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**Supporting Transgender/Gender Diverse Identity Development
Through Embodied Exploration of Gender Euphoria, Joy, and Resilience**

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

Abstract

Transgender/gender diverse identity development is an embodied process that requires the ability to sense one's inner experience of gender and, usually, explore ways of expressing and embodying that gender that feel authentic to one's inner experience. Dance/movement therapy provides a unique platform for transgender/gender diverse individuals to explore and express their gender identities in an embodied way, allowing for a deeper understanding of themselves beyond societal expectations. As a strength-based practice, dance/movement therapy can address the needs of transgender/gender diverse people in a way that cultivates positive experiences of living as a transgender/gender diverse person as a counter to narratives of distress and victimization. Dance/movement therapy interventions can provide transgender/gender diverse individuals and groups with opportunities to experience gender affirmation, celebrate their diverse identities, and find strength in the transgender/gender diverse community. Embodied exploration of gender euphoria, joy, and resilience in dance/movement therapy can support a transgender/gender diverse person's development of a positive self-concept in their individual process of embracing their authentic self. Integrating these themes into a gender affirming dance/movement therapy framework provides a holistic view of transgender/gender diverse experiences and empowers transgender/gender diverse people to live joyful, fulfilling lives.

Keywords: gender euphoria, joy, resilience, identity, transgender, gender diverse, dance/movement therapy

Dedication

To my fellow transgender/gender diverse community.

May we all find strength in the celebration of our joy.

Acknowledgements

There are multiple people who supported me as I journeyed through the creation of this thesis, throughout my time at Sarah Lawrence, and in my personal life leading up to my decision to write about gender euphoria, joy, and resilience.

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Personal Statement

I am a white, non-binary, queer person. My pronouns are they, them, and theirs. I did not question my gender identity or sexuality until my thirties, when I entered into my first queer-identified relationship with a transgender person and began building connections within the queer and transgender/gender diverse communities. I began to explore my gender expression through clothing and hair because, as I discovered, gender can be fluid. I became attuned to a sense that I might be non-binary, but I had difficulty accepting that this was possible because my experience did not match the narratives of dysphoria and distress that I thought were required. However, the more I experimented with my gender expression and embodiment, the more I felt sparks of euphoria that affirmed what my inner self already knew. Following those sparks helped me accept and declare my non-binary identity, and I believe that this process can help other transgender/gender diverse people accept and declare themselves, too. As I am currently positioned in queer and transgender/gender diverse communities, and as transgender/gender diverse people continue to be subject to discrimination, violence, and anti-trans policies in the United States, I believe that celebrating the joys of transgender/gender diverse people and fostering resilience in the community are vital to our ability to thrive—especially for those who are further marginalized due to intersecting minority identities. I cannot possibly speak for the entire transgender/gender diverse community, and it is impossible to account for all transgender/gender diverse experiences within the scope of this thesis. The diversity of the transgender/gender diverse community is vast and beautiful. I hope that the approach presented here can further shift therapeutic work with transgender/gender diverse people toward a more holistic, strengths-based exploration and celebration of that diversity. I hope this approach can uplift transgender/gender diverse people as they embrace themselves and move into their power.

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Societal Narratives of Transgender/Gender Diverse Identities

Transgender/gender diverse individuals represent the various communities of people globally whose gender identities and expressions differ from the gender socially attributed to their sex assigned at birth (Coleman et al., 2022). Their experiences as individuals and as a community are diverse, though societal narratives that challenge that diversity have gained prominence. It is important for therapists to have at least a basic understanding of these competing narratives so that they can help transgender/gender diverse individuals navigate their identity development in relation to and beyond them. With adequate support, transgender/gender diverse people can determine their own personal narratives within a community that is stronger and more vibrant than much of society realizes.

Medical and psychiatric understandings of transgender/gender diverse experiences have contributed to a narrative that all transgender/gender diverse people experience pathological distress over their bodies and their gender identities in the form of gender dysphoria (Riggs et al., 2019). Gender dysphoria is included as a mental health disorder in The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5-TR), which defines gender dysphoria as “the distress that may accompany the incongruence between one’s experienced or expressed gender and one’s assigned gender” (American Psychiatric Association, 2022, p. 511). Medical models have positioned gender dysphoria as an illness which is best treated through gender affirming medical interventions (e.g., hormone replacement therapy and gender affirming surgeries) to bring one’s body into alignment with their gender identity (Johnson, 2016; Riggs et al., 2019). However, recent sociological research conceptualizes gender dysphoria as distress caused when desires for embodiment are filtered through a cisnormative lens, or in other words, when gender diversity is not accepted by a cisnormative society (McKinney, 2022). Still, psychiatric and medical

emphasis on gender dysphoria as an illness has fueled the medicalization and pathologization of transgender/gender diverse people, establishing an ideology of transnormativity in society (Riggs et al., 2019).

