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Sarah Lawrence College

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If I can't dance to it, it's not my revolution:

The Intersection of Feminist Theory & Dance/Movement Therapy

Paige Kliewer-McClellan

Submitted in partial completion of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science in Dance/Movement Therapy at Sarah Lawrence College

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Abstract

Feminism is a social, cultural, and political movement and set of theories which highlight the impact of gender inequality in order to push for equal rights in all spheres. Dance/movement therapy is a method of psychotherapy which utilizes movement rather than verbal language to identify and process emotional material, centering the lived, embodied experience of the client. Both dance/movement therapy as a practice and profession and feminism as a movement and ideology have faced difficulties in being recognized as legitimate, worthwhile areas of focus, and they have also faced similar challenges in embracing diversity and inclusion. The ideological similarities between feminist theory and the theories supporting dance/movement therapy lend themselves to further investigation and incorporation, as both the feminist movement and the practice of dance/movement therapy necessarily evolve to stay both socially and culturally relevant and effectual in the promotion of positive change. By looking to the history of both the American feminist movement and the establishment of dance/movement therapy in America, practitioners of dance/movement therapy can gain valuable perspective on where we have come from, and insight into where we might yet journey to.

Keywords: dance/movement therapy, feminism, feminist movement, empowerment, intersectionality

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“The Church says: the body is a sin.

Science says: the body is a machine.

Advertising says: The body is a business.

The Body says: I am a fiesta.” - Eduardo Galeano

“Thus, the body has its own politics and, faced with the speeches of our persona, the body tells the stories of our unspeakable shadow: our pains, our unrealised wishes, our jealousy, passion, and neediness which sometimes are too painful even to be spoken of.” - Asaf Rolef Ben-Shahar

“If I can't dance to it, it's not my revolution.” - Emma Goldman

Introduction: The Intersection of Feminism & Dance/Movement Therapy

As a body-based therapeutic practice, dance/movement therapy utilizes movement, rather than verbal language, as a mode of expressing and experiencing emotional content. The interconnectivity of the body and the lived experience of the individual, including our identities and the way we interact with the people and world around us, is central to the practice of dance/movement therapy. The philosophical underpinnings of feminism are also closely linked to the body; in particular, attention is paid to the ways in which our intersectional identities, particularly gender identity, impact our day-to-day lives in both personal and systemic ways, all in service of decentering dominant discourse and establishing equity. The ideological similarities between feminist theory and the theories supporting dance/movement therapy lend themselves to further investigation and incorporation, as both the feminist movement and the practice of dance/movement therapy, historically and in the contemporary moment, necessarily evolve to stay both socially and culturally relevant and effectual in the promotion of positive change. Both dance/movement therapy as a practice and profession and feminism as a movement and ideology have faced difficulties in being recognized as legitimate, worthwhile areas of focus, and they have also faced similar challenges in embracing diversity and inclusion. In the same way that contemporary feminism holds space for the second wave feminists who are now writing, working, and marching alongside third wave feminists, American dance/movement therapy has the unique positionality, as a young practice, to include generational perspectives. Practitioners who trained with the foremothers of American dance/movement therapy and new professionals in the field have the ability to be in active conversation – or, in conflict.

By looking to the history of both the American feminist movement and the establishment of dance/movement therapy in America, practitioners of dance/movement therapy can gain valuable perspective on where we have come from, and insight into where we might yet journey to. Relevant topics within contemporary feminist discourse such as intersectionality, body and identity politics, ableism/racism/sexism, and rejection of the gender binary are intrinsically embedded into the conversation of an embodied therapeutic practice such as dance/movement therapy, because all reside on a body level. By intentionally incorporating feminist theory into dance/movement therapy practice, with a commitment towards equity and inclusion, we can move away from the traditional psychotherapeutic focus on pathology, and focus instead on the humanity which is shared within the lived experience of each individual identity. Using the power of decentering and dismantling found within feminist theory, dance/movement therapists can examine ways in which the practice still resides within a power-over hierarchy, and shift into a power-with model of working, with clients as the authorities on their own embodied knowledge and narrative (Kirk, 2009). In this way, dance/movement therapy can expand to its full potential as a therapeutic practice accessible to, and empowering of, all bodily selves.

From Suffrage to Riot Grrls: A Brief History of the Feminist Movement & Overview of Feminist Theory

In order to understand how feminist thought can be effectively incorporated into the practice of dance/movement therapy, a baseline understanding of the history and theories of both feminism and dance/movement therapy is necessary. We will begin with feminism. It seems appropriate to commence this brief look into the history and diverse theoretical underpinnings of, and equally diverse criticisms against, feminism in America (global feminism is beyond the scope of this paper) with a quote from an (in)famous feminist author, oft credited with propelling

the “second wave” of feminism forward. In her book “The Feminine Mystique,” Friedan addresses “the problem that has no name:”

The problem lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States. Each suburban wife struggled with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night—she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question — “Is this all?” (Friedan, 2013, p. 57).

Within this quote, the primary focus of the American feminist movement, from its conception in the 1800s to the reckoning it began facing in the 1990s, is clear: namely, the plight of the unfulfilled middle- to upper-class, cisgender, heterosexual, White housewife. Just as clearly, it can be discerned whose voices are left out: namely, everyone else – those who are Black and Brown, who are working class, who live below the poverty line. Transgender voices, gay voices, voices of those who do not fit within the small box feminism created for itself. Growth and change cannot happen within a vacuum, and an essential truth of feminism historically and in the current moment is that those claiming feminism are often their own worst enemy. It has been the voices in the background, straining and fighting to be heard, that have led the movement forward and kept it from stagnating or dying out altogether. Therefore, this overview will strive to include all narratives, dominant and otherwise, to offer as comprehensive a look into American feminism as possible within this brief section.

French philosopher Fourier is credited with creating the term “*feminisme*,” which was translated into the English “feminism” in the 1890s to represent the burgeoning movement for

political and legal rights for women (New World Encyclopedia, 2017). Feminism can be defined both broadly and quite specifically; for the purposes of this paper, feminism is a social, cultural, and political movement and set of theories which highlight the impact of gender inequality in order to push for equal rights in all spheres (New World Encyclopedia, 2017). Friedan's "problem that has no name" was in fact being named as early as the eighteenth century - although some histories acknowledge much earlier contributions to the discourse on gender inequality, influenced by the Enlightenment and the French Revolution; as early as the twelfth century, convent-founder Hildegard of Bingen wrote about the social status of women, and in the fourteenth century poet Christine de Pizan challenged mainstream views on women and education (Hannam, 2014). However, in the United States, it was not until between 1776 and 1929 that a democratic revolution led by mostly middle-class, White, married women who owned property began to emerge, and it is this "old feminism," also known as the "first wave" of feminism, that is seen as the beginning of the American feminist movement (Hannam, 2014). The wave framework was adopted to highlight the dynamic nature of the feminist movement, but has been criticized for lending itself to generational disconnect and infighting, as well as a false sense that in between the ebbs and flows of the "waves," no change was taking place (Berger, 2006). However, the wave framework is still largely used in scholarship to organize the history of the feminist movement, and for that reason it will be used in this paper. The first wave of feminism was centered on women's suffrage (i.e., achieving the legal right to vote), but that was not the sole theme. Many early feminists considered marriage the primary form of oppression they faced, citing multileveled "sexual, social, and economic inequality" (Schneir, 1972). In 1836, men legally owned their wives, as well as any property with which their wives might happen to have entered into the marriage. The Married Women's Property Act was one of the

earliest examples of feminist politics, aimed at contesting the lack of legal autonomy married women held. The Act was passed by the New York State Legislature in 1848, an important year for first wave feminism.

In July of the same year, a meeting was held in Seneca Falls, New York, to discuss the “social, civil, and religious conditions and rights of women,” and a “declaration of sentiments and resolutions” was drafted, marking the beginning of the organized feminist movement in the United States (Schneir, 1972, p. 76). The document shrewdly utilized language from the Declaration of Independence (“We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men *and women* [emphasis added] are created equal”), highlighting what the early feminists considered to be an illogical and unsupportable lack of equity (Schneir, 1972, p. 77). In spite of the nuances and scope of the declaration, suffrage became the rallying cry of the first wave of feminism, and is remembered as early feminism’s greatest contribution to the movement. The Nineteenth Amendment, giving women the right to vote, was passed in August of 1920, 72 years after the fight began (Schneir, 1972). The Seneca Falls Declaration was made possible in great part by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the daughter of a judge and wife of a lawyer, founder of the National Woman Suffrage Association, and one of the primary theorists of the early feminist movement. Alongside Stanton, Susan B. Anthony acted as an organizer and activist in the early years of the movement. Countless others spurred the first wave of feminism forward in necessary ways, including Lucy Stone and Lucretia Mott, as well as notable abolitionists Sojourner Truth and Frederick Douglass (Schneir, 1972).

The first wave of feminism was intertwined with the abolition movement, and many early feminists began by advocating for the rights of men and women of color (Sanchez-Eppler, 1993).

