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therARTpIST: AN ARTISTIC INQUIRY ON THE INTERPLAY OF IDENTITIES

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Thesis submitted to the faculty of Columbia College Chicago  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
Master of Arts  
in  
Dance/Movement Therapy & Counseling

Department of Dance  
Creative Arts Therapies Program

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## **Abstract**

This thesis is an embodied artistic inquiry focused on thoughtfully engaging in self-reflection through movement, with the intention of discovering how the identities of emerging dance/movement therapist and dance artist inform and interplay with one another. Data was collected through six Authentic Movement sessions with a trained Authentic Movement practitioner. Data analysis occurred through arts-based creative synthesis, which included free-association drawing, writing, and movement improvisation. Main themes of bodily knowing and relationship developed from data analysis. Culmination of artistic inquiry occurred through a dance film focused on above-mentioned themes. The dance film can be viewed [here](#). A review of existing research on the role of identity specifically development of body identity and professional identity was crucial to the research. Implications demonstrated the importance of embodiment for emerging dance/movement therapists.

## Acknowledgements

I initially began this thesis under the assumption that the focus throughout would be on myself as the thesis was developed and designed as a self-study. However, through this journey, I realized that this thesis is actually an homage to all the teachers with whom I have had the honor of crossing paths. These teachers include those who taught me my first pli , how to put on pointe shoes, develop musicality, choreograph, listen to my breath, listen to my clients, write therapy notes, write essays, think critically, trust my intuition and aesthetics, and most importantly, how to live and be embodied. These teachers live in the classroom, the studio, the therapy session, the living room, the car ride, and the kitchen. They are geographically near and far, but always close to me in spirit. Thank you my friends.

Lastly, this thesis is foremost in gratitude to my parents, Steven and Haichi, who are so clearly my first teachers. Thank you for demonstrating to me how to love and have compassion for others, practice humility, persevere, and most fundamentally, how to live by faith.

如果沒有爸爸媽媽的愛我走不到現在。

| 謝謝 |

| Thank you |

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## **Introduction**

“Art’s value is in the fully embodied experience of its creation and appreciation and not only in the discursive forms of academic criticism and connoisseurship” (Shusterman, 2012). This master’s thesis is foremost an embodied artistic inquiry. Thus, I invite you to partake in an embodied experience of witnessing the culmination of this artistic inquiry prior to reading this written reflection. The artistic inquiry can be viewed [here](#).

## **Motivation**

The purpose of this research study was to thoughtfully engage in the process of self-reflection through movement, with the intention of discovering how the identities of emerging dance/movement therapist and dance artist inform and interplay with one another. A secondary purpose of this research study was to intentionally bring the art of dance back into my identity as an emerging dance/movement therapist. Structured as an artistic inquiry based upon dance/movement therapist Lenore Hervey’s (2000) guidelines for arts-based research, this artistic inquiry was focused on the primary research question: What is my experience of the interplay of my identities as an emerging dance/movement therapist and a dance artist?

This research question was initially constructed differently: how do I experience the interplay of my identities as an emerging dance/movement therapist and a dance artist? This question was structured around the word “how” because initially “how” seemed to capture the vagueness and unknown final product of the research. However, through feedback and beginnings of data collection, the main question revealed itself in a slightly different iteration as stated previously.

Secondary questions of the research study were as follows: How do I experience my identity as a dance/movement therapy student and as a dance artist? What is the interrelationship

of these two identities? Where do these experiences of identities cross or diverge? Can I be effective in both these roles or will one of them change as the other grows? Will I lose parts of each identity? Can my experiences and definitions of these two identities shift while still maintaining their same significance in my life?

The motivation for this research study derived from the internal opposition, conflict, and identity crisis I experienced as I entered the Dance/Movement Therapy and Counseling Program at Columbia College Chicago. I struggled with containing both my developed identity as a dance artist and the developing identity as a dance/movement therapy student and later, an emerging dance/movement therapist. There were myriads of moments where these two identities of dance artist and emerging dance/movement therapist felt at complete odds with each other. Throughout much of my time studying to become a dance/movement therapist, I experienced intense emotional turmoil as a result of the conflict and opposition between these two important identities. This emotional turmoil was evident through my frequent thoughts of wanting to leave the graduate program to pursue dance performance and simultaneously wanting to remain in the program and experience the healing powers of psychotherapy.

Thus, a main motivation in undergoing this research was to face my fears and delve into self-reflection about the dance artist and emerging dance/movement therapist identities within me. A byproduct of the consistent internal conflict and opposition was incredible personal doubt in my abilities to be an effective dance artist and effective dance/movement therapist. Therefore, another impetus for this research was the prospect of self-empowerment and healing.

## **Journey**

For much of my formative years, I had dedicated myself wholly towards becoming a professional dance artist—I would make my living through dancing, performing, dancemaking,



and artmaking. This shifted at my undergraduate institution when I was introduced to somatics. Somatics can be defined as the awareness of the body-mind integration (Hanna, 1980). I had previously only viewed the body as a tool with which I could execute steps, and my perspective shifted and widened drastically—I was now understanding the connection between the body and the mind and learning there was an intuitive manner of moving that came directly from listening to the impulses of the body. Thus began my interest in moving beyond technical dance forms towards being embodied through developing my sensory awareness and understanding the body-mind relationship when moving and in stillness (LaMothe, 2015).

In pursuit of an embodied life, my learning path led me to dance/movement therapy and I was delighted to discover that in the field of dance/movement therapy, movement could be used a psychotherapeutic tool to foster social, emotional, and the overall holistic health of an individual (American Dance Therapy Association, 2014). Yet, in my journey of becoming a dance/movement therapist, I experienced immense disparity and internal turmoil between my identity as a dance/movement therapist and that of a dance artist. I had spent considerable amount of time and energy training to become a dance artist and the sudden shift of foci toward becoming a dance/movement therapist felt very jarring to me. I found myself attempting to nourish both identities, yet the development of the dance artist identity felt stagnant in response to this attempt.

Due to the internal conflict and feelings of opposition between my dance artist identity and developing dance/movement therapist identity, I found myself withdrawing from the dance performance world yet missing it dearly. In retreating further, I began experiencing disconnection from my dance artist identity. Simultaneously, however, my dance/movement therapist identity was developing as I acquired honing skills such as practicing empathy and

positive regard for others. As I entered my internship year in graduate school, it seemed I had reached a point where I could engage in potentially understanding the exact turmoil and tension I felt towards these two identities.

