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Empowering the Plus Size Body Using Dance as Therapy

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Empowering the Plus-Size Body Using Dance as Therapy

Thesis Option 3

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Dance/Movement Therapy

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Abstract

In Western society, having the "ideal" body image and size is a societal issue. It is advertised throughout media outlets that the "ideal" body is what should be desired, and any other body type is "abnormal". This capstone thesis focused on the effectiveness of dance as therapy and changing the perspectives of all body types, to support and empower all bodies including plus-sized bodies. The use of individual interviews, in an open dialogue model, with a select few members (3) of Soul thru Sole, including the CEO of the dance company; which focuses on empowering women no matter their age, race, or size was incorporated in this thesis. Observations were noted and discussed after every rehearsal for the showcase. Individual interviews with the participants highlighted increased body satisfaction, improved outlook on personal body image, increased confidence, and improved overall well-being. The author of this capstone thesis noted gaps in the literature pertaining to the exploration into the lasting effects of increased representation of all body types, including "plus sized", in dance. Limited resources are available regarding empowering and embracing other sizes outside the "ideal" thin body type. There is an urgent need for more research on the lasting effects of being inclusive about size and showing more representations on all body types.

Keywords: Dance/Movement Therapy, plus-size, dance, empower, body-image, self-esteem, body inclusivity, media, dance as therapy

EMPOWERING THE PLUS SIZED BODY USING DANCE AS THERAPY

Introduction

"Body image attitudes are assumed to play a central role in organizing thoughts, behaviors, feelings, and evaluations" (Bennik, de Jong, Glashouwer, & Spruyt, 2018, p. 622). Western society puts a higher emphasis on how the body looks and what is the "ideal" body. If what you see a body type that is not similar to your body on every media outlet, how would that impact you? If you identify as someone who is "plus sized" or unlike the "ideal" thin body type and you do not see representations of that body type, how could you not have a negative body sense? It is important to identify how these outside influences can affect "plus sized" individual's mental and physical health. It is equally important to find a resolution for these outside negative influences.

"Research has recognized that fuller-sized and obese people were considered unhappy, unconfident, unattractive, and identified a huge level of discrimination and negativity towards the overweight" (Almond, 2013, p. 197). For the purposes of this capstone thesis, "plus size" is defined as a person who is above the standard body size, which is below a size 10 in women clothing. The use of the word standard is questionable in itself. How can one define a standard size and consider a size larger than that to be negative when it is subjective? Other negative stigmas, such as "fat doesn't sell" are still attached to people that identify as "plus sized" or "fuller- sized", especially in advertisements (Sohn & Youn, 2013, p. 179). The amount of pressure that is put on women to conform to the subjective narrative of what is attractive as far as weight goes, has given our society an immense amount of negative effects, including body image disturbances and assessing worthiness (Sohn & Youn, 2013). The standard is pushed

through various media outlets that are easily accessible and unavoidable such as social media, TV, billboards, and magazine.

In recent years, there has been a rise in body positivity that includes an increase in body inclusive clothing lines, advertisements, and dance. For example, the Dove *Real Beauty* 2004 campaign and the first international "plus-sized" dance company, Pretty Big Movement that went viral in 2016. A dancer's body is usually seen as a thin body. This type of body is what is seen in media and that is how that body type became normalized. Gordon (2014) reported that there are negative effects on individuals not considered thin who may want to become professional dancers or just enjoy dancing.

"As long as they are comfortable with themselves and feel empowered during class, I'm satisfied. I don't want my ladies to feel judged or pressured, I want them to feel confident. Almost as if they're not being taught, but just practicing what they already know." (T. Moore, personal communication, 2017). Dance has more value in this world than to showcase beautiful movements. There is an unlimited knowledge that is gained such as growth, capability, and acceptance while dancing. Dance can be helpful for expression, feeling included, and to gain self-esteem (Beardall, 2017). Furthermore, it can help an individual feel empowered. The author of this capstone thesis has defined empowered as the process of being stronger and confident and taking control of what affects one's life. The journey of empowerment for the "plus sized" body is long and difficult and includes gaining insight, acceptance, pushing pass stigmas, and fully loving what is seen in the mirror. What can happen if there is a dance space where all body types are celebrated to counteract and change the point of view of the what a dancer's body is,

the "plus size" body and body image overall? Can dance be therapeutic and empowering

to the "plus sized" body and help in the journey of body acceptance?

