

JCBP

**Notes From the Field:
Identity, Inclusion,
Intimacy Choreography
and Cultural Competence**

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Notes From the Field: Identity, Inclusion, Intimacy
Choreography, and Cultural Competence

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This issue was collaboratively edited by Amanda Rose
Villarreal, Cessalee Smith-Stovall, and Mya Brown

Call for Papers

The *Journal of Consent-Based Performance* invites artists, educators, and scholars engaged with consent-based performance—in theory or in practice—to interrogate our existing practices and propose new ideas in pursuit of increasingly more equitable, ethical, anti-oppressive, and effective consent-based practices within our field. In our endeavor to promote the work of all individuals engaged in improving the intimacy specialization fields, we invite authors to submit any writings centered upon consent-based performance practices. We encourage authors to submit essays that do the work of:

- Analyzing or interrogating current or past understandings of and approaches to performed intimacy and consent—in theory or in practice
- Questioning or commenting upon the practices that are currently being used to establish consent within performance, modeling continuous adjustment of artistic praxis
- Introducing or investigating theories related to consent and power imbalances in other fields, contextualizing these theories' potential impact upon the further development of consent-based performance
- Documenting the evolution of consent-based performance and similar intimacy specializations throughout history and our current moment
- Analyzing or responding to artistic productions and writings that engage with simulated intimacy and/or the processes that shape these works.

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The Convergence of Consent and Cultural Competence While Staging Intimacy: Editors' Comments

In *Actions Speak Louder: A Step-by-Step Guide to Becoming an Inclusive Workplace*, author Deanna Singh acknowledges that privilege and cultural biases are inherited, comparing privilege to fine china that the inheritor can choose to hoard and defend and display as a symbol of status, or share with guests. Singh acknowledges that the privileges we inherit are varied and do not, in and of themselves, reflect upon the inheritor, writing:

When talking about 'privilege,' [the author] won't imply that the people who have things like native-born, Christian, or neurotypical social identities automatically have a life of ease. Furthermore, having any kind of privilege doesn't mean someone intentionally stole advantages from another or consciously participates in immoral actions that ensure others suffer disadvantages. Certain social contexts privilege certain social identities. Regardless of who we are, what we think, or what we do, just showing up in particular social contexts with specific social identities gives us certain kinds of privileges. (7)

For performance artists and educators, each class or production comprises its own “particular social context” within which our own social identities can increase or decrease our privilege. Working as a faculty member, one may have far greater privilege in a classroom than in a faculty meeting, for example. Establishing this, Singh's second chapter, titled “Check Yourself: Diversifying Your Business Thinking” utilizes multiple case studies and anecdotes to clarify the ways in which culturally uninformed practices add to bias, working to centralize privilege—to hoard the fine china. Meanwhile, Singh argues, cultural competence and remembering that the criteria each workspace uses to define ‘professionalism’ are culturally and socially specific can improve not only individuals' experiences within our processes, but can improve the financial stability and marketability of the organizations we are working within.

Many theatre artists and educators may balk at company-centered language, but the editors of this issue start there so that we may highlight how “family” oriented language can be combined with cultural incompetence to disempower participants. In a recent online research working group hosted by Alexandra Haddad, Theatrical Intimacy Education, and Purdue University, Gloria Imseih Petrelli highlighted the ways in which this verbiage is utilized, using the example of “friends and family discounts” to illustrate how the concept of “we're all family” is often used as an argument to pay theatre practitioners—especially femme-presenting persons of color—less, by manipulating participants to endure more and accept less in return. Similarly, Haddad named the “passion project tax,” which Greg Geffrard elaborated as the “meaningful project tax.” Geffrard described this phenomenon: “when a project speaks to your identity and really excites you, you really want to be there to represent, and to ensure they're telling the story about your community with respect. Then, [the producers] know they can compensate you less than you deserve, because the project is important to you.” Haddad added that this is exacerbated when the artist in question is less-resourced or carries less privilege.

All of this is to say that, yes, whether we like to think of ourselves this way or not, we are in *the business* of creating art, and we need to begin reckoning with the fact that as performance arts

organizations, institutions, and producing entities, our business practices have—like all other fields—been informed by a long inheritance of socially specific beliefs and values shaped by the nation and community within which we work. Most often—at least in the US—this inheritance is limited in its understanding of cultural contexts outside of white, cis, hetero, neurotypical, Christian cultures. And while we have no power over what we’ve inherited, it is up to us to determine what we pass on. And because consent is always hyper-specific to the individual artist and their personal, professional, physical, and cultural boundaries, those of us seeking to inform and utilize consent-based practices must choose to pass on more awareness around our cultural competencies and our lack thereof, so that the practices we pass on serve to feed, rather than to keep our current privilege in the display hutch, out of reach.

The editors of this issue acknowledge the Bennett model of Intercultural Sensitivity, which requires awareness of other individuals’ experiences and cultures as the entry point for cultural competence.

Cultural competence is not a one-off event; nor is it accomplishable, as cultures are constantly shifting, impacted by local specifics, and multifaceted. The editors of this issue reject the notion that any single individual’s experience is a substitute for the deep connections that must be made and maintained in order for an individual to build cultural sensitivity and awareness. Using the *Bennett model of Intercultural Sensitivity*, Cultural Competence requires at minimum awareness, but ideally deep and meaningful integration. Being able to reach integration requires a multitude of verbal, environmental and non-verbal conversations to occur that help to uplift safety, articulate and respond to access needs, and establish a baseline level of trust and a culture of belonging. Without those basic steps, the assumption of cultural competence is derailed even before the work begins.