The turmoil and tension between the two identities appeared to derive from fear of the unknown—I did not know what would entail through facing the conflict and opposition between these two identities. There were numerous fears about the ramifications of facing said conflict and if it would result in shattered identities due to my conscious and unconscious suppression possible confrontation of this tension. This suppression left a very tangible fragmentation between these two identities. However, in the completion of this thesis, I recognize that it has been integral in assisting me in understanding the relationship and interplay between my identities as an emerging dance/movement therapist and dance artist.

I see much value in this study as I transition out of being a student and into an emerging dance/movement therapist. Additionally, there are possible applications of this thesis for future students of dance/movement therapy who may be coming from a predominately dance performance and choreographic background. By modeling how I will be exploring this topic through my thesis, it opens opportunity for others to experience how their identities may interplay or inter-relate. Focused on embodiment of different identities, this study has provided an opportunity for myself to consider the role of my body in the forming and shaping of my identity.

## **Literature Review**

This thesis lies in the intersection of personal identity, professional identity development, and embodiment. These topics draw from the fields of psychology, counseling psychology, philosophy, body cultural studies, dance, and performance studies.

### **Identity**

Identity is generally understood as one of the most guiding concepts and principles throughout life. Issues and considerations surrounding identity have a magnitude of weight for individuals. Research about identity has long captivated humans. Sociologists, philosophers, biologists, and psychologists, to name a few, are among those with vested and historic interest in the concept of identity (Brubaker and Cooper, 2006; Caldwell, 2016; Vignoles, Schwartz, and Luyckx, 2011). Recently, there has been an increased interest in identity-related psychology research (Vignoles et al., 2011). Identity is generally understood to be the integration of life experiences that culminate into creating the qualities, beliefs, and personality of an individual (Hammack, 2014; Siegel, 1999; Sigelman & Rider, 2006). In short, it is how we make sense of ourselves in relationship to the environment around us. Identity plays an important role in how we interact with other people, make decisions, and live in relationship to our world (Kroger, 2007; Vignoles et al., 2011). At the same time, however, the word identity has taken many meanings (Hammack, 2014; Vignoles et al., 2011). What, then, does identity refer to?

It is clear from existing psychological literature, identity is often characterized as a process of change—an individual, collective, or relational shift (Hammack, 2014; Vignoles et al., 2011). Psychologists Vignoles, Schwartz, and Luyckx (2011) offer an integrated approach in which identity is defined by four aspects: individual or personal identity, relational identity, collective identity, and material identities. Together, these four parts of identity form an

integrated whole where different aspects of identity can coexist concurrently. This integrated view recognizes that diverse components of identity may become more salient and prominent in response to different environments (Turner & Onorato, 1999). It also validates how different aspects of identity can clash and be in opposition with each other (Vignoles et al., 2011).

It is important to note that there is much discourse surrounding the concept of having multiple identities versus one singular identity (Vignoles et al., 2011). However, the singular identity theory does not exclude the concept of having a multifaceted identity, thus recognizing that identity is multilayered (Vignoles et al., 2011). Psychologists may offer the identification of multiple identities or a multi-faceted identity to their clients—thus recognizing the pertinence of the client’s narrative (McAdams, 2011; Vignoles et al., 2011).

**Professional Identity.** Beyond personal identity, much research has delved into the realm of professional identity. Psychologists Thomas Skovholt and Michael Rønnestad (1995, 2003) have led the majority of the research on counselor professional identity development. Skovholt and Rønnestad developed a Counselor Development Model, which identifies six phases over the course of a counselor’s development—from layperson to integrated and experienced therapist. This development model is useful in understanding how the identity of a counselor and therapist develops from an individual’s personal experiences (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003; Skovholt & Rønnestad, 1995, 2003).

Skovholt and Rønnestad (1995, 2003) described the six phases as the Lay Helper phase, the Beginning Student phase, the Advanced Student phase, the Novice Professional phase, the Experienced Professional phase, and the Senior Professional phase. Roughly described by its title, each stage emphasized the major differences based upon experience and the emergence of sympathy and empathy in the latter stages (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 2003). In their literature,

Skovholt and Rønnestad (2003) offered examples of how the layperson may become over-involved and give very strong directive advice to another individual whereas the professional may provide more emotional support.

In the student phases, Skovholt and Rønnestad (2003) described the transition period from lay helper to professional as most obvious when the student is assigned their first client. Another major transition that occurred in this model was the transition from advanced student to novice professional. One daunting transition factor was increased independence for novice professionals when there were no longer professors directly overseeing the students' work. Acknowledgements of education gaps were also made apparent in this stage. In becoming a professional counselor, many novice professionals experienced a significant learning curve in separating work from personal life to prevent burnout and exhaustion (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003; Skovholt & Rønnestad, 2003).

Throughout their research, Skovholt and Rønnestad (2003) also recognized several themes that develop throughout the career of a professional counselor. One theme was recognizing that professional development involves the integration of professional and personal self. This integration process is described as occurring at the intrapersonal level when the counselor begins to integrate their personality into their therapy style (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 2003). This integration is particularly relevant to this thesis research of integrating personal dance artist and professional dance/movement therapist identities.

**Professional Identity of Creative Arts Therapists.** Expressive arts therapist Hod Orkibi (2010, 2011, 2012, 2014) has published on the professional development of creative arts therapists. Orkibi stated that one of the major aspects of personal development for creative arts

therapists is understanding how they exist as an artist, in response to their identity as a therapist (2011, 2012). Art therapist B. L. Moon goes even further by stating:

If the art is only an ancillary process to your therapy work, why bother calling what you do art therapy? The professional identity of the art therapist must lie in the equal weighting of both words contained in the discipline's name: Art and Therapy (Moon, 2003, pp. 53; 60)

Other dance/movement therapists have shared the same sentiment stating, "If dance and movement lose their primacy, then something other than dance/movement therapy takes place" (Bruno, 1990, p. 107).