In transnormativity, the primary assumptions about transgender/gender people are as follows: a) that transgender/gender diverse people are distressed by a sense that they are born in the wrong body, b) that the primary way to relieve their distress is through medical interventions that bring their bodies into alignment with their internal sense of gendered self, and c) that all transgender/gender diverse people should seek to appear and be perceived as cisgender (Johnson, 2016; Riggs et al., 2019). Transnormativity creates a hierarchy of legitimacy of certain transgender/gender diverse identities over others based on how well one's personal gender narrative matches the transnormative narrative (Johnson, 2016). Under this hierarchy, transgender/gender diverse people who report feeling severe distress as result of gender dysphoria, subscribe to binary understandings of gender, and seek to pass as cisgender are seen as more legitimately transgender than those who do not experience severe gender dysphoria, do not seek gender affirming medical interventions, and/or fall within non-binary categories of identity (e.g., non-binary, genderqueer, genderfluid) (Garrison, 2018; Johnson, 2016). As a result, transgender/gender diverse individuals must negotiate with transnormativity in the course of their gender identity development, which involves making choices about whether to align with or contest transnormative expectations in their self-identification, gender expression, and embodiment (Bradford & Syed, 2019; McKinney, 2021). Internalized transnormativity can lead some transgender/gender diverse people to feel that they are "not trans enough" when their experience of their gender, their body, and their gender expression do not match the dominant transnormative narrative (Garrison, 2018; Jacobsen & Devor, 2022). In reality, the experiences

and presentations of transgender/gender diverse people can vary immensely from person to person, with no single narrative accounting for all experiences of gender diversity (Coleman et al., 2022). It is thus important for therapists working with transgender/gender diverse people to be aware of the ways in which transnormativity may influence a person's sense of identity and to refrain from imposing transnormative assumptions and resources onto their clients (Bradford & Syed, 2019).

In addition to pathologization and transnormativity, transgender/gender diverse people must also contend with societal non-acceptance of gender diversity. This non-acceptance of gender diversity has created transnegativity, which consists of negative beliefs and stigma about transgender/gender diverse people and manifests in discrimination, rejection, and victimization (Inderbinen et al., 2021). In the United States, transgender/gender diverse people as a community experience significant rates of discrimination, harassment, and violence due to transnegative narratives about transgender/gender diverse people (James et al., 2024). Transnegativity is prevalent in society and can challenge transgender/gender diverse people's resolve to be themselves (Singh, 2018). Kuper et al. (2018) and Puckett et al. (2022) found that transgender/gender diverse individuals may internalize negative views of transgender/gender diverse identities as a result of experiencing stigma and discrimination directed at them from others. Furthermore, transgender/gender diverse individuals may develop negative expectations about their future when living in an oppressive environment fueled by transnegativity, such as in areas of the United States that have enacted anti-transgender policies (e.g., bathroom bans and gender affirming healthcare bans) (Puckett et al., 2022). Internalized transnegativity and expectations of future negative experiences as a transgender/gender diverse person may interfere with a transgender/gender diverse person's identity development, causing them to hide their

authentic selves to avoid rejection or discrimination (Bockting & Coleman, 2016). It is important for therapists to provide a safe, affirming space for transgender/gender diverse people to process their experiences of transnegativity openly. It is also important for therapists to recognize that transgender/gender diverse people possess immense strength to be able to overcome the effects of transnegativity (Richmond et al., 2017) and that their lives are worth celebrating.

To support identity development in transgender/gender diverse individuals, it is important for therapists to counter negative expectations by emphasizing the potential for positive experiences of having a transgender/gender diverse identity, as well as by empowering transgender/gender diverse individuals with tools to thrive despite transnegativity (Jones, 2023; Singh, 2016, 2018). It is also important for therapists to affirm the validity and importance of transgender/gender diverse experiences beyond gender dysphoria and distress, especially since not all transgender/gender diverse individuals experience gender dysphoria in the way that the transnormative narrative suggests (Jones, 2023). This can be done by guiding transgender/gender diverse individuals through exploration of gender euphoria, joy, and resilience in therapy.

