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A Baltimore Love Thing:
A Look at Social Dances and Their Connection to Communal Healing Amongst Black People in
Baltimore

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Abstract

This thesis provides insight on the vast effects of systematic racial injustice towards Black people living in Baltimore, Maryland. It highlights the negative effects of racism and the impact of collective shared trauma, while also bringing attention to the resilience long-time and current residents have shown through the action of movement, dance, and simply being. The essence of the Baltimore originated social dance called Rockin' Off/Shakin' Off, developed in 2005, provides the chance to dance out lived individual and shared experiences. The discussion sheds light on similarities between key principles of dance/movement therapy and Rockin' Off/Shakin' Off, and how this form has been instrumental in emphasizing how belonging aids in communal healing.

Keywords: dance/movement therapy, Baltimore, social dance, shakin' off, communal healing, shared trauma, rockin' off

Dedication

To my loving family:

Thank you for instilling a sense of pride about where I'm from and who I am as a Black woman.

I love you all and I couldn't imagine doing this thing called life without you all being my foundation and my support system.

To the greatest city in America:

“When they ask me what I do, and who I do it for...” -2 Chainz

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Baltimore City, the largest city in Maryland, with a population of over six hundred thousand, is divided into numerous regions separated by two of the longest uninterrupted roadways: North Avenue and Charles Street. North Avenue separates the city's east and west hemisphere, while Charles Street separates north and south Baltimore. In between North Avenue and Charles Street lies Baltimore's nine geographical regions including: North, Northeast, South, Southeast, East, Southwest, West, Northwest, and Central Baltimore. Each of these regions is tethered to landmarks such as the Inner Harbor (Central), Charles Village (North), Federal Hill (South), Morgan State University (Northeast), Johns Hopkins Hospital (East), Little Italy (Southeast), Pimlico Race Track (Northwest), Mondawmin Mall (West), and Pigtown (Southwest). West Baltimore, one of the most well-known regions, has the city's largest Black neighborhood. This region has also been central in hosting gatherings amongst Black people with dance and social clubs such as Hammerjacks and The Paradox, which have spawned unique social dance and been pivotal in cultivating a sense of belonging. West Baltimore may also be known for the five-season television drama *The Wire*. While the entire city of Baltimore is known for its steamed crabs and old bay seasoning, long-time residents of Baltimore are equally familiar with its lineage of racial inequality and turmoil.

Decadence: The Rise of Jim Crow

The Jim Crow era continues to take a pervasive psychological toll on long time and current Black residents of Baltimore. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois wrote of Jim Crow's corrosive psychic damage: "the facing of so vast a prejudice could not but bring the inevitable self-questioning, self-disparagement, and lowering of ideals which ever accompany repression and breed an atmosphere of contempt and hate" (Smith, 2008). When whole existences are forced to live outside the margin, self-worth begins to fall to acute criticism and bigotry of others. Before

Jim Crow, Black people lived throughout Baltimore, in whichever areas they found suitable. In the early nineteen-hundreds, Black people were prevented from buying property and moving into predominately White neighborhoods. Black people who dared to move into a predominately White neighborhood were met with violence and verbal attacks (Smith, 2008). Black Americans living in Baltimore were emotionally, physically, and psychologically taxed with the effects of trying to be a part of a society that incriminated and denounced them for their skin color. Segregation during the Jim Crow era has influenced race and its policies in Baltimore even after its practices were abolished (Smith, 2008).

Act II, Scene VI

Fast forward sixty years from the Jim Crow Era to nineteen sixty-eight in Baltimore. Soon after Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination, the city erupted in its first uprising. Dr. King's death was only the tipping point in an uphill battle for racial equality that not only effected Baltimore, but the nation in general (Smith, 2008). In the days after the uprising multiple deaths, injuries, and demolished buildings were reported. Despite the uprising coming to end, social, racial, economic and political injustices continued to trouble the city of Baltimore. The effects of injustice were never resolved or addressed which resulted in Baltimore's second uprising. The Baltimore City police department's relationship with Baltimoreans has been filled with tension. Government officials have intended to tackle crime in Baltimore by over-policing areas in Baltimore that experience the most crime. Subsequently, areas in Baltimore that have the most accumulation of crime are also Black areas and neighborhoods that are in the midst of food deserts, have the lowest median household income, and where the median education level is a high school diploma. Instead of addressing these aforementioned realities, Baltimore officials have tried to solve crime by dispersing police officers to these areas. Oftentimes, police have harassed,

brutalized, and interrogated Baltimoreans, for little to no cause. The unfair treatment of residents in Baltimore has created a rift and many view police officers as a dangerous power-hungry force, that does not protect and serve its residents (Lopez, 2016).