In Orkibi's (2010, 2011, 2012) research on the professional identity of creative arts therapists, the role of creative arts students' education in their art form was deeply emphasized. While the relationship with their art form was different for each creative arts therapies (CAT), there was a relative basic structure to the students' previous involvement with their art form despite varying levels of experience. Some CAT students had undergraduate degrees in their art form and had worked as paid professionals, while others practiced their art form as a hobby. Through Orkibi's (2012) research, he identified that art therapists and dance/movement therapists were more likely to have pre-training in their art form when compared to music and drama therapists.

In research on the CAT students' relationship with their art form pre-training and during graduate school, many participants identified that they refrained from personal art-making due to lack of time and money (Orkibi, 2012). Most significantly, however, was how CAT students' relationship to their art form shifted from an aesthetic product to an expressive process. This is very significant in response to the transformational process of professional identity development.

It is reasonable to assume that in shifting from layperson helper and into beginning student and advanced student phases, the relationship to a CAT students' art form is also evolving (Orkibi, 2011, 2012, 2014). Additionally, Orkibi (2014) studied the extent to which creative arts therapies students perceived and identified with Skovholt and Rønnestad's (2003) three phases. A mixed-method approach revealed that a higher percentage of CAT students identified with the stages that Skovholt and Rønnestad had determined (Orkibi, 2014).

In a pilot study, Orkibi (2010) studied the sense of vocational identity of CAT students. In this quantitative study, it was revealed that of all of the creative arts therapies, dance/movement therapists were most likely to experience higher vocational identity and higher career commitment scores. Orkibi surmised that this could be in response to how a relationship with the body-self is foundational in dance/movement therapy and that for DMT students, having a clearer relationship or sense of the body-self can lead to a clearer sense of an "embodied professional identity" (Orkibi, 2010).

Beyond Orkibi's (2010, 2011, 2012, 2014, 2016) research on professional identity developing in creative arts therapies students, there is not a wealth of literature examining the interplay of dance/movement therapist and dance artist. There are, however, a handful of Master's theses and heuristic inquiries surrounding this particular subject. Dance/movement therapists Annie Snow (2012) and Brigitte Steinken (2016) both described their experiences integrating identities from dancer to dance/movement therapist or dance educator to dance/movement therapist respectively. Both Snow (2012) and Steinken (2016) addressed the importance of process in the integration of identities. Orkibi (2012) described this transformation as aesthetic and product-oriented artmaking shifting towards an expressive and process-oriented approach. Echoing Orkibi's (2012) conclusions, Snow (2012) and Steinken (2016)

acknowledged the role of the creative process and increased belief in the healing power of movement. In both Orkibi's (2012) and the heuristic studies, there was recognition that a foundational tenet of dance/movement therapy is reconnection with the creative process (Snow, 2012; Steinken, 2016). Orkibi (2012) concluded that the shift towards expressive process-based art was intertwined with a CAT students' continued education in their graduate program and a continuously growing belief in the healing power of their art form through creative process.

### **Body Identity**

Similar to Orkibi's (2010) ponderings about dance/movement therapy students' embodied professional identity, dance/movement therapist Christine Caldwell offered the concept of body identity to augment our understanding of identity. Drawing from narrative identity theory, which assumes that there are multiple identities and selves, body identity is a new discourse focused on "asserting that identity is developed (generated) and lived out in the body" (Caldwell, 2016).

Traditionally, identity has been considered to be a cognitive phenomenon (Caldwell, 2016; Hammack, 2015). Through Cartesian thought and puritanical religiosity, the body was often considered to be less than and oppressed by societal constraints. Identity was thought of as separate from the body and solely composed of cognitive strength (Hammack, 2015). Caldwell (2016) stated that if life experiences and memory of said experiences are pertinent in the development of identity, thus, body memory must be equally a part of our experiences (Fuchs, 2003). Recent research on trauma and its deeply psycho-physiological ramification of the body-mind connection echoes this concept (Van der Kolk, 2014). Caldwell (2016) emphasized that if everything we experience in life is filtered through our bodies then our bodies must be at the core of our identity—cognitive identity is not separate but also encapsulated within body identity.



Caldwell (2016) identified body identity as drawing from narrative identity where each individual's body physiologically and metaphysically narrates a unique narrative (McAdams, 2008, 2011). Caldwell (2016) concluded by stating identity is a “bodily phenomenon” where the body preserves, produces, enacts our multisensory experiences into memories, narratives, and finally into our identity.

**Embodiment.** In the discussion of body identity, it is important to include the work of somatic practitioners and philosophers interested in the relationship of the body and the mind. While we often associate mind-body dualism to Cartesian thought, it is evident through his sixth meditation that Descartes himself did not hold the exact rigidity of mind-body duality that is often associated with him (Turner, 2012, 2015). In her book, *Why We Dance*, dance philosopher and religion scholar Kimerer LaMothe (2015) identified that we dance to know, express, and become. LaMothe described that despite the advent and proliferation of Cartesian thought in mainstream public thought, philosophers such as William James had long expressed a pondering in mind-body connection and how embodiment, and having a relationship with the body was enlivening (LaMothe, 2015).

Somatic practitioners Hanna (1980) and Olsen (2014) described personal rejection of Cartesian or Western thought and shifting towards awareness of the body-mind connection—particularly the healing ramifications. Hanna (1980) and Olsen (2014), among other somatic practitioners, depicted personal transformational stories as a result of body awareness and practice of embodied living.

Through the intersection of this literature, this research recognizes that the body cannot be separated from a dance-based artistic inquiry. Through using the body as the source of data collection and analysis in this thesis, there has been increasing awareness and acknowledgement

of a shift from aesthetic product based art towards expressive process-based art, body identity, and embodiment (Caldwell, 2016; LaMothe, 2015; Orkibi, 2012).

## **Methodology and Methods**

### **Embodied Artistic Inquiry**

Embodied artistic inquiry was utilized for this study. There were both personal and professional motivators in utilizing embodied artistic inquiry. As an emerging dance/movement therapist and a dance artist, I value movement as a form of nonverbal data. Additionally, arts-based research, specifically embodied artistic inquiry, values and integrates both movement and the creative process in a constructivist approach that is both inductive and subjective (Creswell, 2013; Eisner, 2008; Hervey, 2000, 2012, 2015; McNiff, 2008).

