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Soul and Spirit: Cultural Healing Practices and the Roots of Dance/Movement Therapy

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Soul and Spirit: Cultural Healing Practices and the Roots of Dance/Movement Therapy

Ashley Stevenson

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Abstract

Dance has been a part of the global culture for centuries. Sacred dance traditions, although artistic in nature, have been used as a means to sustain and mend civilizations. Members of the African diaspora have had to practice in these cultural practices in secret or not practice at all due to prejudicial laws and codes. Somehow, these traditions are remembered and performed on members of the African diaspora in urban cities across the globe. Over the years, these African healing dance traditions have taken on new form and language through the emergence of new psychotherapeutic disciplines such as creative arts therapy. Dance/movement therapy is a body-based therapy that seeks to integrate all components of our beings. The objective is to use the body to actualize the unconscious and then regain synchronicity using the body. Dance/movement therapy substantiates the continuous reciprocal relationship of the mind and body, and increases the awareness of the body's senses. It is a young field, that is still growing, but is grounded in ancient healing customs. This research focuses on the connections between dance/movement therapy and ancient healing practices found within the African diaspora. The focus of this thesis is to highlight the technical similarities in both practices. This thesis also discusses the cultural considerations of merging Western and Eastern ideals, adopting major European attitudes about African people and the impact on people of color in therapeutic relationship.

Dedication

To the Supreme Creator, I am forever grateful that you chose me to be the walking manifestation of you. I am divinely woman. Fearfully and wonderfully made. Wrapped in Nubian sweetness
AND I'm from New Orleans, where the good food is... What a gift. Thank you.

To my mighty ancestors, the suffering you endured on my behalf still bewilders me. You are the strength in my spine, the reach in my limbs, the beat in my heart, and the shimmer in my skin. I
hope I am wilder than anything you could've ever imagined... Thank you.

To my loving family, the most difficult part of this process was being away from you. You are my foundation, my saving grace, my mirror, my covering, my legacy, my love, and my memories. Thank you for being there to see me safely through it all... I love you.

To my city, I did it for the culture...

You a paper chaser, you got your block on fire

Remaining a G until the moment you expire

You know what it is you make nothin' out of somethin'

You handle your biz and don't be cryin' and sufferin'

-Ha by Juvenile

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Soul and Spirit: Cultural Healing Practices and The Roots of Dance/Movement Therapy

Dance is within us all. Microscopically, the smallest organisms are dancing within our bodies right now. Dance also surrounds us all. The stars and planets of the universe move rhythmically in and out of cosmic pathways, demonstrating a multi-level system of interconnectivity. The components of our intricate atmosphere move within steady continuity to maintain a homeostatic balance. This, in its purest form, is dance. For humans, dance is the sequential phrasing of movement that allows a person to express their experience of life on and through the body. It is a person's natural way of attuning themselves to the world around them. Dance is recognized as the expression of being moved by the "transcendent power" of the universe (Wosien, 1974, p. 8). According to Wosien (as cited in Serlin, 1993, p 66), "early human beings understood the divine by imitating the motions of the celestial order" (Serlin, 1993). Thus, the body in motion, in all of its splendor, highlights the interconnectedness between human beings and the mysteries of the world around us. Early peoples used dance to communicate and receive information. Because of the example left by our ancestors, we know that movement is our first language. In this discovery, we find that dance is where action and understanding meet. Through direct participation, the human vessel becomes open to experience itself and encounter the god (Serlin, 1993). Around the world, sacred dance traditions have reflected humankind's journey to unify themselves with the power and wonder of existence around them. People danced for many reasons such as, but not limited to, hunting preparation, child bearing preparation, worship, harvest, and rites of passage. Each dance, with its own origin, reflected daily culture. Dance was used to socialize, heal and celebrate members of the

community. Ancient civilizations have passed down these dances from generation to generation, preserving their people's way of life (Wosien, 1974).

Through the transatlantic slave trade, African cultural practices have been dispersed throughout the world among the African diaspora. The African diaspora is also a descriptor used widely, which encompasses all people, worldwide, that are of African descent. African dance and spiritual traditions are practiced globally by members of the African diaspora. Also note that the phrase African spiritual tradition is an umbrella phrase that is used to categorize a host of religions practiced by members of the African continental community and those of the diaspora. Although religions may vary from region to region, African people and members of the diaspora share a common core belief in the importance of body-mind integration (Melissa McDaniel, 2012). Because culture plays a large part in how we express our suffering, when discussing Africa, specificity is crucial. Geographically, Africa is a vast, large mass of land. It is the second largest continent and covers about one-fifth of the world's total land surface. The continent is almost equally split into halves by the equator and as a result has various climates and altitudes in each direction. Linguistically, the continent of Africa is home to almost 2000 languages. Therefore, culturally the people are just as diverse as the lands they inhabit. Each region possesses a culture that is unique and specific to their land and way of life, which can be vastly different from coast to coast. So, when using the word "African" to describe, we must acknowledge that it is both plural and monolithic in describing the vastness of a continent.

African/Black Dance as a Healing Modality

African dance has been a creative force toward protecting the well-being, culture and integrity of African people. Africans have also practiced an embodied spirituality which has

acted as a catalyst for the healing of the individual and community (Monteiro & Wall, 2011). Traditional African dances, in general, are both celebratory and functional in nature and serve as a means to achieve healthy levels of self-esteem through cultural movement that is relatable. They provide the African communities with a means of socialization, expression and communication, all while helping to illuminate personal pathways to self-discovery. These movement expressions, or dances, function both symbolically and as art. African dance illuminates and articulates self-expression. It also promotes cosmic harmony, embodied self-integration, and healing (Akunna, 2015, p. 40). Because traditional African dance is strongly connected to West African spiritual customs and healing practices, both dance and spirituality are incorporated in to ritual systems to reaffirm the core belief that mind and body are one and must be integrated fully in ritual to heal, transform and empower members, individually and collectively. According to Daniel (2005), African spiritual traditions, rely on embodied and sounded knowledge through dance to gain and carry information across time and space (Daniel, 2005). African civilizations and members of the African diaspora have developed their own definition and theoretical framework of spiritual transformation. According to the African world view, spiritual transformation is the process of restoring the divine-human relationship. Actually, this is the goal of African spirituality, realignment, which is the transformation by God leading to unlimited possibilities (Steenkamp-Nel, 2018).