The death of Baltimore native Freddie Gray in twenty-fifteen, was evidence of the significant tension between police officers and Black residents. Freddie Gray was arrested by Baltimore City police officers because when approached by on-duty officers he ran. When Freddie Gray was detained by police officers, he repeatedly asked for medical attention due to the physical pain he had experienced upon being arrested. Police officers ignored his cries for medical attention and placed him in a paddy wagon and failed to buckle him. Freddie Gray died in police custody. Once news broke about Freddie Gray's passing, Baltimore residents filled the streets to peacefully protest a nationwide epidemic of unjust treatment and police brutality. The peaceful protest turned not peaceful once the National Guard arrived in Baltimore and police wore militarized gear. Properties, cars, and buildings were set ablaze, damaged, and destroyed (Lopez, 2016).

Looking back at what took place in the Spring of twenty-fifteen, a person's personal politics are often assumed based on the way they refer to April 27th, 2015. The media and those alike may call the events on April 27th, 2015 "riots" or "unrest", while others will refer to April 27th, 2015 as the day of the Baltimore uprising (Smith, 2008). The word 'uprising' has more positive and justifiable connotation. Justified considering that the city of Baltimore has allowed its Black residents to be systematically discriminated against, which has caused deep unhealed trauma. From the upkeep of schools, classrooms, books, teachers, and playgrounds to the prox-

imity in which liquor and corner stores are stationed in predominately Black neighborhoods, Baltimore has shown its Black residents that they are highly despised. The damage that racism and poverty ensues is traumatizing to those it affects.

Some may argue that ‘Black on Black crime’ is the real reason as to why the city of Baltimore has yet to resolve its issues with crime and poverty. ‘Black on Black crime’ refers to homicides occurring amongst Black people; however, the ideology behind ‘Black on Black crime’ speaks nothing to proximity nor does it address being targeted by the state because of one’s race. It also fails to acknowledge that every race has intra-racial homicides, but instead the statement ‘Black on Black crime’ falsely narrates that Black people are inherently more violent. The historical belief that Black people are inherently more violent has led to over policed Black communities, not just in Baltimore, but nationwide.

Shared Trauma: How Can We Wholly Surrender to Healing Despite our Progression Being in a Constant Flux?

The common experience of racial inequality and shared trauma through lived experiences, unites many of the residents in Baltimore, making it clear the importance of gathering to aid in communal healing. Social support, comfort, and connection becomes crucial when experiencing trauma, considering trauma has the ability to numb, disable, and isolate. When those experiencing trauma are able to connect with those who have compassion and understanding, the possibility for them to share themselves and their stories increases. Sharing with others allows those experiencing trauma to be heard. When people can begin to feel appreciated despite revealing the innermost parts of themselves without judgement or fear, then perhaps those who have experienced trauma will begin to appreciate themselves.

According to Gordon (2019), trauma is an integral and inescapable part of all our lives that affect both body and mind. In the nineteen-nineties, a government survey found that sixty

percent of adults experienced trauma as children. Caring for someone with a life-threatening illness, or long-term disability, experiencing chronic pain, living in poverty, racism, gender discrimination, loss of a loving relationship, loss of a loved one, and or the loss of a job all have the potential to be traumatizing. At the same time, Gordon (2019) asserts that everyone can use tools of self-awareness and self-care to heal trauma and advocate to become healthier whole beings. During Gordon's psychiatric residency, he noticed something was missing from his trauma recovery. He identified that missing piece as a holistic understanding of others, understanding people physically, spiritually, mentally, socially, and emotionally in a multi-dimensional way. This new insight prompted him to closely examine drug treatments and the relationship with emotional troubles. Looking for other answers for treating emotional troubles, he longed to accomplish safe and non-pharmacological ways to enhance what he was doing with psychological healing. In the nineteen-seventies, studies were being published that revealed consciously using mind-body connectivity could reverse emotional and physical damage. Gordon argues that natural approaches to minimize the cause of physical, emotional, and spiritual distress have the potential to reverse the biological and psychological damage, improve health, move through trauma, and practice awareness (Gordon 2019).