According to Hervey (2000), artistic inquiry included arts-based methods of gathering, analyzing, and/or presenting data, engagement and acknowledgement of the creative process, and recognition of the researcher's aesthetic values motivating and determining the research. The embodied aspect of embodied artistic inquiry emphasized that the human body with its derived kinesthetic, sensory, and emotional experiences were the primary artistic method used by the researcher (Hervey, 2000, 2012).

Additionally, embodied artistic inquiry was chosen as a way to reconnect to my dance artist identity. Throughout the past two years of graduate school, I had continually participated in technical and embodied improvisational dance and movement classes, whilst experiencing a decreased connection to creativity. I had engaged in creative process through creation of a handful of dances from a less engaged position, resulting in feelings of disconnection from my dance artist identity. I realized that I needed to re-engage with this dance artist identity and deepen my understanding of how it could and had positively influenced my emerging dance/movement therapist identity.

As reflected in my research question, Hervey (2000) recommends embodied artistic inquiry as the methodology of choice if the research question is sensory, emotional, or intuitive. Art, through its use of metaphors, allows an opportunity for certain research questions to be viewed from various vantage points (McNiff, 2008). Arts-based research also has the ability to address the qualitative nuances of situations by creating opportunities for research to be transformed through the research process and imagined into new ways of beings (Eisner, 2008; Finley, 2008; Higgs, 2008). Conversely, arts-based researcher Shaun McNiff (2008) also warns against focusing too deeply on a personal research topic as it could limit the possibilities of replication from other arts-based researchers.

Much of how I intake and ingest experiences as a dance artist and an emerging dance/movement therapist is through sensory awareness, trusting, and intuiting what is occurring in my body at the present moment. In arts-based research, particularly movement or body-based artistic inquiry, trusting what the body teaches is a deeply important step (Pelias, 2008). Through trusting that the body is a site of knowledge and knowing, a researcher using dance or movement-based inquiry understands that the unconscious of the body and its cultural environment will be revealed through movement (Blumenthal-Jones, 2008; Pelias, 2008). In acknowledging the body as the center of cultural integration for movement and dance-based research, the researcher needs to recognize the implications of body biases (Caldwell & Johnson, 2012; Finley, 2008; Pelias, 2008). Finally, with artistic inquiry, one of the foundational tenets is the distinguishing that the final product cannot be planned from the initial planning (McNiff, 2008). Arts-based researchers may have a general understanding of the form of presentation, but the actual specifics of the final product is difficult to determine from the beginnings of the research process (McNiff, 2008).

## **Research Procedure**

Data was collected using arts-based methods including Authentic Movement, movement improvisation, audio recording, journaling, and free association drawing. I participated in six one-hour long Authentic Movement sessions centered upon a different theme and research question with a research consultant or Authentic Movement witness (Adler, 2002). The first and sixth sessions acted as introductory and concluding sessions focused on the research study as a whole. The second, third, fourth, and fifth sessions focused on secondary research questions. These movement sessions were not video-recorded to honor the intuitive practice of Authentic Movement. The verbal discussion and sharing between myself and the witness or research consultant was audio-recorded. Witness and research consultant will be used interchangeably throughout the rest of this thesis.

**Authentic Movement.** Authentic Movement is a form of self-directed movement, done in the presence of at least one witness (Adler, 2002). The role of the witness included sitting to the side of the movement space and observing the movement of the mover openly and non-judgmentally. The witness also focused on their personal emotional or movement response to observing the mover. Beyond witnessing the movement of the mover and the witness' personal response, the witness was also responsible for holding and considering the physical and emotional safety of the space for the mover (Adler, 2002, 2015).

Through being witnessed, Adler (2002, 2015) believed in the ability of the mover to bring conscious awareness to authentic thought and movement that typically resides in the subconscious of an individual. In moving, the mover brings these subconscious thoughts and experiences to a place of illumination in order to find more clarity and understanding. The

mover's ability to track thought processes while moving is difficult, but through time and practice, the mover can strengthen and develop this skill (Adler, 2002).

In Authentic Movement, the mover's eyes are closed to minimize distractions in the space. In doing this, the mover's internal thoughts, images, and feelings become more apparent and judgment is slowly relinquished. Following moving for a predetermined amount of time, the mover and witness verbally discuss and process the experience. First, the mover describes and tracks the journey of the movement from beginning to end or identifies specific "pools" or sections of movement. In describing the movement, the mover also verbally acknowledges any images, feelings, and/or thoughts that emerged simultaneously with the movement. This tracking is a reflection of what Adler (2002) refers to as the "inner witness" of the mover. The inner witness of the mover is aware of the significance of the movement and how the movement draws meaning from memories and metaphors (Adler, 2002, 2015).

The mover is in control of the Authentic Movement experience and chooses how and when to receive feedback from the witness. Following the mover's expression of their journey, the witness can offer reflection or "witnessing" back to the mover by engaging in description of the movement executed by the mover. Additionally, the witness can express other sensory, emotional, or movement responses to both the mover's movements and the verbal sharing (Adler, 2002).

**Participant.** The sole participant of this research was myself. At the time of data collection, I was a 24-year-old female Asian-American emerging dance/movement therapist raised in the Midwest. I was also a dance artist who has received extensive education in performance and choreography. I had been taking dance classes, choreographing, and performing throughout my experience as a dance/movement therapy student. Throughout completion of data

analysis and compilation of the final artistic product, I was living and working in Taipei, Taiwan as a U.S. Student Fulbright Fellow.

**Setting.** The data collection and preliminary data analysis occurred at a private location in Chicago collaboratively identified with the research consultant. Continual data analysis and development of movement motifs and choreography occurred in private locations including my respective apartments in Chicago, Milwaukee, and Taipei. Further data analysis and culmination of artistic inquiry into a dance film occurred in Taiwan. The dance film was filmed on location at four different sites in Taitung County, Taiwan.

**Data Collection.** The research procedure was structured around six sessions of Authentic Movement. Authentic Movement was chosen facilitate embodied artistic inquiry because of my innate trust in bodily knowing and belief that the body is the conduit between the two identities of emerging dance/movement therapist and dance artist.