The synchrony between the two movements was deeply embedded in body politics, and the concept of claiming personhood. Sanchez-Eppler writes,

all the *men* who, Thomas Jefferson declared, *are created equal* shed their gender and their race; in obtaining the right to freedom and equality they discard bodily specificity.

The problem, as feminists and abolitionists surely suspected, was that women and blacks could never shed their bodies to become incorporeal *men* (1993, p. 3).

Over this problem, abolitionists and feminists were able to relate to each other and aid in a shared strategy for liberation. However, a criticism of the feminist movement that has become a throughline from these earliest days can be found within the feminist-abolitionist discourse, as women began using their “enslaved brothers and sisters” as a platform from which to elevate their own situation, equating the oppression of women with the oppression of Black and Brown people. “The difficulty of preventing moments of identification from becoming acts of appropriation constitutes the essential dilemma of feminist-abolitionist rhetoric” Sanchez-Eppler writes, and this difficulty did not end with the first wave of feminism (1993, p. 20).

After suffrage was achieved in 1920, the outbreak of World War II in 1939 led to an ebb in the first wave of feminism (Schneir, 1972). While feminism was present in myriad small ways, it did not rally as a cohesive movement once again until the 1960s, marking the beginning of the second wave (New World Encyclopedia, 2017). Chesler, a prominent second wave feminist, notes “three mighty tributaries of the second wave:” returning to a focus on women’s political and social rights through the founding of the National Organization for Women in 1966, organized marches and protests for and against a variety of issues, from domestic violence to access to abortions, and finally, the implementation and infiltration of feminist ideologies into the workplace, within professions ranging from CEO to construction worker (2018, p. 5). While

first wave feminists challenged women's lack of autonomy in both the private and public spheres separately, second wave feminists took up the slogan "the personal is political" to define the feminist movement as a cohesive fight for equality at home and in the workplace as interconnected and interchangeable settings in which women labored in unequal proportions and with unequal outcomes as compared to men (Hannam, 2013).

Education was an important point of interest for second wave feminists, with an increasing number of middle-class women pursuing higher education. Women's studies classes became available, and an increased interest in integrating a female perspective into the predominately male histories of the Western world resulted in works such as Rowbotham's "Hidden From History," published in 1972, and Lerner's "The Majority Finds Its Past," published in 1979 (Hannam, 2013). Other important feminist texts of the time included "Sexual Politics" by Kate Millet, which examined the hold patriarchal social structures have over all aspects of a woman's life, and "The Second Sex" by Simone de Beauvoir, who rejected the assumption of a biological imperative of womanhood, stating that "it is not nature that defines woman; it is she who defines herself by dealing with nature on her own account in her emotional life" (Beauvoir, 2001, p. 42). Many of the stereotypes that exist surrounding feminism were derived from the second wave; in 1968, feminists protested the Miss America beauty pageant as a patriarchy-bound performance for the male gaze, and many bucked traditional gendered beauty standards by abstaining from wearing makeup or dresses and publicly throwing away or burning their bras and girdles (Hannam, 2013). The second wave also brought a growing focus on sisterhood, feminine energy and power, as well as nonviolence, heavily influenced by the counterculture movement of the 1960s and bolstered by a negative response to the Vietnam War (Hannam, 2013).

This era of feminism was taking place alongside the Civil Rights movement and was deeply inspired by the grassroots activism, consciousness raising, and street demonstrations used by civil rights activists (Hannam, 2013). In spite of these methods becoming central to the second wave of feminism, the originators, Black and Brown activists, were often not credited or included. In addition, lesbian feminists were held on the fringes, for fear that they would delegitimize the movement. Friedan, who wrote so eloquently about the plight of the White middle-class housewife but struggled so obviously to see past that myopic experience, brought up this concern at a meeting of the National Organization for Women, often shortened to NOW (which she founded alongside civil rights activists), referring to lesbian feminists as “the lavender menace” (the color lavender was associated with LGBTQIA+ rights at the time) (Hannam, 2013). The name was later used by lesbian feminists as a tongue in cheek title for their own feminist group. Autonomous women’s groups were central to the second wave, providing support networks outside of the mainstream, and, as larger organizations such as NOW tightened their focus on issues of reproductive rights, mass media’s depiction of women, and other specifically-aimed consciousness raising, working class, gay, and BIPOC feminists created their own micro movements (Hannam, 2013). Black feminists argued against the dominant feminist assertion that sexism existed as the ultimate oppression; author bell hooks wrote prolifically about race, class, sex, and sexual orientation as connected identities which must all be acknowledged as equally relevant for social change to take place (Hannam, 2013). Lesbian feminists such as Adrienne Rich and Mary Daly held a position seen as radical by mainstream feminists, positing that heterosexual women could not truly claim feminism, and pushing for separatist politics (Hannam, 2013). And so, while mainstream second wave feminism was dominated by White, cisgender, middle-class women such as Betty Friedan, Kate Millet, and

Gloria Steinem, the lack of inclusion of other feminist discourse weakened the movement as a whole by keeping the “outsiders” from lending their diverse strengths and necessary input (Chesler, 2018). It was this gatekeeping and factionalization of feminism that led to the rise of the third wave (Mann & Huffman, 2005).

Walker sums up the identity of third wave feminists through contrast with the second wave:

Young women coming of age today wrestle with the term because we have a very different vantage point of the world than that of our foremothers . . . For many of us it seems that to be a feminist in the way that we have seen or understood feminism is to conform to an identity and way of living that doesn't allow for individuality, complexity, or less than perfect personal histories. We fear that the identity will dictate and regulate our lives, instantaneously pitting us against someone, forcing us to choose inflexible and unchanging sides, female against male, black against white, oppressed against oppressor, good against bad (Walker, 1995, p. xxxiii).

This definition highlights two pivotal aspects of the formation and continuation of the third wave of feminism: the rejection of the notion that there is a “correct” way to be a feminist/do feminism, which third wave feminists felt had been imposed on the movement by the second wave, and a welcoming of fluidity and diversity, an invitation for all aspects of identity to have a seat at the table and a voice in the conversation on feminism. Rather than embracing the identity of the wave of feminism following the second wave, the third wave was seen, by both the feminists who were part of it and those that came before, as a wave rising against the then-current flow of feminism. In this way, divisiveness was at the core of the third wave's identity (Mann & Huffman, 2005). However, far from undermining all of the work done by the second

wave, the feminists of the 1990s and early 2000s improved the movement in necessary ways that were made possible only through the labors of the first and second waves. With current access to the internet and increased globalization, the scope and reach of third wave feminism includes social media activism, greater focus on international women's rights, environmental justice and labor activism, as well as a continued (but increased) focus on reproductive rights, gay and transgender rights, racial justice, and the broad, undefinable goal of female empowerment (Levenstein, 2020).

The third wave of feminists can be seen as a political generation; rather than focusing on chronological age, this generation of feminists is home to all who feel the oppression of late-stage capitalism, the "feelings of condescension and exclusion" by second wave feminists for their non-dominant feminist agendas, and a strong desire for space to center a more personal narrative (Mann & Huffman, 2005, p. 70). The political, economic, and social climate in the United States at the beginning of the third wave was highly relevant to its formation. Christian fundamentalism and the New Right stood in opposition to both the Civil Rights and women's movements, and this backlash further cemented the rebellious nature of the third wave. In 1983, the Equal Rights Amendment, a proposed constitutional amendment aimed at guaranteeing equity regardless of sex, was defeated; a defeat that many young feminists blamed on the leaders of second wave feminism's gatekeeping and failure to include diverse identities, such as working-class women, in the movement (Mann & Huffman, 2005).

Activism and consciousness raising in the third wave of feminism looked, and continues to look, very different than it had during the second wave. Walker describes the act of reclaiming what the second wave had deemed outside of or even antithetical to feminism as "anti-revolution activities" (Walker, 1995, p. xxxviii). The third wave's conception of feminism remarked on the

crucial difference between *equal* and *identical*; citing an internalized inferiority touted by second wave feminists who felt that they must disassociate from the traditional notions of femininity in order to be taken seriously as adult, professional, and capable – in short, in order to fit the standard of maleness – third wave feminists shone a light on the systemic power-over social structure of patriarchy (Kirk, 2009). In embracing the diverse possibilities of being a feminist and doing feminism, the perhaps unintended result was an individualism-heavy, “feminist free-for-all” that has left the third wave of feminism facing the same challenges as the first two waves: a difficulty in defining and connecting under a unified feminist movement (Mann & Huffman, 2005, p. 74). In their 1997 book on the third wave of feminism, Haywood and Drake discuss a culture of “lived messiness,” a sense of “hybridity” which refuses to be defined (Mann & Huffman, 2005, p. 71). This theme has continued into later years; in her 2014 collection of essays entitled “Bad Feminist,” Gay writes,

I embrace the label of bad feminist because I am human. I am messy. I’m not trying to be an example. I am not trying to be perfect. I am not trying to say I have all the answers. I am not trying to say I’m right. I am just trying—trying to support what I believe in, trying to do some good in this world, trying to make some noise with my writing while also being myself (p. xi).