After Gordon's nine years of private practice, he opened up a non-profit organization. His mission was to create a healing community and a community of healers, by making self-care and group support central to the nonprofit's outlook on healthcare. His theoretical approach allowed him to develop a way to help people claim hurt and anger without being consumed and owned by it. Addressing trauma in this way has the potential to invite people to begin the process of living in harmony with themselves, and discover that they are connected to something or someone greater than themselves (God, life's meaning or purpose, other people, nature, etc.). Learning to

accept and come to terms with rather than avoid, escape, or numb the challenges symptomatic of trauma, one has the ability to discover how the greatest pain can teach the most salient truths about oneself (Gordon, 2019).

The biological effects of trauma are vast. People experiencing trauma or preoccupied with memories of trauma may have high levels of cortisol. Persisting high level of cortisol has the ability to destroy cells in the hippocampus. The hippocampus is part of the emotional brain key to memory and stress regulation (Gordon 2019). As a medical doctor, Van Der Kolk (2015) found similar results related to trauma while working at the Boston Veterans Administration Clinic. Van Der Kolk began to conduct research about nightmares, but ended up exploring how trauma changes perception and imagination. After hearing one veteran's story in particular, Van Der Kolk was reminded of a something Sigmund Freud said in 1895: "I think this man is suffering from memories." This epiphany began Van Der Kolk's research on linking how imagination affects trauma. By conducting Rorschach tests, he found that traumatized people have a tendency to coincide their trauma to everything around them.

Twenty-one veterans were given the Rorschach test, a projective test that provides an observable, unique way of how people make meaning out of meaningless stimulus, in this case a blot of ink. Sixteen out of the twenty-one veterans that were studied replayed flashbacks of their trauma while looking at the ink blot cards. Van Der Kolk assessed that their trauma interrupted the mental flexibility that signifies imagination. Imagination is crucial to the quality of our lives, as it allows us to think outside of mundane routines and existence, and begin to fantasize about the different possibilities that make each person's life interesting. It relieves boredom, electrifies creativity, lessens pain, and helps cultivate intimate relationships (Van Der Kolk, 2015). Published studies (Gordon, 2019) have revealed that trauma diminishes the function of the cerebral

cortex and with it the capacity for judgement, memory, focus, emotional intelligence, compassion, and self-awareness. As the cycle of trauma continues, trauma and the stress it causes can shorten lifespans. Trauma effects the structures at the end of chromosomes called telomeres. Telomeres naturally decrease in size as people age; however, trauma accelerates the decline of telomeres. Furthermore, trauma challenges the final stage of the digestive tract. When under acute stress, bacteria that belongs in the colon will drift to the large intestine. Even when someone's symptoms do not meet the criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder, trauma has the ability to challenge their ideas about who they are, how their body functions, and why they are here (Gordon, 2019).

Researchers at Harvard and University of California, San Francisco Medical Center (Gordon, 2019) have discovered that meditation can help reverse epigenetic damage of trauma and enhance the resistance to stress and improve resilience. There are many different forms of meditation. Three general categories of meditation include concentrative, mindfulness, and expressive. Shaking and Dancing is a type of expressive meditation which has been practiced for centuries. To rid tribal members of fear and depression, indigenous people in Asia, Africa, and the Americas used Shaking and Dancing. Indigenous people also used Shaking and Dancing increases emotional expression and energy. Shaking and Dancing requires people to shake, standing up with their eyes closed and initiating a shaking motion from their feet traveling up the knees and then the hips (Gordon, 2019). The shaking continues for a few minutes and alternates between movement to music and stillness without music. While still, one is expected to internally focus on the breath. If done regularly, Shaking and Dancing has the same benefits as physical exercise and boosting serotonin, dopamine, and endorphins (Gordon, 2019). The Shaking and Dancing within this expressive meditation play pivotal roles. The shaking is thought to dissolve

physical rigidity and energize expended bodies. Dancing allows for buried feelings to be expressed and to move in ways that are satisfying (Gordon, 2019).