Each Authentic Movement session lasted sixty minutes in length. The sessions were not video-recorded to emulate the ephemeral and transient quality of dance. Additionally, I personally found that the beauty of Authentic Movement lies in how the inner witness of the mover recognizes movement—not in how it actually looks from an outside or external perspective (Adler, 2002). These six sessions occurred within a timeframe of three weeks with one or two days in between each session. The goal of this timeframe was to maintain continuity between sessions without an extended break between sessions. The first and last sessions were focused around the main research question: What is my experience of the interplay of my identities as an emerging dance/movement therapist and a dance artist? The second and third sessions were focused on my identity as a dance artist and an emerging dance/movement therapist respectively. On the fourth session, the question centered upon the interrelationship

between the two identities. The fifth session revolved around new questions and illuminations from previous sessions.

In the beginning of each Authentic Movement session, my witness and I verbally checked-in and I identified how I felt in that present moment and if there was an internal impulse to discuss my relationship and experiences of previous movement sessions. Following, my witness and I engaged in the ritual affirmation of creating the space for the movement where I stood near the far wall away and across from my witness who was located at the opposite wall. After setting a verbal acknowledgment of my role as a mover and my research consultant's role as a witness, I focused my attention on the emptiness of the space before me and invited that space internally to practice a moment of silence and emptiness to allow for movement to emerge. My witness then rang a bell indicating the beginning of twenty minutes of movement (Adler, 2002).

Immediately following the ringing of the bell, I spoke the question of the session and began to move by allowing any internal impulse to guide my movement, thus, aligning with an important part of Authentic Movement (Adler, 2002). After moving in silence with my eyes closed for twenty minutes, my witness rang the bell four times to signal the transition out of the movement experience and into verbal discussion. Taking my time to transition from moving, I sat near my witness and placed both hands on the ground to signal the end of my movement and beginning of verbal discussion and processing (Adler, 2002).

In the verbal discussion of these Authentic Movement sessions, I began by naming either the journey of movement that I experienced or a specific "pool" or section of the movement that took precedence and had left an indelible impact (Adler, 2002). I described the movement and any accompanying thoughts, feelings, emotions, images, or memories as thoroughly as possible



using the present tense. In her responses, the witness offered both what she had experienced in that moment and any responses she had to my verbal discussion or description of the movement journey or pool. Following her verbalization, the witness invited me to speak, if so desired, in response to her witnessing. To signal the end of verbal discussion, my witness and I both placed our hands on the ground and the session ended with me blowing out a candle that had been burning from the beginning of the session.

**Data Analysis.** Data analysis occurred both concurrently with and after data collection. Data analysis occurred first through the verbal discussions of Authentic Movement sessions with the Authentic Movement research consultant. Additional audio recording of the Authentic Movement discussion was transcribed for further clarity. In listening to the transcribed audio recordings of each session, I resonated with and marked certain words from each recording that I intuitively determined as important. Each identified word or phrase from the verbal discussion sparked sensations, memories, and images that influenced my free association writing, drawing, and improvisational movement. Using that preliminary analysis, I engaged in further movement improvisation to clarify and develop the movement motif or theme of these sessions. This creative synthesis informed the choreographic, embodiment, and aesthetic process of creating a final product of this artistic inquiry.

**Artistic Product.** The final product of this artistic inquiry was presented in the form of a dance film viewed at Columbia College Chicago's Creative Arts Therapies Alumni Concert on March 22-23, 2018. Due to the methodology of artistic inquiry, the final product of a dance film was integral to this research (Hervey, 2000, 2012). The dance film was filmed at four different locations in Taitung County, Taiwan. Taitung is located on the southeastern coast of Taiwan and each location was situated on the waterfront. I was intuitively drawn towards the relationship of

the water and the shore as it reflected a dichotomy similar to the two identities of emerging dance/movement therapist and dance artist. The movements developed for the dance film were a combination of choreographed movement and motifs from the data analysis, as well as movement improvisation based upon the themes gathered from the data. A videographer, who had previous experience filming movement and dance, filmed all the footage of movement. Following gathering of footage in Taitung, I engaged in creative synthesis to edit and create the final artistic product.

### **Validity and Reliability**

The validation strategies utilized were two external auditors and a resonance panel. One auditor was the research consultant, who acted as an external witness for the data collection and preliminary analysis. The second external auditor was the videographer of the dance film. Throughout the process of preparation for and during filming, there was much discussion between the videographer and myself regarding the transferring and evoking of emotions from movement onto film. Following each location, the videographer and I watched and re-watched all of the footage and consistently discussed the themes of the research to analyze if those themes had transferred from live movement onto film. This acted as a form of feedback regarding the execution of the artistic inquiry.

The resonance panel consisted of three individuals focused on offering feedback regarding the artistic quality of the embodied artist inquiry prior to completion of the dance film. The feedback gathered from the resonance panel echoed the format of Fieldwork where the work is offered feedback without much information given about the movement. Members were selected based upon their experience in art-making, choreography, and dance filmmaking. Some members were part of the dance/movement therapy field, while other members were not. The

members of the resonance panel offered feedback on the movement individually and only once in the artistic inquiry process.

An electronic folder of movement footage was shared with each member of my resonance panel. Without divulging information about the theme of the research, each member was invited to go through the folder of footage and share their impressions and comments about the aesthetics and their overall response. Members shared their impressions and responses with me via email or in person. The feedback of the resonance panel and external auditors was essential in assisting me to further clarify the translation and execution of my movement from the embodied artistic inquiry onto the final dance film.

**Fieldwork.** Fieldwork is derived from the work of *The Field*, which was founded by Wendy Lasica in New York City in 1985 (The Field, 2018). The Field was originally a space for artists to show their work and receive feedback. However, over time, The Field became an organization where the form of feedback called Fieldwork was established.

In Fieldwork, each artist shows their work to a group of individuals with diverse backgrounds without previously sharing or discussing the content or history of the work. Following sharing of movement, feedback is given in an honest and immediate manner without being suggestive or corrective to the artist's work (The Field, 2018). Thus, Fieldwork acted as the structure for the resonance panel in offering feedback on the choreographic, embodiment, and aesthetics aspects of the artistic inquiry. This reflects the four criteria of qualitative research validation of substantive contribution, aesthetic merit, reflexivity and impact (Creswell, 2013; Finley, 2008; Higgs, 2008). Additionally, it emphasizes the requirements in artistic inquiry of emphasizing creative process and aesthetics (Hervey, 2000, 2012).