Spiritual transformation impacts what Steelkamp-Nel describes as the inner and outer horizons. This experience of horizons in the Eastern philosophy is reflective of the mind and body experience in Western philosophy. The mind encompasses the inner experience and body has an exterior, physical experience. The inner horizon defines personal practice such as thoughts, feelings, prayer and virtuosity. This horizon is comprised of intangible values that are

the foundations of inner balance. All that is in the outer environment, that relates directly to the person, is the outer horizon (Steenkamp-Nel, 2018). The outer environment is the sum of the individual's historical, socio-psychological, economic statuses and cultural affiliations.

Basically, the outer horizon is physical setting and attributes of a person. The inner and outer horizons also echo the multiple levels of connectivity that we observe within relationship when they are exercised through movement. For instance, the inner horizon represents the expressive purpose of the dance, the inner impulse, the origin of the movement. Working through the inner horizon of the individual results in outward expression, allowing the individual to convey information. The outer horizon relates to movement that is externally motivated, yet influences inner experiences, which is functional in purpose. Furthermore, the inner horizon meets the need of expression, the outer horizon meets the need of function. Both horizons support the well-being of the individual and are in a continuous reciprocal relationship, similarly to the relationship with others and the universe. Being able to sense connection is the basis of African spirituality and spiritual transformation (Hackney, 2002).

“In search for transformation, African spirituality is often described as a spirituality of joy from the centrifugal to the centripetal. At the heart of this spirituality is the conviction that the ‘enjoyment of life is part of living’” (Masango, 2006, p. 930). Therefore, African people have developed this method of healing and many others because they are necessary to communal and self-preservation. African spirituality serves to teach and reinforce community through spirituality based on and for the sake of the community, which results in spiritual transformation on the community level. We learn from one another through sharing and engaging, and this fellowship strengthens the community. This is how Steenkamp-Nel defines spiritual centrifugality, spirituality on a macro level. In addition to communal healing, the skills

exchanged at the community level serve as an example for what is needed personally, which defines spiritual centripetality; spirituality geared toward the center of self (Steenkamp-Nel, 2018). Through these examples we see that African people embody the journey of maintaining the balance of poles and duality. These rituals require the ability to go within, then out, then within again, thus affirming the awareness of self and other realms of existence. Although community sharing is encouraged, African spirituality seeks to enhance the “transformative capacity” of the individual to achieve spiritual transformation” (Steenkamp-Nel, 2018, p. 3). African diasporic spiritual traditions are danced religions that are palpable and draw in the whole self. Therefore, when we speak of African diasporic religions and their devotees, we are speaking of divine embodiment.

Additionally, traditional West African dance serves as its own assessment tool to detect and understand imbalances that disrupt the natural order of human connection. African people believe that the manifestation of illness is temporary and can be corrected through culturally prescribed rituals, which allow the individual to dance their lived experience before a supportive, receptive and engaging community (Monteiro & Wall, 2011). Through empathetic interactions with the community, the individual may gain some insight, through movement and experience connections that are fundamental to healing. Members of the African diaspora have conceptualized health and illness in a holistic way which seeks to integrate social, spiritual, physical and mental areas. This worldview is derived from both spiritual and communal paradigms which support that self is not separated into mental and physical parts. Instead, humans have a spiritual root that is responsible for the manifestations of health and illness (Monteiro & Wall, 2011). Overall, Africans believe that health is directly correlated to the peace and balance within the spirit. This harmonizing perspective recognizes distinct differences in the

mind and body, but honors, integrates and appreciates the holism of the individual. Globally, dance “has served all humans as a means of defining and interpreting behaviors within physical, social, spiritual, or psychological environments” (Akunna, 2015, p. 39).

The Igbo Mourning Ritual

Centuries ago, communities across West Africa realized innovative methods to process death; they were directly translating their feelings about the effects of death on the body and mind into movement. Through these mourning rituals, the Igbo found cathartic release and re-established harmony individually and communally. Performing these funerary rites was also spiritual in nature. The Igbo people view death as natural and as the fulfillment of the life cycle of the spirit returning to the spiritual realm, therefore, this process is divine. In this memorial custom, the deceased is officially honored as an ancestor in the spiritual realm; the family of the deceased finds peace and consolation about the physical departure of their loved one; the skills, discipline, spiritual connection, interpersonal relationships and creativity of the community are sharpened within the practice of this ritual; and participating in this practice ensures the longevity of the culture. What is also interesting is the word mourning does not mean death or sorrow in the Igbo language, it is contextually interpreted as *iruuju* or “coming full circle” (Akunna, 2015, p. 41). Mourning dances in the Igbo community produce meaning based on what is felt and moved within the space. In this case, they are exercising the final act of love, grief. Although faced with tragedy, the Igbo community’s participation in mourning rites serves as an indicator of their belief in endless life. As the Igbo say, “There is no enemy in death” (Akunna, 2015, p. 42). The Igbo keep in mind that life is filled with transitions. Though our human experiences vary according to individual, we will all surely experience death.

The Igbo mourning ritual begins when the deceased passes away. Family members gather to the home of the deceased, which is referred to as the “*uno onwu*” or the house of death during this process of mourning. The family makes a death announcement to the community, begins to make funeral preparations and invites the community to join in the mourning even before the service. Community members come bearing gifts and money, anything to show concern or care. The ritual continues in the following days with a church or spiritual service which is reflective of the faith of the deceased. Those that have been initiated into secret societies, or have undergone certain communally sanctioned traditional customs have services that include the rituals of these societies and traditions. Surviving members of these groups play a crucial role in upholding these observances within the mourning rituals of deceased members. For instance, they are responsible for making sure that the deceased is buried in the correct attire and with paraphernalia from these societies. After the burial has been completed, a procession of singing and dancing performed by bands, choirs, and a host of relatives and friends fill the streets, to head back to the home of the deceased. There, dancers continue the dance activities, which intensifies with more energetic drumming and dancing. There is no designated order for the everyone to perform but the church elders, women and family members of the deceased usually move first. Together, they move mostly in circles, enclosing the children of the deceased in the center of the dance ring. This circular structure, with the children of the deceased in the center, is the support of the community embodied in ritual. One of the children of the deceased always bears the portrait of the loved, which is not only for commemorative purposes but it also symbolizes that the deceased arrived safely to the spiritual realm. This gives the children a great sense of pride when moving in the circle and the surviving loved watch approvingly (Akunna, 2015).