Shaking and Dancing incorporates somatic practices that parallel dance/movement therapy. Dance movement therapy traces its codified early roots to the early nineteenth-century (Levy, 2005) and uses dance and movement as a psychotherapeutic tool for healing, growth, and change. Dance/movement therapy uses body-mind connectedness to invite the potential of suppressed thoughts and feelings to emerge. Dance/movement therapy when done in either a group or individual setting has the ability to elicit emotional stimulation. Dance/movement therapy requires no skill or technique for its participants making it applicable to vast populations in search of healing. The healing art of dance/movement therapy derives from the principle of considering the whole person through an emotional, physical, and spiritual lens including but not limited to culture, religion, ethnicity, gender, race, or sexuality (Payne, 2008).

Charm City: ...But This Part Right Here is Baltimore's Own Magic

Connection, social support, and comfort come in many forms. Amongst Black communities, gathering and unification is a prominent way to elicit connection, support, and comfort. Gathering at clubs such as Hammerjacks and The Paradox became a staple in West Baltimore, and united people from all across Baltimore City. Lived experiences of Baltimoreans manifested into a social dance and technique called Rockin' Off/Shakin' Off. The creation of movements and the steps and movements themselves happen between singular and multiple bodies. Rockin' Off/Shakin' Off origins simply took place wherever people decided to gather, not limited to formal studios, clubs, sidewalks, cyberspace, cookouts, or playgrounds. The birth of social dances in communal spaces defines who dances. Without the restrictions of formal spaces such as dance studios and stages, dance becomes more accessible. Movement without a conventional place

meets people where they are in a relaxed community environment and aids in fostering creativity along with accessibility. Movement performed outside of conventional spaces also defines how bodies conform to the spaces in which they dance. The movement then becomes available to anyone who desires to move and, unbeknownst to those who have gathered and indulged in social dancing, the properties in these dances and gatherings have been instrumental in communal healing.

Rockin' Off/Shakin' Off was introduced in 2005 as an umbrella term for the numerous high intensity, stylized movements that fall within the fast-paced dance technique. This dance style consists mostly of six quick, intricate, and wide-legged foundational steps such as 'The Crazy Leg', 'The Spongebob', 'The 611', 'The Sidekick', 'The Cherry Hill', and 'The Heel-Toe' (Britto, 2017).

'The Crazy Leg' gets its name from the fast pace inward and outward movement initiating from the knees. The high energy movement of the knees, while on the balls of the feet as the knees are bent, then ricochets into the whole leg. The tempo of the knees moving in and away from each other, is also the tempo in which a mover would alternate slightly picking up their feet.

Next, 'The Spongebob' was named after the popular television show *SpongeBob SquarePants*. Baltimore DJ's incorporated snippets of the theme song from the show to create a new clubmix. Baltimore Club music or a Baltimore clubmix is a genre or type of music that emerged out of Baltimore. Baltimore Club music uses looped vocals over synthesized beats, various rhythms (polyrhythmic), and vocals at a tempo of one hundred and thirty beats per minute.

Baltimore Club music has been the soundtrack for Rockin' Off/Shakin' Off since two-thousand and five.

The Baltimore originated dance called 'The Spongebob', incorporates jumping from one leg to the other and with the foot of the leg that is free, is brought to the back of the standing knee. The pattern of jumping to one leg and bringing the opposite foot to the back of the knee is repeated to create 'The Spongebob'.

'The 611' is a wide-leg two step that requires a mover to have their legs wider than hip-width apart and take steps forward leading with the heel of the foot. While doing 'The 611' the arms swing opposite of the foot that is forward.

The next foundational step after 'The 611', is called 'The Sidekick'. This is another wide-leg and high energy step. The mover starts with their feet together with their heels slightly raised. Immediately one jumps out as far as they can to one leg while the other extends straight out to the side. After jumping out, one comes back to the starting point with feet together to then repeat on the other side.

'The Cherry Hill' was named after the southernmost Baltimore neighborhood. 'The Cherry Hill' is a bouncy movement that requires one to consistently hop on one leg. While one leg is responsible for hopping, the knee of the other leg comes towards the chest to then cross over in front of the standing leg, the knee is then brought back up to the chest and placed next to the standing leg- these repeated steps make up 'The Cherry Hill'.

Lastly, 'The Heel-Toe' is a four-step patterned step, that requires a mover to be on the heel of the front foot, and the toe of the back foot, and alternating which foot is on the heel and which is on the toe/ball of the foot by stepping four times.