## Results and Discussion

### Themes

Several themes have emerged in this artistic inquiry centered upon the research question: what is my experience of the interplay between my identities as an emerging dance/movement therapist and dance artist. The two main themes gathered from the collected data are embodied knowledge and relationship.

**Embodied Knowledge.** The first major theme that arose throughout my data analysis was that of embodied knowledge: *This exploration, it has been about the body, telling the mind to pause and telling the mind to trust the body.* The quote above from my collected data summarizes that sense of bodily knowing. From the onset of the research process, I was not certain about the answers that would result from this artistic inquiry. Yet, I put considerable trust in the intuitive knowledge of my body. This is reflective of the intuitive processes in arts-based research (Eisner, 2008; Hervey 2000; Hervey, 2015).

In her 2015 Marian Chace Foundation lecture for the American Dance Therapy Association Conference, dance/movement therapist Lenore Hervey shared the following about artistic inquiry:

In my many years of doing research and advising hundreds of researchers, I have found that sometimes the researcher thinks she is asking one question when actually she is asking another, and the data won't answer the first question, it will only answer the question she is really asking. Sometimes research questions hide until they are ready to be seen. And when they do reveal themselves, it's obvious they've been secretly directing the research all along. (Hervey, 2015, pp. 9)

I found myself in a similar situation where, during the preparation stage of the thesis, I was filled with uncertainty regarding the exact focus of my research. To better understand these feelings of uncertainty, I engaged in embodied movement improvisation as the first step in research development. In listening to my body, I came to the realization that this topic of understanding the interplay between identities was pertinent for my growth as an individual and as a developing professional dance/movement therapist.

Initially, the research question had framed itself as: How is my experience between my identities as an emerging dance/movement therapist and dance artist? Grammatically and structurally, this initial research question embodied a vagueness that reflected my internal ambiguity. However, through movement improvisation, it became increasingly clear that the equivocation of the research question was not constructive. Thus, in accordance with Hervey's (2015) observations, at the right moment, the main research question revealed itself as: What is my experience of the interplay between my identities as emerging dance/movement therapist and dance artist? This first foray of trusting the body to reveal the main research questions set the precedence for the entirety of this artistic inquiry. Throughout data collection, trust in bodily knowing and the wisdom of the body consistently revealed itself as a major theme (Adler, 2002; Eisner, 2008).

I experienced curiosity about embodiment of the two identities in different body parts in the first Authentic Movement session: *I feel the dance artist in my pelvis. It's very grounded. It's heavier. It feels settled in the pelvis...I feel the therapist...I don't know, I'm not quite sure, I float it up and down. But I know that it's above the dance artist.* In movement, the dance artist felt very secure and developed in its identity and in its association with the pelvis. The emerging dance/movement therapist, conversely, was less concrete in its association with a body part. As

Authentic Movement sessions progressed a different understanding of the dance/movement therapist identity slowly emerged.

In the third session, there was a shift in my understanding: *I feel the dance therapist in the back, under the scapula...I engage my back muscles and I feel this connection down the spine.* As data collection progressed, the understanding of the dance/movement therapist identity associated with the scapula also shifted. Initially, the connection with the dance/movement therapist identity required extreme exertion and “muscling” but, by the fifth session, shifted to a recognition of softening: *I feel the strength in the back...I’m not muscling it. There’s still firmness in the bones...but also a suppleness to it and I feel that [suppleness] in my back.*

By the final session, I am experiencing a commitment to bodily knowing: *I have strengthened my trust in my body...in this connection...I’m committing to this journey of trusting.* Throughout much of the data collection, my journey in understanding these two identities has depended upon the initial and continual trust that the body knows what the mind does not or cannot see (Adler, 2002, 2015; Caldwell, 2016; Einser, 2008). Through trusting in bodily knowing and wisdom, I was presented with new perspectives surrounding my preconceived notions about the identities of emerging dance/movement therapist and dance artist.

As both a dance/movement therapist and a dance artist, embodied knowledge is essential. Historically, there has been more emphasis placed on tangible quantifiable knowledge as evidenced by Cartesian thought (Turner, 2012). However, as philosophers Kimerer LaMothe (2015) and Garry Young (2004) state, embodied knowledge has not always been rejected or “subjugated.” There is an inherent intangibility in knowledge wherein the body lives (LaMothe, 2015).

**Relationship.** The second theme that resulted from the data collection was relationship. In the fourth session, a question revealed itself in response to the main research question: *How can I be in relationship with both of my identities?*

This final question in response to the main research question is indicative of the importance of relationship in this research. In the first data collection session, the focus was on identifying the associated and correlated body parts with the emerging dance/movement therapist and dance artist identities. By identifying the body as the holding vessel for the identities (Caldwell, 2016), it implicitly and explicitly implied relationship. Each body part is a part of a whole—the whole of the body (Hackney, 2003). The language used in my verbal processing revealed an implicit awareness of the relationship that eventually was explicitly stated: *I'm sitting on my sitzbones. And where I feel the sitz bones on the ground, I feel my upper body engage...and I recognize that this sitz bones engagement, that groundedness...that's the dance artist. And I really feel the dance therapist in the back, under the scapula....sort of coming down. I engage my back muscles and I feel this connection down the spine between the scapula...and I have this thought, "This is who you can be." This feeling in the scapula is powerful...I feel really powerful.*

In the identification of these body parts, I am also identifying that both of these identities live in my body, they already live within the self. Thus, they are each a part of a whole and have a relationship to my pelvis and scapula already. The identities are not in opposition as I had originally imagined in my mind. The body acts as a reminder that these two identities are already in relationship, it is now simply a new understanding of what this relationship looks like.

In the final data collection session, through trusting the body and trusting the relationship between the two identities, the following occurred: *I come to the end of my movement and lie in*

*the mandorla*. This use of the word mandorla describes the intersection of two circles where the identities of dance/movement therapist and dance artist can be together peacefully. Thus, from beginning in a place of opposition and resistance to ending in a place of being together with both identities, it is clear that a transformational shift occurred.

