Somatic Authority and the Myth of the Ideal Body in Dance Education

By: Jill Green

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Introduction

Recently, the field of somatics has provided dance scholarship with a growing body of literature. Research has been conducted in the areas of dance science and education. Dance medicine and somatic education scholars have been able to help dance teachers find ways of using the body effectively in technique classes. For example, Glenna Batson (1990, 1993) and Sylvie Fortin (1993, 1995) have investigated the role of somatics in the improvement of technical dance skills. Further, Fortin (1995) has investigated learning and teaching theory as applied to somatics and dance pedagogy.

As a somaticist and educator, I acknowledge and appreciate the impressive work conducted by these researchers and educators. However, my current work moves somatics into another direction. I am interested in looking at somatic theory and practice through a sociocultural lens. I am particularly interested in investigating how the body is shaped by society and the dance world, in which performers constantly strive for perfection.

Therefore, the following research article is more of a social analysis than a report of findings regarding efficient somatic practices in dance technique classes. My work responds less to the value of particular body-mind techniques and more to the use of somatic practice as a tool to investigate the bodily perceptions and cultural constructions of "body," or the ways in which the dance world in this country influences how these dance education students perceive their bodies. Both evaluation of specific body-mind practices and the investigation of cultural and social influences on the soma are significant; however, each views the body from a separate perspective.

A Contextual Reflection

Imagine, if you will, a traditional Western dance technique class in a typical university setting. Of course, this is an impossible task since there are so many diverse dance techniques, levels and pedagogical styles that may be included under the umbrella "higher education dance." Dance education is not a monolith at the university level. However, there are commonalities that tend to characterize dance education in the United States.

For example, when I envision a typical dance class, I see a large studio space filled with mirrors. The dance teacher usually stands at the front of the studio while the students are often lined up in neat rows facing the mirror and the teacher. Students in dance classes spend much time gazing in the mirror in order to perfect the outward appearance of the body and strengthen dance technique. They commonly wear leotards and tights or variations of tightly clad clothing that allow the teacher to view the body from an outside perspective. Very often the dance teacher focuses on specific corrections, placement of the body, proper technique, and efficient performance of particular dance movements(1). I do not mean to imply that all dance educators control or manipulate students in a destructive way, or that we need to completely overhaul dance classes. I certainly continue to implement and incorporate some traditional dance practices and strategies such as rote/repetitive practice of dance sequences and demonstrations in front of a group class, while students follow my movements. However, it may be significant to look at how such classes may generally reflect some implied assumptions and messages about dance education and dancers' bodies. For one thing, the constant focus on an externalized view

of the body, as reflected in the mirror, objectifies the dancer's body and requires students to strive to achieve a specific "look" while being "corrected" so that the students perform "proper" dance technique.

Furthermore, this traditional dance education setting reflects a particular power relationship between student and teacher. As the teacher presents specific movements that require rote learning, while students anticipate teacher praise and attention through correction and physical manipulation, the teacher is often viewed as an all-knowing expert and authority. The teacher maintains control of the class through specific tacit rules that afford him/her a degree of power over the students in the class. In a sense, dance students give their bodies to their teachers.

Of course, the aforementioned description reflects my own experiences in dance as well as my reaction and responses to students and research in this area. As a somatic educator, I have been concerned about body issues. I personally value proprioceptive awareness and the abilities of students to listen to the inner messages of the soma and reclaim ownership of their bodies. And as a researcher who has been interested in sociocultural issues related to the body and dance education, particularly from a critical/feminist/postmodem perspective, I have been interested in exploring postpositivist methodologies that allow me to investigate such issues within a more global context.

Further, it is relevant to point out that many dance teachers do include somatic work and body awareness techniques in their classes and many educators attempt to help dancers gain ownership of their bodies. Certainly, there is much inner work being done in "release technique" dance classes.

However, with these considerations in mind, the purpose of this article is to share my research regarding more typical traditional dance classes, and the general issue of somatic authority and the myth of the ideal body in the dance world. After introducing the study, discussing the theoretical framework that guided the investigation, and briefly discussing the methodology, I will present the initial findings. It may be significant to point out that this work is part of the larger study. As is common in many large and complex qualitative research projects, I will present part of a fuller investigation based on analysis around the theme of "the ideal body." Therefore, I will be unable to address some significant topics and themes such as somatic practice and the creative process (see Green 1996-d).

The Study: Somatics and the Gendered Body in Dance Education
The purpose of this project was to investigate how the bodies of participant student teachers in dance are socially inscribed in relationship to gender. In this study, somatic practice was used as a tool to investigate body perceptions and experiences of undergraduate dance education majors. The five participants took part in a somatics/creativity project within a university-level instructional setting at a state university in the south. This teaching and research project explored how these body perceptions have been influenced by society and the dance world. For example, the participants were asked questions about previous experiences in dance, and how they have learned to perceive their bodies in reference to a specific weight and body ideal (see Appendix for general themes of individual interviews). Class movement explorations, somatic exercises and discussion were used as tools to explore social influences on the body.

The class was designed so that, during the first part of each session, participants would be exposed to various somatic practices and during the second part of each session, participants would immerse themselves in the creative process and work towards a group production/ performance, which took the form of an interactive movement forum.

Entering the investigation, I sought to 1) interpret how these students perceived their bodies in relationship to society and the dance world, 2) determine if and how they found a relationship between somatic practice, their awareness of their socially inscribed bodies, and creative expression, and 3) understand how somatics may help students become aware of issues regarding gender and the social construction of bodies.

Theoretical Framework

The study reflects a theoretical framework that builds on the ideas of a number of diverse postmodern, feminist, and somatic thinkers. As is often the case in postpositivist research (2), the study reflects ideas that do not necessarily fit together neatly and cleanly. I, as a researcher, continue to wrestle with diverse ideas as I attempt to situate myself within sometimes complex and conflicting perspectives in a postmodern world of uncertainty and change. And as is often the case in postpositivist research, I recognize a level of subjectivity and thus attempt to be self-reflexive and look at how I am positioned in the research context.

