

As an artist-scholar, I mostly conduct humanities-based research through ethnographic and practice-as-research methodologies, and my research outcomes are often performance based. I am committed equally to creative and scholarly inquiry, and the overarching focuses of my research endeavors are social justice, interdisciplinary exploration, and inclusive pedagogy. In my research practice I strive to balance embodied experience, academic discourse, and interdisciplinary collaboration. My process often invites smaller creative outcomes throughout the process; natural manifestations of my scholarly and choreographic research. These variations are documented in small works for the stage, screen dance films, and conference presentations.

My current research agenda is a multidisciplinary exploration in dance, theater, and criminology. While I view this research as ongoing, the most recent iteration of my work was presented as an evening-length choreography on February 25th and 26th, 2022 at the Coleman Dance Theater in Greensboro, North Carolina. This performance, titled *Releases*, highlighted the injustice present in the United States carceral system, and implored audience members to consider “A World Without Prisons” (Solinger 20). This recent manifestation of my research aimed to explore how abolishing the prison system might be the most sustainable solution available to us as a nation.

For the past three years I sought to understand the structural violence prevalent in the Prison-Industrial Complex in the United States. During this pursuit, I was particularly drawn to the concept of collateral consequences (Mahmood 31). Collateral consequences are restrictions placed on individuals following their release from incarceration, which limit their ability to fully participate in society. These consequences are felt most acutely by individuals who are members of minority groups or experience intersectionality. Often these restrictions affect employment, licensing, education, housing, voting, and federal aid/opportunities. Inspired by other artists who use dance to address issues of incarceration (Ross 270) as well as amplify marginalized voices (Akinleye Untitled), *Released* centered the voices of justice-involved women and encouraged fresh dialogue in our community surrounding issues of mass incarceration.

I began this project in Fall 2019, and spent the summer of 2021 conducting ethnographic research at Benevolence Farm, a social services organization in Graham, NC. Benevolence Farm provides housing and employment to previously incarcerated women, and assists them with re-entry immediately following incarceration. The women at Benevolence Farm practice sustainable farming techniques to produce goods and products to sell in the local community. They also devote time to fight for structural change in the North Carolina prison systems. They are incredible, resilient individuals and I am unbelievably grateful to have spent time with them on the farm. During this time, I listened to their stories, assisted with their daily work assignments, and learned as much about their experiences as I could. *Released* shared these stories on stage for a larger audience, and allowed my creative team and performers to embody the women’s experiences in a meaningful way.

A large-scale goal of my research is to abolish the Prison-Industrial Complex and replace the penal system in the United States. There is a massive sustainability problem in the U.S. prison system, despite efforts by grassroots campaigns (ex. Sustainability in Prisons Project) to promote green changes. Yvonne Jewkes and Dominique Moran argue that building new ‘green’ prisons and

remodeling existing prison buildings to be less environmentally harmful is not the answer, despite positive intentions. These ‘green criminologists’ argue that efforts to reduce recidivism and community education are far more effective strategies to creating substantial change within our penal system, both of which strategies I address in my choreographic research project (Jewkes and Moran 451). Ultimately, increased education surrounding issues of incarceration, paired with a plan to abolish and replace the current penal system in the United States, will create lasting sustainable change in our country.

As a Visiting Professor of Dance at Converse University, I am developing strategies to involve my students in this research trajectory in more than just performance roles. Multiple dance educators have paved a way to bring dance inside prison walls as a means of healing, and I am working to establish a curriculum that would allow my students to enter the prison system and collaborate creatively with incarcerated individuals. The details of this proposition are still shifting, but some of my research goals include:

- Connecting young artists with incarcerated individuals to increase empathy
- Training incarcerated individuals in theatre and dance techniques to offer a new method of expression for their experiences
- Performing the lived experiences of incarcerated individuals to increase awareness and understanding for the outside world
- Increasing student understanding of the Prison-Industrial Complex and its shortcomings

As my current position is a visiting contract, I do not have the time and resources necessary to complete the curriculum review process at my current institution. I hope to use this research to propose the course at my next university.

While this creative and pedagogical research is my long-term agenda, I have many other interests that would be well-situated for choreographic and theatrical research. Additionally, I recently taught a course at the University of North Carolina Greensboro called “Art-Making for Social Change.” The final project for students in this course was an artistic outcome that addressed a social issue and worked to progress each student’s chosen agenda. These projects were encouraged to be interdisciplinary and included music composition, dance and theater works, podcast creation, murals and other visual art works. Mentoring these student research projects was such a joy, and it inspired me in my own research journey. Using art to support social change is the driving force behind my research, and the opportunity to teach this course and mentor student research projects was so special.

I am learning more every day about how my research, pedagogy, and creative practices are intertwined. The arts are beautifully intricate, and defining research methodologies within creative practice can be equally as complicated. Nonetheless, it is a journey I am grateful to be traveling.

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