### **Oscillate: A Dance Film**

The culmination of the artistic inquiry was the creation of a dance film entitled *oscillate*. This dance film was filmed at four different locations in Taitung, Taiwan. Drawing from the themes of relationship and bodily knowing, the movement echoed and reflected these growing understandings. I was drawn to the locations due to the dichotomy of land and sea where oscillation occurred as I moved between identities and between water and land on film. In that parallel process, there was a constant negotiation of what each identity was experiencing at a given moment.

Similar to Orkibi (2012), Snow (2012), and Steiken's (2016) research, through the creation of the dance film, I experienced the transformational shift of planning and desiring to make aesthetic product-based film to creating a dance film that was expressive and process-based. A byproduct of my inability to travel from Taipei, Taiwan to Columbia College Chicago's Alumni Concert in March 2018, I experienced a sense of completion and healing without needing the validating response of an audience. In contrast to my previous choreographed work where I deeply valued the response of the audience, *oscillate* provided an opportunity where the process itself was more fulfilling and pertinent (Orkibi, 2012).

Additionally, despite the permanent nature of film when compared to ephemeral live performance, what feels most salient is still the process of creating this dance film. The sensory



and kinesthetic memory of moving between water and land, demonstrating the relationship between identities of dance/movement therapist and dance artist, was and is unforgettable.

**Parallel Processes.** In discussion of identities of dance/movement therapist and dance artist, I was reminded of another dual identity in my life—that of Asian American. This was starkly felt while being in Asia, specifically in the country from where my parents immigrated. In many ways, the constant negotiation of Asian and American identities was reflected in my negotiation of the dance/movement therapist and dance artist identities. While the discussion of racial and ethnic identity and its relationship to professional development and overall identity is worthy of its own thesis, it is necessary to identify and clarify the implications that arose throughout this process.

It is important to recognize that definitions and experiences of “Asian” and “American” are incredibly broad (Huynh, Nguyen, & Benet-Martinez, 2011). I have traditionally identified as an Asian American as the moniker has had the ability to speak to two separate yet connected cultural experiences. In similar ways to my analysis of dance/movement therapist and dance artist identity, my racial identity experience has depended upon relationship and constant negotiation of these two different cultural identities. Similarly, embodied knowing is valuable in that I can only speak of my lived personal experiences of my bicultural identity.

One manner in which the parallel process is evident is through the symbolism in the dance film. Through my movement interactions with water and land, I bodily negotiated the experiences of Asian American and emerging dance/movement therapist and dance artist. Negotiation is a word that comes to mind often because of my lived experience of knowing that the culture in which my school or work life is significantly different from my home life and how I was raised as a child of immigrants. In daily life there existed challenges of deciding how to

interact in ways that are culturally appropriate (Huynh et al., 2011). In this thesis year in Taiwan, I have been faced with reverse and converse situations than what I faced growing up in the United States. Theorists Huynh, Nguyen, and Benet-Martinez (2011) referred to this shifting as cultural frame switching where individuals with higher bicultural identity integration are more likely to switch smoothly. Huynh, Nguyen, and Benet-Martinez stated that in bicultural identity integration, some individuals might exhibit either blendedness or compartmentalization. This reference to blendedness appeared to reflect the theme of relationship, while compartmentalization spoke towards feelings of opposition or turmoil (Huynh et al., 2011).

I particularly saw the bicultural negotiation in my movements that are based upon the water. At times, I attempted to muscle my way through movement, at other times, I surrendered and let the waves and metaphoric cultural tides pull and move me. When moving on land, it was clear that I was experiencing physical grounding and rooting in my pelvis in the land where my families' indigenous roots lay. Living in Taiwan, moving on Taiwanese land, I cannot deny the pull of home—the recognition that my ancestors are buried in this land.

The negotiation of my interactions from land and water speak to daily cultural negotiations where I recognize and understand that certain ways in which I walk through life can be deeply culturally inherent. The difficulty of moving in water reminds me of the difficulties of bicultural negotiation and simultaneously reminds me of how said negotiations can be different for each individual—in very similar ways to professional identity development (Huynh et al., 2011; Orkibi, 2012; Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003; Skovholt & Rønnestad, 1995, 2003).

**Resonance Panel.** A concern of mine throughout the filming of movement was the transference and evocation of emotion similar to what I experienced throughout the research process. This concern was met through validity via a three-person resonance panel. To my

surprise, the response of the resonance panel members reflected certain experiences such as the initial conflict, and a slow development of understanding and peace, and eventual joy. One member commented that there was “thoughtful processing of your relationship to the world around you—or seeking a relationship with the world around,” as well as a “struggling with something you can’t reconcile.” Another member commented on the contrast of the colors in the footage—particularly on slow progression of brighter lighting affecting the overall emotional tone of the footage. This member also commented on the authenticity in movement—a true interaction with internal and external environment.

A third member mentioned my movement’s relationship with the waves as “the fear of the unknown, a slight step beyond my comfort zone, that easily dissolves into a peaceful understanding that all is in fact well.” This member identified that “your movements exist between these two worlds [water and shore], your body bridging them together for me,” and that the “return to water feels quite different this time [at the end]...I feel a freedom and certainty that feed into a courage to take flight when necessary combined with a wisdom to recuperate in grounding as needed.” Thus, in their own words, each member of the resonance panel reflected upon my aesthetic choices in ways that echoed the emotional context and embodied learning in the research process.

## **Limitations**

Limitations of this study include tracking in Authentic Movement, location, and time. Another limitation of this study is due to the thesis being arts-based research. Due to the nature of arts-based research, another researcher may not necessarily reproduce the exact final artistic product. As a result of the subjective quality of art, another researcher may make completely different aesthetic choices regarding the movement, filming, or editing of the final dance film.

**Tracking in Authentic Movement.** One note of consideration is the role of tracking in Authentic Movement. Prior to this self-study, I had previous exposure to and practice with Authentic Movement both individually and with groups (Adler, 2002). It was brought to my attention, both from my research consultant and my thesis advisor that the amount of detail that I was able to track in movement is at a more advanced level and was very comfortable tracking more specific pools in each Authentic Movement session. In a possible recreation of this research process, it is very evident that each individual researcher may track their movements in different ways that are intuitive to each individual. Furthermore, Authentic Movement is focused on an individual narrative, thus, it is clear that different themes may emerge for each individual.