Literature Review

The literature review includes a discussion of previous studies conducted on

media's influence on how people perceive one's body, the concepts of Dance/Movement

Therapy, and the effectiveness of Dance/Movement Therapy and Dance as Therapy on

body acceptance. The topic of empowering and embracing the "plus sized" body is still

an underrepresented topic in mass media, dance, and dance/movement therapy. There has

been varying research about the "plus sized" body. Bunce, et al. (2014) questioned the

rationale behind using Dance Movement Psychotherapy to develop awareness about

young people's body image. The development nature of a young person is exponentially

influenced by culture. The development includes how young people perceive body image

and self-esteem. Grabe, Hyde, and Ward (2008) reported that it is common to find

warped personal body image interpretations because of what images the media produces

about the "perfect body" and the type of culture forms with that idea. The media

continues to show unattainable body images which results in negative views of one's

body, depression, skewed reality, and possible eating disorders. This can have a negative

effect on adolescents' emotional and developmental stability.

Bunce et al. (2014) reported the following:

The way that young people develop is influenced by the culture they

absorb and is linked to early emotional experience and development.

Ideas and attitudes about the body develop with the same cultural

conditioning and the perception of the body is influenced by attitudes and emotional responses. (p. 4)

Bunce et al. (2014) explored the factors that contributed to improving body image of young people through Dance/Movement Psychotherapy. Results were obtained from 13 young people and all the participants were 17 years old and white with the exception for one Asian woman. This study found a link between the benefits of using Dance Movement Psychotherapy and improvement of self-esteem, psychological mood, body perception, and body awareness. After one Dance/Movement Psychotherapy session, the participants were interviewed to share the experience of the session. The main themes and ideas that were revealed in interviews were more connection to and understanding of one's body, lack of self-consciousness, and improved body acceptance. Overall, the participants reported that Dance/Movement Psychotherapy helped access a more positive outlook of body image. Participants felt more in control of what types of information influences individual idea of the body. It helped participants accept one's own body instead of listening to what the media says is the "ideal body" or the "stereotypical body." The participant stated that there is a need for this type of work to increase a more positive outlook on one's body. The participants also agreed to more and longer sessions to continue to explore these ideas. "The limitations this study could have faced, such as location; dance studio and within an educational environment as well as a possible pressure to conform to the expectations of the study from the participants" (Bunce, et al, 2014, p. 13). The article debated that with these limitations, it is still a benefit for others to explore and have the possibility for further investigation on the topic.

Based on the idea that the body, mind, and spirit are interconnected, the American Dance Therapy Association (ADTA) defines dance/movement therapy (DMT) as "the psychotherapeutic use of movement to promote emotional, social, cognitive and physical integration of the individual" (http://www.adta.org). DMT has broad health benefits. It has been demonstrated to be clinically effective at improving body image, self-esteem, attentiveness, and communication skills. Loman (1998) conducted a longer study with Dance/Movement Therapy as useful intervention with children to test how it can be beneficial to improve body image and self-esteem. "Healthy use of the body creates self-esteem, a dynamic body image and the development of appropriate body boundaries" (Loman, 1998, p. 101). By using a dance/movement therapy assessment tool; the Kestenberg Movement Profile tool (KMP), it provided information about the children's strengths and limitations and helped with what needs to be focused on during each session. "Understanding a child's movement development and using related movement interventions can be a creative resource for working through clinical as well as developmental issues on a body level" (Loman, 1998, p. 106). From using dance/movement therapy and using the KMP Approach tool, Loman's (1998) study resulted in the children becoming more aware of movements and feelings about certain traumas, more positive ideas about body image, and a deeper understanding of how to emotional regulate. As the child grows into an adolescent then to an adult, that foundation of ideas about their own body image changes and alters as time goes on. These changes are affected by different pathways through life and influences that might add or take away from childhood lessons about body images.