These six foundational movements can be transformed and altered into numerous dance steps. This agency to create one's own steps allows for the implementation of the spiritual practice of freestyling. Freestyling is a transcendent spiritual practice that can allow one's body to become familiar with self-trust beyond an art form. It is making habit out of the question of how one can most efficiently handle a situation despite not preparing beforehand (Bragin, 2015). Freestyling provides an opportunity, on a body level, to establish and ingrain the practice of spontaneous movement and expression while finding ways to efficiently link movements without cognitively preparing beforehand. The repeated practice of yielding to unpredictability and flexibility brings forth the question- how do we wholly surrender to healing despite our progression being thrown into a constant flux. Perhaps the question is better answered through a body-based medium that uses movement and the navigation of freedom and structure. The existence of structure that is the six foundational steps of Rockin'off/Shakin' off allows for freedom within self-directed movement.

Dance/Movement Therapy

Dance/movement therapy emerged as a field in the nineteen-forties. As a professional field of study, dance/movement therapy uses embodiment as a central mode of assessment and intervention in the therapeutic process. The field was created amongst Western cultures with an intention on healing and well-being with a multi-disciplinary focus. Marian Chace, Liljan Espenak, Trudi Schoop, Mary Whitehouse, and Alma Hawkins, were early dance/movement therapists who contributed to the fields' early beginnings. However, these contributions are rooted in a limited cultural and racial perspective from a White European background. This also includes a limited orientation to the dance form used in dance/movement therapy which is predominately modern dance. The current field of dance/movement therapy is expanding on integrating both in

theory and practice the crucial elements of multi-cultural dance and life perspectives. In addition, dance being therapeutic and having therapeutic qualities also has an elongated history. Dance as an integral part of life and well-being amongst people is a common practice of current and past cultures and communities. Baltimore is one of many communities that consciously and unconsciously recognizes the healing and therapeutic properties of dance. Baltimoreans and other Black communities unite through dance and movement. Specifically, youth and adolescents have curated social dances that moved people both literally and figuratively. The social dances that have emerged out of Baltimore have demonstrated a vital coping mechanism for managing individual and shared lived experiences in communities. These social dances, combined with the act of freestyling, clearly demonstrate overarching core principles and themes in dance/movement therapy. These themes include honoring the whole person, using verbal and non-verbal communication as a vehicle for understanding, attunement, embodying a transformative experience, empathy, and enhanced awareness of thoughts and feelings. Dance/movement therapy approaches include and value functional everyday movements as well as movements being expressive and communicative.

Using dance/movement therapy as a way to facilitate communal healing among communities in a city that is already deeply engaged in dance, can highlight how dance and movement can help transform crowds of people through embodied experiences. Dance/movement is a body-based practice that uses dance and movement as a psychotherapeutic tool to promote well-being. Bringing focus and attention to movement behavior has the potential to allow the subconscious to transition to the conscious. The body, through dance, has the capacity to tell the story of the inhibited unconscious mind, considering experiences shape not only the mind, but the body as well. The body accumulates and carries each person's individual experiences. Dance/movement

therapy provides the opportunity unity for people to ‘move out’ lived experience and explore symbolic movements which can be representative of past experiences. Movers have the potential to identify what could be symbolic or important once an awareness or attention to the movement experience develops (Pallaro, 2007).

Rockin' Off/Shakin' Off resembles a structure found in dance/movement therapy called Authentic Movement. The word authentic in Authentic Movement is a vague term, but refers to what is most true or pure to a person's whole being. Authentic Movement is an exploration between a mover and a witness. This type of mindful movement happens when a mover moves with their eyes closed and is influenced by inner impulses, sensations, emotions, and/or thoughts. While the mover is moving, the role of the witness is to maintain the mover's safety as well as their own safety and to observe in a non-judgmental way while noticing intruding perceptions and biases that, more commonly, do present themselves (Welling, 2015). The term ‘Authentic Movement’ was coined by Mary Starks Whitehouse, one of several, early dance/movement therapists. Whitehouse categorized Authentic Movement as a three-part process to connect with all aspects of one's being. The first stage of the process is awakening the kinesthetic sense and finding the subjective connection to one's movement. The second stage in the three-part process is to *be moved* rather than to move. This stage relies on each person's individual impulse to move, which then manifests outwardly as a visible action. A person's impulse to move may arise from emotion, imagery, physical sensation, or a concept of curiosity. The third and final stage is described as connecting the outward action of movement to one's inner active imagination. These three stages are the building blocks that help cultivate a mover's experience while the witnesses

observe the movers using a circular container. The role of the witnesses is to observe the movement non-judgmentally and to cultivate a holistic and safe space in order to yield to a transformative experience (Pallaro, 2007).