**Location and Time.** It is important to note the possibilities of the location and timing of data analysis into the culminating dance film influencing the research process. While the data collection occurred in Chicago immediately following the conclusion of my graduate studies, the majority of the data analysis and creative synthesis of artistic inquiry occurred in Taiwan where I was working as a Fulbright Fellow.

In considering the significance of literal and metaphoric space, I was thousands of miles away from where I had most intensely felt the internal turmoil between identities. The geographic and time distance assisted my ability to ponder objectively about my relationship with the emerging dance/movement therapist and dance artist identity. Time-wise, I had the opportunity to spend a significant part of a year analyzing data and creating the dance film. The length of time contributed to the reflection of the relationship between these two identities. For another individual, they may not have the same opportunity of time and geographic distance in objective reflection or data analysis.

### **Clinical Application**

As mentioned previously, this research reaffirms the importance of fostering creativity outside of clinical work for clinicians. Hod Orkibi's (2012) longitudinal study concluded that many creative arts therapies students avoided making art during their training. Dance/movement therapist Corinna Brown (2008) goes further and describes how professional creative arts therapists have and are continually avoiding making art as well. Thus, a contribution of this study to the field of dance/movement therapy and more generally, creative arts therapies, is to draw attention to how the art of dance can live within our practice as dance/movement therapists.

While previous theses and articles focus primarily on professional counselor identity development, this thesis is focused on how embodiment and body identity development can bring new awareness for dance/movement therapy students in regards to their identities. Dance, and most fundamentally, the body, is undeniably identified at the core and foundation of dance/movement therapy (Chaiklin & Wengrower, 2016). Thus, this thesis offers support for research and inquiry on the re-introduction of dance and embodiment into our work as dance/movement therapists. Finally, this thesis is reflective of the healing power of movement. As other dance/movement therapy students and emerging professionals have expressed, creative arts therapists' belief in the healing abilities of creative process is the result of continued intra-personal and interpersonal exposure to their art from. As dance/movement therapists and body-based clinicians, we have the opportunity to access different modes of knowledge. Thus, this thesis is a reminder for us as clinicians to bring our bodies into our sessions, to remember that we also have a completely other set of tools.

### **Future Research**

This research has considerable value to students entering the creative arts therapy field. For many students, it is possible that they had previous careers as artists, educators, or worked in

other creative or educational fields. The transition into becoming an emerging dance/movement therapist is not simple. By emphasizing embodiment, this research provides new opportunity and perspective for students immersing themselves into the field. Thus, there are implications of this research in longitudinal studies for beginning creative arts therapy students, as well as for established professionals in the field. In my life, there will be future ponderings about the main research question as I continue to develop in the field of dance/movement therapy.

## **Conclusion**

Through this artistic inquiry, I found the courage to face my fears and came to the realization that the identities of dance/movement therapist and dance artist are connected. Despite experiencing a significant amount of emotional turmoil during the beginning of this thesis process, I can confidently say that I have experienced a transformational shift towards healing due to my increased belief in the power of the creative process and the wisdom of the body. In shifting towards creating expressive process-based art, I experienced a metamorphosis through discovering softness and openness in my movement. I understood that I did not need to “muscle” the relationships between my two identities, but that my body acted as a conduit of relationship. While I may continually struggle with lingering aspects of the main research question, this arts-based and written reflection will act as a reminder to trust in the power of embodied knowledge.

Embodied knowledge is an entire body of knowledge that must not be ignored. Regardless of the influence of Cartesian thought, it is important to pay attention and understand our bodily knowing (Caldwell, 2016; Hanna, 1980; LaMothe, 2015). As clinicians working in mental health, specifically as body-based dance/movement therapists, we not only have access to our quantifiable knowledge, but also our embodied experiences. This thesis is a reminder to tap into that embodied knowing, activate it in our work with our clients, and utilize it in our personal art making endeavors (Orkibi, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2014).

While this thesis is focused on a personal journey, it is clear to me that the act of embodying these questions through movement was the initial breakthrough. Thus, for others who may experience fragmentation in identity and roles, I invite you to embrace your fears and trust your embodied experiences. As dance/movement therapists, we must not forget the role of our

bodies in dance/movement therapy. Let us remember to bring the body back into the therapy session, and I can only hope that the awareness of our embodied knowledge coupled with personal art making can further enrich our creative spirit as creative arts clinicians.



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## **Appendix A: Definition of Key Terms**

### **Dance Artist**

An individual who expresses themselves through choreographed or improvised movement of their body. This individual may have codified training in dance performance and dance-making, or develops their kinesthetic ability through mentorship or self-discovery. A dance artist values richly embodied movement as a means of moving and choreographing (Olsen & McHose, 2014).

### **Dance/Movement Therapy**

The psychotherapeutic use of movement to promote the emotional, social, cognitive, and physical integration of an individual, for the purpose of improving overall holistic health and wellbeing. Dance/Movement Therapy belongs to the Creative Arts Therapies, which includes Art Therapy, Music Therapy, and Drama Therapy, among others (American Dance Therapy Association, 2014).

### **Emerging Dance/Movement Therapist**

An individual who has completed coursework and practicum and internship for a degree in Dance/Movement Therapy at an accredited domestic or international graduate or alternate-route program, and is entering the workforce as a dance/movement therapist (American Dance Therapy Association, 2014).

### **Embodiment**

The understanding of body and mind integration through the development of sensory, emotional, and physical awareness of the living body in motion and in stillness. This understanding informs our daily living experiences where oscillation can occur between internal and external awareness (Hanna, 1980; LaMothe, 2015).

## **Embodied Artistic Inquiry**

The use of artistic methods of gathering, analyzing, and/or presenting data, engagement and acknowledgement of the creative process, and recognizing how the aesthetic values of the researcher motivates and determines the research (Hervey, 2000). The embodied aspect of embodied artistic inquiry emphasizes that the human body and its derived movement is the primary artistic method used by the researcher (Hervey, 2000, 2012).

## **Identity**

A process of change in terms of the qualities, characteristics, experiences, beliefs, and values that make up an individual. These processes of change can occur intra-personally and inter-personally. These processes determine how we make sense of ourselves in relationship to the environment around us (Oxford Handbook of Identity Theory, 2011).