Dance/Movement Therapy can have positive effects on the duality of the body and mind. Gordon's (2014) qualitative study investigated the positive effects of dance/movement therapy for adults. An interview of three dance/movement therapists was conducted to collect the data about therapeutic interventions, developing therapeutic relationships, goals, client attributes, and therapists' attributes. When people can identify positive emotions, it is an overall benefit to physical and mental well-being. This study aimed to contribute and assist dance/movement therapy practitioners in helping clients not just decrease what is undesirable, but to increase what is desirable for their overall well-being. The interviewer inquired about how to consciously use positive affect in a session with adults and what interventions are the most beneficial. Findings included 13 common themes that were expressed with all three dance/movement therapists. The themes relevant to this study included the benefits of positive affect with clients who suffer through depression, anxiety, low vitality, disconnection with self and others, and self-criticism or self-hatred. When using interventions that directly or indirectly encourage positive affect, trust is built between the client and the therapist and it's validating and normalizing the client's lived experience. Clients were able to access, and report said positive affect that span the emotional, physical, cognitive and social realms, including increased confidence, acceptance of oneself, fearlessness, and increased body awareness. The limitations of the study included more diversity in gender, ethnicity, and educational background. Future studies should include a more robust sample and greater diverse group of practitioners to deepen the understanding of how the practice of dance/movement therapy can increase positive affect for the client's overall well-being.

According to Hyde, Grabe, and Ward (2008), "Body dissatisfaction has reached normative levels among American girls and young women. Approximately 50% of girls and undergraduate college women report being dissatisfied with their bodies" (p. 460). Hyde, Grabe, and Ward (2008) explored the links between media exposure to women's dissatisfaction, internalization of the thin ideal body, and eating behaviors using a meta-analysis of experimental and correlational studies. This meta-analysis study focused on 77 sample studies of differentiating body sizes and testing to find the effects of media exposure to the negative reactions to one's body, regardless of the size. The researchers found it interesting that the images of current media oversaturate every media platform with thinner women than previous years. These images that are being overly exposed through media do not depict the average women's body sizes, which are larger. This thin "ideal" body is unattainable to most and is constantly repeated to young girls and women through public media outlets. It has been reported that repetitive exposure to media content can lead the consumer to accept it as reality. In this case, women start to accept the thin ideal body as a reality and that leads to a negative viewing on the individual's body. The methods used to conduct the study were very well designed and included many assessments and scales to measure possible body dissatisfaction, body self-consciousness, ideal body stereotypes, eating behaviors and beliefs with the participants. The study included two groups for media exposure. One group was appearance-focused, which focused on images from fashion magazines or television programing. The other group was the control-focused group and were exposed to non-appearance focused advertisements from the same fashion magazines or nonappearance focused television programming from the same network. Findings from the data analysis emerged common

themes, which indicated that media exposure had a negative effect on women's body image, an increase internalizing the thin "ideal" body and an increase in eating disorders. These effects appear to be robust and are present in multiple assessments that were tested and sampled. The researchers noted that this study did not use a control group that was not exposed to any media previously mentioned. The researchers noted that exposure to attractive, averaged-size images resulted in lower body- focused anxiety. It suggested that using average-sized body images in advertising can help protect women from body dissatisfaction. Lastly, the researcher included some relevant recommendations for further studies, which included broadening the cultural and ethnicity sample, finding the long term effects of being exposed to media coverage of the thin ideal body, finding other outcomes that were weight-based other than eating disorders, and exploring the small percentage of outcomes that show that there was a positive effect to this media coverage such as feeling better about one's body.

Beale, Malson, and Tischner (2008) explored young women's views about advertising images featuring "plus-sized" models in the UK. "Critical feminist scholars have now thoroughly critiqued cultural idealizations of female thinness and notions of gendered beauty" (Beale, Malson, & Tischner, 2008, p. 379). This contributed to body dissatisfaction, possibly an eating disorder, and a decrease in psychological and physical well-being. In 2004, UK premiered a Dove *Real Beauty* campaign displaying women of different sizes other than the "ideal" thin body. Its aim was to feature "real women with real bodies and real curves" and debunk the stereotype that women can only have self-confidence and beauty focused on a thin body. More representation of different body types has been associated with positive body image. A total of 35 women completed the

qualitative online survey gathering women's views about images of "plus sized" models in an advertising campaign. Findings from the answers to the qualitative online survey expressed both praise and criticisms. Participants expressed that the "plus-sized" women advertised were "like normal women" and looked similar to the participants. These women represented the general public and the participants could relate more to these women than the other "ideal-sized" women that are normally shown the media. Additionally, the participants felt that the women in the advertisement were beautiful, brave, confident, non-conforming, and most importantly; happy. These women are simply "real". The researcher noted that with the praise from the participant of the advertisement including "plus-sized" models created the need for more representation in every size. There is a need for widening the scope that every body type is beautiful. There is also a need for moving past societal norms and learning the value of every shape and size. The researcher concluded by suggesting further research on the topic and continued empowerment women no matter their size.