Similar to Authentic Movement, Rockin' Off/Shakin' Off is done in circular formation. In many street and social dance styles a circular formation is called a cypher. Those that are standing around the circle are the witnesses. The contrast between witness and mover is less distinct in cyphers because a witness becomes a part of the movement. Ballet establishes an obvious contrast between viewer and dancer; however, hip hop invites viewers to become co-participants in hip hop cyphers (Bragin, 2015). A cypher allows witnesses to become active co-participants by responding both verbally and non-verbally to what is happening in the nucleus of the circle: clapping, snapping, cheering, repeating previous movements, are all fitting responses during a cypher. Responses from witnesses are ways of showing empathy towards movers through movement, gesture, and language. Both dance/movement therapy and Rockin' Off/Shakin' Off value interpersonal relationships. Whether verbally or non-verbally empathy is essential to understanding and appreciating the full person. More specifically, in Authentic Movement empathy is processed verbally after moving. The mover speaks first and afterwards the witness speaks using present tense 'I' statements, in response to the observed movement, internal response, and any bodily sensations (Welling, 2015).

Furthermore, inside of a cypher there is one person moving at a time in a self-directed/improvisational way, also known as freestyling. Freestyling asks movers to find and follow an inner impulse (to be moved vs. moving) and to rely on the music to sequence both individual and collective movements. The physical coordination of singular movements and se-

quencing each individual movement to the next leads to physical mastery. Physical mastery provides the opportunity to investigate dancing beyond perceived limits which requires risk-taking. Risk-taking, once again, requires one to make habit out of most efficiently handling a situation despite not preparing beforehand.

Once a mover has completed their freestyle, another mover will respond non-verbally back to the initial mover- a structure referred to as 'call and response'. This exchange is conversation-like. Dance movements within singular bodies and between multiple bodies convey speech-like qualities beyond the formal, aesthetic shapes, and sequences of movement while the body is in motion. Conversational performative utterances, performing the actions they name such as 'I challenge you', 'let's settle this', 'I apologize', 'I see you', 'you can't do this', 'I can do anything you can do', etc. (DeFrantz, 2003). This playful taunting supports showcasing one's truest self on a body level, which can be an empowering experience.

Cyphers become labs for experimenting with one's own self-perception. Oftentimes, before stepping into a cypher, movers will attempt to pre-plan movement and over-analyze movements they wish to showcase. Somewhere in the midst of the cypher, one's own cognitive expectations quiet and the intense adrenaline captivates the process of letting go. This process manifests into an unconscious intuitive visceral expression. Moving from structure to freedom was a practice one of the early dance/movement therapist brought to the field. Espenak brought free improvisation and organized structure to the dance/movement therapy field (Levy, 2005). Espenak realized that without structure, freedom would be chaotic (Marlock et al., 2015). The process of letting go and surrendering to vulnerability is safer amongst people of similar racial and cultural similarities. It is crucial to connect the importance and impact of belonging amongst

Black people to Black bodies historically being displaced. In these moments, gathering and dancing functions as a way to redefine non-biological kinship which inspires innovation of movement techniques within the lived experiences of communities (Bragin, 2015).

Music and its relationship to the action of dance/movement is essential to how movers respond to music. Baltimore Club music is the genre in which Rockin' off/Shakin' off is danced. The high intensity of Baltimore Club music rivals the high intensity steps of Rockin' Off/Shakin' Off. The rhythm makes the music predictable, which allows movers to become organized within themselves and unite them with the collective. Rhythm within a cypher draws similarities in how it is used in dance/movement therapy, to organize and unite an individual and the collective. The predictability and the consistency of Baltimore Club music gives the mover the ability to unleash themselves and explore the possibilities of freestyling. Freestyling is a practice that allows movers to have agency over their own body. Agency practiced through freestyling gives authorization for movers to make choices. An opportunity for Black bodies to make their own choices is not presented in general very often, and more specifically in Baltimore. Choices are often forced on to Black bodies in efforts to remain safe, receive employment and education, medical care, housing opportunities, etc.