The reality of feminism in the contemporary moment, where words such as “post-feminism” and “fourth wave,” get bandied about without real impact, is that it exists on a continuum for many women, with differing salience in their daily lives (Hannam, 2013). Adichie describes “feminism lite” as a harmful version of contemporary feminism, stating that a conditional vision of equality - which she sums up by using the idiom “men are the head, but women are the neck” - is not a useful or truly equitable feminist ideology (2017, p. 20). On the

opposite end of the contemporary feminism continuum, radical-cultural feminists posit that true feminism implies that women must exist outside the patriarchy entirely, by refusing to participate in heterosexual relationship on any level (Tong, 1996). Though the range of difference in contemporary feminist theory may have arisen from a desire for deconstruction and inclusivity, the very factionalization that the third wave identified as weakening the second wave is still alive and well in the feminist movement (Mann & Huffman, 2005). Moreover, for all the intention of cultivating an inclusive movement, gay, transgender, and feminists of color have still felt left out of mainstream feminism. As hooks writes, “to be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body” (Levenstein, 2020, p. 165). While third wave feminists eschewed the one-size-fits-all (White, cisgender, middle-class) feminism of the National Organization for Women through the creation of the Women’s Action Correlation, its membership remained predominately White, leading to the creation of fringe organizations such as INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence and SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Health Collective in order to address the feminist needs of women of color, by women of color (Levenstein, 2020). These feminists have been active participants in the Black Lives Matter movement, highlighting the interlocking systems of oppression which mainstream feminism has continued to shy away from (Levenstein, 2020).

While others have identified the “rhetoric of inclusion” of the second wave as surface level and ineffective (Labaton & Martin, 2004, p. xxix), contemporary feminist authors of color Kendall (2020) and Zakaria (2021) further identify the overwhelming and enduring Whiteness of feminism, which fails to reach a place of true inclusion. Zakaria defines a White feminist as “someone who refuses to consider the role that whiteness and the racial privilege attached to it have played and continue to play in universalizing white feminist concerns, agendas, and beliefs

as being those of all of feminism and all of feminists” (2021, p. ix). The word “intersectionality,” a theory developed by Crenshaw to recognize the multiple, interlocking oppressions connected to multiple, interlocking marginal identities, has become nearly meaningless in its use within the mainstream feminist movement (Zakaria, 2021). Kendall uses the term “misogynoir” to reference the specific misogyny faced by Black women in America, and highlights feminist issues such as gun violence, food scarcity, and affordable education and housing that are left out of the mainstream feminist message (Kendall, 2020). Faced with the same set of shortcomings it has been plagued with from its inception, the future of feminism can be viewed as grim.

Yet such a wide theoretical base containing so many labels, ranging from liberal feminism to post-modern feminism; Marxist feminism to ecofeminism; psychoanalytic feminism to multicultural feminism, can be seen as a strength rather than a weakness, according to Tong. “They signal to the broader public that feminism is not a monolithic ideology, that all feminists do not think alike, and that, like all other time-honored modes of thinking, feminist thought has a past as well as a present and a future” (Tong, 1998, p. 1). Feminism is inherently flawed, Gay offers, because it is inherently human (2014). In spite of its flaws, many continue to claim the title of feminist and work for social change under the banner of feminism. Until intersectional social and cultural equity is realized, feminism is necessary. In order to grow as a theoretical construct and as a movement, feminists must look to the past, acknowledge and take accountability for the shortcomings, and work to include the feminists who have been held at the margins of the movement for far too long. Adichie writes: “If we do something over and over again, it becomes normal. If we see the same thing over and over again, it becomes normal” (2012, p. 13). Using this logic, feminists have the power to define what is normal within the

movement. In the same way, the field of dance/movement therapy can look to its past, acknowledge its shortcomings, and work towards a new, more inclusive and equitable normal.

Movement as Medicine: A Brief History of Dance/Movement Therapy in America & Overview of Theory

Depending on one's point of view, dance/movement therapy suffers from, or is strengthened by, the same difficulty as feminism: landing upon a definitive explication that all practitioners can agree upon. From the American Dance Therapy Association to Psychology Today, the definition of dance/ movement therapy includes aspects of the body, cognition or intellect, emotional expression, relational factors, and the idea of physical and mental health, but with differing emphasis and language. Roberts notes that "a fundamental assumption in dance/movement therapy is that body movement reflects inner emotional states and that by changing one's movement behavior, changes in the psyche can occur" (2016, p. 67). According to Payne, "dance/movement therapy supports people whereby spontaneous movement is seen as symbolic of unconscious processes. It increases self-awareness and self-esteem, providing for growth, change, and healing within the therapeutic relationship" (2006, p. 2). She goes on to state, "dance/movement therapy is embodiment in action" (Payne, 2006, p. 3). What, then, is embodiment? Quoting Aposhyan, Roberts writes: "Embodiment is the moment to moment process by which human beings allow awareness to enhance the flow of thoughts, feelings, sensations, and energies through our bodily selves" (2016, p. 72). Stanton-Jones and Meekums list the following theoretical principles as central to dance/movement therapy: 1) The mind and body are in constant interaction with one another; 2) Movement is indicative of personality, including psychological developmental processes, psychopathology, and interpersonal relational patterns; 3) The therapeutic relationship, which is key to treatment, includes nonverbal

dimensions; 4) Movement is symbolic, and evidences unconscious processes; 5) Improvisation in movement allows clients to experiment with new ways of being and relating; 6) Creative processes in free movement are inherently therapeutic (Jones, 2005, p. 39). At its core, dance/movement therapy is a method of psychotherapy which utilizes movement rather than verbal language to identify and process emotional material, centering the lived, embodied experience of the client and the cultivation of kinesthetic empathy - described as “the ability to experience empathy merely by observing the movements of another human being” (Reynolds & Reason, 2012, p. 1) - between client and practitioner.

It would be deeply inaccurate to assume that dance as healing began in America in the 1940s. Although this paper's focus is on the development of dance/movement therapy in the United States, specifically following the timeline which led to the formation of the American Dance Therapy Association in 1966, it would be remiss to move forward without acknowledging that early societies, often called “primitive” (a derogatory term used here to emphasize the historical context and mishandling of early cultural anthropology practices), were utilizing movement as medicine long before any of the foremothers of Western dance/movement therapy did (Brooke, 2006). All those who practice dance/movement therapy owe much to the knowledge and practice of these early healers. In the current moment, dance is still utilized as a healing practice and a means of community building globally; though this utilization of movement may have inherently therapeutic properties, it is not necessarily considered dance/movement therapy. The distinct practice of dance/movement therapy is at different stages of development in different countries; while an overview of international dance/movement therapy is outside the scope of this paper, it is notable that it is rising in use across the globe (Jones, 2005). As scientific studies continue to recognize the interrelatedness of the somatic and

the cognitive, the practice of dance/movement therapy may continue to gain ground (Payne, 2006).

There are many goals a dance/movement therapist might co-create with their client, and many differences in how a dance/movement therapy session might be led. Herein lies the difficulty in giving a clear and comprehensive look into the practice. However, within most practices, emphasis is placed on creating a safe and secure therapeutic container in which to work, and building connection, both between client and practitioner and client to felt sensation and emotional experience; developing “links between thought, feelings and actions, inner and outer reality, physical, emotional and/or cognitive shifts” (Jones, 2005, p. 40). The sessions can be held individually or conducted in a group; they may include a theme, may be directive or non-directive (depending heavily on the population being addressed), and most include some level of verbal processing and reflection, usually following movement exploration. There is emphasis placed on relational, interactive movement, either between clients in a group setting or between the client and therapist, and imagery is often used to help guide exploration and processing (Jones, 2005). Another general goal is the expansion of potential within both movement and emotional expression. It is in this goal that the concepts of mental and physical health interact, and the strength of the method can be seen through the combination of the artistry and physical expression of dance with the emotional and cognitive processing of psychotherapy (Payne, 2006). Another aspect that sets dance/movement therapy apart from more traditional models of psychotherapy is the role of the therapist as an active participant; both witnessing and modeling movement and offering embodied support throughout the session (Jones, 2005).

