

REPORT

For The Dance Center of Columbia College Chicago
Cross-Ethnic Research & Marketing Initiative



Qualitative Research on Ethnic and Cross-Ethnic Dance Attendance

Summary of findings and implications

June 25, 2008

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STRATEGIES

Audience research and planning for the mission-driven world.

Prepared by:

Anne Lee, Research Analyst

Chloe Chittick, Senior Associate

Peter Linett, Partner

The Dance Center's Cross-Ethnic Research & Marketing Initiative is funded, in part, by the Chicago Community Trust, Columbia College Chicago's School of Fine & Performing Arts, and Columbia College Chicago's Office of Marketing & Communications.

RESEARCH REPORT

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Cover Photo: Cloud Gate Dance Theatre of Taiwan, by LIN Ching-yuan

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Overview

About the cross-ethnic initiative

The Dance Center of Columbia College Chicago has been remarkably successful in attracting ethnically diverse audiences to its programs. Over the course of the season, a wide range of cultural and ethnic communities attend performances by noted local, national, and international dance companies. The Dance Center's survey data reveals that non-white dance patrons tend to choose performers and performances that represent their own ethnic heritage. When an African American or African dance troupe performs, for example, the audience tends to include a high proportion of African American patrons, but relatively few Asians or Latinos. When an Asian company performs, the audience includes many Asians but few Latinos and African Americans, and so on. The Dance Center views this pattern as an opportunity and a challenge. In addition to enjoying dance of their "own" cultures on the stage of The Dance Center, would these ethnic audiences enjoy "crossing over" to sample the dance traditions, stories, and music of cultures other than their own? What kinds of benefits would such "cross-ethnic" attendance offer to them? What would encourage them to try it?

To answer those questions and begin working to change its ethnic attendance patterns, The Dance Center's leadership team has launched a **Cross-Ethnic Research & Marketing Initiative**. The Dance Center has engaged Slover Linett Strategies Inc., a Chicago-based research firm serving the arts and education sectors, to conduct a research study and develop a model and plans aimed at increasing cross-ethnic attendance among the Dance Center's current patrons. The consulting team also includes culturally-specific researchers Pepper Miller, Cecilia Garibay, and Bill Imada, as well as leading national arts audience expert Alan S. Brown, who serves as an advisor to the project.

To inform and help guide the process, The Dance Center has also assembled an **Intercultural Advisory Group** comprised of thought-

leaders working in and around the arts, marketing, and market research in Chicago and nationally. This group, which has abundant experience in multicultural community engagement issues, met at the outset of the project, and will convene at other key junctures to review progress, provide input, and assist in the planning process for the marketing portion of the cross-ethnic initiative.

Working definitions

The innovative goals of this initiative have required us to define several new or hybrid terms. Following are our working definitions, which may change as the Cross-Ethnic Research & Marketing Initiative progresses:

- **“intra-ethnic attendance”**: people of one ethnic background attending an arts performance by people of (or an arts company representing) the same ethnic background; e.g., an African American dance patron attending an African American or African dance company.
- **“cross-ethnic attendance”**: people of one ethnic background attending an arts performance by people of (or an arts company representing) a different ethnic background; e.g., an African American dance patron attending an Asian dance company.
- **“non-ethically specific”**: used here to describe an arts performance that does not represent a particular ethnic heritage, except perhaps the “mainstream” European tradition. The performers in a “non-ethically specific” performance may be Caucasian, non-white, or ethnically diverse, but as a whole the presentation is not perceived as, or attempting to be, ethnically specific.

Note that the first two definitions refer to types of *attendance*, while the third refers to a type of *performance*. To complicate matters, we will classify attendance by non-Caucasians at a non-ethically specific (i.e., white) performance as cross-ethnic attendance. This classification is warranted by prior research indicating that some non-whites feel that they are stepping into another culture’s domain when they attend non-ethically specific or “mainstream” performing arts (Williams and Clippinger, 2006; Morton and Symth, 2004).

If the reader is not completely comfortable with these three definitions, that’s part of the point of the Cross-Ethnic Research & Marketing Initiative. We are exploring new territory for arts management, and we must begin by working out a new language with which to discuss the relevant issues.

This initiative is not primarily focused on Caucasian attendance at ethnically-specific performances, about which there is already a fair amount of research, and which is already occurring at The Dance Center and many other presenters around the nation.

Structure of the Initiative

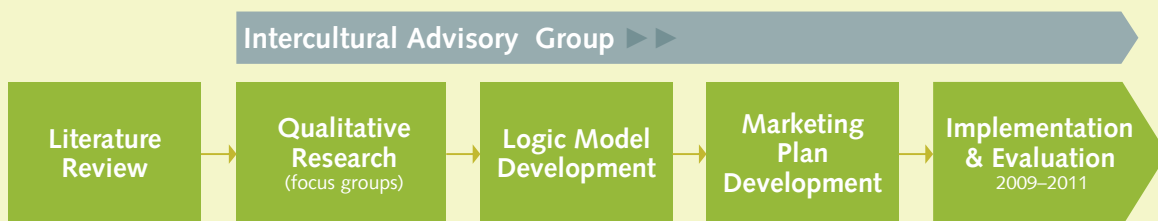
The Cross-Ethnic Research & Marketing Initiative has been designed as a five-step process, as shown in the diagram below. Brief summaries of each step follow:

- **Step 1: Best Practices Review**

We began by reviewing the available literature in hopes of finding previous studies about cross-ethnic attendance in the arts. As our Literature Review Report (June 24, 2008) recounts, we found that this is an under-studied area. Much has been written on minority participation in the arts and on how organizations can attract underserved audiences through programming, messaging, etc. But the efforts labeled “cross ethnic” that we found were focused either on Caucasian attendance at multicultural performances or on minority attendance at mainstream arts venues traditionally patronized largely by whites—neither of which is the main focus of our initiative. Our report summarized the most relevant insights and included a customized analysis of data from a national arts attendance study by Alan Brown. The Best Practices Review informed the design of the qualitative research in Step 2.

- **Step 2: Qualitative Research (THIS REPORT)**

Next, we conducted focus groups and interviews with current patrons of The Dance Center to explore their perceptions of, and experiences with, ethnically-specific dance in both intra-ethnic and cross-ethnic contexts. *This report details our findings.*



Cross-Ethnic Research & Marketing Initiative
Dance Center of Columbia College Chicago
PROJECT PLAN

- **Step 3: Logic Model**

Using the findings and new hypotheses generated by Steps 1 and 2, we will develop a logic model for the cross-ethnic marketing initiative. A logic model is a visual diagram resembling a flow-chart, which illustrates the intended relationships between a program's activities and outcomes. Logic models are widely used in the social services sector and are becoming a more common management and evaluation tool in other nonprofit arenas. Creating the logic model will be an important opportunity for The Dance Center leadership, the Intercultural Advisory Group, and the consultants to reach consensus about this project's assumptions and goals.

- **Step 4: Marketing Plan**

In turn, the logic model will guide the creation of an experimental, three-year marketing plan to increase cross-ethnic attendance at The Dance Center. The marketing plan will be developed by Dance Center and Slover Linett Strategies staff and individual marketing consultants, including a few members of the Intercultural Advisory Group. It will potentially involve not just marketing communications but other elements of the patron experience, as well.

- **Step 5: Implementation & Evaluation**

Rigorous evaluation will be built into the process as the marketing plan is implemented, so that the hypotheses and outcomes can be tested and adjustments made to the marketing plan to yield new insight about what works and what doesn't in this under-explored area.

About this qualitative research

Objectives

The goal of the qualitative research is to explore the issues surrounding attendance at ethnically-specific dance, with particular emphasis on the benefits of, and barriers to, cross-ethnic attendance. We had five broad objectives in mind:

1. To get an initial sense of how *possible* it will be for the Dance Center to increase cross-ethnic attendance among its current patrons;
2. To learn how *desirable* it will be to do so—that is, to understand

whether attending cross-ethnically would increase or diversify the benefits that dance patrons obtain, compared to current attendance patterns;

3. To understand how cross-ethnic dance attendance might be marketed compellingly, and more generally what role ethnicity plays in patrons' evaluation of marketing materials and attendance decisions;
4. To identify differences between ethnic groups on these questions of ethnicity and attendance motivations;
5. To discover opportunities for improving The Dance Center's communication and delivery of opportunities for cross-ethnic participation.

It's important to note that these are broad research objectives in a highly complex, as-yet-unexplored arena. We understood going in that these objectives were unlikely to be fully met in the course of a few focus groups and interviews, and that more research of various kinds—and perhaps also experimentation and evaluation of new approaches—would probably be needed. The findings from this qualitative research bear out those concerns, and this research must be considered a preliminary, exploratory step that *begins* the inquiry into cross-ethnic attendance but by no means exhausts it.

Methodology

For a more detailed description of the methods used in this research, including the recruiting process, please see the Appendix of this report

To conduct the qualitative research, we held **three focus group discussions** with Dance Center patrons of different ethnic backgrounds:

- African Americans—*moderated by Charlotte Bandele of the Hunter Miller Group (Pepper Miller, principal)*
- Caucasians—*moderated by Chloe Chittick of Slover Linett Strategies*
- Latinos—*moderated by Cecilia Garibay of The Garibay Group*

We intended to conduct an additional focus group with Asian dance patrons, but due to difficulties recruiting a complete group using The Dance Center's patron list, we decided to conduct **telephone interviews** with Asian respondents instead. The interviews were conducted by Anne Lee of Slover Linett Strategies.

The discussion guide we used was consistent across all four audience segments, with one exception: the live focus group format allowed us to present a selection of The Dance Center’s marketing materials (postcards, brochures) as “prompts” for the respondents to discuss their decision-making priorities and process, whereas this was not possible in the phone interviews with Asian respondents.