Transgender/Gender Diverse Identity Development

Gender refers to a person's sense of self "in terms of masculinity, femininity, neutrality, or a combination of these" (Bonhomme et al., 2023, p. 6). Gender is separate from sex assigned at birth, which "refers to a person's status as male, female, or intersex based on physical characteristics" such as genitalia (Coleman et al., 2022, p. 252). Gender may include a person's internal sense of gender, or gender identity, as well as a person's gender expression—how they express their gender through physical appearance, mannerisms, behaviors, speech, and language—and social gender roles they inhabit based on cultural expectations for a particular sex assigned at birth (Bonhomme et al., 2023; Coleman et al., 2022).

Gender is a core component of identity development, with most children beginning to express a gender identity between two and three years old. However, though traditional gender development models theorize that gender identity is fixed at a young age, contemporary models recognize that gender is often renegotiated throughout childhood and adulthood (Ehrensaft, 2017). This suggests a more fluid quality to gender development, though Ehrensaft (2017) states that “although gender evolves over the course of a lifetime, gender identity appears to be a relatively more stable and consistent construct compared to gender expressions” (p. 62). Transgender/gender diverse identities are natural within contemporary models, reflecting the diversity of human experiences of socialization, culture, expression, and embodiment. Multiple researchers have developed models of transgender/gender diverse identity development to explain the process of identifying oneself as transgender/gender diverse, beginning to live in one’s gender identity, and embodying one’s gender.

Devor (2004) identified a 14-stage process of exploration of transgender/gender diverse identity, progressing through stages of discomfort and disidentification with originally assigned sex, discovery of transgender/gender diverse identities and making comparisons between self and transgender/gender diverse people, self-acceptance of transgender/gender diverse identity and coming out to others as transgender/gender diverse, transitioning medically and socially, integrating one’s transgender/gender diverse identity, and living openly and proudly as a transgender/gender diverse person. Lev (2004) described a six-stage model of transgender emergence that begins with a transgender/gender diverse person’s awareness of their gender incongruence and potential transgender/gender diverse identity and progresses through stages of seeking information about transgender/gender diverse identities, disclosing one’s transgender/gender diverse identity to significant others, exploration of identity and self-labeling,

exploration of social and medical transition, and acceptance and integration of transgender/gender diverse identity. Bockting and Coleman (2016) described a five-stage model of coming out that began with a pre-coming out stage consisting of the emergence of unnamed “transgender feelings” (p. 139), progressing to coming out to others, exploring gender expression and embodiment, desiring and pursuing intimacy in the new gender role, and integrating identity into a positive self-image. What these models have in common is a recognition of the social nature of transgender/gender diverse identity development, the importance of exploration of gender identity, expression, and embodiment, and the task of identity integration.

Identifying one’s transgender/gender diverse identity is usually accompanied by exploration of various ways to embody that identity (DuBois et al., 2022). Transgender/gender diverse embodiment may include relatively easily alterable aspects of appearance, such as clothing, hair, and makeup. It may also include embodiment through gender affirming medical interventions, such as hormones or surgeries. Behavior may also be explored, through posture, gestures, ways of walking, ways of speaking, and other mannerisms associated with the person’s gender. A person may also explore new gender roles at work, school, with family and friends, and in romantic relationships. Additionally, a transgender/gender diverse person may change their name, pronouns, and adopt an identity label that feels right to them (DuBois et al., 2022). The ways in which a transgender/gender diverse individual chooses to express and embody their gender identity will be unique to their own gendered experiences. All of these methods of embodiment are subject to experimentation, as transgender/gender diverse people may not know what will be affirming or spark a sense of congruence until they try it.

Langer (2019) asserts that interoception, or inner sensing, of gender and exploration of gender embodiment are integral to transgender/gender diverse identity development. According

to Langer (2019), a transgender/gender diverse person must first sense their gender incongruence and then determine what gender expressions, presentations, and identifiers feel right to them through a process of experimentation. Langer (2019) states that “...someone cannot solely think their way through it. They have to practice being before they can know it” (p. 60). For instance, a transgender/gender diverse person in the stage of questioning their gender identity may initially be unsure of how to identify or move forward. However, they can develop a stronger sense of identity as they progress through the process of embodiment experimentation and evaluation via interoception, trying on new clothes, hair, or name and pronouns to see what fits. The internal sense of what fits for transgender/gender diverse people is the same internal sense that sparks gender euphoria, indicating that gender euphoria is key to transgender/gender diverse identity development.