An overview of the progression of Western dance/movement therapy might begin in several different places; this paper will begin with the first forays into the study of nonverbal

communication by Darwin and Osler (considered the father of modern medicine), both of whom recognized the relevance of the body within interpersonal relationship as early as the late 1800s and into the 1900s, laying the foundation for others to build upon (Brooke, 2006). In 1952, Birdwhistell wrote "Introduction to Kinesis," which detailed "the study of all bodily motions that are communicative" (Brooke, 2006, p. 98). Continuing in this vein, Morain wrote about the impact culture has on emotional expression, including nonverbal elements, challenging the burgeoning notion of universality (Brooke, 2006). In concert with these scientific studies, modern dancers such as Ruth St. Denis, Ted Shawn, Isadora Duncan, and Martha Graham were expanding the artistic scope of dance performance, highlighting emotional significance within ritualized movement and incorporating exploratory, psychologically inspired themes into their work, which would inspire the first generation of Western dance/movement therapists (Brooke, 2006). Finally, the emergence of the Humanistic theory of psychology and the "actualization tendency," led by Rogers and Maslow in the 1950s, lent support to the idea touted by early dance/movement therapists that clients wished to reach their full potential, and the role of the practitioner was to facilitate this (Brooke, 2006). Humanistic theory also centers what is right as opposed to only noticing what is wrong within a client; practitioners of the theory are able to develop an empathic and accepting relationship with clients, which also appealed to the first Western dance/movement therapists (Brooke, 2006). In addition to all this, the social and political climate of the times had an impact on both the demand for and method of conduction of psychotherapy. The end of World War II led to higher demand for therapeutic treatment, moving towards more focus on group therapy - an area in which dance/movement therapy thrives (Payne, 2006). The intersection of scientific research, new directions in dance performance within

modern dance, and developments in psychological theory all led to the formation of the profession of dance/movement therapy.

The foremothers of Western dance/movement therapy were not initially trained as psychotherapists; rather, they approached movement as a therapeutic modality from the positionality of trained dancers. In the 1940s and '50s, Marian Chace, Francizka Boas, Mary Whitehouse, Trudi Schoop, Blanche Evan, Liljan Espenak, and Alma Hawkins all began practicing what would eventually form the basis of the modern practice of dance/movement therapy in America (Stanton-Jones, 1992). Chace (1896 – 1970) is credited as the founder of American dance/movement therapy (Stanton-Jones, 1992). She studied modern dance with St. Denis and Shawn, and went on to teach it from the 1920s until the early '40s, when she became interested in incorporating movement and interactive communication into a therapeutic practice. Influenced by the work of Sullivan and Fromm-Reichmann with individuals diagnosed with schizophrenia, she began her work at St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington DC and the Chestnut Lodge Sanitarium throughout the 1940s (Stanton-Jones, 1992). Although she never formally published her work, she trained many prominent figures in the second generation of dance/movement therapists, such as Sharon Chaiklin and Claire Schmais. Among her main contributions to the theory and practice of dance/movement therapy are a structure for group interactions, often utilizing a circle formation and sharing leadership; use of rhythm to regulate and integrate; the technique of movement mirroring; centering the therapeutic relationship; and finally, the use of metaphor and symbology within the practice (Stanton-Jones, 1992).

Francizka Boas (1902 – 1988) began her practice in the 1940s as well, working with children at the Bellevue Psychiatric Hospital in New York, teaching “creative modern dance” (Stanton-Jones, 1992). Influenced by coworker Laretta Bender, a child psychiatrist, as well as

psychoanalyst Paul Schilder (who studied the concept of body image extensively, a concept which both he and Boas felt could be altered through the use of movement [Stanton-Jones, 1992]), Boas's focus was on combining movement and psychoanalysis. Also trained in modern dance, she stated that she "made no separation between dance as an art and dance as a therapy" (Stanton-Jones, 1992, p. 17). Like Chace, she relied on the use of rhythmic percussion as a means of channeling emotion, and she developed a use of imagery similar to a Rorschach inkblot test, specifically focusing on animal imagery as a means of symbolically connecting to unconscious material and bringing it into the consciousness; a form of free association through movement (Stanton-Jones, 1992). Blanche Evan (1910 – 1982), a modern and Spanish trained dancer, worked with both adults and children, and focused on the ways in which modern life caused disconnect between the body and the emotional experience (Brooke, 2006). Her main contribution was the creation of the "Fundamental Technique," which centralized the necessity of spinal alignment and upright posture for physical and emotional integration (Brooke, 2006). Iris Rifkin-Gainer, a second-generation practitioner, studied with Evan and is influenced by her work (Leventhal et al., 2016). Liljan Espenak (1905 – 1988) had a background in folk dance, and was influenced by Chace's work. She established the first postgraduate program for dance/movement therapy at the New York Medical College, and included the study of ancient dance forms and cultural dances as part of the curriculum (Brooke, 2006). Espenak's work inspired second generation practitioners like Nana Koch and Eleanor DiPalma (Leventhal et al., 2016).

Though native to Switzerland, Trudi Schoop (1903 – 1999) is included amongst the early American dance/movement therapists for her contributions to the practice. Her most famous written offering, entitled "Won't You Join the Dance? A Dancer's Essay into the Treatment of

Psychosis” highlighted both her positionality as a dancer and the inherent therapeutic value of movement (Stanton-Jones, 1992). She believed that movement could be used as a method of expanding the emotional expression of psychotic individuals, and centered her practice in the therapeutic and relational benefits of meeting individuals where they are at (Stanton-Jones, 1992). Alma Hawkins (1905 – 1988) studied modern dance with Doris Humphrey, and founded a dance/movement therapy program at the University of California in the early 1960s (Stanton-Jones, 1992). She was influenced by Humanistic psychology, stating “man seeks creative and aesthetic experiences because they enrich him” (Stanton-Jones, 1992, p. 22). Hawkins contributed to dance/movement therapy academically through her focus on the nature of the creative experience and the relationship between movement and cognition. Her use of open-ended imagery, similar to Chace and Boas, and integration of inner-sensing, allowed her clients to have a feeling of autonomy over their own felt experience (Stanton-Jones, 1992). Second generation dance/movement therapist Marcia B. Leventhal studied under Hawkins during her tenure at UCLA and continues to be inspired by her contributions to the practice (Leventhal et al., 2016).

Mary Whitehouse (1911 – 1975), another modern dancer, was deeply influenced by her own experience with Jungian psychoanalysis; the theories of depth psychology shaped her practice of dance/movement therapy, which she called “movement in depth” (Stanton-Jones, 1992, p. 20). She created the model of Authentic Movement as a way to utilize active imagination and inner-directed movement to bring unconscious material into the consciousness; she described her work as “physical movement as a revelation of the Self” (Stanton-Jones, 1992, p. 20). It is important to note that Whitehouse did not work with psychiatric patients; she recognized that the openness and level of self-direction and regulation required with Authentic

Movement would not be available to all populations. However, her theoretical contributions to the practice remain relevant in the current moment. Though cursory, this overview of the foremothers of American dance/movement therapy highlights the themes that originally emerged within the practice, many of which remain salient today. All of these early practitioners were first - and perhaps foremost - dancers, and there is evident tension within their conceptions of dance/movement therapy surrounding achieving balance within a structure; moving away from dance technique and into spontaneous movement expression, while feeling a compulsion to teach their clients how to move in order to expand their movement potential (Stanton-Jones, 1992). In 2022, most practitioners of dance/movement therapy still come from a dance background, and the question of structuring a session and striking a balance between leading and allowing is still part of the education undertaken by dance/movement therapists.

The concept of movement analysis and assessment is one of the unique tools used by the early dance/movement therapists that can still be found in many contemporary dance/movement therapy practices. Beginning in the late 1920s and continuing through the 1980s, codified systems of movement analysis were generated and subsequently adopted by dance/movement therapists. Perhaps the most well-known and widely used, Laban Movement Analysis, was created by Austro-Hungarian dancer Rudolf Laban in the late 1920s (Brooke, 2006). His work was later expanded upon by Warren Lamb and Irmgard Bartenieff, as well as Judith Kestenberg, who developed Kestenberg Movement Profiling in the 1930s, merging Laban Movement Analysis and the concepts of developmental theory, based on Anna Freud's theoretical works (Brooke, 2006). In broad strokes, the aim of Laban Movement Analysis is to observe and notate movement phrases dynamically through the use of effort dimensions, which consider elements of time, space, weight, and flow. Each dimension has two opposing features; weight, for example,

can be heavy or light, time can be quick or sustained, space direct or indirect. The contemporary use of this method of analyzing movement is centralized around the concept of describing access to a full range of potential movements in a specific and repeatable format; traditionally, Laban Movement Analysis was also utilized as a means of labeling some movement as “pathological,” assuming that those who experience mental illness may be stuck in certain movement patterns and not have access to the full range of their expressive potential (Brooke, 2006). The systems of movement analysis are complex languages in and of themselves, and an in-depth discussion on each is beyond the scope of this paper. However, it is important to include them in this historical overview, as the continued use of traditional movement analysis methods (such as Laban Movement Analysis) within the practice of dance/movement therapy has been questioned in recent years. Meg Chang, a contemporary practitioner of dance/movement therapy, was the first to call attention to the inherent set of biases, assumptions, and systems of power within the very construct of “analyzing” movement. This paper will further examine the use of movement analysis from a feminist perspective following the historical overview.