The study draws on the writings of some somatic theorists such as Don Johnson (1992) and Elizabeth Behnke (1990-91) who have addressed issues of bodily authority and have demonstrated how our bodies are shaped by the cultures in which we live. According to these theorists, Western culture creates the myth of a body/mind split. This split does not simply separate our bodies from our minds and favor mind over body. According to these theorists, this split removes us from the experience of our bodies and disconnects us from our own inner proprioceptive signals as well as from our somas and living processes. Rather than simply splitting the body from the mind, there is an active obsession with the body as an objective, mechanical entity. As a result we are often numbed to the awareness of internal body messages and the power of our connected selves.

Furthermore, as Johnson (1992) suggests, dominant cultures often perpetuate this body/ mind split in an effort to maintain somatic weakness by disconnecting us from our sensory selves through the imposition of external models of "ideal bodies." In other words, attainment of an ideal body is a myth perpetuated by a dominant culture in order to more easily control people and maintain a status quo.

Much of this work is also framed around the discourse of Michel Foucault, a postmodern thinker, who looked at power and its relationship to knowledge (1979, 1980). Foucault addressed and critiqued the extremes of standardizing bodily behavior that have characterized institutions such as military schools, prisons and mental hospitals; he believed that schools are primarily designed to train docile citizens.

He pointed to the dangers of what he called "technologies of the self' as part of regimes of power or techniques that society requires of people to discipline themselves. As a result, society produces what Foucault has referred to as "docile bodies," which are bodies that are self regulated and habituated. The dance world is fertile ground for a Foucauldian analysis, particularly since the body is the direct training instrument in dance.

Moreover, this study intersects with much feminist theory, particularly those literatures that are part of a growing interest in the body and address such issues as inner authority, gender and objectification and representation (Bordo 1989, 1993; Dallery 1989; Dimen 1989; Gallop 1988; Irigary 1985; Jaggar and Bordo 1989; Wilshire 1989).

And lastly, resonating with a transformative and transgressive educational approach, I borrow from a growing body of literature that calls for an emancipatory pedagogy (Ellsworth 1992; hooks 1994; Lather 1991) and work that addresses critical issues in dance education (Alter 1986; Brightman 1997; Marques 1995; Shapiro 1996; Stinson 1993).

Methodology

Given the nature of the research problem, a qualitative, postpositivist, or naturalistic inquiry approach and design was used. These terms refer to different aspects of the study. For example, "qualitative" refers to the type of methods used during the data collection process. "Postpositivist" refers to the paradigmatic framework for the study (Green 1996-a; Green and Stinson 1999, Lather 1991). "Naturalistic" refers to the research approach. According to Egon Guba and Yvonna Lincoln (1989), in naturalistic inquiry, the researcher cannot know what constructions will be introduced during the investigation, and cannot predict beforehand what claims, concerns and issues will arise (254-55). While the initial research problem and general procedures for data collection and analysis provided parameters and a general guide, I was purposefully open to emerging patterns throughout the study.

I began the investigation by announcing the new experimental course, "The Gendered Body in Dance Education," to dance education students who were preparing for student teaching. This course was designed as both a pedagogical endeavor and an opportunity to collect data for the research project. I was hoping to enroll students who were interested in somatic work and the sociocultural issues tied to the body in dance. Five women joined the project through this snowball sampling process (Guba and Lincoln 1989). This small sample is characteristic of qualitative research studies. I was not attempting to generalize findings to all dance education students. I was attempting to understand this particular research and begin to generate theory regarding dance in higher education. Thus, I was not interested in a random sampling but a purposive sampling (see Guba and Lincoln 1989; and Lincoln and Guba 1985).

Although all the students were undergraduates, ranged in age from twenty to twenty-four years old, and knew each other prior to the project, their backgrounds were diverse. Participants included one African American (whom I will call Jasmine) and four Caucasian students. One participant came from Long Island, New York (Missy), two were from New Jersey (Kathy and Tess), and two were from North Carolina (Jasmine and Nancy). Two participants also identified themselves as lesbians (Kathy and Tess). The women came from diverse backgrounds; some studied in public school settings while others studied in conservatories and dance studios.

Data Collection

Data collection occurred throughout the duration of the two-semester study. Since I was not looking at the efficacy of particular somatic practices, I did not include a movement analysis or quantitative assessment of results in body perception changes. I was more interested in class discussions and interviews that reflected general changes in perception through somatic practice as an investigative tool. Classes met once a week for three hours and usually included discussion, somatic and creative work, and work on the final performance/production. Each session was audiotaped and videotaped. Audiotapes of group discussions were transcribed and used as group interview data. Since I taught each class, videotapes were revisited for research purposes (i.e., data for field notes). The data collection methods included individual interviews, group interviews, observation, and documents. Individual interviews were conducted with each participant in May, at the end of the project. They addressed perceptions about socially inscribed bodies entering the project and after being exposed to somatic practices at the conclusion of the project. They also addressed the role of dance educators in relationship to the student's perceptions of the body, and future plans for action. Unstructured (Denzin 1989) and theme-oriented questions (Kvale 1983) were used in order to keep an open sense of give-and-take between interviewer and interviewee (see Appendix for themes).

Group interviews were conducted informally. After each exercise, students discussed their experiences. These discussions provided a natural vehicle for data collection by offering information about each student's lived bodily experiences. These informal group interviews were ongoing throughout the course of the project. However, once during November and once during May, after reviewing collected data, I focused specific questions around my current findings and emerging themes. These interviews also served as "member checks," a common validity criterion used in naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Guba and Lincoln 1989).

Observation provided additional data. I used videotapes of classes in order to take field notes of each class. Documents also became a primary data source. Throughout the duration of the project, participants submitted various forms of artwork from class sessions and for the production/performance. Participants also collected ads and articles that were analyzed from a critical perspective and submitted journals that included experiences, feelings, reactions, changes, and observations during the project.

Data Analysis

Data analysis included both an informal "analysis-in-the-field" phase, and a more formal "cut-up-and-put-in-folders approach" whereby themes were generated and categories emerged from the data analysis process (Bogdan and Biklen 1982).

Validity

Another consideration regarding methodology was validity/trustworthiness in postpositivist research. Where validity in positivism focuses on generalizing findings, and measuring and verifying existing knowledge, validity in postpositivism focuses on understanding specific contexts, and investigating and generating the application of knowledge (Kvale 1989, 89). Some common appropriate criteria used during this study included triangulation of data and sources, a systematized reflexivity, checking for discrepant cases, member checks, questioning, theorizing, peer debriefing, and catalytic validity (which requires that an investigation take action to produce desired results) (3).