Akunna (2015) describes multiple levels of connection present during the ceremony. The children in the center of the circle are paying homage to their deceased loved one. This symbol signifies the realization that although the deceased has transitioned, they still live through their children, through shared blood and flesh, traditions like these and treasured memories. While the children are moving in the center, the surviving family members circle around them and look on solemnly or also participate in movement. This signifies the active presence of living relationship and its call for the skill of transitioning between roles. In this case, the roles can be seen as mover and witness. Dancers pop in and out to dance alone, or dance in groups. While dancing in groups, members can be seen attuning to one another. Then the remainder of the community reinforces this by showing their support and solidarity for the family, dancing in and out of the circles to affirm their presence, in this life and the next (Akunna, 2015). “The performers do not just react emotionally to the event of death in the dance, but endeavor to focus on, interpret and define the dance actions by changes the dance makes in them and their environmental conditions” (Akunna, 2015, p. 44). This process allows members of Igbo society to not only acknowledge how they feel verbally but to feel it on the body. Movement is used here to communicate feelings, process trauma and find joy after tragedy. The Igbo mourning ritual serves as a means to release that which concerns us individually, while concurrently fostering group connection, and providing a safe space for healing. The Igbo mourning dance has the therapeutic ability to regulate the body and its response to stress. Negative thoughts and feelings caused by grief can be alleviated, overall health is increased, and the pain is diminished. Thus, in Igbo funeral mourning rites, as in dance/movement therapy interventions from the global North, depression, grief, pain, and feelings of gloom are transformed through dancing (Callahan, 2011).

For the Igbo people, dance is therapy. This ritual dance, like other African dances, shut “off the source of pain and reduces suffering to manageable proportions” (Akunna, 2015, p. 44).

The New Orleans Jazz Funeral a.k.a. The Second Line

Gottschild (2003) wrote that within the collective memory of members of the African diaspora is the tradition of dancing religions and divinities. She found that members of the African diaspora share an Africanist collective memory of embodied practice. This collective memory is not necessarily genetic, nor biological, but it is a shared unconscious knowing that lives within African people. Those memories are reconstituted and manifested on the body within ritual (Gottschild, 2003). Today, we see these rituals remembered in urban cities across the United States. New Orleans, Louisiana is the birthplace of a mourning ritual that was created four centuries ago in the Western Region of Africa. The Jazz Funeral, also known as the Second Line, is a ritual that serves as culmination of multiple fragmented traditions of enslaved Africans people. The Second Line has known roots in the West African Yoruba tradition, the burial traditions of New Orleans, the music traditions of New Orleans black brass bands, the Black church, Catholicism, and Haitian Vodou (Turner, 2017). The mixing of these traditions has created a sacred dance tradition that catapults the African American community into introspection when faced with the crisis of death. This performative meditation uses the rhythms of our ancestors to stir up the spirit of the African diaspora. The Second Line exposes the cultural memory and the subconscious knowledge of ancient dances, drumming, and singing in members of the African diaspora. Through movement and music, the Second Line transforms the consciousness of participants by enabling them to experience ancestral spirits (Turner, 2017).

Some consider this ritual to be a journey, both literally and figuratively, being that this process brings elements from the other world into this one.

The Second Line had a benevolent beginning in New Orleans. It was developed out of the need for survival techniques for African Americans during and after slavery. African Americans have a painful history in this country, extending back hundreds of years. In 1719, two ships harboring 450 Africans arrived in New Orleans. At this time, the Louisiana colony, founded by Jean-Baptist Le Moyne de Bienville, was under French rule. Approximately five years later, Louisiana adopted the *Code Noir*, or The Black Code, which was a decree, originally passed in France in 1685, that outlined the parameters of slavery (Evans, 2011). Under this law, slave owners were given the rules of enslavement, which left enslaved people with no rights, and harsh punishments for disobeying the law. For instance, one article of the code read that enslaved people were to be baptized in the Roman Catholic faith, were forbidden from publicly practicing any other religion, and must observe Sundays and all other Catholic holidays by refraining from work, unless paid by their master (Evans, 2011). Although restrictive, the Sunday observance afforded enslaved people the opportunity to engage in their own cultural practices. These celebrations would take place on plantations, in back yards, in the streets and in Congo Square. Congo Square is a gathering place which began with the Native Americans, and has existed on the historical continuum for all three (French, Spanish and American) periods of rule. The “Congo” in Congo Square is from the country in Africa that is now named the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The “square” in Congo Square demarks the actual shape of the space. Spaces like this existed in every area of the United States that practiced slavery. In fact, what we know as today’s Washington Square in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania was once Congo Square as well (Evans, 2011). These places served as a gathering places, burial spaces, and pasture for

enslaved Africans on the Sabbath. This lasted for about 25 years until the year 1751 when new police regulations were adopted. The new law forbade slave owners to allow enslaved Africans to congregate for any reason. The laws of the *Code Noir* not only shaped the frequency of practice of African cultural practices but attempted to eliminate it completely (Evans, 2011).

For the next 60 years, Louisiana would be bought and sold many times, and each time experiencing a new government. The lives of enslaved and free people of color and the spaces they occupied would hang in the balance as the wave of colonization inspired the creation of laws that criminalized them, and executed punishment harshly and gruesomely. Even with the influx of enslaved and free peoples of color to New Orleans in the early 1800s, the laws grew more prohibitive. People of color, free or enslaved, were restricted from masking in traditional costumes, engaging in rituals and dancing in public spaces. If caught, they'd be arrested and charged with "unlawful assembly." People of color were also arrested for practicing Vodou, even in privacy, for which they'd be fined ten dollars. At some point, Congo Square would be off limits to people of African descent at night due to curfew laws (Evans, 2011). Instead, places that were once sacred to people of color would be used to exercise the *Code Noir*. In March of 1930, an enslaved person was hung in Congo Square for a miniscule offense. The act of a white person hanging a Black man in a Black sacred space was meant to diminish the spirit of African people. This violent act was another was to replace joy of African people with fear as a means of enslavement (Evans, 2011). This code also sought to manage where people of color could work or live. Laws prohibited free people of color and enslaved people from renting or owning homes, and selling goods in marketplaces. These laws made it difficult for people of color to organize self-sustaining structures in society for the benefit of people of color, governed by people of color. Out of this came the re-emergence of secret societies (Evans, 2011).

