did you understand about your race and ethnicity? How did you identify?
- How has your understanding of your racial or ethnic identity changed as you've gotten older?
- Give me some background about your experience with dance in general.
 - What styles have you done (outside of step)?
 - Have you ever been on a team or company? Tell me about your experience.
- Tell me about your experience with BYU's Multicultural Student Services.
 - Walk me through one of these experiences. What were your thoughts and feelings?
 - How have MSS experiences helped you understand more about your race/ethnic identity?

Step

- How did you first learn about step? Tell me what you know about its history.
 - Describe your past participation with step or step teams.
 - Why did you decide to participate on BYU's team?
- Walk me through your first rehearsal with BYU Step Team. What were your impressions, your thoughts, etc.? How did you feel like you fit in?
 - Words to look out for:
 - comfortable, uncomfortable, fit in, my people, excited, etc.
 - What do you mean by that word?
- How would you describe your responsibility toward the team?
 - Tell me about a time where you really felt like you belonged on the step team.
 - Walk me through a time at rehearsals where you felt like you didn't fit in, if any. How did you manage that?
- Describe your relationships with other people on the team.
- Tell me more about your friends on the team. How did these relationships develop?
 - If you still feel like you're in the process of making friends, what do you feel has prevented you from making friends so far?

- Do you think that the experience on BYU Step Team is different for participants from various backgrounds? Why?
- How do you feel like BYU Step Team is similar to other activities at BYU? Can you give me an example?
- How do you feel like BYU Step Team is different from other activities at BYU? Can you give me an example?
- How do you feel like your racial/ethnic identity has impacted your experience on the team?
 - How have others' identities impacted their experience? Can you give me an example (i.e., describe their behavior)?
- How do you feel like being on a multicultural team changed your perspective on those you dance with? Feel free to be as open as you choose, as this is an anonymized space.
- What are you most looking forward to on step team? Why?
- Imagine you are performing. Describe the sensation and how you feel.