Sohn and Youn (2013) conducted a study that examined how different body sizes influence advertising effectiveness. Advertisement has a strong effect on mass media and its audience. Advertisement's sole purpose is to sell the consumer a dream, to sell the consumer what reality should look like. The advertisements influence what brands the audience favors and how the audience evaluates themselves and their self-assessed worthiness. It is common to use the "ideal" features for an advertisement as a persuasive power to convince people of an idea or a brand. These "ideal" features are often of a thin model that is pushed throughout media and can negatively affect the audience. The audience comes out of the advertisement thinking that there is a need to have this body

and other unrealistic goals to live a better life. Depending on how vulnerable the audience is; children, adolescence, and young adults, it can cause more negative views of body images, low self-esteem and individual's overall well-being. Due to criticism of the advertisement industry and following the 2004's Dove *Campaign for Real Beauty*; that included plus sized bodies, other advertising companies have felt the pressure to become more body inclusive. However, there are still companies that promote the idea that "thinness sells, whereas fatness does not" (Sohn & Youn, 2013, p. 179). The study's objective was to explore the concept that all body sizes can be effective in advertising. With the help of 201 participants, this study used the same model and photo shopped the model into nine different body types; ranging from thin, average, and plus sized, showing the model promoting an alarm clock and a makeup kit. The alarm clock representing an object that is not representing beauty and body image and the makeup kit representing the opposite. The participants were asked a series of questions about the advertisements that were displayed. The questions included, if the participants ever compared their body to that of a body in an advertisement, if the advertisement was effective, and how closely did the participants pay attention to the advertisement. Findings from this study included, positive attitudes towards the average sized model in the advertisement and there was no special attention from the audience to the thin model in the advertisement. Sohn and Youn (2013) noted that this study is a step in advancing our knowledge on the impacts of model's bodies in advertising world and mass media as a whole. The findings made the researchers ponder the efficacy and ethics of continued use of unrealistically thin models in advertising when advertising something that does not does not represent beauty or body image. If companies realize that bodies other than the "ideal" thin body can sell,

there will be an increase in body acceptance. Sohn and Youn (2013) suggested further studies on this topic such as different and more gender-inclusive products in advertisements as a testing tool. Sohn and Youn (2013) concluded that "fat" and any type of body can sell, and media needs to change the common belief that only the "ideal" thin body is what needs to be represented.

"In effect, the great majority of women, when viewing idealized images, are comparing their own appearance to that of someone who is "more" attractive" (Birkeland, et al, 2005, p. 53). For someone who identifies as "plus sized" having poor representation of "plus sized" in mass media can cause a negative outlook on an individual's body, body image problems, and overall well-being. It would be a valuable addition to what is exposed throughout the media to become more inclusive of size to promote body positivity and empower all sizes throughout the world. There is a slow-moving movement to promote body positivity, but there is still a bigger push back to continue to perpetuate only the "ideal" body because point of view hasn't changed in the general public. Dance and movement are one way to integrate a better outlook and empower one's body as a form of therapy to create body image acceptance, increase mental health and overall positive well-being.

Methodology

This methodology section details the agenda and facilitation techniques used to gain insight by conducting interviews about the community of the dance company Soul thru' Sole. It also outlines how effective dance is when trying to accept one's body as a "plus sized" individual. Soul thru' Sole is a New York City based dance company that encourages sisterhood, freedom and empowerment through movement. The main

objective is to provide a space for women to heal, rejoice and celebrate who they are through dance. Soul thru' Sole's vision focuses on dance being liberating, therapeutic, and possibly life changing for all women who join their experiential classes and workshops. The dance company is inclusive of all sizes and this and other messages gets broadcasted to the world through media coverage, public speaking and dance workshops.