In New Orleans, secret societies were formed among African Americans as a means of protection, and a way to preserve cultural practices. Secret societies required the members to pay dues each month, which could be used in a number of ways. Today, these clubs use their resources to throw anniversary second line parades and parties, and to carry out burial rites of group members; but initially, African American secret societies served exclusively as a group savings account, contributed to by all group members, to assure all group members a proper burial. The legacy of secret societies pre-dates the slave trade, and carries with it the essence of ancient African mourning traditions (Turner, 2017). Everything from the slow dirges played by the brass bands, to the personalized memorabilia and photographs of the deceased echo African cultural practice. What we know as the New Orleans Jazz funeral or Second Line serves as a collective gesture of homage and eternal memory to those lost, by the communities in which their presence was significant. The Jazz funeral is structured around the deceased, totally. The parade is routed around significant landmarks that the deceased frequented while living, which would include their homes, favorite bar, church, etc. The Jazz funeral would also incorporate rituals specific to the beliefs of the deceased. For instance, when a member of any Mardi Gras Indian Nation passes away, he or she is buried the Mardi Gras Indian way (Turner, 2017).

The Jazz funeral got its nickname “The Second Line” from its multi-dimensional structure. It refers to the steps performed, the syncopated rhythm distinctive to New Orleans, and the parade itself (Regis, 2008). The steps are improvisational in nature, but there is a technique which gives way to a playful freedom (Turner, 2017). This freedom allows the body to move according to the commands of the subconscious, a journey that is catalyzed by the unique rhythm of New Orleans music. Performing Second Line steps require a mastery of body codes and logic of action. The spontaneous movement demonstrated at Jazz Funerals expresses a collective

subconscious knowledge of ancient dances, songs and rhythms among African Americans in New Orleans. This is how the Second Line performance transforms our awareness of mourning, by purposely enabling the flow of ancestral spirits through the body. The Second Line tradition is also a means to re-claiming urban spaces, which is another reason this ritual is communal. It involves maintaining networks that served to preserve the communities during colonialization, and now gentrification (Regis, 2008). “In the same way that ancestors in lineage-based societies bind the living into groups defined by shared descent, so the memory of people and places defines communities in the contemporary New Orleans Second Line” (Regis, 2008, p. 756).

Dance/Movement Therapy

The field of dance/movement therapy is Western creation, that has a multi-disciplinary focus on healing. Dance as therapy is a practice that began centuries ago in cultures across the globe. Dance has long been considered an integral part of the well-being of people, and dance/movement therapy is a professional discipline that is an embodied therapy. In the 1940s, pioneers such as Marian Chace began experimenting with dance as a spontaneous expression that demonstrated the inner self. In her early life, Chace was introduced to dance as therapy when she was prescribed a dance class by her physician following a diving accident. (ADTA) After her professional dance career came to a close, dance took on new meaning for Chace. She found that dance met a need that was not exclusive to performers. Her perceptions of dance grew from choreographing to creating pleasing aesthetics for people simply dancing. As a result of this focal shift, information about the relationship between the mind and body began to develop. Dance was viewed more as a means to inform and be informed. The mover’s expression informed and influenced the witness, reciprocally, the mover is informed and sometimes transformed by the movement. Chace’s philosophy was that dance is a communication tool,

bringing the unconscious into awareness. Her work with victims of trauma greatly impacted the field by integrating the verbal and non-verbal components in ways to create a flow between the body and mind. This was groundbreaking for alternative healing practices because this practice was incorporating psychotherapeutic theory/practice and dance. From this, dance as a communication tool grew to dance/movement therapy. In 1947, Chace became the first full-time dance/movement therapist. She also supported the development of the American Dance Therapy Association and served as its first president for two years (ADTA). Today, “the American Dance Therapy Association (ADTA) defines dance/movement therapy as the psychotherapeutic use of movement to promote emotional social, cognitive and physical integration of the individual” (ADTA). The field is focused on movement behavior as it is revealed in the therapeutic relationship. Dance/movement therapy is based on a sophisticated interpersonal and person-centered therapy model in which group and individual treatment is encouraged. In the field of dance/movement therapy, body movement is used as a means of assessment and intervention. Dance tells the story of the repressed unconscious mind, allowing participants to experience the traumatized self. Dance/movement therapy is practiced with multiple populations, in multiple settings, integrating body sensations, movements, thoughts and feelings. Using dance/movement therapy with individuals with challenges has shown to be efficacious. Dance/movement therapy allows varied opportunities of expression and active engagement for members of all communities, with the goal of achieving health and balance. Interventions are client centered, and seek to help clients maintain, improve or transform. Dance/movement therapy is practiced with “people of all ages, races and ethnic backgrounds in individual, couples, family and group therapy formats” (ADTA).

Since its inception, dance/movement therapy has influenced and been influenced by many pioneers. Mary Whitehouse was another modern dancer turned dance therapist who profoundly impacted the field. Her career began as a student of modern dance underneath the supervision of the legendary Mary Wigman and Martha Graham (Adler, 2002). She is remembered for being the first dance therapist to adapt dance and movement principles to depth psychology (Chodorow J. , 1991). Depth psychology refers to therapeutic approaches that explore the unconscious. Her work is heavily inspired by the psychological contributions of Carl Jung. Carl Jung was a Swiss psychoanalyst, who made major contributions to the field of psychology. In fact, he is often referred to as the father of analytic psychology (Feist, 2013). Like his predecessors, Carl Jung's work is heavily concentrated on the contents of the unconscious mind. He is most famous for coining what he calls the active imagination. The active imagination is the actualization of the unconscious; these are the images that are produced in our minds that have a strong yet unconscious effect on our daily actions. Jung thought that using the active imagination could move the unconscious into consciousness through expressive arts (Chodorow J. , 1991), and the patient could gain some objectivity. Whitehouse began drawing significant connections between the two fields, and developed her own approach with the specific goal of drawing out the inner feelings. After her psychotherapy training, she began teaching her approach to groups of men and women (Whitehouse, 1999b). This approach is called Authentic Movement. Authentic movement is a psychotherapeutic technique (Lewis, 1996) developed by Mary Stark Whitehouse inspired by Carl Jung's theory of active imagination (Pallaro, 1999). It is movement, in depth, and brings the attention inward, allowing the unconscious image to emerge. The discipline of authentic movement has evolved since the years of Whitehouse, thanks to the devoted work of Janet Adler and Joan Chodorow. (Haze, 1999).