Each focus group was led by an experienced moderator, and in the case of the African American and Latino groups the moderators were specialists in studying those communities. The focus groups were conducted on March 31 and April 21, 2008. The interviews were conducted April 10–18, 2008.



Findings at a glance

Following are brief summaries of what we learned in the course of this exploratory qualitative research. For a much fuller discussion, please turn to the “Detailed Findings” section, below.

One caveat—actually a research finding in itself—is that we heard little unanimity in these research discussions, either across or within our four ethnic segments. While there were some interesting consistencies, in general we heard such a multiplicity of opinions even *within* each group that we can’t generalize with confidence to any ethnic audience, nor, in fact, to the audience outside The Dance Center’s current patron base. This means the findings in this report should be seen as directional rather than conclusive, and that they should be confirmed, measured, and deepened at some point through quantitative and additional qualitative study.

We should also keep in mind that this research looked at *current* dance patrons, many of whom attend quite frequently at The Dance Center as well as other Chicago venues. So the findings and conclusion here are very different from what we might have seen in research with newcomers or underserved audiences—or, for that matter, with people who are active dance-goers but who haven’t yet attended The Dance Center’s programming. This self-selected audience was fully appropriate, since the initiative aims to increase cross-ethnic attendance among people who are already attending The Dance Center. But we should not presume that the motivations, barriers, and messaging strategies discussed here would be applicable to other potential audiences.

1. **The Dance Center’s Caucasian audiences already do a good deal of cross-ethnic attending, while audiences from the other ethnic groups do much less.** In recruiting for each focus group, we aimed to obtain a mix of patrons who *have* attended cross-ethnically and those who *haven’t*. This was difficult for the Caucasian group because *so many of them had* attended ethnically-

specific dance performances (i.e., from outside the white or European tradition). It was difficult for the African American group because *so few of them had* attended cross-ethnically. The recruiting process for Latino and Asian respondents suggested that cross-ethnic attendance is also fairly rare among these groups, though not as rare as among African Americans. This “pre-finding” from the recruiting process was borne out in the focus group discussions and interviews themselves. Since the Cross-Ethnic Research & Marketing Initiative is not primarily concerned with white attendance at culturally-specific dance, this finding implies that little cross-ethnic participation is already occurring. Such a finding can be interpreted as sign of the significant challenge the initiative faces, but it is also a valuable (though not measurable) baseline against which progress can be judged.

- 2. The ethnicity of the dance company plays only a secondary role in patrons’ attendance decisions.** For most of the respondents in this study, the perceived quality and aesthetic appeal of a dance performance is the dominant criterion when they consider what to attend, and issues of ethnic identification are less important. In terms of the three motivations we postulated in our Literature Review, the aesthetic motivation trumps both the identity motivation and the “world-citizen” motivation. (Our definitions for these terms are reprinted in this report on pages 14–15. In brief, *aesthetically motivated* patrons prioritize the form, movement and artistic quality of the performance over other factors when making their attendance decisions. *Identity motivated* patrons prioritize a sense of connection to their ethnic roots or to others who share their background. Those motivated by a “world-citizen” outlook prioritize exploring and supporting diversity through art.)

For a few respondents, however, the identity motivation is prominent, and occasionally even dominant. There are important differences among ethnic groups on this point: respondents in the African American group tended to place greater weight than others on the ability to connect with their own culture and identity through an arts experience. For them, dance companies that are African or African American are more likely to be noticed and considered. Yet these respondents emphasized that the ethnic connection is not, in itself, a sufficient reason for them to attend: the dance company also has to be high quality. In general, we found that, whether the patron’s *primary* motivation is aesthetics or identity, the expectation of quality and aesthetic value is a major element of the purchase decision. This is especially true for repeat

attendance: ethnic identification may be enough to draw some patrons to a dance company for the first time, but it's the perceived quality of that company that leads to loyal patronage. (This is an example of a finding that might be very different had we spoken with infrequent arts attenders in the same ethnic categories; less frequent patrons and non-attenders tend to be motivated less by programming and aesthetic values than by other factors.)

3. **Powerful benefits come from attending ethnically-specific dance of one's own ethnic background or identity.**

Among the non-Caucasian respondents, intra-ethnic dance attendance was perceived as among the most powerful arts experiences one can have. Collectively they mentioned several kinds of benefits (though not all respondents experience all of these benefits):

- *Connecting to your heritage.* — Almost unanimously, respondents used the word “connection” to describe the feelings associated with intra-ethnic dance attendance. They enjoy a deeper bond with the performers onstage and a clearer understanding of the movements and music when attending dance from their own ethnic background. The performance can carry echoes of their heritage and traditions, but can also provide a window onto current themes. Such experiences are rare in the lives of these respondents, so they often regard an intra-ethnic dance experience as “not-to-be-missed” (as long as the company is also of high aesthetic quality). *For more detail, see pages 22–23.*
- *Connecting to people who share your background.* — Another strong motivation for minorities to attend intra-ethnically is to see and share the experience with people of similar ethnicity or heritage (“people who look like me”). They attend in part because of the enjoyable social interaction or environment. *See page 24.*
- *Feeling like you're supporting your own.* — These dance patrons expressed a sense of responsibility to support and sustain their ethnic traditions for future generations and celebrate successes together as a community. Attending intra-ethnically is a way to show pride in their background, particularly for African Americans. *See page 23.*
- *Inspiring and educating the young about your cultural traditions.* — Respondents said that dance, like other performing arts, can pass down cultural traditions and also inspire people by showcasing individuals and groups that have been successful. *See page 24.*
- *Seeing how your heritage is being represented to the public.* — Respondents feel that the dancers and artistic messages on the stage can be seen as proxies for the whole ethnic group. So

they're curious to see how their culture and people are being portrayed. *See pages 24–25.*

- *Grappling with relevant social and political issues.*—Dance and other art forms can address important or difficult social issues, and intra-ethnic attenders enjoy seeing these issues treated in ways that are relevant to their own ethnic history or current experience. *See page 25.*

For Caucasian dance-goers, however, we found that the notion of intra-ethnic attendance is not really applicable. In general, the ethnic identity of the company or performers is a low priority for these respondents, and sometimes isn't even noticed as such. They attend a range of ethnically-specific dance companies simply because they see a large amount and variety of dance—and they use a primarily aesthetic lens to make their ticket-buying choices.

4. **Other benefits come from attending ethnically-specific dance of someone else's ethnic background or identity, although these seem less motivating.** Respondents mentioned several benefits of cross-ethnic attendance. Most of these fall under the “world citizen” motivation, which has both cultural and aesthetic components:

- *Being exposed to new cultures.*—More than anything else, the motivation for attending cross-ethnic performances is the desire to be exposed to new cultures, contexts, and art forms. *See page 26.*
- *Finding commonalities.*—Respondents are interested in finding common ground between divergent identities or contexts. It is the revelation of these underlying similarities, rather than the more apparent differences, that they find appealing about cross-ethnic dance experiences. *See page 27.*
- *Supporting diversity.*—It is important to respondents to offer encouragement to other ethnic minorities by attending their performances. Some said they feel more connected with dances or stories representing other “outsider” groups, such as people of color, than they do with Caucasian or mainstream performances. Cross-ethnic attenders enjoy the diversity of the audience as well as the diversity onstage. *See page 28.*

These, at any rate, were the benefits *ascribed* to cross-ethnic attendance. But it's important to note that for many respondents these benefits were entirely hypothetical, since they hadn't attended dance cross-ethnically, or had done so only once or twice. They see the value in those experiences without having made them

a priority in their cultural choices. In general, the discussion of these benefits was less energetic and more abstract than the conversation about intra-ethnic attendance, which in qualitative research is usually a sign that the issues aren't really central to consumers' behaviors.

Interestingly, the respondents who do currently attend dance cross-ethnically seem to have come to it gradually, more as an outgrowth of their love for the art form of dance than due to any immediate bond with the type of experiences that cross-ethnic participation can provide. (Of course, we can't extrapolate from this small sample.) The rest of these respondents are open to cross-ethnic attendance in principle and understand the benefits of it. Getting them to choose it actively will require helping them over certain perceptual barriers (see next point).

5. **There are a few barriers that get in the way of cross-ethnic dance attendance.** First, many non-Caucasian patrons feel a stronger sense of relevance and greater predicted enjoyment with intra-ethnic attendance than with cross-ethnic. (This is not true for Caucasian dance-goers, for whom the identity motivation is notably low. In fact, our Caucasian responses confirm a finding from Alan Brown's research on impacts that white arts audiences tend to derive greater benefits from ethnically-specific performances than from non-ethnically specific ones. *See the Literature Review Report.*)

Second, although the desirability of gathering new perspectives and exploring other cultures is fairly strong, there is some predictable resistance to actually going outside of one's comfort zone. It's much easier to stay with the familiar, and in practice that comfort often takes precedence over exploration. The cross-ethnic marketing effort will need to gently (or perhaps humorously) prod people to take this risk.

Third, we found certain subtle but widely-held stereotypes of culturally-specific dance that appear to create barriers, or at least complications, for people who might otherwise attend across ethnic lines. The assumption among many respondents was that ethnically-specific dance is tied to the past and largely traditional, even "folkloric" —in other words, in a different category than the contemporary dance that they enjoy. Of course, these perceptions can be positive for some dance patrons, who go to ethnic dance as a way to appreciate particular places, experiences, and people. But for others, the association of ethnic dance with "traditional" or

“folk” genres conflicts with their aesthetic preference for modern or contemporary dance. (Since The Dance Center doesn’t present classical ballet or folkloric dance, our respondents tended to be those with contemporary affinities.)

Finally, some respondents were hesitant about attending a cultural performance of an ethnic background other than their own because they could feel like an “outsider” or have trouble relating to the experiences or themes depicted. Interestingly, this concern was not about the prospect of feeling any hostility or awkwardness from others in the audience. Rather, it was a perception that they might not understand the nuances of the content being presented.