The second generation of dance/movement therapists in America can be related to second wave feminists through the continuation of many of the same practices began by their foremothers, in addition to making their own unique contributions. Likewise, second generation dance/movement therapists coming together with like-minded practitioners in order to create a deeper sense of in-group unity and out-group validity mirrored the evolution of the feminist movement. In the early 1960s, there were three main organized groups of practicing dance/movement therapists, each founded by the American foremothers; one in Washington DC, one California, and one New York. Unlike the many organizations that arose during the second wave of feminism, however, these groups were separated more by distance than ideology, and,

with the aim of bringing all practitioners of dance/movement therapy together and creating a standard for ethical practice, the American Dance Therapy Association (ADTA), a national organization for dance/movement therapists, was founded in 1966 by Chace and other first-generation practitioners (Brooke, 2006).

Much like large organizations such as the National Organization for Women did not represent the existence of a singular mode of feminism within the feminist movement, the existence of the ADTA does not mean that a singular practice of dance/movement therapy exists, either historically or presently. From each of the earliest practitioners, different theoretical groundings for practicing dance/movement therapy arose. Psychodynamic dance/movement therapy, practiced by Diane Fletcher, draws on both Freud and Hawkins' work, linking movement to "intrapsychic reorganization through insight into meaning (Stanton-Jones, 1992, p. 25). Ego-psychoanalytic dance/movement therapy, practiced by Elaine Siegel and influenced by Freud and Chace, translates the concepts found in psychoanalysis into movement (Stanton-Jones, 1992). Jungian dance/movement therapy, inspired by Jung and Whitehouse, led Joan Chodorow to write a book entitled "Dance Therapy & Depth Psychology: The Moving Imagination." Her work studies "individuation through self-directed expression" (Stanton-Jones, p. 29). Finally, Gestalt dance/movement therapy, practiced by Penny Lewis Bernstein, was influenced by drama therapy, and focuses on "attending to present emotional experience" through the use of role play to solidify and clarify feelings (Stanton-Jones, 1992, p. 35). Primarily practiced with those seeking therapy as a means of gaining more insight and awareness of the self rather than with psychiatric patients, influences from Whitehouse, as well as Perls, can be seen in Bernstein's work (Stanton-Jones, 1992). All of these styles of dance/movement therapy can be done individually or within groups, and have varying applicability with different populations. The

unifying factors in all of the styles that have evolved (and continue to evolve) within the field of dance/movement therapy are the use of movement and the focus on the body; the recognition of physical expression as indicative of the inner state of being, the importance of felt experience, and the inherent healing potential of movement (Payne, 2006).

The field of dance/movement therapy – once again, like the feminist movement – is both enriched and divided by the diverse identities of its practitioners. As a relatively young formalized practice, women who trained with the original American practitioners, such as Chaiklin (who learned from Chace), and Leventhal (who learned from Hawkins) are still active in the community. The American Dance Therapy Association has been an important platform for codifying the practice of dance/movement therapy for the past 56 years. Although the foremothers of Western dance/movement therapy were predominantly White women, the ADTA's membership is far more diverse in the current moment. Like the third wave of feminism, the newest generation of practitioners is focused on diversity and equity in the practice. Meg Chang has led the charge in writing and speaking about the deeply embedded Whiteness of American dance/movement therapy and the need for more diversity in the field; Angela M. Grayson, now the president of the ADTA, authored a book and has work featured in peer reviewed journals, textbooks and other publications, as well as being the CEO and Chief Clinician of her own psychotherapy LLC; Tomoyo Kawano is chair of the ADTA's education committee, the director of the dance/movement therapy program at Antioch University, and has written extensively about dance epistemology and dance/movement therapy as social action; Charne Furcron is the multicultural diversity chair and the vice-president of the Southern Chapter of the ADTA, as well as contributing research and written works on multicultural competency to the field; and Selena Coburn is the chair of the ADTA's standards and ethics

committee, an adjunct professor for Lesley University's dance/movement therapy program, and has written about incorporating indigenous influences into the practice of dance/movement therapy. Although the burgeoning decentering of dominant identities and narratives is being led forward by these and other contemporary practitioners, like the feminist movement, the American Dance Therapy Association has historically struggled with inclusivity. In 2008, a committee based on diversity was created; however, as late as 2018, members of the ADTA were challenging the leadership to address issues of inclusivity on a deeper, more intentional level, specifically naming a "culture of oppression" and White supremacy within the organization (Hoyt, n.d.). In May of 2020, following the murder of George Floyd by police, members of the ADTA "called out and called on the ADTA to urgently prioritize actions," and the organization received overwhelming feedback which exemplified the following:

Pain and marginalization of Black members within the ADTA ... clear that this pain and marginalization is not limited to Black members but also experienced by Latinx, Asian and Asian-American, Native American and LGBTQIA+ members as well as members with disabilities, amongst others (Hoyt, n.d.).

The organization responded to this call for accountability and reparations with a multi-phased strategic plan for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. Importantly, the committee has included the voices of the younger generation of practitioners through the input of new professionals and students. Time will tell if these measures will be sufficient to heal the foundational cracks within the organization which have been made apparent by the voices of the marginalized, just as in the feminist movement.

Setting the Stage: Dance/Movement Therapy, Movement Analysis, Education, & Feminism

And now we arrive at the critical intersection; through examining the history of both the American feminist movement and American dance/movement therapy, we can observe overlap in both theory and practice, as well as in dissention and challenges. But how can contemporary feminism thought be connected with contemporary dance/movement therapy practice? The following review of literature from both feminist and dance/movement therapy theorists and researchers will highlight this intersection, followed by a discussion on how feminist theory can be utilized in moving towards a dance/movement therapy practice that is accessible to all demographics, with the aim of empowering all individuals towards expanding their own embodied potential and autonomy. Feminism is an essentially embodied theoretical framework, being both centered on and primarily concerned with the oppression and othering of any bodies that do not fit the Western “norm” (i.e., the White, heterosexual, cisgender, middle-class, able male body) and prioritizing equity based on the belief that all bodies are of worth and should be treated with dignity and respect (Walker, 1995). The intersection of feminist theory and dance/movement therapy seems like a rich area of focus in the interest of further evolving the scope of practice within the field of dance/movement therapy. However, there is very little literature written from either theoretical perspective about the incorporation of feminist ideologies into the practice of dance/movement therapy.

This paucity of work was examined by Caldwell and Leighton, who point out that while the field of dance/movement therapy upsets the patriarchal norms of the larger field of psychotherapy by being composed of primarily cisgender, female-identified practitioners, it has shortcomings that mirror those of the feminist movement, such as a lack of diversity and

intersectionality, and difficulty overcoming generational conflict amongst those who practice (Caldwell & Leighton, 2016). The article states that, “awareness and activism are different” (Caldwell & Leighton, 2016, p. 281), and proposes that dance/movement therapists utilize their unique position as mental health practitioners focused on the lived experience of the body to further social justice work, dismantle harmful stereotypes about mental and physical health, and diversify the field in order to remain relevant and effectual.

In an earlier article, Caldwell brought the topic of diversity in the context of movement observation and assessment methods used in dance/movement therapy to the forefront, pointing out the capacity of dance/movement therapists to be “unconsciously enacting bias by subtly pathologizing how the ‘different’ body moves and acts” (Caldwell, 2013, p. 183). The attempt to position movement assessment methods, such as Laban Movement Analysis or Kestenberg Movement Profiling, as universally relevant, separates movement from the “movement communities” it is found in; these communities encompass gender, culture, and socioeconomic status, all of which impact movement behaviors, and all of which are of particular relevance in contemporary feminist discourse. Caldwell speaks to the power dynamics that are present within the therapeutic relationship – dynamics which are also impacted by gender, culture, and socioeconomic status – and which may act as an invisible barrier to authentic movement expression and experience for clients, should these power dynamics remain unaddressed. Caldwell proposes that the process of altering the self for the purpose of safety and inclusion can play out nonverbally as well as verbally; as bilingual individuals might alter their verbal expression to fit that of the dominant group, so too might those who hold marginal identities alter their movement expression to match that of the therapist (2013). A practitioner’s processing of

countertransference, Caldwell states, must therefore include awareness of “unexamined privilege, internalized body shame, and unresolved or unconscious bias” (2013, p. 184).

According to Caldwell, the client’s lived experience and way of knowing should be the guiding force in the joint creation of therapeutic goals. In this way, the focus shifts from the therapist’s autonomy to the client’s, creating a more just and equitable practice (2013). Caldwell brings the very practice of movement assessment into question, arguing that the client’s own meaning making is the crucial component dance/movement therapy should hold space for, and the importance of practitioners keeping their “encoding” and “decoding” of movement wholly separate (Caldwell, 2013). Caldwell writes, “Locating expertise about how the body works and what it is signaling as coming from outside the body, from people in power over that body, essentially defines any ‘ism’ anyone would care to mention” (2013, p. 193). Caldwell concludes with suggestions on how to incorporate performance ethnography (a method of qualitative research which utilizes participant observation and collaboration, culminating in an artistic performance aimed at building awareness surrounding the subject of the research) into the practice in order to contribute to social justice work, and calls for the field to take up “critical commentary and pedagogy on sexual identity, gender identity, ableism, classism, and ageism, as well as taking on issues such as the somatic abuse of power and privilege via domination, marginalization, and oppression” (2013, p. 189).