Janet Adler was the first to utilize the term witness to describe the silent participant in the authentic movement experience. By her definition, witnessing encompasses active listening, embodied attention and presence (Akunna, 2015). According to Janet Adler, authentic movement is a form of artistic expression that is therapeutic, with a special focus on the relationship of witness and mover. Joan Chodorow's understanding of authentic movement grew as she began to apply Jung's depth psychology to her movement experiences (Chodorow J. , 1991). She believed that dance/movement therapy could also be used to support inner changes (Chodorow J. , 1999, p. 247). Both Adler and Chodorow created frameworks to support the stages of progression through the authentic movement experience, as they shared similar viewpoints. They believed that Authentic movement was a valuable practice that allowed the unconscious to surface so it can be dealt with (Chodorow J. , 1991).

Authentic movement requires the presence of a mover and witness, with a designated time frame for each mover to move, and witness to witness. Each mover sits quietly, awaiting the impulse to be moved by the unconscious (Chodorow J. , 1991). Although this discipline is focused on the mover's inner experience, the role of witness is essential to the practice of authentic movement. The witness and mover in this setting foster a therapeutic relationship, which requires a safe space to grow and heal. The mover is responsible for moving on impulse and nothing more. The witness must observe the mover without judgment, while experiencing themselves. After the mover's time is complete, the witness listens in silence as the mover shares their experience. The witness then shares their experience with the mover. They both discuss the experience further then process individually. (Adler, *Offering from the Conscious Body*, 2002). Processing can be accomplished in a number of ways. Clients are encouraged to journal, create, or participate in any other method of meditative art. By using this process, participants are able

to recognize and restructure behaviors, which is pertinent to the process of transformation and self-awareness (Chodorow J. , 1991).

The Parallels of African Mourning Rituals and Dance/Movement Therapy Practice

The therapeutic discipline of dance/movement therapy and African mourning rituals share a few commonalities. The self is at the center of both, and surrounded by community. Both use circles within session or ritual spaces. Both are spiritual in nature and highlight the multileveled, interconnected relationship between this world and the next. Both use dance performance to foster emotional balance and to move through painful experiences and gain insight for deeper processing of the unconscious mind. Within each modality, we see the importance of roles emerge. Both processes require a harmonious and safe environment, which is crucial to the transformative experience. In both dance/movement therapy practice and African mourning rituals, we see that the mover and witness are in reciprocal relationship, flowing in and out of the roles of catalyst and vessel. The mover presents movement authored by the unconscious as an offering to be seen by the witness. In turn, the witness has their own experience while witnessing the mover. Relational witnessing is a therapeutic technique that “possesses psychic characteristics that permeate subjective feelings, thus inducing valuable intuitive judgments for the purpose of growth” (Akunna, 2015, p. 42). This definition of relational witnessing as a therapeutic process applies to the African spiritual tradition of the Igbo mourning ritual, the New Orleans Jazz Funeral, and dance/movement therapy. All methodologies provide the tools to explore a deeper understanding of self, through body mind awareness and relational witnessing. We also see that attunement is integral to both processes. Attunement is the practice of being in touch with the experience of another, or the inner experience of oneself.

Attunement in dance/movement therapy is used as a precursor to compassion (ADTA). Though the language is different, the goal of transcendence and body as a tool are strikingly similar. All of these examples provide us with evidence that certain values are shared globally.

Merging Dance/Movement Therapy with Traditional Cultural Practices

Today, areas all over the world still suffer from poverty, oppression and civil conflict. Haiti is a country that experiences ongoing hardship due to trauma resulting from its unstable past. Haiti has a complex history of colonialization, enslavement, extreme violence, resistance, liberation and poverty. What was once a beautiful nation is now a country facing extreme poverty. Before enslavement, Haiti was home to the Arawak-Tainos people, the Ciboneys and the Caribs, who were all slaughtered after the arrival of Christopher Columbus (Gray A. E., 2008). Africans were later imported to Haiti, and took part in what is historically considered one of the most brutal eras of enslavement. Slave owners and traders were extremely harsh to the enslaved, usually exposing them to disease, torture, and extreme conditions. The slave trade lasted from 1502 until 1789, and two years later a slavery revolt ensued. Enslaved peoples organized, created plans, participated in rituals to prepare, and rebelled against the system of enslavement. On December 31, 1804, former enslaved peoples declared the country of Haiti independent from the French colony (Gray A. E., 2008).

Throughout this time, enslaved people kept their own spiritual practices, rituals and beliefs intact. Haitian Vodou is an embodied, danced religion that has fused the practices and religions of the tribes represented in the enslaved population of Haiti. This practice combines the tradition of communal gatherings, drumming, dancing and healing rites. We see the artistic culture of Haiti reflected in the rituals and rites of Vodou. This tradition combines aspects of

faith and healing with community and social responsibility. The core of this danced religion is the health and wellbeing of its practitioners and that healing happens in community. Vodou teaches that humans are limitless in realizing their purpose, there is one transcendental spiritual entity, and spiritual freedom is attainable in this life (Gray A. E., 2008). The dances of Vodou are embedded in meaningful, historical philosophies that celebrate life, help us integrate the transformation we experience in ritual into daily life, and help us see ourselves in the continuum of existence. The religion of Vodou exists for a people that know they are African, yet do not any real African dances. Vodou pays homage and gives thanks for opportunity to see and be seen (Gray 2008).

Amber Gray is a dance/movement therapist and author who documented her work in Haiti with children who have experienced trauma. She describes that Haiti drew her in because of its dance and rhythm-based traditions, which align with dance/movement therapy. This discipline is perfect for the merging of culture and therapeutic form. Gray believes that dance/movement therapy has roots in the traditional healing practices from around the world (Gray A. E., 2008). Therefore, Gray considers dance/movement to be a great segue to therapy for clients who come from different cultures. She also considered that since dance/movement therapy is a body-based modality, survivors of extreme violence, like those found in Haiti, would benefit greatly from the work. In Haiti, to dance is to be affected and enter into a psychic state. Acknowledging that the people of Haiti viewed dance differently was crucial to combining their existing rituals with dance/movement therapy. Gray also recognized that even though dance/movement therapy is a somewhat new and innovative modality, modifications would still have to be made in order to support the communal practices of the Haitian people. It was important that Gray recognized the importance of the cultural implications of what dance and

rituals meant to the Haitian people. To the Haitian people, dance is an ancient form of worship that is interwoven into daily life. It is both artistic and sacred. Knowing this allows and supports the integration of familiar cultural elements of clients (Vodou) into the healing process (dance/movement therapy) (Gray A. E., 2008).