It’s not clear from this research how serious these various barriers are, nor how prevalent they are among dance patrons. Further study will be needed to understand each perception and how it might be overcome in the cross-ethnic initiative.

Summary of this summary

These findings suggest that it may not be easy to change dance-goers’ priorities so that their theoretical understanding of the benefits of cross-ethnic attendance begins to translate into actual ticket-buying.

As with all consumer research in the arts, these findings about the needs and possible future behaviors of dance patrons are colored by how dance is currently presented and marketed. There may be some disparity between what respondents said in this research, which reflects the recent past, and what they might say about very different messages, events, promotions, programming, and so on. They can’t comment on these because they haven’t yet imagined or encountered them. Yet such approaches may in fact be quite successful, in ways that are not yet predictable. The Dance Center will need to create new opportunities and experiences through which the benefits of cross-ethnic attendance are made more vivid and compelling, and the barriers are made less daunting. Those strategies will need to be created in a kind of experimental, evolving collaboration between The Dance Center (and its advisors and marketing agencies) and the ethnic audience (through research).

The following pages present the findings in more comprehensive form, followed by recommendations and a discussion of next steps.

Detailed findings

Introduction

In this section, we present an analysis of the focus group and interview findings organized by theme. It bears repeating that these opinions were expressed by some respondents in each group, but not all. Once we have highlighted the consistencies where they exist, we turn to the differences we heard between ethnic respondent groups and the unique situations and motivations of each.

To frame these findings, we first offer some context about the relationship of ethnicity and dance attendance.

The intersection of ethnicity and dance

The term “culture” can be interpreted in at least two ways. One is the creative output of the arts, and another is the cumulative experiences, heritage, values, and customs of a specific community or nation. Ethnically-specific dance stands at the intersection of these two concepts: it is an artistic performance that features or in some way speaks to people of a particular cultural heritage. This research explores dance patrons’ perceptions of, and motivations to attend, performances that have some ethnic affiliation or focus, whether that affiliation is the same or different from the patron’s own.

As we noted in the Literature Review Report, one of our hypotheses in this research was that there are three possible motivations for attending ethnically-specific dance performances. Although one motivation may be primary for a given patron, all three are usually at play in the audience as a whole (and even in one person on different occasions). Patrons who are *aesthetically motivated* prioritize the form, movement and the quality of the dance itself above its subject matter and ethnic sources. They may attend the arts frequently and have clear preferences for certain styles, companies, or dancers that they find appealing. Patrons who are *identity motivated* are attracted to dance performances that connect them with their ethnic roots or

with others who share the same background. Other dance patrons also wish to explore ethnic cultures through dance, but more out of a desire to explore and support diversity or expand their own horizons than because they belong to that culture; we refer to this mindset as a *world-citizen motivation*. Such respondents may be of any ethnic background, but share a desire to understand the world around them through the arts.

These research findings largely support that taxonomy of attendance motivations (and highlight the importance of the aesthetic motivation, at least for regular dance-goers). But the “mental maps” of dance consumers about ethnicity, identity, and dance are complex, and vary significantly from individual to individual. The definitions we articulated for this initiative (on page 3) do not correspond neatly to the ways patrons think about these issues. In fact, even among those for whom the issue of ethnicity is a high priority when making arts decisions, there don’t seem to be any easy or consistent terms to describe their priorities or operative categorizations. The issues are simply hard to talk about. This reminds us that we are navigating uncharted waters here, and that The Dance Center team will have to be particularly sensitive to language as we listen to, and eventually market cross-ethnic experiences to, dance patrons. Meanwhile, our existing definitions will continue to offer the project team a consistent (if not uncontested) vocabulary to refer to the central concepts.

In particular, the team is aware that the use of “ethnicity” over “culture” may engender debate. However, there is a consensus that *ethnic* identity is more closely aligned with The Dance Center’s interest in this issue than the broader, more fluid notion of culture. Whereas culture can mean the influence of any number of experiences on an individual, family, or community, ethnicity is usually experienced as core “given” of one’s identity. It is that identity we have begun to examine in its relationship to dance attendance decisions.

With that context in mind, let’s turn to the detailed findings and analysis.

Ethnicity, identity, and dance

How patrons frame their identities

How did our research respondents define their own cultural backgrounds? It was an easy task for some, but more difficult for others. A few respondents identified themselves quite specifically with a certain ethnic group, nation, or region, for example, “I’m Northern Indian” (Asian, female). Others identified with a broader ethnic category, sometimes untethered to geography: “I’m from the African Diaspora” (African American, Male). Some thought even more broadly, interpreting “my culture” to encompass their own personal experiences:

“To me, what’s a part of my culture is something I’ve experienced. Whether or not it is of my true blood line ethnic experience doesn’t really matter. Like my affinity to Latin dance and Latin music. It’s out of my ethnicity but not out of my cultural experience.” (African American, Male)

Some mentioned multiple ethnic identities that are resonant for them:

“I’m Japanese, born and lived there until I was 18 and moved to the States. But really I identify myself with the larger Asian context within the American social framework rather than strictly Japanese.” (Asian, male)

So, ethnic background is variable, and people may feel more or less connected to their ethnic heritage over time. They may even come to incorporate other traditions and heritages into their identities. Although we segmented these respondents by ethnic background for this research, we cannot assume that people of a common ethnicity share anything like a common point of view.

Motivations to attend—does ethnicity matter?

For many respondents, the aesthetic quality of the dance trumps the ethnicity of the performers or company. The prerequisite for attending any type of dance performance is the appeal of the choreography and movement *as* dance. In these cases, the aesthetic motivation is stronger than the identity or world citizen motivations.

“First thing I consider is that I would like to see innovative movement that’s cutting edge but not too conceptual. I would be bored with that. Some challenging aesthetic is always attractive.” (Asian, male)

Any performance, whether ethnically-specific or not, must convince patrons of its quality and worth before they will purchase tickets. This respondent regards the cultural angle as a peripheral benefit, to be considered in conjunction with other motivations like the quality and rarity of the performance:

"If a group is coming to this country and it's a rare opportunity to see them, there's a part of me that feels: Am I going to get to Spain, am I going to get to Mexico? Probably not. So that could be a little bit of an incentive to see them. But again, I'd want to know that their performance is going to be really good. It's not just because they're from another country, it's the combination."

(Caucasian, female)

Sometimes patrons may even find the ethnic or cultural content of a performance off-putting or unappealing, at least in prospect. But that can be put aside for the opportunity to see something visually unique or moving; aesthetics is the governing motivation:

"Cloud Gate [Dance Theatre of Taiwan] looks like a story I probably won't understand but I'd still go to just enjoy the movement. [The dancer pictured] seems very flexible and in control of her body, so I'd bet that she's a fantastic dancer." (African American, female)

Although it may not be the most important consideration, many non-Caucasian dance patrons do take the ethnic identity of a performance (or its performers) into account. Across groups, few respondents said that ethnicity did not matter to them at all. As one respondent explains:

"What's most important is the content of the actual performance. Cultural focus is just one of the priorities for me, it's not the top priority" (Asian, female).

For a dance fan who is primarily motivated by aesthetics, ethnicity can sometimes represent a differentiating factor that leads her to attend something she otherwise would not have considered:

"When I consider attending, for me first and foremost it's the style of dance. Ethnicity is important and it can get me past the style of dance, but it's not my number one consideration. For example, this company had a version of The Nutcracker called 'Nuts and Bolts.' If it had just been a straight up ballet version of the Nutcracker, I wouldn't have been interested. But it was an African American company with some Latinos too." (African American, female)

The identity motivation is strongest for African Americans, but is also active for some Latino and Asian respondents. Overall, non-Caucasians tended to take ethnicity into consideration much more consistently than Caucasians, keeping an eye out for dance troupes from their own ethnic backgrounds.

“Ethnicity catches my eye. Folks that I can relate to, that might look like me.”
(African American, female)

“If it’s an ethnic group from Latin America, then I’ll make the effort.”
(Latino, male)

Respondents across our ethnic segments also exhibited some world-citizen motivations, and are drawn to performances that feature minority cultures or foreign countries outside of their own ethnicity.

“Yes, I absolutely seek out cultural dance. I attend all types of dance, but I do bias towards culturally specific dance. I pay attention to international dance companies more.” (Asian, female)

“I’m always curious about dance companies from other countries. So that in itself lures me and spikes my interest.” (Caucasian, male)

Regardless of whether one’s primary motivation is identity-driven or aesthetics-driven, the demand for quality applies to all performances.

These respondents give no excuses for sub-par dance just because the performers or cultural content relates to their own background or originates from a different country.

“I have a really low tolerance for mediocre art that excuses itself by being culturally significant. Like, we’re black dance troupes so we don’t have to be good. I think that’s crap. Well, so what? Don’t suck.” (African American, female)

“I’d support my own people, but on the flip side of that, you get one time for me to say ‘Okay I must support black art because it needs to be there.’ If I go to see you and you’re not interesting or I don’t think you’re up to my level of dance standards, you got that one time and that’s it.” (African American, female)

The cultural angle may be enough to get a patron through the door the first time, but unless the quality of the performance is high, she will not return.

Perceptions of ethnic dance

Dance as inclusive, universal

Dance is perceived to be an art form well-positioned to catalyze cross-ethnic arts experiences. As one respondent said, *“the language of dance is all the same in terms of movement and music”* (Caucasian, male). Whereas words are more active in framing other art forms like theater and vocal music, dance is interpreted physically and visually and therefore does not require a shared language. The viewer is more unencumbered when it comes to making his own meaning from the artwork—and more challenged to do so.