The author of this capstone thesis became a part of the Soul thru' Sole dance company in 2017. This helped facilitate entry into rehearsals and performances for its fifth-year recital. The recital's objective was to showcase what classes the company offered and celebrate the continued growth of the company over its five years of operation. Additionally, the objective included empowering; predominantly women, in finding peace, power, beauty and love of body, mind, spirit, with the building of greater confidence, and self-esteem as the dancers in the company prepared for the recital. During the rehearsals for the recital, the author of this capstone thesis started to take notice of what was happening to the women. With close observation and assessing the testimonies from the promotional videos for the recital, there were shifts in the women's attitude in how the women felt about their bodies and how it felt to dance again. Prior to joining this dance company, some of the women have stopped dancing. They reported quitting because of their size as they started to compare their bodies to other "traditional" sized dancers in their classes as well as what was represented in the public media outlets as the perfect thin dancer's body. Some of the reasons they came back to dance included, wanting face to their fears, wanting to be healthier, and having a genuine love for dance. Some of these insecurities were revealed when the choreography asked for the women to step out of their comfort zone. This resulted in some push back and hesitation about being

a part of a particular piece in the recital. The journey to overcome these insecurities in preparation for the recital was difficult and included tackling self-doubt, worthlessness, and negative attitudes.

During the rehearsals for the recital, the author of this capstone thesis became an active participant; learning and performing the dances as well as an observant participant, noting how the other dancers evolved throughout the experience of preparing for the recital. As an active participant, the author of this capstone thesis worked alongside the other company members to ensure the preparation for the recital was running smoothly. This included giving creative input on movements, asking questions about formations and discussing the effort given with each movement. As an observant participant, the author of this capstone thesis observed and noted the members expressing worrisome and negative thoughts about the participants' ability to perform certain dances that included thoughts and verbalizations about their size. Observation were noted of some member's defeated body language when obstacles got in their way such as long rehearsals and personal struggles. As the day of the recital moved closer, attitudes and thought patterns about the dancers' bodies and capabilities shifted and transformed to a positive sense of the dancers' body, mind, and self after continuous encouragement from all the members of the company.

After reviewing the promotional videos for the recitals that showed testimonies of the journeys of the dance company's members and completing the recital, an open dialogue model was used to conduct interviews with two dance company members and the CEO of the dance company. This dialogue included a few prepared questions. The questions were developed from literature review conducted, which included questions

about media's influence on body image, "plus sized" individuals, and dance's positive effect on self-esteem and body image. In order to establish growth from the literature, questions such as empowerment from dance, media improvements on the topic of body inclusion, and future advocacy were asked. The author of this capstone thesis asked the same seven questions to the two dance company members and had a different set of questions for the CEO of the dance company. Each of the interviewees set up different times to conduct the interviews.

The three interviewees were members of the Soul thru' Sole dance company; including the CEO of the dance company and two dancers. The interviewees were all between the ages of 25-29, resided in New York City and were active members of this dance company for more than two years. For interviewee two, this was their second time being a dancer for Soul thru Sole. All interviewees were demographically middle class, African American women, and who had earned their high school diplomas. Interviewees one and two identify as "plus sized" professional dancers. The first interviewee, who was the CEO of Soul thru' Sole, did not identify as a plus sized dancer. The CEO's role was to give the perspective of an ally of body inclusion. Open dialogue, no judgement and self-disclosure was encouraged during the process of getting performance ready and in each interview that was conducted. Overall, the author of this thesis wanted to learn how preparing for the recital impacted the lives of the "plus sized" dancers. Additionally, how an ally for body inclusion of the "plus sized" body made the decision to create such a space and how preparing for the recital reaffirmed this ideology.

All interviews are detailed in Appendix A and Appendix B

Results

One of the goals of the capstone thesis project was to explore the perspectives of 3 dancers of Soul thru' Sole on the benefits of dance and movement for people identifying as "plus size". Interviews were conducted to explore the influence the media has on "plus sized" individuals. Additionally, dance and movement was used as a tool to assess how it empowers "plus sized" individuals. As the day of the recital moved closer and after rehearing for 4 months, the dance company members became confidence in all of the dance routines including the routines they previously found difficult. The company members began to embody the routines and put their personalities within the movements. Their attitudes shifted from saying they wouldn't be able to execute the movements because they felt uncomfortable in their bodies to saying they're going to work on it because they now know they can do it. From participants' responses to the interview questions, individual growth and perspectives underlying the benefits of performing for Soul thru' Sole were noted. Additionally, three common themes emerged from all interviewees in response to the questions that were asked. The three common themes were advocacy about body inclusivity, media's inclusive representation improvements, and therapeutic effects from dance. These results might have a small impact to influence the breaking down of stigmas on "plus size" bodies.