During her time in Haiti, Gray quickly learned that her traditional leadership approach would have to change while facilitating the children. In Vodou tradition, during gatherings, the leadership roles are different. Instead of someone leading, that someone actually initiates the ritual and oscillates between leadership and group membership. She was aware that she would have to learn, as well as teach in order create the correct intervention for the children. Gray didn't have to change her approach completely, instead she was able to formulate some connections between Vodou and dance/movement therapy. This allowed Gray to bring her whole self into the space and truly decipher what the children of Haiti needed. The street children of Haiti face many hardships. Some are homeless, have been sold as child sex slaves, sell drugs, and work as prostitutes. Some have a place to live, while others are living on the streets. The children that live on the streets are often jailed repeatedly by local authorities for being on the streets. "Torture is prevalent in the jails in Haiti and, more recently, in the frequent cases of kidnapping occurring in Port-au-Prince" (Gray A. E., 2008, p. 230). Those that do have a home often suffer abuse and live in impoverished conditions. Many children are sold as indentured servants to wealthier Haitian, in which they may still suffer neglect, rape and abuse. From this, Gray gathered that the practice of Vodou works to powerfully transform a people facing deplorable social conditions (Gray A. E., 2008).

As time went by, Amber Gray had established relationships with the children. They began sharing knowledge with her about the culture, giving names to dances and rhythms, once

they became comfortable. The children also began co-creating in session with Gray by incorporating Vodou rituals to open and close the sessions. The children believed that incorporating rituals into dance/movement therapy practice was the only way to successfully merge their worlds. Healing together through community-endorsed movement is how we connect with our ancestors, ask for help in times of need, and fully become our highest selves through daily routine (Gray A. E., 2008). During groups, the children would begin with a cleansing ritual to maintain a clean spiritual space, then they would proceed into an interactive dance experience in a circle. Each child would take the role of leader inside the circle, and come up with a movement phrase. They would also engage and make eye contact with each person in the circle, being sure to see them and be seen. The children that weren't dancing would be drumming and maintaining the flow of the rhythms. Each rhythm and dance holds a specific purpose, and pays homage to a particular *lwa*. A *lwa* is spirit of Haitian that is served by human beings. They have their own likes and dislikes, symbols, songs and rituals. They are the intermediaries between humans and the Supreme Creator. This interactive relationship experience is similar to African dance and ritual circles. The people of Haiti strongly acknowledge their Africanness but do not know any real African dances, so these rituals pay homage to the past and the collective unconscious knowing of how to heal.

Grey concluded that Vodou shares many commonalities with the field of dance/movement therapy. Both speak to the collective longing to express the soul in healing rituals and practices. Vodou, and many other ancient healing rituals demonstrate that ancient healing traditions are just as effective as western psychotherapeutic techniques (Gray A. E., 2008).

Cultural Biases in Dance/Movement Therapy Practice

According to Hanna (1990), the fields of mental health, psychology and counseling, have developed with little consideration for other worldviews (Hanna, 1990). Humankind of the ancient East and West have asked similar questions pertaining to their own human condition for centuries. Through their experiential research and rituals, they developed modalities that supported their culture, and themselves. Though their practices may derive from the same human mechanism that yearns for understanding of self, each methodology is specific to the culture in which it is practiced. Some assume that because we experience the same universal elements such as space, time and energy that we all experience them the same (Hanna, 1990). Nobles (2013) believes that people experience life differently, especially in respect to race. “The domination of the European standard on all people, the dehumanization of African peoples and the subsequent erosion of African consciousness have caused fissures and cracks in the African consciousness and identity” (Nobles, 2013, p. 236). Multicultural awareness and empathy is critical within the therapeutic relationship between people of African ancestry and European ancestry. It is crucial that dance/movement therapists become familiar with and embody cultural competency, as to fairly assess, diagnose or heal clients. Culture can significantly affect the movement patterns and behaviors of its people. Cultural practices such as healing rituals both influence and are influenced by its environment. Without familiarity of cultures other than our own, therapists run the risk of inaccurately assessing a client (Caldwell C. , 2013), or developing psychological foundations that are later developed into methods of analysis that is inherently biased.

During her time in Haiti, Gray realized that although dance/movement therapy is a tremendous vehicle to incorporate social and cultural specificities, western views can present cultural limitations (Gray A. E., 2008). “In research context, difference will be defined in two

ways; a research participant being ‘different’ from the researcher, and the researcher or participant occupying a socially-defined category that is deemed different than the norm” (Caldwell C. &, 2012). The discipline of authentic movement, for example, is inspired by Carl Jung’s active imagination. Active imagination is a methodology that assists in transforming unconscious content into artistic expression. Carl Jung thought that the unconscious mind housed our tensions, worries, discord and our conflicts. He believed the unconscious and conscious minds to be opposites, but of equal importance to wholeness. When the two are in disharmony, the balance between the conscious and unconscious mind can only be re-established through the transcendent function, which he later calls the active imagination. Jung believed this phenomenon to be “the suspension between two opposites, a living birth that leads to a new level of being; the function of meditation between the opposites” (Jung C. , Jung on Active Imagination, 1997, p. 5). Carl Jung’s theory of active imagination explains that at times we become aware of images of the unconscious, yet we still struggle to comprehend and process the image. This is where embodiment comes into play. Carl Jung believed expressive mediums, such as dance, lead us naturally to the understanding we seek through the use of intuition and spontaneity in safe, experiential settings. This process of self-actualization is the essence of healing rituals and therapy modalities worldwide. Specifically speaking, just as Jung described the active imagination as having two phases: letting the unconscious image come up, then coming to terms with it (Jung C. , Jung on Active Imagination, 1997). The field of dance/movement therapy, the Igbo mourning ritual, the New Orleans Jazz funeral and Haitian Vodou rituals actively engage willing participants in the balance of transcendence.