“I think dance is one of those rare art forms that can move more easily across cultures than anything else. With language, it’s very easy to have people [feel] left out. But with dance, there are no words so you don’t run into that same wall.” (Caucasian, female)

“Dance just feels more universal than an African American play. With dance, we can all have a different experience because we all have a rhythmic beat, no matter what [ethnic background] we are.” (African American, female)

Many see dance as being able to rise above language barriers, and as a potentially powerful way to address themes common to all people. One respondent seeks that universal theme above other attributes:

“Having a universal truth about art or humans in general is my priority in order to attend something. Whether it’s Mexican dance or if it’s Japanese, I’ll go if I’m interested. But it has to address a universal truth first.” (Latino, Female)

Another speaks about his desire for dance to go beyond the cultural context and transcend the ethnicity of its performers::

“I might take an interest in a dance first because of identity, for self-conscious reasons. But once I go there, I don’t want to see who the performers are. White, Asian, Black, whatever. I get more engaged when they transcend that ethnic baggage on stage. I want to walk away with the feeling that I have come to feel something personal, specific, that doesn’t end within the minority/majority political rhetoric.” (Asian, male)

It may seem like an oxymoron for this respondent to ask dance performances to be universal and highly personal at the same time. But overarching, shared issues are the ones that really matter to him.

Themes that apply to everyone, not just people within a specific ethnic group, will be more inclusive and leave a larger impact. This sense of connection and universality could be a key benefit for The Dance Center to highlight in cross-ethnic marketing communications.

Perceptions of ethnically-specific dance

Some stereotypes exist about ethnically-specific dance, and these will be important to address in communications—in some cases reinforcing and in some cases challenging them. Many respondents associated culturally-specific dance with descriptors like “traditional,” “folkloric,” and “tribal.” The first instinct among these patrons was that dance representing an ethnic tradition will be tied to the past and largely at odds with contemporary dance.

But this cuts both ways. **Some who hold this perception appreciate ethnic dance as an art form that reflects particular places, experiences, and people they connect with.** These respondents tend to be non-Caucasians who enjoy “folkloric” dance that emerged from and portrays their own ethnic roots. One respondent respects its long ancestry and how it has been performed historically over time.

“I really like tribal dancing and seeing cultures without a long history of modern dance doing dance. And with traditional folk dancing, you know that it’s been done perfectly every time forever. So even though it doesn’t grow or evolve over time, it’s a different art form and I really enjoy that.” (Caucasian, male)

A few respondents had themselves been trained in their respective cultural dance, so they enjoy attending those traditional styles when available.

“As an African dancer I studied African dance and traditional African music a lot and I tend to gravitate toward that in the dance world.” (African American, female)

Traditional ethnic dance is also particularly appealing to immigrant dance-goers who wish for a connection to their homeland and reminders of their heritage.

“I may go to folkloric dance if I’m far away from where I come from, like when I’m here [in the U.S.]. One day I might be nostalgic.” (Latino, Female, immigrant from Mexico)

“If there were Japanese Kabuki players [performing in Chicago], I might think it’s a good example of witnessing tradition. I would feel a stronger connection to it because of my own background. It’s funny how I didn’t feel anything about it while I was still living in Japan. But if it’s here, I’d realize how I haven’t seen it [recently]. So it’d be a great experience to witness it here, like relearning about my own heritage.” (Asian, male, immigrant from Japan)

But for others, the association of ethnic dance with “traditional” or “folk” forms is at odds with their strong preference for modern and contemporary dance. These respondents expressed negative (albeit vague) perceptions of ethnically-specific dance, saying that it is static and predictable.

“I’m making great presumptions here, but it seems like it’s probably more history, acting-type stuff than straight-out modern dance. So just from these pictures [in the brochure] I probably wouldn’t go. If there were more [explanations] supporting it or I knew more about any of the other companies involved then I’d consider it. [But] it’s not that it’s African that puts me off.” (Caucasian, male)

For these patrons, who value innovation in the arts, the presumption is that ethnically-specific dance is locked in the past and does not evolve over time. (Because The Dance Center presents contemporary dance, that sentiment may be more acute among these respondents than it might have been elsewhere.) One respondent, though, tried to correct this misperception when discussing the Urban Bush Women/Compagnie Jant-Bi postcard:

“I think there’s a misconception out there to think that this is going to be strictly traditional West African dance, which is not true. People get this flyer and try to categorize it as folk dance. Just like Luna Negra is a more contemporary ballet, this is more contemporary too.” (Latino, Female)

While a few respondents seek a mix of traditional and contemporary ethnic dance styles in their attendance repertoire, overall we found that most respondents are interested in ethnically-based dance that feels contemporary and addresses today’s issues rather than simply following a folkloric tradition.

The preference for ethnically-specific dance with a modern twist tends to be driven by a desire to see something new. In particular, patrons watching dance from their own ethnic background would rather see a fresh take rather than a standard presentation of the tradition. This

preference for a fusion of old and new is associated with a general preference for contemporary dance, which (as noted above) was prevalent among these respondents.

“I’m always interested in some minority context. I’d enjoy something more innovative and not necessarily recapturing the traditional form. Ideally it’d be some kind of fusion that is well done by a diverse make-up of people.” (Asian, male)

“I’m drawn, not necessarily to a particular culture or the dance of a particular culture, but to groups that somehow integrate traditional cultural dance with a more modern vocabulary. That’s something that interests me, the blending of the two.” (Caucasian, male)

“I think dance really expresses history and reflects the people, so I like to see both traditional dance for our history and modern dance as a way of showing what’s happening now. I’m really picky when I see people trying to fuse the two. Sometimes it diffuses the authenticity of some of the traditional dance, or it could bring it out even more.” (Latino, Female)

Motivations and barriers to intra-ethnic attendance

Motivations

Intra-ethnic attendance is powerful because it provides a connection between respondents and their culture, among respondents in the audience together, and to a shared tradition or past. Respondents almost unanimously used the word “connection” to describe the motivations and benefits of intra-ethnic attendance. Particularly for those who are removed from their culture, whether by distance or by their Americanized social network, they look for opportunities to experience a piece of the “home” culture. These performances are echoes of their personal history and their cultural traditions, but also a source of “*knowledge about what’s happening in the current movements back in our countries*” (Latino, male). They feel a deeper bond with the performers onstage and understanding of the movements and music. And since these opportunities may be rare, intra-ethnic dance is often regarded as “not-to-be-missed.”

“Because I’m far removed from my country, I’m drawn to and want to see dance from my background. Because it’s not all the time that you’re able to see that type of performance. It’s a way to connect with my culture.” (Latino,

male)

“In terms of benefits, first, I like to know that even though I’m not actually in India or surrounded a majority Indian community, that culture is still alive here in the States, specifically in Chicago. It’s nice to know there are venues that are available that give me access to that. And second, I want to know that the tradition of Indian classical dance is still alive and kicking.” (Asian, female)

“I was born in a different country, so even though I’m very Americanized, I still have ties to different customs. It can be amusing and make me laugh, or I can just reminisce. It’s just nice to see something that you normally do not see.” (Asian, female)

Attending a performance from their background also lets the viewer who shares that heritage reminisce about fond memories. *“It’s familiar dances, familiar sounds”* that *“evoke nostalgic memories from the past”* (Both Latino, male).

Supporting “our own” is another important motivation for non-Caucasians to attend intra-ethnic performances. Some respondents expressed that they feel a sense of responsibility to support and sustain ethnic traditions for future generations and celebrate successes together as a community. Attending intra-ethnic dance is a way to show pride in their ethnic background. While this was expressed by some respondents in each of the non-Caucasian groups, it was strongest among our African American respondents.

“It’s very important for me as an African American person to support African American dance. Because if we don’t do it, who else will? So if I see or hear about almost any African American dance company, most of the time I’m there. We have a sense of responsibility to support our own.” (African American, male)

“You perpetuate the culture by keeping those companies in business for future generations. And you keep the dollars in the community.” (African American, female)

“Regardless of whatever country in Latin America they’re coming from, I feel proud of whoever is Brazilian, Mexican, and so forth. Because to me, we’re all a single group in this country and I would like to support whichever cultural group is trying to understand the current movements in Central and South America. To support and understand others like me is part of that pride.” (Latino, male)

Another strong motivation for intra-ethnic attendance is to see and share the experience with people of similar backgrounds. When attending an arts performance, most patrons also take notice of who's in the audience. Some non-Caucasians said that because they are ethnic minorities, they don't often see a concentration of people who share their heritage and background. Intra-ethnic arts experiences, though, do allow them this. We heard from respondents that they attend *"to be part of the social interaction"* (Latino, male), to talk to each other and connect to their greater ethnic community. Some described this as *"a lack of self-consciousness,"* an easy feeling of connection to others around them in the audience without pretense.

"For me it's social hour. At Ailey, not only is the show on stage, it's in the audience as well. Who's with who and [being able to] speak to everybody." (African American, female)

"There's a connection between me and who I see on the stage, and there's another connection between me and who else is with me. There's something about walking into a room if the audience is predominately Black and looks like me. I'm going to feel a connection with that as opposed to going to the movie theater where it's a little bit more anonymous." (African American, male)

"When I go to see a show of my ethnicity, I don't have to...only concentrate on [the people on the stage]. I can do the 'That's a pretty purse' thing, you know, that type of stuff. You feel a little more comfortable in the audience." (African American, female)

Intra-ethnic attendance at a performance is also valued for being inspiring and educational. A few respondents mentioned that performances can teach about cultural traditions and act as examples of achieving success. Some respondents said that they hope that intra-ethnic dance performances will encourage younger generations to focus their energies on positive endeavors like art:

"I think the performances can inspire the young people in the audience [to say], 'This is something that maybe I can be.'" (African American, male)

Some patrons are drawn to intra-ethnic dance experiences because they want to see how "their" identity is being represented to the public. These respondents expressed that the performers and messages onstage can be read by Caucasians and others as proxies for the ethnic group as a whole, and they are curious about the ways in which their

culture is being portrayed.