Theme 1: Advocacy about Body Inclusivity

All interviewees demonstrated a willingness to be advocates for body inclusion in different forms. The CEO of Soul thru Sole, embodied an ally for body inclusion and used the dance company as a platform for body inclusion. The CEO detailed that they

will continue to use the dance company, social media platform and personal life to continue to uplift, empower, and encourage women to accept their body no matter its color, shape, or size. The CEO created a needed space for movement expression for all sizes to be embraced and welcomed to the fullest. As the company grows, the example of advocacy for "plus sized" body inclusion will expand its messaging. The company's contribution to the body positivity movement will continue to show that all sizes are welcomed and will be empowered within Soul thru Sole and should in all dance platforms.

Interviewee two stated that they advocate by showing up and showing out. (See Appendix B). Their "plus sized" body is their way of advocacy. They want to continue going to dance class and dance spaces to be an example of a "plus sized" dancer in hopes to change the point of view of what a dancer looks like. In addition, empowering and encouraging other "plus sized" dancers to face their fears and not let anyone stop them from dancing because of their body type.

Interviewee three stated that they will continue to advocate by being an example for their community of "plus sized" dancers and individuals. They want others to be comfortable in their own skin just like they have grown to love their body after a long journey of self and body acceptance. Their journey included accepting that not everyone will like how you look and may talk about you. This shouldn't stop you from loving the body that you are in and spreading body positivity for people that need it. They want to continue to be that voice for themselves and others. They want to show that "plus sized" individuals are capable of anything and size does not stop them from doing anything and there is room for all bodies, including performing.

Theme 2: Media's Inclusive Representation Improvements

   All interviewees have seen many improvements in media outlets on the topic of body inclusion and body positivity, but more needs to be done to show better representation on the subject manner. The CEO stated that they felt like media is not quite all inclusive yet, but it's getting there. (See Appendix A). There are dance companies such as Soul thru Sole, Pretty Big Movement and other dance influences that promote the "plus sized" body, but there are still people who are amazed that "plus sized" individuals can move as well as "standard" size individuals. There needs to be a shift in perspectives to show that all sizes are capable of everything and there shouldn't be any comparing of one body type versus another. Interviewee two stated that media has a huge impact on how "plus size" is perceived. They felt that in recent years, the "plus size" body has been slowly included within mainstream media. Interviewee three stated that even though there is upward mobility in body positivity, there is an underlining dread that it might be just a trend happening within the media. There is more of an attraction to the "plus sized" body from men and more women embracing being "plus sized". (See Appendix B).

Theme 3: Dance to Empower the "Plus Sized" Body

   All interviewees have gained more awareness to the need of more spaces for body inclusivity and celebrating the person which includes plus-size bodies like Soul thru' Sole does very well. This awareness also includes accepting and empowering the individual's body and its challenges that could arise as the body changes. Interviewee two stated that dance helps break down stigmas about what the "plus size" body type is capable of doing. Dance made them feel confident and sexy again. Interviewee three stated that performing

with groups such as Soul thru Sole has made them feel better and proud of themselves. They are capable of pushing through the figurative blocks put upon them because of their size.

Full interviews are detailed in Appendix A and Appendix B.

Discussion

This capstone thesis focused on empowering individuals who identify as "plus size" while using dance as a therapeutic tool to increase awareness on body size inclusion, decrease the negative effects of media on the body, to promote healing and body acceptance. From the literature, the author of this thesis learned that the media has a great impact on body image and it's mainly negative. The media is obsessed with an unrealistic thin body size which the vast majority of women cannot achieve. This obsession has contributed to poor body image, eating disorders and low self-esteem for women not in the "thin" or size 0-5 category. Although certain advertisers (Dove Body Care) and media (television sitcoms such as Mike and Molloy, American Housewife featured plus-size women as lead characters) have taken steps in recent years to become more body positive and aware they are far and few between, much work lays ahead.