Social clubs such as The Paradox and Hammerjacks become sacred and safe spaces for Black people. Not only are these types of clubs instrumental in providing a space for choice-making, clubs also allow certain narratives pertaining to Black people to be shifted. The narrative amongst many media outlets often portray Black people negatively. In contradiction to this narrative, at the nucleus of a circle in a club, the mover is receiving positive attention and praise for being their truest self. Whole identities and lived experiences are honored through the action of

dance and movement. Honoring lived experiences mirror values found in dance/movement therapy, that agree to holistically consider each person and assuage single-story narratives. Adichie (2020) describes single story narratives as overly simplistic perceptions formed about individuals, groups, countries, and cultures that are sometimes false (“Lesson: Stereotypes” 2020).

Discussion

When it comes to discussing the history, lineage, and impact of social dances, many people give credit and focus to Chicago, New York City, and Los Angeles, as these three cities are landmarks to the origination of house, breaking, and locking. House, breaking, and locking are social and street dance forms created by Black movers in the nineteen-seventies and eighties. Although the aforementioned styles influenced Baltimore social dances, Baltimore, being a smaller city, often gets overlooked in the conversation about social dances. Baltimore social dances include Rockin' Off/Shakin' Off, however little to no academic writing on social dances originating from Baltimore can be found. Academic writing that examines resemblance between communal healing and Baltimore social dances are also non-existent. As a Baltimore native, I am overjoyed to be the first to write about communal healing specific to Baltimore social dances to aid in overcoming shared trauma as a community.

Shared trauma in response to issues with racism and police brutality are not distinct to just Baltimore City. These issues exist amongst all predominately Black communities in almost every state and region in the United States. Despite issues with racism and bigotry going beyond just Baltimore, the city is known as ‘the city of firsts.’ Being a city of firsts, Baltimore has the ability to live up to its name and be the first city to heal damaged communities.

As an emerging dance/movement therapist, who finds pride in being from Baltimore, a community rich in culture, traditions, and dance, it excites and moves me to bring elements of

what I have acquired at institutions and making them palatable and useful amongst my own community. Implementing dance/movement therapy in communities throughout Baltimore and abroad provides an opportunity to expand dance/movement therapy from traditional clinical settings. Traditionally, dance/movement therapy is done in a clinical setting in which healthcare, accessibility, and disposable income are required. Reaping the benefits of healthcare should not solely benefit people with financial and socioeconomic privilege. To break traditional boundaries dance/movement therapy would be brought to communities rather than communities having to go to traditional settings. Broadening dance/movement therapy's boundaries resultantly makes it more accessible to a broader range of people. Dance/movement therapy would then have the opportunity to take place within communities at recreation centers, playgrounds, community centers, neighborhoods, and any other space people could safely gather. Incorporating these elements would also provide an opportunity for the power dynamic between client and therapist to be reduced, enhance inclusivity, and support risk taking in a space that feels safer within a community. Instead of the therapist holding all of the power in the therapeutic relationship, it becomes both client and therapist reciprocally learning and benefiting from each other. Practicing as a Black dance/movement therapist in a city that is predominately Black, provides an opportunity to be a mirror to others. Baltimore uses Rockin' Off/Shakin' Off which is under the umbrella of hip-hop social dances. Dance/movement therapists provide important elements through the therapeutic process by attuning and embodying non-verbal elements. Social dances in Baltimore use Rockin' Off/Shakin' Off which is under the umbrella of the dance form hip-hop. Hip hop and other non-Western dance forms are considered secondary in the hierarchy of Western dance forms. The implied assumptions toward Western dance forms in the dance/movement ther-

apy field, restricts the appreciation and inclusion of other vital dance forms, crucial to communities and cultures. Dismantling this hierarchy of dance forms allows for a broader multicultural awareness amongst the field and shifts how we are able to validate a person's lived experience.

“Defining myself, as opposed to being defined by others, is one of the most difficult challenges I face.” —Carol Moseley-Braun

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Appendix

Figure 1

The Crazy Leg



Note: Image Citation: “Baltimore Club ‘Fundamentals’”

Figure 2

The SpongeBob

Note: Image Citation: "Baltimore Club 'Fundamentals'"

Figure 3

The 611

Note: Image Citation; "Baltimore Club 'Fundamentals'"

Figure 4

The Sidekick

Note: Image Citation: "Baltimore Club 'Fundamentals'"

Figure 5

The Cherry Hill



Note: Image Citation: "Baltimore Club 'Fundamentals'"

Figure 6

The Heel-Toe

Note: Image Citation: "Baltimore Club 'Fundamentals'"