Acknowledging that no one individual’s experience can speak for an entire community, the editors have curated a collection of experiences that we hope will serve as a reminder of the vast multidimensionality of intersecting identities that impact our lived cultural experiences and the ways in which we communicate and create. We hope these six Notes From the Field can serve as an invitation to consider the cultural competencies we hold and those we lack outside of the limitations of a binary, encouraging our consideration to include the vast and intersecting cultural identities that inform the multidimensionality of each individual artist. We hope that this selection of Notes serves as an invitation to recognize, and reflect upon the value of, our own lived cultural competencies, rather than assuming that these cultural competencies are shared by all of our collaborators. Simultaneously, we hope these Notes will inspire increased questioning and research related to specific approaches and supports to consent-based performance that can further the development of culturally sustaining practices that not only support, but elevate, the multifaceted and pluricultural identities of all artists.

We open this issue with Emily Kitchens’s “Puppy Love and [Information] Play.” This Note illustrates one faculty director’s journey of recognizing a gap in their own cultural competence and the ways in which working to learn about and actively include cultural competency impacted the artistic process. In reflecting upon her process, Kitchens models ways that faculty and directors can

acknowledge and seek to overcome our own lack of cultural competency, and how artists can work to respectfully include others' cultural competence when it is offered.

Joy Brooke Fairfield's "The Scope of Practice in India Today" then presents an interview with Aastha Khanna, who has been hailed by Indian media as the first intimacy choreographer in Bollywood. This note serves as a reflection of the ways in which intimacy choreography can become flexible to serve the varying needs of different national, local, legal, or artistic cultures, communities, and production practices. This piece highlights the ways in which cultural expectations related to genre and form can be included in intimacy practice, rather than imposing one approach on all artistic communities.

Matthias Bolon's "Awareness in Casting" presents readers with an artist's reflection on their experience as a trans individual performing a gender not their own. This Note presents a lens on gender inclusivity that has not been widely explored, while offering tools that supported this actor in the process of performing a role that does not align with his gender. Bolon offers a kit of tools so that other educators and artists considering casting someone to play a character of a gender that fuels the actor's dysphoria may use these tools as guidance or as starting points. The tools presented offer practical steps collaborators can take to support genderqueer artists; the tools presented relate to communication, casting, costuming, and other supports that may be needed throughout the production process.

"Devising in Hawai'i" by Michael Poblete, PhD, presents an artist educator's concerns and experience with facilitating devising processes with students not of his own culture. In this Note, Poblete reflects on his own practice and on the ways that Eurocentric devising practices can intersect with—and incorporate—the culture of participants. Poblete centers students' agency in the creative process, and then reflects upon and analyzes the resulting work, considering the analysis of local artists who share the students' culture. Poblete highlights the artistic and interpersonal value of approaching devising with intercultural awareness, by acknowledging one's own cultural competence and lack thereof, and by centering care when seeking to uplift collaborators' cultures within the devising process and devised product.

"Am I Halo-Halo? Finding the Filipino-American Re-Storying Framework Through Consent" introduces a new framework developed by author Matt Denney, created to support culturally sustaining practices for Filipino-American artists. Denney highlights the cultural specificity of first-generation Filipino-Americans, calling readers to think beyond overgeneralizations such as "Asian" and to consider the ways in which we can offer individualized, specific, and culturally sustaining support for diverse artists and collaborators.

Finally, Elaine Brown's "Fawning, Masking, and Working as an Intimacy Professional on the Autism Spectrum" invites readers to consider the cultural competency required to facilitate collaboration with neurodiverse artists. This Note reflects upon the author's own experience learning about and working in intimacy choreography as a person on the autism spectrum, and calls readers to consider the ways in which our work can impact, and be impacted by, neurodiversity. Brown's Note highlights common misconceptions, asking artists and educators to recognize the ways in which these generalizations hinder their collaboration with neurodiverse artists. This note reminds us to consider

the ways in which our own lack of certain cultural competencies may impact our collaborators when we do not realize their multifaceted and diverse identities.

Established societal systems and institutions are complicit in the erasure and concealment of the struggles marginalized artists face which further exacerbates their challenges to work in a safer and braver environment. A sense of safety is a minimum baseline for an artist to do their best and most fully realized work. As Rikard and Villarreal acknowledge, “a person who is marginalized is already, and always, carving out a brave space within and for themselves, not by choice, but as a requirement created by a world, a society, and an industry that was not created with them in mind” (6). These Notes have been curated to highlight the ways in which we can acknowledge, and work to address, our industry’s current lack of culturally inclusive practices, while seeking to expand our industry’s mind in consideration of the multidimensional identities our collaborators bring into each room. The editors present this collection of notes as reminders for us to acknowledge our lack of cultural competence with humility, elevate the identities of those who have been historically and systematically excluded, and create structures to support those who have had to carve out brave spaces for themselves. This issue aims to highlight how diversity, equity, inclusion, and cultural competence require thinking beyond binary identity markers, recognizing the many intersecting identities every individual inhabits, and working to alter inherited practices, whether by utilizing tools or frameworks such as those our authors introduce, or by taking other purposeful action to support one another.

Because the status quo that we have inherited should not be passed on unchallenged.

Amanda Rose Villarreal, Cessalee Smith-Stovall, and Mya Brown
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