“My own cultural background isn’t often represented in the arts, so I pay attention to it. I want to see how it’s presented so I watch out for it like a barometer. I want to know, what context is it, how is it marketed?” (Asian, male)

“I’m always curious to see what is being expressed, how people are claiming things, and what they’re actually showing. If the company says ‘I’m representing Latinos’ or ‘I’m representing Mexicans’, then I’m a Mexican and I want to know what they’re saying about me. It’s important what they’re putting out there for other people to interpret because they’re representing me and my people.” (Latino, Female)

“I’m also interested in seeing how people from a different culture are going to receive the message that this company is trying to give.” (Latino, male)

Social and political issues in ethnically-specific dance performances can also appeal to some intra-ethnic dance attendees. These respondents want art to address difficult and important issues from their ethnic history and/or its current place in society.

“Our [Latino] cultures are very complex and often deal with a lot of painful issues, so there’s a duality between this happy, colorful celebration of life and these dark and troubling issues. It’s interesting to see that opposition explored.” (Latino, male)

“What attracted me about Luna Negra was that it referenced an event that happened in Mexico in the 60s. So the combination of that history with and contemporary dance really attracted me. It’s the ethnic or social issue brought into a contemporary setting.” (Latino, male)

Barriers to intra-ethnic attendance

Respondents reported very few barriers to intra-ethnic attendance. The one potential issue is the feeling that “my own” traditionally-based dance forms are too familiar, especially for people who seek creativity and innovation in dance. A few respondents would prefer to see something they have never seen before, rather than dance that they may have practiced when they were young or that they are otherwise already well-versed in. Some also said that they’d rather see art challenge and redefine, rather than reaffirm, ethnic images. This, too, relates to the general appreciation for new and cutting-edge work among these respondents.

"I'd rather see something more innovative, something that I haven't seen before, things I haven't thought about before. That's what I'm looking for, some new experiences rather than something that I'm familiar with. Something that looks unique and different." (Asian, female)

"I'm not really crazy about just classical Indian dance. After a while, it seems the same. I appreciate it and I like the hand movements and the beat, but I don't think I'd go just to see that. It's just that I'm too familiar with it." (Asian, female)

"I'd rather see something that challenges identity, and is more redefining. Celebrating culture is appealing, but not as much as something that's novel. It's not as exciting." (Asian, female)

Motivations and barriers to cross-ethnic attendance

As mentioned above, Caucasians were the most active cross-ethnic dance attenders, and are present here in some ways as a control group. Non-Caucasian respondents attend cross-ethnically much less frequently. Non-Caucasians spoke energetically about why they enjoy intra-ethnic attendance, but had more difficulty articulating the (potential) benefits and barriers to cross-ethnic attendance. We frequently heard tentative, qualifying words like "if," "may," and "could," indicating that this part of the discussion was somewhat hypothetical: rather than reports of actual experiences, respondents were talking about what they imagined cross-ethnic attendance would be like, and occasionally referring to past attendance at other performing arts, such as theater.

Motivations

The perceived benefit of cross-ethnic attendance is being exposed to new cultures, contexts, and art forms. As one respondent put it, cross-ethnic dance attendance *"demystifies a people"* (African American, female). Patrons spurred by this world-citizen motivation are curious and hope to expand their understanding of the world by exploring heritages and traditions other than their own. They hope to gain new perspectives while also enjoying the dance in artistic terms.

"If they're discussing a universal issue like love, then I can connect to those ideas but they may express it in a way that I've never thought of before. I'd be curious to see a fresh and interesting take on something." (Latino, Female)

Respondents also hope to broaden their artistic sphere of reference, gaining “*some insight into other artists around the world and how they compare to artists here*” (Caucasian, female). Cross-ethnic dance attendance can help you become more aware of international artistic movements.

Even though cross-ethnic attenders do not share the ethnic background of the performers, respondents said they (would) enjoy immersing themselves in the other culture. Some likened this to a travel experience. When the performance is engrossing, an audience member can feel part of that culture even if it’s not her own.

“Sometimes going to a very different cultural performance makes me feel like I’m like traveling to another part of the world. If I go to Afro-Contempo, I may feel that I’m in Africa and that’s great.” (Latino, Female)

“It’s like visiting a different country and you can learn through osmosis. By experiencing that culture, you get out of this box that we’re so humdrum with because it’s become so ordinary.” (Caucasian, male)

“It’s nice to explore other cultures. Especially being in a place like Chicago where neighborhoods are drawn around ethnic lines. You can walk to another neighborhood but not understand it because you’re just walking through. But when you’re actually actively engaged in a cultural tradition from that ethnicity, then you’re more engaged. I like to feel engaged in something that I don’t think I own.” (Asian-American, Female)

There is curiosity and intrigue in finding common ground between differing contexts. It is this similarity, rather than the more apparent differences, that appeals to cross-ethnic attenders. Respondents enjoy discovering similarities through cross-ethnic attendance, which can create a bond across cultural divides and highlight the universality of human emotions and experiences.

“When there’s that feeling of connection to someone else, it makes you feel very humbled and very human. Like I am one person among many people, we all are broken, we all are touchable, we can all be destroyed, we can all create. It is a very dilating experience that makes me very aware of my own humanity relative to others.” (African American, female)

“I think sometimes you’re sort of surprised at what you share, even though it’s a different ethnicity. Everyone shares the same experience and there are universal themes like emotions and hardship.” (African American, male)

These non-Caucasian respondents also value how performances from another ethnic heritage can evoke personal memories of similar experiences faced in the past. These specific cues can resonate deeply.

“Depending on the performance, it could bring on a sort of nostalgia too. Some sort of feeling that you can compare to, like parallel memories of something that happened in my country or to me.” (Latino, male)

“Luna Negra is relevant [to me] in theory because of the whole idea of the displaced immigrant. One of the biggest themes is the idea of the third continent. Not only being an immigrant to the United States but also this in-between place. Indians think of United Kingdom as their third continent because it tends to be a way-station between the US and India. Natya Dance Academy explores this theme, so does Luna Negra. Both are equally strong in resonating with me.” (Asian, female)

Wanting to “support our own” doesn’t preclude wanting to “support diversity.” Respondents want to offer encouragement to other ethnic minorities by patronizing those dance groups.

“I do tend to support groups that are very diverse because I feel like I’m not only supporting those dancers, but I’m supporting a company that is giving opportunities to a diverse group of artists.” (African American, male)

In some cases, though, this impulse seems to be driven more by a sense of obligation than by personal interest in attending the performance. The ethical or social desirability may not translate often to actual attendance.

“I feel like it’s something that I should do. I had a really great teacher who urged us to do things outside of what’s comfortable and I think that’s how you grow as a person.” (African American, male)

“Of the places that I can think of, The Dance Center does the best job of presenting diverse companies. I’m not sure that’s a recipe for success, but it certainly provides a service to the community.” (Caucasian, female)

Respondents who have attended cross-ethnically report feeling welcomed and included in the experience.

“I saw Complexions Contemporary Ballet this past winter and it was a largely African American audience, but at no point did I feel out of place or was I made to feel that way. It just happens that the entire company is African American.” (Caucasian, male)

“If they made me feel inside a global community then I would feel more connected and be more interested. Because then I will have a sense of belonging in that global community, instead of separating me out as you are Latin, you are this, you are that.” (Latino, Female)

And one respondent even felt part of the audience: *“The audience was very Black, and it just got me into it. Like, yeah sister! This is great!”* (Caucasian, female)

Most cross-ethnic attenders say they find the diversity of the crowd appealing. Since some of these respondents are ethnic minorities themselves, they feel a general bond within a diverse, majority-minority lobby or auditorium. The diversity was important to many Caucasian patrons as well.

“I do tend look at the audience and I enjoy seeing a more diverse group. I don’t want one huge portion to be a certain nationality or ethnicity or whatever, I like it to look like a really mixed group and then I always feel better. This is so neat that this is attracting so many different people.” (Caucasian, female)

“I never feel uncomfortable in an international setting because we are kind of internationals ourselves.” (Latino, male)

But a few respondents said it didn’t matter who was in the audience around them; they didn’t (or wouldn’t, hypothetically) feel any differently than when attend other performances. These patrons were focused on the stage, not on their fellow-attenders.

“Once the lights go down and the dancers come on stage, as long as the people around me aren’t talking too loud, it doesn’t really matter who they are.” (Caucasian, male)

Barriers to cross-ethnic dance

Even though respondents like the idea of venturing into someone else’s cultural sphere, in practice there’s some hesitancy to leave your own cultural comfort zone. It’s easier to stay with what’s familiar and more obviously relevant to you. Again, this qualitative evidence suggests that non-Caucasians attend dance intra-ethnically much more than they do cross-ethnically. They want to broaden their horizons but rarely seem to do so.

“It would be hard for me to go to something outside of my culture. When I

think of what I've done lately, I can't think of anything outside my own ethnicity. I would really have to push myself. The reality is, I'm going to do what is comfortable. I'm going to do what I know or what I think I know." (African American, male)

▶▶▶ **Feeling like an outsider due to content.** The major barrier to cross-ethnic attendance is feeling like an "outsider" and therefore not relating to the experiences and situations reflected in an ethnic performance from another culture. This concern—again, mostly presumed rather than recalled—centers on not understanding the nuances of the performance content rather than any hostility from, or awkwardness among, the audience of a different ethnic group.

Some respondents, when looking at recent postcards from The Dance Center promoting ethnic performances, feared that such performances might contain too much "social commentary" and would be outside of their comfort zones.