Ethical Issues

Recently, teacher education research has embraced new paradigms and strategies for conducting research. Rather than rely solely on quantifying experience and measuring learning, many educational researchers have begun to expand the inquiry process to a broader context which includes their own students. Some benefits of this approach include professionalization of teaching, an intimacy with the data as well as the participants of the project, and collaborative engagement in the research process (Adler 1993; Hammack 1997.) Earlier, I have pointed to some benefits of including separate teacher and researcher comments in my field notes (Green 1993). In this way, I was able to understand more acutely particular teacher-student dynamics. I noted that my teacher-self was privy to particular information. By maintaining these separate comments, my teacher-self was able to inform my researcher-self about this information.

Resonating with these ideas of accessibility and intimacy, more and more researchers and teachers are conducting studies with their students. As Susan Adler points out,

Research in education is no longer restricted as it once was, to empirical-analytical, or experimental approaches. Alternative paradigms have opened educational research to the notion that there are multiple ways of knowing and coming to know (Eisner 1990). Expanded images of and expectations for research have done away with the necessity of a separation between the practitioner, involved in the experience, and the researcher, once thought to stand outside the experience.... Thus, coming to know can involve the researcher in the exploration of his or her experience as a teacher and as a person.... Teaching and conducting research should be seen, not as conflicting, or even different, but in fact, as part of the same whole. (1993, 160)

At the same time that educational researchers are pointing to the benefits of a dual role relationship with students, many investigators are noting the ethical issues inherent in such practices. For example, without critical reflection and an "interplay between objective and subjective understandings" (Adler 1993, 161), such research can become one-sided and lead to what Lincoln and Guba refer to as "naive inquiry" (cited in Adler 1993, 161). Therefore, researchers conducting this type of work must be self-reflective and continually seek outliers and discrepant cases. Adler suggests keeping a log of one's teaching experience to facilitate reflective inquiry and explore assumptions to question one's own established beliefs. I have attempted to explore both suggestions and include a section on discrepant cases at the end of my analysis.

Another thorny issue that emerges from the dual role relationship is the question of coerciveness and obligation to students. In this case, the students were receiving grades in the class designed for the research project. The potential problems for teaching and research cannot be denied. For one thing, the question of unfettered informed consent must be raised (Hammack 1997). Do the students registering for the class feel pressured to take part in the research process? Anticipating this potential problem, I informed the participants about the class and study before the class began and let them know that they were not required to take part in the study. However, I was lucky because all the participants indicated that they were interested in the research as well as the class. Since the class was an elective, the students joined both class and study willingly. However, I did inform them that they may drop out of the study at any point.

Grading was a particularly thorny ethical issue. For this reason, I informed students that they would be graded on quality of written work and project rather than what they had to say. Of course, I had to take into consideration the idea that they may want to please me and tell me what I wanted to hear in order to receive a good grade. For this reason, again, I attempted to be reflective and encouraged them to disagree with me. I was

happy that many of the participants did provide data that conflicted with my initial assumptions (as evident in the section regarding discrepant cases). This provided some evidence that the participants were not interested in pleasing me in order to receive high grades in the class. Further, during the first and final individual interviews, I asked each participant whether or not she felt pressured to provide particular responses and support my claims and findings. They all said that they felt they were able to voice their opinions and viewpoints.

Still, I do believe that this type of research does present some problems. Along with the asset of providing many benefits, researchers who conduct this type of investigation are particularly at risk of becoming one-sided. Therefore, we must be continuously cognizant of the ways our viewpoints and participation influence the study.

Findings: Dying to be Perfect

Not surprisingly, initial findings suggest that these participants' previous experiences in dance did reflect an emphasis on "ideal body" myths in society and particularly in the dance world. When asked to describe and talk about their bodies, the women emphasized the influence of a dualistic perception of body as separate from mind and represented through an objectified perspective. Jasmine spoke about the size of her "butt" being too large, particularly for dance and she continually referred to her body as unacceptable according to a stereotypical model in dance. In her journal, she offered one of many body stories that the participants were asked to recall:

I was sitting in [the ballet studio] putting on my street clothes after a typical ballet class. So that meant I felt like a total zero with two left feet. But of course I was not alone in my thoughts. Three of my friends were thinking and saying the same thing. Then walked in the stereotypical ballerinas, long legs and arms, skinny, white, hair pulled back or short, and very defined facial features. Don't forget the flexibility for days [sic]. And all we did was say, "Here come the 'real' ballerinas and of course [we] are leaving. We would not fit in with them." As I thought more about this the more I felt that I and my friends were still caught in the traditional attitude and myths [that you must look like this to be a "real" dancer].... I still fall so easily back into that stereotyped ballet body ideal. I even fInd myself wishing my body was like that and asking God for a body like that.

Tess spoke about a perfect body as a necessity in dance. In her journal she provided a list of requirements for the acceptable dance body:

> [In the dance world] there is only one acceptable way to see ourselves. Example:
> *Legs* = Need to be long, slender, super flexible, usually the skinnier the better, and if you don't have thin legs it is because you are lazy and don't want to have to work at it. Legs are a definite accent point of the body.
> *Buttocks* = Small, proportional to the skinny legs, and round, it must be firm and not jiggle.
> *Stomach* = flat, no bulge, preferably no room to pinch an inch. Should be hard.
> *Hips* = No fat, as close to the bone as possible, no love handles.
> *Waist* = Should have a straight line. No large hour glass shapes. Shapely to attract men, never sag.
> *Arms* = Small, a small amount of muscle & no flab under the arm & no flab between shoulder and breast.
> *Face* = Thin, fine, clear bone structure.
> *Lips* = Full, heart shaped.
> *Eyes* = Large.
> *Hair* = Long.
> Should be light as a feather. Never eat sweets.

Even Nancy, who indicated that she was told she had a good dance body and liked her body, described it as an accumulation of parts designed for what Foucault refers to as an outsider's "gaze":

I like my body. I have a fairly small body because I have a large metabolism. The only part of my body I would change is the fat near my butt. I would like to tone that up a bit. I have nice hips, broad shoulders for my height of 5 foot 5 inches, and a small head. I have

wonderful arches in my feet and strong legs. My pelvis was twisted but is straightening back up. My back has a flat spot at the bottom—it will not bend. I like the size of [my] breasts because they are big enough to be there yet small enough to be out of the way.