Due to women regularly being exposed to media's continued production of "thin", the author of the thesis wanted to explore how dance/movement has helped women empower themselves leading to acceptance of all body types. Dance/movement therapy helps one connect to their body, works with the body to build coping skills, stress management techniques, and mental and emotion regulation. Dance as therapy and dance/movement therapy have been proven within literature to help create a more positive outlook on body image and body acceptance. Working alongside Soul thru' Sole,

while the company was preparing for their first annual dance recital, the author of this capstone thesis became an active community member and an observant participant. These roles helped gained in-depth observations to note the changes that were happening as the performance date became closer. The observations included the dancers feeling unable to move a certain way and not having the confidence to execute the dance properly. These feelings correlated to the dancer's body type and shifted to a more positive outlook. There was a journey each interviewee had to find their way through to accept their body and shift their perspective to a more positive outlook on what their body is capable of. There was a journey to realize that not being the "ideal" body is enough and it needs to be included within mass media. Dance and performing was a part of the journey to love and feel empowered in their bodies. A small occurrence, such as this performance had the possibility to leave a big impact on all the factors that made the event come to life. These factors include the power of community such as behind the scenes helpers, social media, and most importantly, the audience as well as each member of the dance company.

The effect of outside influences such as media can have a negative outlook on the duality of your body and mind when referring to body size. In the clinical practice of expressive therapies, it is important to be aware that all aspects of diversity need to be included and addressed, but size is also a factor that can be left out of the conversation. Poor body image and body self-esteem is proven to lead to negative symptoms in mental, emotion, and physical health. When body size is considered in the treatment plan of clients or patients, it could be helpful with expression and with embodiment of the body. It is recommended that in any similar community more research is needed. There needs to be greater exploration of this subject manner that can include a larger demographic

sample size of participants as well as race and gender inclusion to create a deeper

understanding of size inclusion and empowering all body types, including the "plus

sized" body.

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Appendix A

Interview 1- CEO of Soul thru' Sole

Interviewer: What influenced your decision to make your company all body inclusive?

CEO: My friends and family, ultimately myself. My weight also fluctuates often. I've never been petite, but I've always known how to move. I knew the struggles up close of watching women feel like they can't do certain movements due to weight or size and I wanted to show them that they can.

Interviewer: What are your thoughts of how body representation has changed over time?

CEO: I'm proud of its attention body positivity has gotten, but I'm not quite satisfied with whose represents. There's still a specific type of "plus size" they look for, such as the hourglass shape. It's not quite all inclusive yet, but it's getting there.

Interviewer: What changes are needed for more body positivity in the dance world and media?

CEO: All dance instructors that encourage EVERYONE that they can dance and move no matter, the age, size or race. There is a need for more dance schools that cater to and reach out to all body types and media that provides everyone the same platform, no stipulations.

Interviewer: Other than your company how are you an advocate for more body representation/positivity?

CEO: My company is my everyday life so it's hard to say how, but I guess in my personal life I uplift and encourage everyone. I have friends of all shapes and sizes and love up on them fully. After the recital, one of the audience members commented that they enjoyed that the dancer was not only one size. My reply to them was, this is how it should always be.

Interviewer: As the recital performance became closer, what improvements did you see with your company members?

CEO: All of my performers have been a part of this company from more than a year. I wanted to make that an important aspect for the first annual recital because I wanted to know that the recital is full of women that were consistent with the company. In the beginning, I had to encourage many of the women to embrace who they are and challenge themselves with dances they might not feel 100 percent about. I push them because I knew that they are capable of all movement no matter their size or confidence. That shift was an incredible thing to witness as we got closer to the performance date and as I watched my members perform. I saw my member embrace and celebrate their body and themselves.

Appendix B

Interviews 2 and 3: Interviewees 2 and 3

Interviewer: How has being a plus sized individual changed over the years? Media and thought wise.

Interviewee 2: I've always identified as a plus sized person. I've always been bigger than the average. Growing up as a plus size girl/women we didn't really have much representation, so there weren't many people to look up to when looking for someone with the same body type as me. I believe social media had a huge part in how society viewed plus women. We were slowly being included.

Interviewee 3: I definitely think that over the years being a plus sized individual has become more "acceptable". I feel like it has become a trend. There is more of an attraction quality to it; more guys are into it and more women embracing it. It has become a hashtag on social media such as "#fatty". There have always been women who was comfortable in their skin. On the other side of the same coin, there were more women who were uncomfortable with their body until recently because it has been deemed as "acceptable" in the media. There are more campaigns that have more body representations with their models and the "ideal thin" body is not the only body being represented and used.