"When I go to some kind of art form that's ethnic, I don't want to feel like I'm going to not understand things or I'm feeling a little bit excluded. I saw a great group [of African American women] that have wonderful a cappella voices and were very good singers, but they really did have a very strong political message. They were really talking as if it was an African American audience, which it primarily was but not 100%. There was a part of me that felt like, 'Well maybe they didn't care about me'... I definitely felt like an outsider in that audience." (Caucasian, female)

"I'm not sure how to word it exactly, but when I go to dance or music or anything, I don't necessarily want a political message. And I'm not familiar with Urban Bush Woman, but for some reason I feel like it's going to be a political statement. I could be totally wrong, I could be misreading it but that's what it seems like to me." (Caucasian, female)

"Even though I understood from the picture [on the postcard] that there would be a story here, it's not a story that would appeal to me. The Asian oppression of women is a little out of my comfort zone. I don't know what story she might be trying to tell, but my own thoughts about it would say to me – I can skip that." (African American, female)

Some patrons simply find greater relevance and personal enjoyment in intra-ethnic attendance than they do in cross-ethnic ones.

"[With issues] I think it's a little more resonate when it's from someone within my own culture, just because I know the nuances of what they are

playing with. When I look at Luna Negra, I don't catch a lot of the first or third world references, like when they refer to Cuban traditions I don't know what the hell they're talking about." (Asian, female)

▶▶ **Feeling like an outsider due to the audience experience.** There was also a concern, particularly among African American respondents, about being visibly "different" from the rest of the audience and standing out. A few of respondents felt that being African American drew attention in some contexts, and worried that this might be the case if they attended dance from a non-black culture. They reported that, in general, audiences in the performing arts do, in fact, notice African Americans or other minority attenders who don't share the ethnic background of the performers.

A few patrons admitted to noticing such people themselves when attending intra-ethnically. Seeing minority people from another ethnic background in the audience arouses curiosity and makes them wonder, *"Why are you here and what do you hope to experience?"* (African American, female). These respondents explained that their attention isn't hostility or objection; it's just curiosity about that person's motivations for attending that performance.

"I don't distrust you but I do want to know why you're here. Like hey, let's all have this cool cultural experience together, but you're not here because you're expecting some stereotype, right? You're here because you don't know something. Or because you do know something and you enjoy it and we can have a common bond." (African American, female)

At least one respondent, though, felt more adamantly, especially about seeing Caucasians in the audience at an African American theater:

"When I go to the ETA [Creative Arts Foundation] to a performance and I see white people in the audience I'm like—what in the world? This is not your space. You got all that other stuff, you got Court Theatre, so why are you here?" (African American, female)

This may or may not be an articulation of sentiments that others feel but weren't comfortable verbalizing in our research discussions. Another person also spoke skeptically about the feelings of whites in an ethnically-specific audience: *"I don't feel uncomfortable in the audience. Only xenophobes or U.S.-born Americans do, and that's the truth."* (Latino, male)

▶▶▶ **Overcoming that outsider feeling.** Despite these concerns, some respondents indicated that, once they “take the plunge” into cross-ethnic arts experiences, they open themselves up to performances that transcend any superficial lack of relevance.

“If you’re not comfortable being in a group setting where everyone doesn’t look like you, then you may just focus on the stage. But then there’s that moment where everything melts away from me and I’m completely sucked into the story, regardless of who’s there.” (African American, male)

The performance can broaden their knowledge of the ethnic group, making them feel that they have gained some new insight that subtly shifts their status from outsider to semi-insider.

“At Luna Negra, I am no longer the insider, I become the outsider. I definitely sense a palpable shift in that role. I feel like the more awkward one and it’s uncomfortable and unsettling. But when the performances begins, when the themes are blunt and the ethnic references are clear, it’s easier to become an insider as the performance goes on.” (Asian, female)

The responses of those who have attended cross-ethnically suggest that they came to gradual acceptance and enjoyment of the experiences that cross-ethnic participation can provide, rather than an immediate bond with those benefits. Ultimately, these people found those benefits rewarding enough to overcome their initial concerns. However, very few seem to have made cross-ethnic attendance a frequent or even regular part of their dance diet.

Differences among ethnic segments

As noted earlier, we must be cautious about extrapolating from one focus group or set of interviews to an entire ethnic group, especially given the variety of opinions voiced in this research. Nevertheless, it makes sense to try to characterize provisionally some of the differences we heard between groups.

African American respondents

African American respondents tended to define their own identities in less ethnic, more broadly cultural terms than Latinos or Asians.

More than the other non-Caucasian respondents, African Americans complicated the notion of ethnic identification and blurred the distinction between their ethnic background and the wider realm of

cultural experience in which their identities were formed. This may have something to do with the fact that the Latino and Asian respondents included immigrants and first-generation respondents who were still closely tied to their homelands, while the African American dance patrons had grown up both “American” and “African American.” The American identity is equally strong, in some cases: *“I just feel like American identity is my identity and American culture is my culture, so I feel like being black is a big part of being American and vice-versa.”* (African American, female)

So, while the African or African American flavor of a dance company or performance is important to most of these respondents, they also believe that that quality can emerge from other connections and styles of dance, even those of other cultures. This respondent explained why he considers Luna Negra Dance Theater to be within his own sphere of identification:

“I don’t have any Latin blood but I’ve heard one of the founders of Luna Negra talking about Latin music. He said basically from the hips down it’s African, from the waist up it’s European. So even though I don’t have any Latin blood, I connect to it.” (African American, male)

African Americans were the most strongly identity-driven segment.

Exploring their own roots, history, and community is of great importance to them, and these motivations were mentioned throughout the discussion. Whether attending dance, theater, or music, these patrons look for an African American theme, story, or “flavor” (as more than one respondent referred to this intangible quality).

“Afro-Contempo [is appealing] because I think I’m going to see something that’s culturally significant to me. I feel like culturally I’m going to have a connection to the dancers and I think the music is going to be part of that.” (African American, male)

“If I were to go see an all-African American ballet company, even if it’s traditional, classical ballet, there’s still an expectation that there’s going to be some element of ‘flavor’ to it. I expect to see fierce movement, fierce agility, fierce rhythm – some attitude. And maybe it’s also the affinity of seeing someone on stage that looks like you.” (African American, male)

One respondent attends *only* performances within her own ethnic sphere. She simply finds intra-ethnic attendance much more personally relevant and stimulating than performances from the white

mainstream or from another ethnic group:

“For the last 10 years I’ve tried to immerse myself in the African American world. That’s different from 25 years beforehand when I was over there in the white world. It’s opened up an awareness in me of my ethnicity that I didn’t necessarily have before. I see my own Blackness perhaps. So now I think, what was I doing over there in the white world? When I go to those [white] shows it’s like—how does this relate to me? Where am I in this...? I just find African dance so enriching. It doesn’t bother me to go back to the white world but I don’t really have a desire to, because there’s just so much more here in my own ethnicity.” (African American, female)

While none of the other African American respondents expressed an exclusive preference for intra-ethnic experiences, some did concur with her about the ability to connect with aspects of themselves through Black dance that are not possible in a cross-ethnic context.

African American respondents placed a high value on dance with a strong sense of narrative or theme, regardless of whether the performance was ethnically focused. No other respondents discussed the narrative aspect of the performances as a motivation to attend. When we asked African American respondents what factors they consider when deciding to attend dance, the general consensus was *“I’m looking for a visual narrative, a story without words”* (African American, male). Some said that they need help interpreting abstract dance that doesn’t have a clear narrative. A formalist conception of contemporary dance was not appealing to some African American respondents. These respondents didn’t feel engaged by modern dance that lacks any element of narrative or recognizable human theme; these qualities are among their criteria for aesthetic appeal.

“I don’t really do abstract well. I don’t like abstract music, abstract dancing, abstract painting. I’m always like...I don’t get it.” (African American, female)

“When I can’t see the story, I’m thinking ‘What am I supposed to be thinking about right now?’” (African American, female)

“I think Merce Cunningham is a bit abstract. I think they’re on the way modern end of modern, which would annoy me. Based on this postcard, I don’t really think they have an original story to tell, they don’t have anything to say to me. I would call it like – let’s move around without a purpose, without a reason.” (African American, female)

These respondents feel that stories of and by ethnic minorities resonate more powerfully than stories without an ethnic context.

Ethnic stories—those of African Americans or other people of color or outsiders—are perceived to be deeper and more profound than those which emerge from the dominant culture. This relates to the point about narrative just mentioned: the stories that these respondents want to sense in dance, theater, and other performances are in some way *about* ethnicity. Thus narrative can be a bridge between the identity and aesthetic motivations.

“Most ethnicities come from a point of some level of oppression. So I think it’s important to hear them share their stories through dance and cleanse themselves with that telling of the story.” (African American, female)

“I think that if you are a person of color or of a non-pale nature, then we as a people tend to have a much more interesting, more intense story to tell. For anyone non-Caucasian, I think that life is a little more intense on that side of the platform. There’s history and experience that comes out through a rhythmic sense that’s owned by that culture as opposed to fed on by another culture.” (African American, female)

“I’m interested in ethnicity and it can be Latin, it can be Asian – it can be any of those. But I really want to see something that’s going to speak to me, to talk to me in a language that I can understand and I don’t think that the white culture really does that. I’m interested in hearing where are you coming from today and who are you trying to be like today... That’s communicated to me in their dance.” (African American, female)

Despite this sense that non-Caucasians share a deeper set of stories to tell, respondents in the African American group were more willing to admit that attending cross-ethnically may be outside of their comfort zones. They are more likely to choose to attend dance that reflects their own heritage than another ethnicity’s. They were more forthcoming than other respondents about having a heightened awareness of themselves as being “different” from the rest of the audience when they do attend non-ethnically specific or cross-ethnic performances.