Applying critical commentary and pedagogy to the field of dance/movement therapy is an idea echoed by Kawano and Chang (2019). Kawano and Chang position dance/movement therapy as a “profession and cultural community with its own habitus, assumptions, and biases,” embedded in “inherent whiteness” and a “heteropatriarchal European-American epistemology” (2019, p. 234). The authors speak to the expectations and hierarchical nature of the assessment of

movement in the field of dance/movement therapy, and go further to discuss systemic power dynamics and need for “humanizing” the process of dance/movement therapy education (Kawano & Chang, 2019). As stated previously in the historical overview of American dance/movement therapy, current practitioners have spoken to an incongruence between theory and practice in the field; the focus on multicultural competence and inclusion within the American Dance Therapy Association, which became a major talking point in 2008 (Hoyt, n.d.), often feels more abstract than actual in practice. Citing critical feminist theory as an example, Kawano and Chang encourage the use of critical pedagogy and embodied dialectics as standard within higher education and alternative routes of training to be a dance/movement therapist, with the aim of evolving the abstract intention of multicultural competence into active incorporation within the practice of dance/movement therapy (2019).

Continuing in this vein, Chang and Kawano address the important feminist contributions dance/movement therapy has made to the greater psychotherapeutic field; “the incorporation of the female-identified body and dance into psychotherapeutic treatment was, and still is radical in of itself” (2019, p. 240). However, dance/movement therapy often fails to recognize and “understand the body as a site of political and social struggle,” viewing all bodies and movement through an ethnocentric, individualistic lens. The authors posit that there are two levels to the body oppression perpetuated by the field of dance/movement therapy, concerning the professional identities of practitioners and the “unexamined cultural practices” in the field itself (Kawano & Chang, 2019, p. 240.) The authors conclude with questioning whose views are included in the historical and educational narrative surrounding the creation of the field, and argue against the assumption that diversifying the field constitutes a lowering of standards;

rather, “meeting those who wish to do the work where they are” is a clear representation of the theory that scaffolds the practice of dance/movement therapy (Kawano & Chang, 2019, p. 251).

The field of Somatics is founded on many of the same theoretical tenets as dance/movement therapy. In an article utilizing phenomenological, cognitive, and feminist perspectives, Weber wrote about the use of creativity in somatic dance movement education (2019). Derived from the Greek “*somatikos*,” for “of the body,” and first used by Hanna in 1970, the field of Somatics is defined as the union of embodiment and cognitive experiences; the practice of integrating the mind and the body (Weber, 2019). Much like the study of dance/movement therapy, pedagogical themes that emerge within somatic movement dance education include the use of movement for self-discovery, autonomy, meaning making, and observation. While phenomenological and feminist philosophies are central to the framework of somatic movement dance education, Weber examines the cognitive aspects of movement, exploring how “embodied cognitive processes support creativity in dance making” (2019, p. 308).

Like dance/movement therapy, Somatics existed as a practice for multiple years before achieving greater cohesion and oversight regarding ethical standards of practice, as well as educational goals, through the creation of an association. Founded in 1988 by Jim Spira, the International Somatic Movement Education and Therapy Association’s list of “pan-modality educational objectives” include recognizing “habitual” perceptual and movement patterns, improving coordination and expressive integration, expanding embodiment for bettering quality of life, refining self-regulation, and recognizing “the body both as an objective physical process and as a subjective process of lived consciousness” (Weber, 2019). In continuation of the similarities between the two fields, Somatics struggles against the deeply ingrained academic and

psychological notion of separation between the mind and body that positions the body as less than the mind, and has faced questioning surrounding the scientific validity of body-based therapeutic methodology. However, the criticism directed at Somatics failed to take into account the existing empirical research on the benefits of the practice, as well as ignoring the use of phenomenological philosophies which place the field of Somatics within a post-positivist paradigm (Weber, 2019). Central to Somatics is the idea of “embodied cognition,” described by Gibbs as:

Understanding embodied experience is not simply a matter of physiology or kinesiology (i.e., the body as object), but demands recognition of how people dynamically move in the physical world (i.e., the body experienced from a first-person, phenomenological perspective). The mind (its images, thoughts, representations) is created from ideas that are closely related to brain representations of the body and to the body’s continued activities in the real world (2019, p. 313).

The connection of the body to the world, or the “personal to the political,” highlights the feminist undertones that inherently exist in both Somatics and dance/movement therapy’s theoretical framework. Shrewsbury (1997) stated, “feminist pedagogy begins with a vision of what education might be like but frequently is not. This is a vision of the classroom as a liberatory environment in which we, teacher-student and student-teacher, act as subjects, not objects (Weber, 2019). Gustafson (1999) puts forth these standards for feminist pedagogy: the recognition of the role of the body as an epistemological site, meaning that the body is key to understanding human nature, and as political signifier, referring to both the politics of the body and the body as a political site. Recognition of the explicit construction of knowledge and the reconstructing of self (referred to in Somatics as “re patterning”) as both personal and political,

and finally, the importance of discovering aspects of shared humanity while actively supporting diversity (Weber, 2019). These concepts, alongside those of creating collaborative learning environments with a focus on empowerment, personal autonomy, community, and leadership, are strongly rooted in feminist ideology and should be upheld as the standard in both Somatics and dance/movement therapy education, as well as within the therapeutic relationship.

The Personal & Political Body: Performance, Self-Esteem, Appearance, Ethics, Empowerment, & the Therapeutic Relationship

Similar to the ideas surrounding embodied cognition found in Somatics and dance/movement therapy education, the concept of “embodied performances” combines elements of dance as an art form, dance/movement therapy theories, and feminist philosophies. Thornborow and Coates (cited in Allegranti, 2009) state that there are different categories of what we call “performance;” the performance of identity and the social self, and the telling of a story as performance. Allegranti explored the intersection of these two categories as the “embodied performance” of gender and sexuality. Through the use of feminism-informed dance movement therapy, Allegranti aimed to “deconstruct and reconstruct” these embodied performances of identity (2009). “By building on feminist notions of working in the spaces ‘in-between’ dominant discourses and embodiment through language, this paper presents examples of how the process and outcomes of [dance/movement therapy] and performance-making assist in moving beyond dominant hegemonic discourses” (Allegranti, 2009). Allegranti centers the discussion of sexuality and gender as interconnected but not interdependent topics, which are essentially located within the “site and sight” of the body (Allegranti, 2009). So too is feminism

essentially embodied, concerned with both the personal and the political aspects of being/having a body that is both “autobiographical and relational,” according to Allegranti (2009).

In 2001, Allegranti established the “Personal Text Public Body Lab for Arts Therapists and Performance Practitioners” as a cross between a traditional performance space and a Winnicottian “holding environment” (2009). Inspired by poststructuralist and contemporary feminist philosophy, the multiplicity of the human identity and experience of being/having a body, and the lack of theories surrounding the body itself within dance/movement therapy, Allegranti created a multimodal research and art project focused on the performance of identity, specifically as it relates to sexuality, gender, the body, and relationships (2009).

Participants were invited to explore and embody their relationship to each category and develop solo and group movement and verbal phrasing. The Lab was filmed throughout, and at the end of each day there was a group discussion. These discussions, after each movement experiential, formed the context for my data production. The ‘data’ for the research was not only ‘embodied’ within the participants but also existed in the co-creation of meaning between participants and myself as a ‘practitioner-researcher’ (Allegranti, 2009).

This method of research is deeply embedded in feminist ideology and dance/movement therapy’s theoretical underpinnings. In the admission to and challenging of power differentials and dominant social discourse, Allegranti argues for use of the “embodied, authorial ‘I’” (2009, p. 21) to be used in feminism-informed dance/movement therapy research and practice, harnessing the active voice to make one’s identity and sociocultural positioning known to the reader and dismantling academic gatekeeping. In her 2020 article on dance/movement therapy as a “shared experience” in Rwanda, Orkand began her writing by positioning herself for the readers,

discussing her salient identities and privileges, using the active voice, and dismantling the power differential between the author and reader, and between the therapist and client (Orkand, 2020).

Far from being relevant only within dance/movement therapy research, the focus on democratizing the narrative should extend into the therapeutic space, with practitioners cultivating an awareness around the dominant discourses we uphold and how they inform our own embodied performance (Allegranti, 2009). Allegranti reminds the reader that this awareness is not exclusively needed for men; rather, women, too, play a part in the perpetuation of patriarchal constructs. To take that argument further, internalized “isms” are not endemic of any specific gender identity; as mental health practitioners, ongoing investigation and processing through supervision, personal therapy, and continued education is essential to best practice and cultural competency. Allegranti concludes by urging “that practitioners consider contemporary feminist principles since they offer ideologically and politically responsible ways of positioning ourselves where we can work more explicitly with issues of power and agency” (2009, p. 28).