Although Carl Jung has made substantial contributions to the fields of psychiatry, psychology and philosophy globally, quite a few of his writings demonstrate his opinion of

people of color. It is clear that there is prejudice. It is also evident that even through his personal practice of the active imagination as a means of transformation, he could not transcend the societal attitudes of the time. In his collection of notes, Jung writes “I have not been led by any kind of wisdom; I have been led by dreams, like any primitive. I am ashamed to say so, but I am as primitive as any nigger because I do not know” (Jung C. , *The symbols of life*, 1969, p. 286). Here, Jung is not only using a racial slur, but claiming to not have been inspired by anyone or anything in particular, but his own self, mind and dreams when speaking of his research on the continent of Africa. It is ironic that Jung viewed African people as inferior to Europeans, yet his own methods of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy is derived directly from ancient peoples, which includes people of African ancestry. His active imagination methodology has been practiced among ancient people for centuries, across the globe. Disciples of Jung, such as Chodorow felt that he was “far ahead of time” (Chodorow J. , 1991, p. 1) due to his contributions to the fields of psychotherapy, but creative and expressive arts have always been the primary focus and form of the psychotherapeutic process embodied in the spiritual practices of ancient people, especially African people. Somehow, European psychologists such as Jung have earned the credit for the discovery of such modalities that have been around longer than we know.

Dance/movement therapist has a strongly transpersonal nature, but this does not negate the fact that we must work hard to validate the experience of the client’s inner and lived experiences. The relationship between client and therapist is both verbal and non-verbal, and differences are experienced. Within the context of dance/movement therapy and ancient healing rituals, the witness and mover relationship must also embody cultural competency and empathy. If the mover embodies a difference within shared space with someone that fits the social norm,

this can impact the mover's impulse to move authentically, due to a lack of trust for members of the dominant culture (Caldwell C. &, 2012) (Caldwell C. , 2013).

Discussion

Dance/movement therapy is a relatively young field that is continually growing and changing. This field utilizes the embodied experiences of clients for therapeutic purposes, such as maintaining balanced health, assessing challenges, unpacking the unconscious mind and healing. Although the field of dance/movement therapy encompasses a repertoire of embodied psychosocial tools, the cultural and spiritual component to this work is not sufficient. From my experience as a member of the African diaspora, I do not always feel seen or heard within traditional dance/movement therapy interventions. When entering all spaces, the first thing I notice is the number of Black people in the room. This is how I determine how much of myself I can bring, which further determines how often I speak, what I say, what conversations I engage in, or do I engage at all. My personhood, culture, dignity and life are inevitably vulnerable in this society, and given my experience as a Black woman, sharing therapeutic spaces with members of the dominant culture directly affects my access to healing. Therefore, it is crucial that the field of dance/movement therapy advocates for and participates in the cultivation of all Black spaces, and the integration of African culture. African diasporic religions share similar values, techniques and goals with the field and would merge beautifully with dance/movement therapy to be more inclusive to members of the African diaspora. African people already use their bodies to alleviate and process pain, therefore the psychologically sophisticated language of the field would partner smoothly with the "culturally sophisticated learned responses" (Gottschild, 2003, p. 224) of members of the African diaspora. Both dance/movement therapy and African diasporic religions

seek to give way to harmony in disparaged environments and repair the well-being of the community. They are also used to deconstruct societal obstacles through authentic relationships, interpersonal learning, existential awareness, insight and group cohesion (Akunna, 2015).

Because there are so many similarities between the two one would wonder why integration is needed. Dance/movement therapy, although rooted in cultural traditions, has lost its true essence, which is the soul and spirit. Pioneers of dance/movement therapy have substituted soul and spirit with phrases like energetic phenomena, and have homogenized and diminished the spiritual and cultural components of the work. African healing practices are derived from culturally influenced faiths, that speak to the spirit first, and call devotees to be transformed through movement. In this tradition, soul and spirit are at the heart of the movement, and is the personification of energy. Devotees gain strength, knowledge and healing in their embodied experience. The collective acknowledgement and instruction of the origins of the field of dance/movement therapy, partnered with the acknowledgement of the cultural and spiritual background of clients would augment the dance/movement therapy practice.

The Igbo mourning ritual and the New Orleans Second Line traditions both harness an aspect that dance/movement therapy misses, which is culture. Both rituals are culturally artistic performances that amount to healing techniques with a cultural focus. Although dance/movement therapy promotes catharsis, the Igbo mourning ritual and the New Orleans Second Line traditions transcend catharsis by incorporating spiritual and cultural elements. The rituals compound the socialization and physical processes of dance to trigger active responses in the body used for regulation. Both rituals propel members in to introspective realms of awareness that generate soul power and manifests the spirit. The Igbo mourning ritual and the New Orleans Second Line traditions serve as cultural prescriptions, sacredly designed to elevate participants beyond

physical grief and trauma on to restorative transformation (Akunna, 2015). The transformation that is experienced within ritual is largely due to the comforts in familiarity. These act out their lives together. The Igbo govern themselves and set their own standards. The Igbo mourning ritual and the New Orleans Second Line demonstrate a system in which the members of this culture identify what is normal, and provide safe space to move through. This is important for clients who embody difference within therapeutic relationship.

In addition to activating regulatory body responses, the literature discusses the improvisational proficiency that it takes to participate in these rituals. These dance rituals require a mastery of logic of action and distinctive cultural body codes. These African diasporic rituals transform the people and environments they take place in by relying on the present. Engaging in the here and now allows members to process feelings with their community members, focus on their own senses, resolve conflict and get in touch with the body's responses to grief. Within these communal activities, members of the African diaspora yield the energies of their deities and ancestors and neutralize catastrophe (Akunna, 2015) with the help of drums, dance, communal presence and ceremonies. Rituals of the African diaspora support the belief that ancestors and deities can be affected by us and we can be affected by them. We worship and embody our ancestors and deities on earth, keeping their spirits alive, and in return they protect us in the heavenly realm. This belief highlights the use of dance to bridge a gap between this world and the next. Although tragic, death in the diaspora signifies an important portion of the endless life cycle, returning to earth. Death also signifies a new beginning. The practice of honoring the dead highlights the death experience of members of the African diaspora. The mourning ritual process emphasizes the human existence as the infinite embodiment of soul and spirit, cycling through to the spirit world, returning again as a newborn (Akunna, 2015). This

faith based belief incorporates the soul and spirit while acting as a therapeutic component. The African belief that our soul and spirit are infinite, accompanied with ritual music and dance provides an intersubjective way of identifying with and managing feelings about death.