The one description that veered away from a sole external perception of body came from Kathy, a student who had spent much of her college life in women's studies classes and alternative educational settings. Her description, as offered in her journal, juxtaposed contrasting physical characteristics, qualities, and sensations including a sense of inner strength:

> My body is:
> long
> lean
> stiff
> strong
> tired
> transforming from weakness to strength. Transforming from clumsiness to nimbleness. Growing out of the waif-like, delicate on the edge of off balance body that seemed desirable but did not work for me. My growing strength and power coincides with a grounded-ness and a better sense of balance.

Kathy appeared to be resisting imposed ideal definitions of body and locating inner feelings of strength. For example, she was the only student who defined her body as strong and identified a "grounded-ness" in her body. I noted in my field journal, after I read her first journal entry, that she already appeared to be moving toward a consciousness of sociocultural forces that influenced body perception and somatic authority. By being able to feel connected to inner somatic sensations, she experienced, as she claimed, more "grounded-ness" and "strength." This, however, moved along with an awareness of political prescriptions and standards. As a lesbian and student interested in women's studies classes as well as support groups, she came in with more of an inclination toward awareness of bodily issues on a social level. In other words, she may have been aware of social factors by being able to feel inwardly and sense herself. However, inner feeling alone did not propel her to be aware of sociocultural concerns. She focused both on inner and outer awareness, micro and macro issues, through a kind of symbiotic consciousness. During the course of the study, other participants also became acutely aware of this perspective and began to consider how they socially construct their bodies in reference to the dance world.

Continuously asking about factors that may have contributed to the initial overwhelmingly objectified body perceptions, I found that a number of influences emerged from the study. The wider and larger social Western culture (outside of the dance world) emerged as a major factor regarding ideal body images. I will not fully engage in a discussion of these influences as a separate consideration. The students did point out, however, that the added stress they were under when being bombarded with images of tall thin models in ads and in the media affected their bodily perceptions. They constantly reflected on pressures from the "outside" world as well as institutions that combined dance and society. For example, they reflected on destructive perceptions of body as a result of dancing at what they called "Dolly Dinkle" dance studios (usually rural private dance studios that often required them to wear frilly outfits for dance recitals). These studios were more often referred to as a social training ground for young girls and women than a facility to teach dance technique.

However, it may be interesting to note that the participants often claimed that, with all the destructive effects of social influences such as advertising and media, the dance world itself was a more serious culprit because students were directly faced with the pressure to live up to these expectations on a daily basis. In dance classes they were, in Foucauldian terms, constantly under "surveillance."

The influence of the dance world on the body perceptions of the student participants generally broke down into three main categories: 1) the dance education setting and preconceived teacher judgements of students based on

attitudes about a body ideal; (2) pressure to perform according to specific bodily behaviors and the training of docile bodies; and (3) teacher/student power relationships.

The Dance Setting and Preconceived Judgements about Bodies

The participants continuously referred to the traditional Western dance setting, with particular relevance to the existence of mirrors, as an ominous and powerful presence that contributed to physical self-evaluation, behavior regulation, body objectifiction, and competition. As Tess explained,

We as dancers spend so much time in front of the mirror. And I sit there and pick my body apart the whole time. And many of my classmates claim that they are overweight and need to lose but they have bodies that are fine and outside the dance world these women are considered small, skinny, tiny. But here they are considered chunky, flabby, not professional material. They tell me how bad their eating habits are for them, then they won't even finish their salad. When I enter class, I look around to see who is smaller than me and think about how big I am. If I concentrate in class half as hard as I do on the shape of my body I would be an incredible dancer. I want to know how to change this attitude because I don't want to pass it on to my students...Cause you can do a lot of damage when you take all that we've been programmed with and then you sit in front of a mirror over and over and over and [you are] encouraged to correct, correct, correct, pull up, pull in, suck, tuck. You're getting all that all day. So, [the mirror] it's kind of a reinforcer.... Everything that we do reflects how we are perceived.

Along with this significance placed on perception, the analysis pointed to a parallel emphasis on the attitudes of dance teachers and the assumptions communicated about how students should look. As Kathy communicated in her journal, "...it is sometimes more important that the dancer look a certain way than it is that the dancer have something to communicate." Interestingly, as Susan Bordo (1993) points out and even according to an article in Newsweeek (Brant 1995), the ideal body has changed within the last decade. The new aesthetic also includes a toned and muscular ideal. However, this new model does not replace the societal expectation of achieving a small, emaciated body, with an empowering model of strength, vitality, health, and power. To the contrary, bodies, particularly women's bodies, are still expected to be conditioned and manipulated into "shape." Women are expected to spend large amounts of time primping and training the body. Bodies must remain thin and smaller; but now women have the additional demand of appearing strong and muscular too. According to Thomas F. Cash, professor of psychology at Old Dominion University, "It's [the fitness ethos] just added another master to be served.... Women say they want to look healthier, not be healthier." (cited in Brant 1995, 88). With an exaggeration of this attitude in the dance world, the participants often felt added pressure to meet this cumulative ideal.

The participants expressed many implicit and explicit messages that students receive regarding self surveillance and pressure to achieve an ideal dancer body. There may be variations in styles requiring specific aesthetic concerns, but the data supported the argument that the results are similar, that regardless of specifics, the ideal is unattainable and destructive. For example, when Missy addressed the fact that she was too short to be encouraged to succeed in ballet at a prior university with a ballet program, she indicated that one teacher kept telling her to be tall, which sometimes resulted in a strain and excessive tension through her body. After she made this comment, Tess proclaimed, "you're not going to be a ballerina because you're not five-nine and a hundred pounds." And according to Missy, messages about modern dance bodies were no less confusing:

I was always told, you have the ideal modern body. That's when I got into modern, and I'm at JU [her previous school], and I'm like, I don't have an ideal modern body. Then I started seeing more modern companies and more diverse [bodies in dance] companies. There is no ideal modern body.