Two other works on performance are salient to this discussion: an article on performative justice by Jamal and Hales, and a chapter on performance from “Collaborative Arts-Based Research for Social Justice” by Foster. Using post-structuralist and feminist critique of “abstract, generalized notions of justice in Western liberal democracies” (2016, p. 176), Jamal and Hales examine the discursive qualities of performative justice. “Feminist scholars argue for greater attention to the local and the particular, the embodied, gendered, emotion-based, ethnic subject of justice and injustice. Yet, limited research has been conducted on performative and performance-based relationships to justice” (Hales & Jamal, 2016, p. 176). The authors cite Hobson’s work to define performative justice as “a situated, embodied justice grounded in the local” (2016, p. 177). Similar to performance ethnography, performative justice is focused on

consciousness raising in ways that are accessible and relatable to the general public, taking on concepts that are often left out of dominant discourse on social justice (Hales & Jamal, 2016). Performative justice aligns with the feminist theory that became the rallying cry of the second wave of feminism: the personal is political.

It is important to note that outside of academic contexts, the concept of performative justice can have more negative connotations due to being equated to performative activism and/or performative allyship, categories that are linked to attempting to gain personal clout and essentially profiting socially from the name of activist or ally without the dedication to or conviction regarding social justice. All three concepts – performative justice, performative allyship, and performative activism – are relevant to a discussion on arts-based social justice work, and to dance/movement therapy. The American Dance Therapy Association has earned critique from new professionals in the field and dance/movement therapists of color surrounding the topic of surface level, too-little-too-late organizational changes being made to address issues of racism and lack of diversity as a performance of social justice rather than a commitment to it (Hoyt, n.d.). It is also important to note that, using Hobson's definition of performative justice, dance/movement therapy is uniquely positioned to utilize "situated, embodied justice" in practice (Hales & Jamal, 2016). This is an area of ongoing discussion and change within the dance/movement therapy community at large, and will continue to be for the foreseeable future. As Butler wrote in 1993, "Performativity relates to the nature of language and its relationship to the world to which it refers, specifically, it is 'that discursive practice that enacts or produces that which it names'" (cited in Hales & Jamal, 2016, p. 177).

Foster's (2016) conception of performance in the use of social justice names both feminist and postmodern theories as pivotal in paving the way towards viewing the body as "the

site of culturally inscribed and disputed meanings, experiences, and feelings that can, like emotions, be mined as sources of insight and subjects for analysis” (p. 76). Our sense of knowing, and thus our grasp of ethics and development of a personal moral code and worldview, begins in the body. Through the use of performative arts, Foster posits that a deeper sense of empathy towards the experience of others can be achieved (2016). This idea is in line with the prominent theory of kinesthetic empathy in dance/movement therapy; by embodying another’s experience, a practitioner can access a deeper understanding of and openness towards that individual. However, Foster brings up an important point, which harks back to Caldwell and Leighton’s statement about awareness and activism; “empathy does not always translate into action” (2016, p. 76). If therapeutic practitioners wish to actively participate in the promotion of social justice, feeling empathy alone for the daily subjugations of bodies that do not fit the White, heterosexual, cisgender, middle-class, able-bodied male “norm” is not enough. Translating empathy into action and using the privileged therapeutic platform to enact change should be the goal of feminism-informed dance/movement therapists, and of any practitioners who seek social change.

Feminist ideas can be related to, and clearly expressed in, multiple aspects of therapeutic practice. One such example can be found in the correlations drawn between self-esteem and ethics by Bortolan (2018). Through a feminist and phenomenological lens, Bortolan positions self-esteem as being best understood through the concept of “existential feeling,” which shapes the way we view ourselves and others (2018). Self-esteem is a deeply embodied, multileveled experience, encompassing the internal and external, the positive and the negative, both emotions and cognition. It is, at its core, “fundamentally affective” and not subject to the rapid fluctuations of basic emotion; “Feelings of pride, shame, and guilt can arise quickly and last just for a few

moments, but it does not seem possible to say that we experience self-esteem only for such a short time. In fact, other feelings can be present or not, but it seems that self-esteem—be it low, moderate, or high—cannot be absent. We do not constantly feel proud, ashamed, or guilty, but we always have an implicit sense of our value and capacities” (Bortolan, 2018, p. 58).

In a gendered context, the experience of low self-esteem, Bortolan proposes, can be directly related to women’s relationship with normative expectations and their sense of autonomy (2018). As with many examples of feminist scholarship, women are the focus of the author. This focus is important to a continued effort to dismantle the patriarchal practice of centering the White male experience as the norm. The unique embodied experience of women, whether cisgender or transgender, is a rich area of focus. The framework that Bortolan creates to examine self-esteem in women could also be evolved to consider a less binary exploration of self-esteem, by expanding to encompass individuals who do not align with either gender presented in the binary, although they may have been born in a body that was assigned female at birth. This evolution would be indicative of contemporary feminist theory, which has become far less centered on the myopic experience of cisgender women than it once was (Gay, 2014).

In addition to these personal, social/relational, and political aspects of self-esteem, Bortolan states that there are ethical consequences attached to low self-esteem, including the phenomenon of “imposter syndrome,” and the difficulty in removing oneself from abusive relationships. Both are experiences often held by those who possess marginalized, low-power multicultural identities, and both experiences are shaped by personal and interpersonal embodied thoughts and feelings. While self-esteem has become a fairly mainstream topic of discussion, seen in both negative and positive light, the self-esteem of therapeutic practitioners and the impact it may have on their clients bares further research. “From a philosophical perspective ...

the nurturance and maintenance of self-esteem can have significant positive effects on various dimensions of our personal and interpersonal life” (Bortolan, 2018, p. 57). The embodied experience of self-esteem, of both the practitioner and the client, can and should be taken into consideration within a feminism-informed, body-based therapeutic practice.

Bringing yet more embodied feminist ideology into the therapeutic space, Erb’s (2018) work on the politics of appearance and bodily transference within the therapeutic relationship highlights a topic that many professionals would perhaps be hesitant to approach. Erb cites feminist psychotherapist Susie Orbach to emphasize her point: “Bodies in the current psychoanalytic session are adjuncts to mental processes: sometimes they stimulate affects, sometimes they become diseased, sometimes they represent memory . . . But mindedness to the body, as a body which is speaking for itself, is peculiarly absent” (2018, p. 2). Orbach speaks to the connection between the body and our sense of self, rejecting the Cartesian mind/body dualism endemic to traditional psychotherapy (Erb, 2018). The body does not exist as neutral in a therapeutic space; much can be judged and assumed by physical appearance alone, by both the client and the practitioner. “Neither transference nor countertransference are neutral, but are embedded in one's cultural, personal, and interpersonal dynamics” (Erb, 2018, p. 11). Transference and countertransference are common relational psychological phenomena within a therapeutic context, yet the body is predominantly left out of the study of each. Erb reminds the readers that “appearance is political as discourses dictate how a body *should look*, which impacts the way that client and counsellor relate to one another based upon past experiences” (2018, p. 1).

Just as a client may initially judge a practitioner based on their appearance (as Erb stated on behalf of a client, “how can someone who looks like you help me?”), so too must therapists

be aware of the biases they carry surrounding their own body and that of their clients. The Foucauldian concept of “biopower” helps expand this exploration. Biopower references the ways in which individuals internalize the sociocultural norms of their environments (Erb, 2018). This is particularly salient in the context of body-based therapies such as dance/movement therapy, as the biopower internalized by practitioners, if not given the proper supervision and processing, can potentially be counter-transferred to individuals who seek treatment. As Caldwell (2013) suggested, the unrecognized biases practitioners hold surrounding movement patterning can heighten the risk of pathologizing bodies that do not fit within the practitioner’s internalized norms of “healthy” bodies. Citing Merleau-Ponty, Erb concludes by speaking to the great risk in “discounting the body” within a practitioner’s self-awareness and within the therapeutic relationship, which only “perpetuates this silence, and wrongfully ignores the fact that the first point of meeting with another is always through the body” (2018, p. 1).

Feminist theory can offer rich ground from which to grow for dance/movement therapy practices focused on empowering clients. Empowerment is an essentially embodied concept, as we interact with the world around us through our bodies, and so the confidence and safety we experience in that interaction is centered on the confidence and safety we feel within our bodies (Roberts, 2016). Bernstein (2019) writes specifically about moving through the experience of trauma, building self-esteem and emotional resources, and accessing inner strengths as elements of embodied empowerment. Based on the work of early dance/movement therapist Blanche Evan, Bernstein’s Empowerment-Focused Dance/Movement Therapy model is focused on the treatment of trauma survivors; however, the model certainly has room for expansion beyond the realm of trauma and into utilizing dance/movement therapy for the empowerment of any and all populations. Bernstein’s describes her work with trauma survivors in Kolkata, India, giving

emphasis to the importance of skilled, intentional, and careful therapeutic titration and prioritizing emotional safety to avoid retraumatizing clients as they advance towards the goal of “freeing the body from the emotional and somatic impacts of trauma” (2019, p. 194). Through the use of co-created symbolic imagery and creative expression, Bernstein posits that the very experience of the physical and emotional body can be transformed (2019).