Therefore, when death happens there is already hope that there is a more pleasurable existence beyond this world. This is beneficial to dance/movement therapy practice because provides members of the African diaspora a chance to identify themselves with godly figures. Once we can identify with those figures, we can align ourselves and embody the characteristics of the gods, which improves our quality of life and our communities.

Through participative group play, members of the African diaspora are allowed to express their emotional states related to death, which can “commonly be expressed through aggressive behavior” (Akunna, 2015, p. 48). These wild dances, consisting of stomping your feet, spontaneous outburst, and prancing angrily, are seen as ways of releasing tension and frustration in the African community. The unconscious images of anger are actualized through movement, then released from consciousness (Akunna, 2015). The Igbo mourning ritual and the New Orleans Second Line tradition allow members of the African diaspora to heal within an African context. Therefore, what may seem aggressive to one person may be completely normal within context to another. That is why it is important to not only have dance/movement therapists that are culturally competent, but actively educate and produce dance/movement therapists that from other cultural backgrounds. Mourning rituals in these communities provide safe spaces for African descendants to uncover their rawest emotions in the most intense and energetic way, without judgement, academic observation or bias.

There were a few pieces of literature presented in the review that caught my attention and sparked the idea of these topics: the fragmented psyche of members of the African diaspora, the

journey of self-actualization for members of the African diaspora, and the Westernized “Eastern” healing modalities that seek to heal members of the African diasporic community.

“Dancing as a holy, spirit-filled practice is, therefore, a familiar concept to peoples of African lineage” (Gottschild, 2003). Throughout this process I reflected on my upbringing, and I realized that my cultural practices, although hidden well within Christianity, were inherently African. It wasn’t until adulthood that I was able to identify the rituals emerging from the collective unconscious of Black New Orleanians as a collective African remembrance. Before, in my experience, fear and evil accompanied the topic of African spirituality. I now attribute the negative stigma associated with African spiritual practices to the history of criminalization of African people and African spiritual traditions. History shows that members of the African diaspora were forced to abandon their cultural practices and adopt Christianity by law. These prejudiced and racially oppressive laws were enforced in Black towns across the United States. Laws, like the *Code Noir*, allowed Europeans to maintain power through racism and deprivation of resources, which encouraged law makers and the white general public to continue to implement racist policies that exclude people of color. This is a result of white supremacy branding African people and our spiritual traditions as demonic and dangerous. Banning people of African descent from participating in communal cultural practices upholds systems that maintain the wealth and resource gap between Europeans and people of African descent. It prevents people of African descent from gaining true agency by developing institutions that are self-sustaining. When a population has experienced multigenerational trauma, and continues to be oppressed by the same systems that enslaved them, they develop self-hatred, the demoralization of self and the collective, and the continuation of the genocidal cycle. The psychological effects of intergenerational trauma have not been approached adequately by the

Western psychotherapeutic community, yet non-African members of this field, without the knowledge of the context, treat and diagnose members of the African diaspora often. Western models of psychology have to explore the cultural experiences of clients within therapeutic relationship, and use non-biased assessment tools. And as we see in the literature presented, African people or our spiritual traditions are not evil at all. In fact, they are embodied joy, healing and worship. Members of the African diaspora have a shared history of body-based communal healing practices. Based on my research, I think that it would be beneficial for members of the African diaspora to consider re-integrating traditional methods of healing into their lives. Through communal rituals we provide members of our community the opportunity to see and be seen. This gives people of African descent a chance to implement what we value most. African dance and healing practices teach our children early on to think and plan for themselves. This helps members of the African diaspora understand the power of the collective unconscious and how it could help shift our collective reality.

Today, many members of the African diaspora are looking to the ancient wisdom of the ancestors for more holistic ways of healing and being. A collective cultural shift has encouraged many to begin their journeys back to the self. Unfortunately, some ancient practices have been homogenized to fit and comfort the masses, and are being used without the original context. For example, the New Orleans Jazz Funeral is being appropriated currently, largely due to gentrification and the ever-changing landscape of the city's population. As discussed previously, members of the African diaspora who live in the continental United States have experienced great hardship due to enslavement, racism, and disenfranchisement. Since the ending of slavery in the late 1800s, people of African descent have been working twice as hard to gain their footing in this country. Yet, no matter the trauma or displacement, the unconscious mind of people of

African descent prevails. Our inherent resilience is most definitely our default setting, but what if more people of African descent were aware of the value of the collective, communal practices? Dance/movement therapy has shown to be a way to incorporate our conscious and unconscious minds. Therefore, more advocating of the effectiveness of dance/movement therapy in communities of color should be done. This could also give members of the African diaspora and opportunity to monetize their own skills and healing practices, which would prevent a non-person of color from monetizing and re-integrating the homogenized version of the symbols of the traditional practice into it again.

Those that benefit from being the majority should also explore who and what they represent in designated healing spaces for people of color. I propose that the education to become professionals in the field of dance/movement therapy be made more accessible to members of the African diaspora. This means starting programs at Historically Black Colleges and Universities. This means beginning programs in the most disparaged neighborhoods as a total labor of love. It also means cultivating personal relationships with people of color just because. It seems more beneficial to have therapists that have the well-rounded healing knowledge of the field as well as the knowledge of culture and the full understanding of the cultural implications that members of that demographic face in their communities. It would give space for patients of color to fully be free of the dominant culture's attitudes towards them. And that is what safe space is. I also think that this would promote self-sufficiency and increase self-esteem within the African diasporic community, giving members of the African diaspora a chance to reclaim ownership of their bodies, social spaces and their healing.

Limitations

We see in the literature presented that adopting major European attitudes towards people of color has deeply damaged and erased the histories of communities across the globe. What is also interesting is the eagerness of Europeans to act as healers within the same communities that were destroyed by their ancestors. There is little research that shows the ongoing rate of Europeans becoming practitioners in African healing traditions and their collective unconscious. Knowing the rate of initiation of Europeans in these practices would help break the stigma of African healing traditions and their integration into daily life and dance/movement therapy globally. Being aware of the shared collective unconscious of Europeans would help members of the African diaspora better protect themselves against systems unconsciously engrained with racism and hate. Is it time for the field of dance/movement therapy to explore the devaluation of black intellectual theft from Black people throughout history in order to understand how our field benefits from, and can be dismissive of, that knowledge. It is in this way that we can begin to acknowledge our debt and empower members of the African diaspora.

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