She also spoke about a guest artist (Jeff) who she felt was obsessive with appearance:

He was always comparing, saying, "...you and me have the same body type. We're not tall and we don't have long limbs like [Kasey]....You're not a [Kasey]. You have reached your plateau as a short dancer. You cannot go any further as a short dancer. You have made the fullest of that." Now to me that is something good. If I made the fullest and I have taken that to the furthest point that I can take what I have been given, I think that is good. But he said it's not that I had to learn how to dance tall. I had to learn how to be a tall person. And through my whole meeting [midterm conference] I felt like he was taking out his shortcoming on me.

Of course, not all instructors compare body types or prefer a specific aesthetic model. However there were many comments from all the participants that illustrate the prevalence of attention to an objective dance body and how students, particularly female students, continue to be trained to focus on an unattainable ideal.

Pressure to Perform Disciplined Behaviors: Training Docile Bodies

Along with an emphasis on an unattainable ideal, the participants often discussed teacher expectations regarding student behavior and performance in class. Again, responses resonated with Johnson's reference to a body ideal that disconnects us from a sense of an inner authority and Foucault's notion of discipline of the body through surveillance. With the teacher's eye constantly on students, the teacher does not have to impose an outside force to motivate students to perform according to specific standards; the students learn to discipline themselves through self-regulation and unconscious habit. For example, during the time of the research study, many of the student participants were taking classes with Jeff, the aforementioned guest artist. According to the students, Jeff often treated their bodies as entities to be looked at and judged from his expert "gaze" and as objects for him to manipulate and control. Nancy remembered him saying to her,

Your body doesn't do this right. It should look like this, you know ...when he did it [forced her leg up the side], he had my leg and he was saying, "put your hip down, put your hip down." And I felt like I was going like that [demonstrating a twisted, contorted, pained position and expression on her face].... And he goes, "Well, it could be higher and look better."

Missy emphasized his focus on pushing the body beyond where students feel comfortable when she explained, "He has this philosophy that like if you keep stretching it beyond your limits [referring to forcing the height of the leg], it's going to go further."

There were also stories about other teachers who physically forced turnout from the feet or manipulated student bodies in other destructive ways. Students were literally required to openly allow teachers to touch, prod and manipulate them.

However, although these examples demonstrate direct teacher force, the participants provided many examples of teacher directions which required self-training and regulation in order to achieve an external standard. Comments included instructions and corrections such as, "don't let your butt stick out," "lock your knees," "make sure your back is flat," "squeeze your butt." Teachers were also accused of stopping class to point out student weaknesses in these areas. According to the participants, pressure to meet these standards led to dysfunctional habits and strategies such as tucking under, hyperextended knees, forced turnout and a number of other physical ailments, injury, lack of feelings of connectedness and well-being, physical and emotional distress, and pain.

Furthermore, participants suggested that the overriding message was not to trust their sensory impulses or take care of their bodies; the teachers were experts who should be obeyed without question or reflection. For example, Nancy suggested that Jeff purposely required movements that were dangerous to perform. She once recalled that he demonstrated a particularly unsafe movement sequence and then told the students to watch out because he had people bust their face on the floor while performing this sequence in the past. Researchers and observers outside the dance world may be horrified to hear of such a lack of regard and respect for student bodies. But those of us in the dance world may recognize this degree of authority wielded by dance teachers across this country. As Tess professed, "We treat dance instructors as gods because that is the way we are brought up. We don't question what they say. We don't question what they do."

Teacher and Student Power Relationships

With the training of docile dance bodies so prevalent in the experiences of these participants, authority and power relationships became overriding subthemes in the study. The participants often discussed feelings of oppression and dominance by powerful instructors. Some students indicated they felt intimidated by various teachers and some described specific teachers as authoritarian. During class discussions Kathy referred to "the whole authoritarian structure" of dance classes. And Tess referred to a silent code when she said, "If you break

that code of what you're supposed to do, you are just upsetting the whole hierarchy." In her journal, Jasmine literally and metaphorically recalled, "I remember beginning a jazz class...and I got scolded for being out of line."

Many times, participants discussed particular authoritarian practices and standardized behaviors that were required within the broader educational dance setting. Often, control was established through institutionalized codes of dress and behavior, particularly in classes at dance conservatories, where students in different levels were required to wear different colored leotards. At some schools, eating was monitored by teachers. And often students were required to participate in "weigh-ins."

Competition, cliques, and rivalry for teacher attention were other tensions discussed. These conditions often further exacerbated inequities in power while disconnecting students from a sense of somatic awareness and authority. They also led to feelings of intimidation, student frustration, isolation, and lack of confidence.

Moreover, students often perceived dance programs as divisive and dance teachers as unsupportive and threatening. Furthermore, some students communicated difficulty with the assessment process and felt that they received lower grades due to how their bodies looked or whether they behaved or performed according to standardized teacher expectations regarding the appearance of the body. During mid-term evaluations, there was particular concern regarding meetings with Jeff. Jasmine indicated that he told her she could go no further because she does not have a good body, while Nancy recalled that she was told she has an excellent dance body, and therefore she should perform better.

The participants often talked about this abuse of power as a violation and assault that resulted in a disconnection from their bodies. Somatic awareness sessions and practice tended to provide students with a place where they could reconnect to inner senses and somatic impulses while releasing some of the habitual physical strain required from keeping constant vigilance and surveillance over their bodies.

However, it may be significant to point out that, although somatic practice was used as a vehicle for body awareness and release of habitual tension patterns, I caution educators not to use somatic practice as separate from social analysis and critical thought. It may be just as dangerous to view somatics as a panacea for dealing with the effects of power and the training of docile bodies. In past research, I have pointed out the danger of solely employing somatic practice outside the recognition of a sociocultural-political context and within an individualistic and micro context alone (1993). Without a broader social lens used to examine how bodies are habituated and regulated through technologies of normalization, we are not likely to change pressure to conform to a dominant ideal body model or break down strategies for training docile bodies.

One final consideration regarding power relationships and authority was gender. Entering the study with a focus on gender, I was interested in examining body ideals in dance with consideration to responses from women. I do not mean to suggest that men are not influenced or disenfranchised by the pressure to achieve an ideal body in dance. As a somatic educator, I have observed many men express the destructive effects of a normalizing body ideal. I do not wish to ignore or negate the power of such responses. My purpose, however, was to look at the significance for women since women are, on the whole, more often devastated by a constant focus on an objectified model (see Bordo 1993). Furthermore, with so many girls and women in dance, this theme holds particular relevance for a gender so affected by direct pedagogical practice.