Bernstein offers categories of interventions in her model of Empowerment-Focused Dance/Movement Therapy, and within these categories the opportunities for expansion into practices that do not have a trauma-specific focus shine through. Developing awareness of previously unrecognized strengths, creating new muscle memory, and reclaiming and expanding movement potential in order to reframe world- and self-view, all through the integration (or reintegration) of play, free and creative expression, and improvisational themes, are all essential tools in dance/movement therapy. While the exact focus and intention can and should change from individual to individual, the overarching central point of empowering movers on a body level is beneficial for any individual seeking movement-based therapy. Bernstein cites current research into the “neurological foundations of human behavior” through functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) brain mapping; specifically, how it relates to human interaction with imagery and metaphor, and dance/movement therapy’s unique ability to connect the somatic experience of the symbolic and the actual in order to promote healing (Bernstein, 2019). While Bernstein strongly upholds cultural competence and inclusivity in terms of race, ethnicity, and differing sociocultural norms and traditions in her work with trauma survivors in India, her model would benefit from an expansion of the functional definition of cultural sensitivity to include differently-abled and cognitively lower-functioning individuals. By building a model of

empowerment focused dance/movement therapy that takes all experiences and ways of inhabiting a moving body into account, a truly powerful practice could be born.

Empowered Bodies: Feminism-Informed Dance/Movement Therapy

The question we must answer now is one that has been asked before, although perhaps never in the context of dance/movement therapy: what does a feminist therapist do? Chesler, a self-proclaimed feminist therapist, writes,

“a feminist therapist tries to believe what women say. Given the history of psychiatry and psychoanalysis, this alone is a radical act ... a feminist therapist believes that a woman needs to be told that she’s not “crazy;” that it’s normal to feel sad or angry about being overworked, underpaid, underloved ... that self-love is the basis for love of others; that it’s hard to break free of patriarchy; that the struggle to do so is both miraculous and life-long; that very few of us know how to support women in flight from - or at war with - internalized self-hatred ... a feminist therapist tries to listen to women respectfully, and does not minimize the extent to which a woman has been wounded. A feminist therapist remains resolutely optimistic because no woman ... is beyond the reach of human community and compassion” (Chesler, 2012, p. 95).

This idea of feminism-informed therapeutic practice is indicative of a feminism which is quite narrowly focused on and situated within a binary gender system; by using language which suggests that feminism can only be found in therapy conducted by and for women, the scope of this feminism is not wholly representative of many contemporary feminist viewpoints on gender (which are inclusive of all gender identities). However, the ideas within can evolve, as feminist ideas have and will continue to in the future, in order to remain relevant. A feminist therapist

might instead set an intention to believe all individuals they work with, as a basis of grounding the therapeutic relationship in empathy and acceptance. A feminist therapist might release the idea of “crazy,” separating altogether from the fixed dichotomy of healthy/unhealthy, whole/broken, sane/insane (Price & Shildrick, 1999). A feminist therapist needs to recognize the intricate sociocultural systems, including patriarchy and capitalism, which so deeply impact the lived experience of all individuals in Western society, particularly those with marginal intersectional identities, and to encourage the radical act of self-love in spite of the systems which hold these identities as “less than” others. A feminist therapist must be respectful, and embody a sense of hope and trust in humanity as vast as oceans in order to be continuously open and present in their work.

These feminism-informed therapeutic practices are not beholden to gender identity, nor to any specific mode of psychotherapy. However, dance/movement therapy is uniquely positioned to embody feminist theory within its practical implementation, due to the centrality of the body within both feminist discourse and dance/movement therapy practice. “That bodies matter is axiomatic to current feminist debate” (Horner & Keane, 2000, p. 1). The same, of course, could be said of dance/movement therapy. Sharing in the decentering of traditional Cartesian mind/body duality, both feminist theory and dance/movement therapy recognize the body as the site of lived experiences which shape the sense of self, both positive and negative, deeply integrated into the identities an individual inhabits within their sociocultural structure. Horner and Keane write,

What is required is an analysis of how identities are differentiated through the metonymic association of particular bodies with the border that confounds identity (= strange bodies)

- including women's bodies, lesbian and gay bodies, black bodies, working-class bodies, disabled bodies, and aged bodies (2000, p. 94).

The embodied identities contemporary feminist theory seeks to empower are the individual bodies that dance/movement therapy can serve in equally empowering ways. By recognizing the weight of what these bodies have carried as “strange bodies,” dance/movement therapists can offer a reprieve from that weight. Feminist dance/movement therapists need not start from scratch; interventions and methods formed by the earliest American dance/movement therapists, scaffolded by the contemporary feminist theory that has grown out of the rich history of the feminist movement, can be evolved to meet the current needs of each individual in order to give space for the body within the therapeutic relationship; to see so that others can see themselves, as Adler suggested (2003, p. 12). A feminist dance/movement therapist may offer a safe container for individuals to unpack their burdens; perhaps literally moving through the actions of unpacking, unloading, releasing weight. They may offer up their own strength in weight sharing movements, or simply give space for the total release of lying on the floor and breathing, circling back to the peace of early infancy.

A feminism-informed dance/movement therapist recognizes that awareness of the body is not always a positive experience – or a choice. Rather, for those whose bodies do not hold the power of dominant identities, awareness of the body is a matter of survival (Price & Shildrick, 1999). Individuals of color, individuals who are differently-abled, have chronic pain, or other “invisible” illnesses may not desire to be embodied, because their body may feel unsafe, hostile, or painful to them. In the same way, those who have experienced the trauma of sexual assault or physical abuse may work to actively disconnect from embodied sensations. Dance/movement therapists cannot afford to lack cultural consciousness and competence in carefully titrating the

experiencing of the body without retraumatizing or alienating clients. Grounding in feminist theory can provide a strong base for such considerations, especially for practitioners who embody dominant identities, to hold safe and inclusive space for and power-with their clients (Kirk, 2009). Additionally, education and training for dance/movement therapists might move towards an expanded scope of practice, more specific to the differing lived experiences of differing bodily selves. While the current practitioners of dance/movement therapy are much more diverse than the Western foremothers, there are still barriers for many trying to enter the field. Training and educational programs are extremely expensive; therefore, the majority of practitioners continue to be part of the middle- to upper-class, or are required to take on significant debt in order to receive training. Many training and educational programs require a background in dance; therefore, the majority of practitioners continue to be able-bodied individuals. Through the lens of critical feminist theory, the ADTA and practitioners of dance/movement therapy can further the commitment made to not only listening to, but highlighting marginalized voices, and expanding attention to social justice issues in addition to racial equity, such as classism and disability rights with the field of dance/movement therapy.

Like the feminist movement in its early years (and to a lesser extent, presently), dance/movement therapy has struggled to overcome its marginal status and join the mainstream of psychotherapeutic method. As a movement for social justice and change, however, feminism can be viewed as being at its least powerful and empowering when it aligned with mainstream narratives historically (Walker, 1995). The field of dance/movement therapy can learn from the feminist movement that there is a different sort of power and empowerment to be found in the margins; by bringing the full self, through the body, into the therapeutic relationship, dance/movement therapy is both inherently empowering and is positioned to act as holistic

therapy for marginalized individuals in a way that traditional psychotherapy may not be. The systemic problems within traditional psychotherapy, such as the power-over hierarchy within the therapeutic relationship, the focus on diagnosis and psychopathology, and the separation of the mind and verbal communication from the body and nonverbal communication, weakens the practice as a whole (Henley, 1986). Dance/movement therapy can use its marginal positionality as a bridge to those who are not being holistically served through other modes of therapy, rather than routing all resources to fighting against that marginal status. Without ignoring the very real issues of health insurance coverage and access to less dominant modes of therapy within a capitalist society, dance/movement therapists can argue for the validity of the practice based on its own strengths and its important differences from traditional methods of therapy.

Incorporating feminist theory into dance/movement therapy seems to make perfect sense; and yet, it cannot be taken for granted that the practice of dance/movement therapy is a feminist practice without the intentional integration of feminist theory as a grounding place for commitment to cultural competency and equitable, inclusive, ethical therapeutic care for all individuals. By looking to the past of both the feminist movement and the founding of dance/movement therapy in America, feminist dance/movement therapy practitioners can learn valuable lessons about both the strengths and weaknesses of the field, and gain insight into navigating conflict and continuing to push for a deeper level of inclusion of social justice work into the practice. Additionally, utilizing a critical feminist theory lens to hold the field accountable for its past, present, and future through acknowledgement of its shortcomings and embracing of its unique strengths is necessary for evolving the practice of dance/movement therapy. A feminist dance/movement therapist knows this to be true: we hold our lived experience within our bodies, and that experience is formative of who we are and how we

interact with the world around us. The practice of centering the body in the therapeutic relationship is transformative, and movement is inherently therapeutic and empowering.

Dance/movement therapy is a powerful and revolutionary practice; after all, if you can't dance to it, it isn't a revolution.

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