“I do feel more alone and isolated in the audience. Even when I’m with somebody else it’s kind of like we’re an island in the sea of other people.” (African American, female)

Lastly, African American respondents were more conscious of practical issues, such as scheduling and ticket prices. This was true even though the household income level of these patrons was generally no different from that of other respondent groups. Even though we asked them to set aside price and scheduling concerns in order to focus on ethnicity issues, those two issues kept coming up; it also influenced the categories they created when we asked them to sort the dance marketing postcards. This finding echoes other research with African American arts consumers, which suggests that they don't simply assume that the arts are what they *should* spend their time and money on, just because they're considered prestigious or edifying by the dominant culture. Rather, they want to know that the particular arts experience will have sufficient *value* to them to be worth scheduling and paying for. So the cross-ethnic marketing plan will have to be creative about communicating that value convincingly, and also convey cost and schedule information in ways that minimize any perceived barriers.

Latino respondents

Our Latino respondents were a diverse group with varying proportions of identity, aesthetic, and world-citizen motivations for attending dance. These Latino respondents were the least unanimous segment in their views on cross-ethnic arts participation. Aesthetic motivations were heard immediately and frequently, but identity and world-citizen motivations also came up with little prompting. The unusual diversity of opinions could be due to the demographic breadth of the group, which included both immigrants and American-born Mexicans, dancers and non-dancers, and younger and older individuals.

Despite this diversity of motivations, the ethnic aspect of dance performances was top-of-mind for many Latino respondents—along with the fundamental priority of artistic quality and interest. When asked to sort The Dance Center's postcards into two groups, these respondents put them into piles delineated by ethnically-focused dance vs. non-ethnically focused dance. *"It's the difference between seeing more abstract movement versus more traditional, folkloric movement from a specific culture."* (Latino, Female)

Some of the Latino respondents said they enjoy connecting to their own culture, history, and socio-political issues through dance and the arts. Their intra-ethnic attendance helps them connect to both the past

and the present, support their own community, and see how Latinos from different nations relate as a group. They also enjoy sharing arts experiences with other Latinos in the audience. These benefits were particularly strong for those who feel distanced from their homelands and extended families.

But connecting with one's own ethnic identity is not the only motivation that drives Latinos' dance attendance decisions. The focus group included at least one respondent who was strongly motivated by a world-citizen framework, in which the arts are important and enjoyable partly because they provide a fresh context for one's own experiences and bring a fresh, specific perspective to universal themes. However, the other Latino respondents did not seem to attend dance cross-ethnically with any regularity.

Latino respondents view music, emotion, and passion as critical elements in dance. These components were mentioned less frequently by the other segments, which tended to focus on the technical qualities of movement, agility, narrative, etc. Perhaps these elements are more important to Latino dance patrons because of the greater role they play in Latino dance and cultural life generally—even though respondents noted that they apply to many other ethnically-specific traditions, as well. When asked which postcards from The Dance Center were appealing, one respondent chose *only* ethnically-specific performances because she felt these postcards revealed powerful emotions.

"I like the women in this Urban Bush Women postcard. The colors pop out at me and it's simple but still very expressive. I also like this Afro-Contemporary Festival. It's really appealing to me to see faces and eyes and the actual expressions of the dancers. It seems like they're really engaged in what they're doing, versus a plain face in traditional dance pictures. It's being able to see their expression as they're moving." (Latino, Female)

Latino respondents expressed somewhat greater comfort about being an audience member in any kind of performance, compared to our other segments. Those who had attended dance or other performances from other minority cultures reported positive experiences. And when considering the idea of doing so, Latino respondents did not raise concerns about feeling "left out" or self-conscious about being different. After a bit of discussion about cross-ethnic attendance, one respondent summarized:

"I think every single person here is really curious and open-minded and

international. Getting a glimpse of another culture – how can you go wrong?”
(Latino, male)

So there appear to be few barriers to cross-ethnic attendance by Latinos, which may make them a high-potential audience for The Dance Center’s cross-ethnic initiative.

Asian respondents

Similar to the Latino group, our Asian respondents came from a variety of cultural backgrounds and levels of acculturation. This segment of respondents (who were interviewed by phone rather than invited to a focus group) was comprised of people with roots in two very different parts of Asia: countries in Eastern Asia (Japan, Korea, and Taiwan) and India. A few were recent immigrants, some had been in America for many years, and some had been born in this country. Interestingly, several gave a two-level answer when asked to define their own ethnicity or culture: first a geographic answer identifying a relatively specific region, then a broader ethnic answer. (This was not true of the other respondent groups.) Throughout the interviews, these Asian dance-goers displayed an interest in arts experiences that speak not only to their specific regional heritage, but also to their broader cultural or ethnic identity.

“I’m Korean, but I’m generally more interested in general Asian culture than just specifically Korean.” (Asian, female)

“My family is northern Indian and Natya dance academy and Indian classical dance is southern Indian, so it’s not a direct linkage. But based on the nationality I was drawn to it.” (Asian, female)

Performances with an Asian focus are on their radar, although individuals differed in how actively they seek them out. All our Asian respondents had attended an intra-ethnic dance performance. They differed however, on how much attention and energy they devote to these ethnically-rooted performances: some regularly search for them, while others take notice only if they happen to come across something ethnically relevant or familiar.

“Yes, I generally do look for an Asian focus.” (Asian, female)

“I’m not necessarily always looking for performances with a cultural focus, but they always catch my eye. I’m not looking for it, but if I see contemporary Taiwanese dance, then my eyes will go there.” (Asian, male)

While these respondents do feel connected to a pan-Asian community, at least to some degree, a few confessed that they don't feel wholly connected to their specific ethnic heritage. One respondent is half-Japanese and half-Caucasian, and noted that she does not feel particularly connected to her Japanese heritage. An Indian respondent who is married to a Mexican tried to educate her mixed-ethnicity daughter about traditional Indian dance, but her daughter was not engaged by the performance they attended. *"It's kind of sad,"* she says, *"It didn't resonate with her as it did with me, because of her mixed background. We tried to get her into that particular type of dance class and she's not interested"* (Asian, female). The respondent would like to use intra-ethnic dance performances and classes to pass along her heritage, but that heritage doesn't evoke the same nostalgia or sense of belonging in the daughter. Such cultural-generational gaps are one reason why the cross-ethnic marketing initiative will need to focus strategically on particular generations and nationalities rather than grouping all Asians together.

Caucasian respondents

This exploratory research suggests that Caucasian dance patrons are not driven by an identity motivation, at least not in ethnic or cultural terms. Connecting with one's own ethnic background is a non-issue for these respondents. This makes sense, since the majority ethnic group in the U.S. would not be as focused as minority groups on issues of culture, and identity. It also meant that the concept of "cross-ethnic" attendance that we wanted to discuss in this research made little sense for the Caucasian respondents. A few said they don't even notice cultural identifiers of ethnically-based performances. Looking at the dance marketing materials showing ethnically-specific companies, some of these respondents missed the cultural angle almost entirely; they felt that those dances could have been performed by anyone from anywhere.

"With Cloud Gate, other than dancers being mostly Chinese, there was nothing really particularly cultural about it. The piece had American music and the style, everything, it could have been straight off Broadway. It could have been done in London or New York by a local company. I'm not sure that an identifiable culture actually makes any difference. It is part of it but not the only part of it." (Caucasian, male)

Instead, Caucasian respondents were motivated overwhelmingly by aesthetic preferences. For this segment, artistic quality or interest is

the dominant decision factor when it comes to dance. Caucasians also showed the strongest preference of the four segments for modern and contemporary dance over other styles or traditions.

“If you have a show that’s too much the same thing or just isn’t good quality, it doesn’t matter if it’s ethnic or not. If you’ve got someone who’s doing interesting choreography and from piece to piece they’ve put together a show that has some variety, any show can be really good if it’s executed well.”
(Caucasian, female)

Perhaps in keeping with that preference for contemporary dance, more Caucasians than other respondents expressed hesitation over ethnic dance that is folkloric. These patrons generically associate culturally-specific dance with traditional forms, which they consider in another, less appealing category than professional contemporary dance. However, there are many culturally-specific dance companies that they respect, attend, and enjoy—albeit on aesthetic grounds.

Caucasian respondents attend dance in general more frequently than other groups, including plenty of culturally-specific dance representing a wide range of ethnicities. It seems likely that the ethnic attendance is a byproduct of the amount and diversity of dance they see rather than an intentional process. Caucasian respondents regard the ethnic focus of a dance company as a peripheral factor which affords them additional forms of variety in their dance diet. Some even say they don’t notice or register the ethnic category of the dance they choose to attend; they’re focusing on the quality of the dance itself.

“The cultural focus really doesn’t come into play for me, not at all. I’m more interested in seeing a variety of performances. It doesn’t matter to me the background at all, it’s more enjoyment of the art form itself. For example, when I saw the dancers from Taiwan, I didn’t see it as any sort of cultural anchor. The performance was just magnificent and truly talented individuals. It wasn’t really visualizing or seeing any cultural aspects to it. I wouldn’t seek that out, it’s strictly the art form itself.” (Caucasian, male)

While the world-citizen motivation runs a distant second to aesthetic choices for Caucasians, it did emerge as strongly as in the other groups. When we probed about the benefits of cross-ethnic attendance, responses from the Caucasian group clustered around the value of seeing something different or from a new perspective. So for this segment, attendance motivations relate back to the desire for

exploration and opportunities to see new connections, rather than resonance with one's cultural identity or feeling a shared community with the people and story on the stage.

For all these reasons, the Caucasian focus group can be considered an important "control group," useful as a point of comparison with the other ethnic segments. The initiative's marketing communications, as well as future research and evaluation efforts, can probably concentrate on the ethnic audiences who are not yet attending a wide range of programs at The Dance Center.



Next steps

Already planned...

This qualitative study offers some broad, preliminary answers to our research questions. Those answers will need to be discussed and debated by The Dance Center leadership, the Intercultural Advisory Group, and the consulting team en route to the next step in the initiative, the development of a **logic model** for the Cross-Ethnic Research & Marketing Initiative. The logic model, in turn, will inform the development of a **three-year marketing plan**, a process which will be led by Dance Center and Slover Linett Strategies staff and individual marketing consultants, including a few members of the Intercultural Advisory Group.