Moreover, many of the aforementioned teacher comments were from female instructors. Many feminist theorists attribute this behvior by women to a collusion with the dominant way of thinking. Women are not free from destructive behaviors and action. We tend to follow the teaching styles of our own former teachers. In dance, as well as in other areas, we may have learned to habitually repeat the power relationships of those who came before us. Power relationships in dance class do not necessarily involve solely what men do to female stndents. Rather, the dance world, itself, may have perpetuated a patriarchal teaching model.

Additionally, as I explained in a previous paper (1996-c), [learned that gender could not be considered as separate from race. The effects and context of ideal bodies in dance cannot be generalized for women or limited to a dominant white, middle-class perspective. This study presented data that demonstrated that not all the body ideal issues were the same for all women, regardless of race (4).

However, with these considerations in mind, I found that these female student participants often expressed how strongly gender played a role in their feelings of powerlessness in dance. Some students claimed that women are most vulnerable and negatively affected by the pressures to meet ideal body standards. As Kathy explained, "Women are the most prevalent, you know, in the classes. And if somebody's giving you the message that your body is supposed to look like this and I can tell you how your body is and is not supposed to be, it disempowers us."

One explanation for this sense of emphasis on the outward appearance of female bodies may be attributed to a dance culture that embraces the patriarchal values of the larger society. Bordo claims that there are differences between how men's and women's bodies have been historically disciplined (1993, 17). Often connected to emotion and uncontrolled evil, women's bodies have been associated with "dangerous female desire" (1993, 14). Thus, according to Bordo, in a patriarchal society women's bodies and "appetites require containment and control, whereas male indulgence is legitimated and encouraged" (1993, 14).

The pedagogical need for management of women's bodies was particularly relevant for these students as dancers. Throughout the study, the participants often discussed issues of bodily authority in relation to gender; they provided a number of responses that point to the common training of ideal bodies, directed at control of women. And they often pointed to differences between male and female teachers in this respect. For example, Tess associated dance training with abuse of women. Specifically, she spoke about Jeff's actions in class:

[I think it is] definitely an assault.... The way men are taught to objectify women and Jeff's desire to find the perfect female body. Looking at his failure to look at another person's point of view and think about how that would affect her. And I don't think men are encouraged to do that.... There's a breakdown there in being sensitive to the needs [of women] and their interpretations of the society.

While reviewing these reflections and stories, I was surprised by how much material was generated that addressed health, eating disorders and injury. As Missy explained, "When people are not taught how to deal with their bodies, it is easier to shut it down." As a result of direct or indirect pressure to regulate the body through diet and other modification practices, the students often experienced health problems.

In attempting to understand the relationship between body image disturbance and the preponderance of eating disorders in women, Bordo and other feminists have been committed to thinking beyond psychopathologic designations and individualistic explanations. This perspective takes the perceptions of women seriously and recognizes the necessity of systemic social analysis (1993, 54). Rather than attribute eating disorders to distorted perceptions of bodies, Bordo asserts that women's perceptions are not really distorted and that women are often fed information from the culture that requires an unattainable ideal. She claims that women are simply attempting to act according to the laws "and institutional parameters governing the construction of gender in our culture" (1993, 61).

This may explain the mixed messages Missy received from her prior dance program. Rather than assume that her severe eating disorder and obsessive perceptions of her body were connected to an individualistic context alone or the result of a purely psychological dysfunction, it may be helpful to view her perceptions in relationship to the world around her and include a social analysis.

For example, according to past research (Bordo 1993), many eating disorders begin with comments made by others regarding a woman's body or weight. This was no different for Missy. But for her, pressure came directly from the dance world. She explained the beginning of her eating disorder:

There were some things said in the dance department to friends that I had that you should watch your weight. From the department head at LU. You should watch your weight; you've gained a couple of pounds. You should watch that if this is what you want to do. It was never said to me but there was always the feeling that if it was said to me what would I do? Unconsciously I was cutting down on my eating. The next thing I know I came home from school my freshman year and I was so sick. I lost fifteen pounds [and later much more]. I was completely run down. I was just sick; I was completely exhausted—sleeping constantly.

Dancers are particularly vulnerable to the current spread of diet regimes and other technologies aimed at bodily "correction" (Bordo 1993, 104). While "control" and "mastery" are concepts being used in media and advertisements to dictate acceptable behavior regarding weight management and body regulation in the larger society, "prohibitions against female indulgence" are even more severe for dancers in the studio and the micro dance culture. Lack of control of the body is often not tolerated. Dancers cannot succeed in the dance world if they are perceived as slovenly, lazy, or fat.

Furthermore, interestingly, Bruch notes that a typical symptom of an eating disorder is the feeling of "not owning the body and its sensations" (cited in Bordo 1993, 147). Dance students are faced with the double whammy of daily training that teaches them to disconnect from their bodies and the threat of disorders that further weaken and disembody them. Often, in an attempt to "not take up too much space" (Bordo 1993, 160), female dancers run the risk of literally vanishing from the dance world.

There was one discrepancy regarding the data in relationship to strength and control. As a feminist and somatic educator, I began to feel quite uncomfortable with a number of responses that described feelings of power and control experienced by some of the participants while they were practicing weight and strength training at the gym. I could not ascertain why students expressed such feelings of power associated with current techniques that require body modification and regulation. To me, the new fitness craze was not empowering for women. While women could learn to build muscle and look more like men, I believed strength training, like traditional dance pedagogy, required women to spend more time training an ideal body, thin, yet now muscular, whose purpose was an objectified representation designed for the male gaze. Yet it seemed to me that the participants were not ready to release an aesthetic ideal and were assuming that this ideal had empowered them. Missy, for example, talked about her recovery from an eating disorder which included taking a job at a gym:

When I looked at different people in the gym there are so many different body types in the gym. I realized aesthetically to me someone who was muscular and had—as a male or female—I found was a lot more attractive than a skinny person with no shape, no muscle tone. Finally I was like—I always looked like I worked out even when I didn't. I was like....it is not in my genes to look like a bean pole. Apparently I said there is something in my genes that tends toward the muscular. That's what I'm going to do. I got to eating right to help me build my muscle definition. I looked at this as a health conscious choice of proper eating but I said that gave me a goal to eat something right. Because this was something that I wanted. It was still an aesthetic body because I was going toward the aesthetic. I couldn't get it without eating.