Interviewer: What ways, if any, has dance and the dance world affected you as a person who dances?

Interviewee 2: I've danced my whole life, but to see how the dance world is seeing that plus dancer can also hold their own on the stage, it is huge. I actually stopped dancing for a while because of my size and how uncomfortable I was in dance classes, but I am thankful for Soul thru' Sole; a dance company that sees beyond size helped my confidence in dance come back.

Interviewee 3: There were times in the past that I did feel uncomfortable when I went to dance classes and when I was a cheerleader, knowing that I will be the biggest one there. I would get questions such as, "How do you move like that?!" or "You are that size and I can't do that" I would have to prove to the room that no matter the size, I can move and be possibly the best mover in the room, which was often overlooked. People have this stigma that because you are a certain size that you are lazy and you do not do anything and that is why you look like that, but there are so many other factors that affect what you size and shape are.

Interviewer: Has dance empowered you as a "plus sized" individual?

Interviewee 2: Yes, dance has empowered me, especially breaking molds and stigmas against us now that the world sees that I can move and dance and be sexy too. I love it.

Interviewee 3: Yes, dance has empowered me. It has taught me to embrace my size and thickness right now in my life. I have always been comfortable with myself. I'm

confident, but there have been a few times that I did feel like I was being looked at because of my size. Soul thru Sole has helped me embrace my body more and I found that their sensual classes have opened up a new and sexy part of me that I wouldn't have discovered in a different space. As well as performing with the company, it made me feel better about myself. I might not be a person that always hides in the closet, but when I look back at this performs and other dance videos from their classes, I proud of myself and thinking, "Wow that is me." Even through me off days.

Interviewer: Has dance not empowered you as a "plus sized" individual?

Interviewee 2: It's definitely has had its challenges. I stopped dancing for a very long time because I didn't see women or people like me, so it hindered me from doing what I love. I felt that there was no space for me. I didn't see me being represented.

Interviewee 3: I'm a confidence person, but it does become disheartening when people are surprised that I can move. I do not want to prove myself every time I walk into a dance space. I want to be viewed and treated like any other dancer or non-dancer coming into class ready to move and learn.

Interviewer: What would you change about how media and the dance world displays body inclusion?

Interviewee 2: I would change that plus dancer's only feel that they can only dance with other plus size dancers because the world of dance doesn't see them as professionals. Dancers come in all shapes and sizes and there needs to be better representation of all sizes in dance classes and dance videos.

Interviewee 3: There are still this stigma in the dance world that ballerinas must be thin and skinny. However, I do believe body inclusion in the media is moving in the right direction and it is improving. As time progresses, I do hope media becomes more realistic on what they are showing to the masses. That means showing what average women looks like. I also hope it is not a market scheme because it is trending now.

Interviewer: How are you an advocate for body inclusion in the dance world, in particular?

Interviewee 2: The way I advocate for body inclusion in the dance world is that I dance with a group of women of all shapes and sizes. I show people that I can dance amongst the smaller dancer and now other women feel like they can do it also. My influence has encouraged my best friend that is also a plus sized individual to come to dance class and be comfortable in any class no matter if you are the only plus sized dancer in the room.

Interviewee 3: I'm more so an advocate of being comfortable in your own skin regardless of what size you are. There will always be people that will not like how you look and talk about you. When you are comfortable in your own skin, you are able to deal with it and

spread body inclusion. No matter what people say and the people that will try to not include you, you are able to have a voice to stand up for yourself and others and that everyone is capable to have space everywhere. No one should be discredited of what you are capable of because of your size. I believe that and I advocate on all platforms for that.

Interviewer: How did performing and still dancing with Soul thru' Sole empower you as a plus sized dancer and generally a plus sized individual?

Interviewee 2: It helped and still helps me internally especially being around women who genuinely have your back and root for you. Also being of the bigger women of the group, it can discourage you but that's not allowed in this group. There is nothing but positivity and just knowing you're not being judged feels like you can conquer the dance floor every time.

Interviewee 3: Soul thru' Sole is more than dance. It is not always and only about the performance. It is about being a part of a family and doing your best. There is a focus on team building and doing things for your soul and body to feel the best. The dance company never makes me feel like I'm extra special because I'm a plus size person who can dance well. They make me feel special because I just an amazing dancer. The company just celebrates you.