...and under discussion

The answers uncovered in this research also raise further questions, as is often the case with strategic or exploratory research. Several of these fall into the *quantitative* area, requiring collecting survey data from a representative sample of The Dance Center's attenders, especially ethnic minorities. How much intra-ethnic and cross-ethnic attendance is already going on at The Dance Center? Who's doing what—not just at the broad level of “Latino” or “Asian” but with a finer mesh that looks at country of origin, level of acculturation and language preference, psychographics, and other arts attendance? How does satisfaction (and its various benefit components) differ by ethnic group and by intra- vs. cross-ethnic contexts? What's the relationship between motivation coming in and satisfaction going out, or between satisfaction and willingness to attend cross-ethnically the next time? Answering these questions will **establish a quantitative baseline**, so that the implementation of the marketing plan can be evaluated meaningfully. (Without that baseline data, it will be hard to tell whether the initiative is increasing cross-ethnic attendance later, and by whom.)

Other open questions might require additional *qualitative* study, such

as interviews with patrons immediately before and after performances by ethnically-specific dance companies, or ideation sessions to generate workable strategies and concepts for the marketing planning phase, from messaging strategies, programming, events, ticketing policies, etc. The qualitative research will **deepen and confirm our initial understanding** of where the potential lies, what the pitfalls are, whether different ethnic segments will require separate “campaigns” within the marketing initiative, and how to use patrons’ existing values and priorities to draw attention to, and personal support for, cross-ethnic attendance.

Dissemination to the field

One of the key goals of this initiative is to break new ground on behalf of the wider performing arts field and share the resulting knowledge widely. To that end, representatives of The Dance Center, the Chicago Community Trust, and Slover Linett Strategies will be presenting the project and our findings to date at the National Arts Marketing Project Conference in Houston in November, 2008. As the initiative progresses and there is more to report, additional conference sessions may be scheduled.



Appendix

References

- Morton, Maddy, Debbie Bayne, Séamus Smyth and Mel Jennings. *'Not for the Likes of You' Phase Two Final Report: Document A: How To Reach A Broader Audience*. Edinburgh. Morton Smyth Limited. 2004.
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Methodology details

In this qualitative research, we spoke to a total of 27 respondents in three focus groups and seven telephone interviews.

Respondent requirements (for all segments)

- Must have attended at least one Dance Center performance in the past two years
- Mix of people who have and have not attended a cross-ethnic dance performance within the last two years
 - *Note:* It was difficult to achieve a 50/50 mix of cross-ethnic and non-cross-ethnic attenders in each group
- Maximum of 1-2 per group who have attended only one Dance Center performance and no other arts/cultural activities in the past 3 months
- Mix of gender, age, and employment

Ethnic segments

- Caucasians: 8 participants attended focus groups on March 31, 2008
- Latinos/Hispanics: 5 focus group participants on April 21, 2008
- African Americans: 7 focus group participants on April 21, 2008
- Asians: 7 telephone interviews between April 10 and April 18, 2008

Recruitment process

The Dance Center provided an initial patron list and Slover Linett sent an email informing patrons of the study and notifying them that they may be contacted to participate. A \$75 incentive was offered.

Recruiting began by telephone screening interested respondents who replied to the email blast, then expanded to contacting patrons off the patron lists. In total, we called at least 800 patrons.

Although The Dance Center's own survey shows that about 35% of its audience is non-Caucasian, recruiting for the non-Caucasian groups proved to be more difficult than anticipated. Based on the people we screened, 20-30% were non-Caucasian, making the ethnic groups for our discussions difficult to reach. Recruiting was further hampered by the following factors:

- The Dance Center has a wide patron base of students, but we limited the number of students allowed in the groups. This is due to the different price structure for students as well as the difference in decision-making when attending dance performances. We ended up terminating many non-Caucasian students from the groups.
- The Latino group proved difficult with more patrons than other ethnic segments refusing to take the screener. Another interesting roadblock we encountered is that even with many common indicators pointing to a Latino heritage – such as name, accent, even language with which they answer the phone – some patrons consider themselves Caucasian.
- We aimed to have an even split in each group of cross-ethnic attenders and non-cross-ethnic attenders, but that was difficult to achieve. Caucasians were overwhelmingly cross-ethnic attenders, but the non-Caucasians were the opposite. In particular, it was difficult to find African American cross-ethnic attenders.

Only the Caucasian group was filled and took place as originally scheduled on March 31st. The other three groups were delayed (Latino and African American groups) to allow more time for recruiting. We were further aided by a patron list from Luna Negra Dance Theater to fill the Latino group. For Asians, the methodology was changed to telephone interviews to allow more flexibility for participation and two free tickets to a Dance Center performance was offered as an incentive instead of the \$75 focus group stipend.

Focus groups were held at a focus group facility at the Kellstadt Marketing Center, DePaul University in downtown Chicago. Each focus group lasted 2 hours. Telephone interviews were scheduled according to the availability of the interviewee and lasted from 25 to 35 minutes.

Marketing tactic recommendations

In this appendix, we summarize several tactical marketing recommendations that emerge from the research discussions. These include a few suggestions that respondents themselves offered in passing while discussing the more general issues at hand, as well as recommendations based on our analysis of the transcripts. We recognize, however, that these are general audience development tactics that could apply to most dance marketing situations and do not solve the riddle of encouraging cross-ethnic attendance.

Show, don't tell

Potential ticket-buyers want to “see” what kind of movement the dance will feature. It's obvious that dance is a kinetic and visual art form and that compelling visuals matter in dance marketing. But this research emphasizes the importance of conveying the style of movement above all. Along with some context about the works to be performed and an implicit guarantee of quality and professionalism, a vivid sense of the movement will help a hesitant potential patron decide to purchase a ticket. Patrons tend to skip opportunities when they don't feel they have a sharp enough sense of what it will be like or whether they will enjoy it. That information needs to be conveyed visually, since only the most seasoned dance connoisseurs can translate stylistic terms into meaningful, dynamic mental images.

The most appealing postcards we tested in this research captured the essence of the dance in visual terms. Respondents stressed repeatedly that they need to see (or feel) the movement of the dance in order to become interested. For these dance patrons, pictures are worth a thousand words:

“The postcards that appealed to me all have photos taken on the stage of the performance. They give you a good feeling of movement and what you can expect to see on stage.” (Caucasian, male)

“I go for the visuals. When I open up a brochure, my main thought is – what is the photo? To me, that speaks an awful lot about the vibe of the show, whether or not I’ll like it, a sense of the costumes, the music, and so on. It shouldn’t be overly wordy.” (Caucasian, female)

Provide human, non-formalist context

Along with descriptive visuals, marketing communications should feature descriptive or interpretive text that furnishes context and “seals the deal” for potential patrons. The pictures may capture a reader’s attention first, but the text must also be convincing. Most of our respondents let us know that they’re not moved by technical dance terminology or dance-world terminology; they want interpretive insights and context that emphasizes theme and narrative. For ethnically-specific performances in particular, this kind of context can lower the barriers of foreignness and familiarize the reader with the dance and its background.

“In the pamphlets you need to have accurate information. A little bit of the background of what the dance is about, what the performance is about. Some kind of historical perspective, where it comes from, how the dance came about, or what the dance is about.” (Asian, female)

Program notes and pre- or post-performance discussions can add deeper context and bring people closer to the experience. These forums not only provide cognitive information, they can also reduce the barriers associated with feeling like an outsider and increase the benefits of social, ethnic, and emotional exploration through dance.

“It’s kind of like the placard you see at the museums. The painting doesn’t make sense unless you read about it. At larger venues when they do ethnically-based stuff, they tend to do a little intro, vocally, that clears thing up a little bit.” (Asian, female)

“Historical context is really important, particularly if it’s a dance from a particular culture.” (Caucasian, female)

The opportunity to hear the choreographer or performers speak is a big draw for all dance lovers, including those motivated by ethnic identity and world-citizen curiosity. These pre- or post-performance discussions with the artists may be a valuable pathway to attract general dance lovers to ethnically-based dance performances.

“One of the things I love about Columbia College and others is when you can actually talk to the choreographers and dancers. We tend to schedule our attendance on those nights because it gives us a much better framework to view the performance and what it’s all about. To me, it’s very important and a value added.” (Caucasian, female)

Video clips

Videos are even more enticing and convincing than photographs as “previews” for performances. Few of these patrons knew that The Dance Center already offers video clips on its website. Making an effort to increase awareness, as well as the prominence and ease-of-use of the clips on the site, could draw in patrons who may be hesitant about whether they would enjoy and relate to the performance. One respondent suggested showing a clip of an upcoming performance at each Dance Center show, much like the coming attractions trailers at a movie theater.

“When it comes down to it, it’s the movement. If the movement fascinates me, I want to go see it. But that may be very difficult to convey through photos. That’s just one of the problems that dance promotion has. It’s a still photo, no matter how well it’s shot. Film can show a lot of motifs in one plane. You’ve got to show motion.” (Asian, male)

“If I was going to convince someone to attend, I’d just show them the video. You don’t have to say much, the proof is in the pudding. You can tell them a lot about it but they won’t really understand until they see.” (Asian, female)

Program multi-ethnic companies

This research did not reveal a clear path of progression from interest in dance to cross-ethnic attendance. However, there may be a hint here of how The Dance Center can get its patrons enjoying dance performances featuring different ethnicities. One respondent suggested strategically **programming more multi-ethnic companies,**

which will draw audiences of various backgrounds at the same time.

“Bring in a dance company that is racially mixed, or have a festival of that sort. Because if the dance theater wants to bring in diversity, then the programming has got to be diverse” (African American, male). Multi-cultural dance performances are one way to introduce cross-ethnic dance to audiences who would otherwise only attend performances from their own ethnic heritage or mainstream (white) performances.