As a teacher, I became very concerned about Missy. She came to me two years ago because she had not eaten in two weeks. I was the one who drove her to the hospital and listened to her story about her inability to keep food down. Here she was telling me she was eating, and taking care of her body, yet she seemed still to work compulsively to mold her body into a more familiar and contemporary shape, but nevertheless an imposed body ideal.

Interestingly, Missy communicated a sense of control and power when she refused to eat and became focused on molding her body. But Bordo explains this feeling of strength, control and power as deceptive. She describes it as a modification practice that leads women to collude with a dominant culture. The self-control necessary to diet or shape the body may afford dancers a sense of mastery over their bodies, qualities valued in a male-dominated society. However, as Bordo suggests, "To reshape one's body into a male body is not to put on male power and privilege. To feel autonomous and free while harnessing body and soul to an obsessive body-practice is to serve, not transform, a social order that limits female possibilities" (1993, 179).

Thus, self-management of bodies is a "continual and virtually impossible task in our culture" (1993, 187) and particularly in the dance world. The ideal body is impossible to achieve because it requires vast energy which

often saps the body of usable strength and decreases agency in women by disconnecting them from their bodies as they fight to adapt to cumulatively impossible standards that are designed to control women's bodies and desires. However, interestingly, Kathy often did talk about strength in relationship to an inner feeling of connectedness. By not allowing herself to be disconnected from her own embodiment and focusing more on somatic sensitivity than outer standardized ideals, she may be more likely to connect to the larger global world and use her sense of physical strength along with social agency.

Reflexive Analysis: Surprises and Discrepant Cases

Up to this prior point, it may seem apparent that participant responses seemed to fit neatly into place regarding my paradigmatic positioning and theoretical assumptions when I entered the study. However, the pieces to this research puzzle did not actually fit together so neatly, as I found myself struggling with a number of outliers and discrepant cases. I chose first to discuss what seemed to come together while saving problematic aspects to the end. There were, however, a number of surprises as well as disconfirming pieces of evidence, as is often common in a self-reflexive postpositivist analysis.

For example, there were a number of discussions that included memories of effective and helpful university dance teachers regarding attitudes toward the body and pedagogical style. Most of these memories involved female teachers who included somatic elements in their classes; some men were awarded some positive qualities (i.e. using somatic practices and approaches) but women were reserved for particular acclaim regarding this consideration.

However, Missy stood out as a student who seemed to defy this categorization; she often had problems in more supportive and somatic classes. And she often expressed success with teachers like Jeff who intimidated other students while she sometimes explained that she likes to be pushed and physically challenged. She said that she hurt in Jeff's classes but she liked it. Listening to her, I could not help but feel that Missy's responses were connected to her training, that she may have felt more comfortable with this approach because it was familiar. She felt like she was working "hard" and achieving success in control of her body through self-discipline and restraint. In Bordo's words, she may have experienced some sense of "mastery" over her body, with pain as an unfortunate result. Her words often haunted me because I could not help but think this was a case of physical denial and an effort to numb the body. Interestingly, she also experienced some problems with the somatic work (mostly the body awareness exercises) because it did not always help her to feel better, but rather sometimes made her aware of her physical discomfort and brought on negative feelings about her body size. She explained feeling her body take up space:

Sometimes the somatic work can work for me as in like, releasing tension and stuff like that. Then other times it doesn't work because I start thinking about my body and the shape of my body.... Sometimes I can just let everything go, but other times, when you're concentrating on yourself... you go down to your back, or go down to this part of your body, then you're like, OK this part of my body is wide.

Missy may have experienced discomfort because she had been previously attempting to tune out inner messages of her body in an attempt to work towards a body ideal. This may indicate a feeling of personal responsibility to train a docile body rather than an awareness of impossible larger social standards. In other words, while listening to her body she experienced unsuccessful feelings and frustration in not meeting an objectified body ideal.

Nancy also often provided a sense of tension and contradiction when communicating perceptions about her body and past experiences in dance. She often said that she did not feel badly about her body and often discussed the positive dance education she received from a former teacher at a private studio. Although she often addressed many body problems after arriving at the university, she claimed that she was very happy in dance prior to her move to this university. She attributed this attitude to her cheerful disposition, inability to feel depressed and the nurturing care of her family and former teacher. She seemed to not want to deal with critical analysis or to own any contradictory feelings regarding her body. She claimed she did not have a dark side and

resisted working on dances that did not express happiness and lightness. She perceived herself as strong and attributed her strength to her positive self- image. I, as researcher and teacher, observed that there appeared to be a lack of strength in Nancy's body and movement. However, Nancy may have associated strength with the projection of a constantly happy "appearance." Perhaps, Nancy did feel good because she was supported and valued at home and in her prior dance classes. She recalled her teacher affirming all body types and appreciating the value of each student. However, I sensed that Nancy's stories seemed "too good" and that she was demonstrating "good girl" qualities. My ongoing personal frustration with Nancy's resistance to "think critically" and address issues related to the body in a reflexive and thoughtful manner created a certain postmodern tension (5). I fonnd myself attributing this denial to what many critical theorists refer to as a "false consciousness" (see Lather 1_991) and resistance to think critically. My observations were confirmed by some participants who expressed concern regarding what Jasmine referred to as Nancy's "ignorance" and "negativity" regarding other participants' feelings of marginalization.

Nancy also did confirm her behavior as disciplined at times. For example, she attributed her resistance to delve into serious issues and her dislike of "heavy" dance to her prior education where she got more rewards for smiling on stage. She did complain about teacher attitudes regarding perceived body problems. And she addressed expectations from teachers who characterized her "perfect body," while expressing concern that she was not perfect at all. Furthermore, her connection to a body ideal may not have been conscious but was nevertheless apparent at times. When discussing a particular student's problem with weight control, she inadvertently said, "I would have killed to have her body." And although she said that pressure to achieve an ideal body did not bother her, she did recognize and affirm that body ideals were socially influenced and destructive to other students; she expressed concern about health considerations and expressed a desire to affirm body difference and diversity in her future classes.

It may be significant to be aware, however, that although I may find evidence to support my findings regarding some participant behavior and attitudes, the point may be that I had a sense that they were attempting to tell me more than I thought I knew. Kathy and Missy's feelings of strength from weight training could not be denied. (In fact, I have considered going to a gym in order to attempt to see if I would experience a similar result.) Further, I could not argue with Nancy's strong denial of marginalization during her dance training.

I continued to wrestle with these complex questions and issues. And while I continue to find evidence to support the need to look at how we educate dancers' bodies, I also strive to be open to the complexity of the issue.

Implications for Dance Education
Very often, agency is valued as a validity criterion in postpositivist research (Lather 1986; 1991; 1993). Particularly for emancipatory pedagogy, educators and researchers attempt to work toward change and action in both the teaching and research processes. This is why teaching and research often overlap.

For this reason, throughout the class and project I asked the participants about the relevance of the issues in relation to their goals and objectives as dance teachers. Many ideas, strategies and plans for action were generated. For one thing, these participants discussed the need for awareness of these issues. As Jasmine suggested, "It's important just to be aware that we can address those [issues]."

The participants also referred to the need to teach multiculturally, in other words, to be aware of who is marginalized in the dance class and to be aware of judging students based on body types. Interestingly, Missy, although striving at times to achieve a muscular look, indicated that there is nobody who can meet these impossible standards and said she would strive to bring this awareness into her future classes.

Furthermore, participants addressed the need to honor all body types and teach to all students both in the studio, by emphasizing that dancers come in all shapes and sizes, and outside it by choreographing works that use dancers of different sizes, and different body types. They also suggested showing videos of ethnically diverse

dance companies and dancers who use different body types. I was quite surprised that, by the end of the project, the participants were also thinking about directly addressing critical issues in class. As Kathy suggested, "As dance educators, we can integrate ways of broadening the definition of who is a dancer and what a woman is, and recognizing how media and society confine the definition of what a woman is and how they should be and act and look." They spoke about including classes modeled on the one we used for the project, with brainstorming and discussion that directly raise the issue of body ideals. Kathy also suggested teaching dance history critically and including the body as a topic. Some specifIc ideas included using videos of traditional dancing critically to raise questions regarding the lack of color and diverse body types, and problematizing ads, texts and other materials and sources that teach and perpetuate reliance on achieving a body ideal, and recognizing and challenging bias and prejudice in the classroom.

The participants were also interested in challenging the societal construct that female dancers must be skinny by discussing the detrimental effects of the pressure to attain this ideal. This would include particular ways such pressure may lead to bodily disconnection, i.e., retraction of the pelvis to fit the body of an ideal women can lead to alignment problems and injury, while the additional compensation of tucking can create another set of problems.

Finally, the participants also discussed plans to incorporate somatic and body awareness practices into their classes and curriculums and, as Tess suggested, also to make it available to men because they are not often taught to get in touch with their bodies. Kathy spoke to the need for somatic work when she said, "Somatic experience, you know, connecting the mind and the body, would seem to me another feminist pedagogical tool because a lot of dance doesn't necessarily do that."

Many of the participants spoke about helping students reclaim ownership of their bodies and associated somatic authority with an inner strength. Kathy expressed her plans to continue using somatic practice [body awareness] in the fitness world by emphasizing an inner bodily focus. She articulated that, by reconnecting inwardly, even fitness teachers may incorporate a somatic approach to an activity that generally brings authority to objectified bodies. For the most part, the participants were interested in using strategies that disconnect from an external standard and reconnect to their embodied selves.

I'd like to close with an excerpt of a journal entry from Kathy, who effectively summed up the heart of this topic:

In talking with my fellow field experience students, it seems that many have trouble teaching technical classes from a non-objectified approach. Showing movement to be copied is certainly the more traditional/accepted way of teaching, but an investment of less common pedagogical practices would be worth it in the long run. By teaching movement concepts from the inside out to arrive at a technical aspect shows a student that they have something to give from the inside rather than someone who has movement put upon them. The inner approach gives the student a sense of ownership of themselves and their contribution to dance. The outward approach makes the student feel like they are something to be molded or that they need to fit into a mold and if they don't they cannot contribute. It is important to change the way we teach dance in order to change what is valued in dance.

APPENDIX
Themes for Individual Interviews
1. Meaning and influence of the project—as a woman, dancer, and educator.
2. Meaning of "the gendered body in dance education."
3. Value of the course (somatic work, class activities, discussion of issues, creative process and creative project). What worked? What did not work?
4. Learning regarding diversity and other issues raised.
5. Social and pedagogical influences on ideal bodies and body perceptions.
6. Implications for dance education and strategies for future teaching.

NOTES

1. See Stinson (1993) for a broader discussion of traditional dance pedagogy and underlying philosophical assumptions.

2. Postpositivist inquiry includes a number of research paradigms existing at the same time. In a postmodern world of conflicting positionalities, multiple and competing perspectives and fuzzy boundaries, these categorizations are not often so clearly defined. See Green (1996-a, 1996-b), and Lather (1991) for fuller discussions about postpositivist research.

3. Due to a lack of time and space here, and the complexity of the issue of validity in postpositivist research, l cannot discuss this broad topic. For a fuller discussion see Guba and Lincoln (1989), Lather (1986, 1993), and Lincoln and Guba (1985).

4. See Green (1996-c) for a discussion about the problems of working from a gender perspective that does not include issues of race and class. The one African American student in the study did provide some data that reflected a different perspective regarding ideal representation in her African American community. However, working daily with dancers, she felt that she was open to the messages prevalent in the dance world and she felt pressured to achieve an external ideal body.

5. Erica McWilliam (1993, 1994) describes postmodern tension as a physical [or somatic] response to the uncertainty of knowledge and "truth" in a postmodern world. Postpositivist researchers often struggle with the multiple perspectives of participants, researcher, and theories while attempting to make meaning of a research context. See also Green (1993, 1996-a, 1996-b) for a description of this condition and a discussion about how somatic sensitivity may be used as a research tool.

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