Gender Euphoria: Feelings of Affirmation

Within the transgender/gender diverse community, experiences of gender euphoria are widely discussed, yet the concept of gender euphoria is far less researched than gender dysphoria. Based on a study of transgender/gender diverse community understandings of gender euphoria, Beischel et al. (2022) defines gender euphoria as “a joyful feeling of rightness in one’s gender/sex” (p. 286). They also specify that gender euphoric experiences can be external, internal, or social—similar to external/bodily, internal, and social aspects of gender dysphoria (Bonhomme et al., 2023). However, Beischel et al. (2022) found that gender euphoria is not necessarily the opposite of gender dysphoria, nor does it occur exclusively separately from gender dysphoria. Some transgender/gender diverse people may not experience gender dysphoria at all, but rather experience gender euphoria in relation to their gender expression, embodiment, or others’ perceptions of them. Others may know gender dysphoria quite well and experience

gender euphoria as a sense of calm or even neutrality rather than an overt feeling of joy. Others may experience gender euphoria as feelings of confidence or attractiveness (Beischel et al., 2022).

Jacobsen and Devor (2022) define gender euphoria as “positive emotions resulting from affirmation of one’s gender identity or expression” (p. 120). In their study about transgender experiences of positive emotions related to gender, participants described feelings and somatic sensations of gender euphoria in relation to gender affirming experiences. Participants described sensations of gender euphoria as “a wonderful explosion” or a “feeling of joy that radiates throughout my entire body, that either confirms how I might be feeling or validates who I am” (Jacobsen & Devor, 2022, p. 126). Participants described one type of gender euphoria as a sort of instant, powerful “surge of happiness” (Jacobsen & Devor, 2022, p. 126) related to gender affirming milestones, such as the first time someone used their correct pronouns or when they first started hormones. Participants also described another type of gender euphoria marked by an ongoing sense of calm or relief resulting from expressing their gender or being gendered correctly more frequently over time (Jacobsen & Devor, 2022).

Austin et al. (2022) identified several gender euphoria processes, including “being exposed to a gender affirming antecedent”, “having an affirming thought”, “feeling a positive emotion”, “and “experiencing enhanced quality of life” (p. 8). They identified that a gender affirming experience was a consistent precursor to gender euphoric feelings, with experiences ranging from seeing the results of gender affirming medical interventions, to seeing oneself after an affirming haircut, to being gendered correctly, and to being seen for one’s authentic self. Their study also found that experiences of gender euphoria can greatly enhance quality of life for transgender/gender diverse people (Austin et al., 2022). Jacobsen and Devor (2022) and Beischel

et al. (2022) identified gender euphoria as a resilience factor that may mitigate the harmful effects of minority stress and gender dysphoria. In addition to being a source of resilience, gender euphoria may also be a source of knowing one's gender identity and guiding toward gender affirming expression and embodiment. Indeed, Beischel et al. (2022) found that "some people experience not only a 'push' away from their assigned gender/sex, but also or instead a 'pull' toward gender/sexed aspects that feel more authentic and enjoyable" (p. 291). Reframing our societal understanding of transgender/gender diverse experiences to include gender euphoria recenters the narrative on the potentials for joy, affirmation, freedom of self-expression, and fulfillment that can come from embodying a transgender/gender diverse identity.

Trans Joy: Happiness and Well-Being

In contrast with narratives of distress and victimization of transgender/gender diverse people (Lindley & Budge, 2023), community expressions of trans joy, or the joy and celebration of being transgender/gender diverse, have emerged. There exists little research on the subject of trans joy, but its importance to the diversity of transgender/gender diverse narratives in the public discourse is substantial (Shuster & Westbrook, 2022). Without attention to joy, clinicians and researchers miss out on the potential to understand and share a significant part of the transgender/gender diverse experience—and the transgender/gender diverse experience comes with a lot of joy. A lack of attention to joy also perpetuates overemphasis on negative expectations of the transgender/gender diverse experience, which can be detrimental not only to societal acceptance of transgender/gender diverse people, but also to a transgender/gender diverse person's sense of positive identity (Shuster & Westbrook, 2022).

Shuster and Westbrook (2022) conducted a sociological study to demonstrate the theoretical importance of asking transgender/gender diverse people about joy in their lives, and

in doing so, they found several recurring themes of the positive aspects of claiming and living in a transgender/gender diverse identity. In contrast to common assumptions that members of marginalized groups cannot find joy due to the prevalence of inequality in their lives, participants in their study reported feeling immense joy in being transgender/gender diverse. For some, the act of claiming their identities and being their authentic selves brought comfort and satisfaction as opposed to resisting who they are for the sake of avoiding inequality or hardship. Others reported feeling joyful about having unique experiences and perspectives as members of a marginalized group, as well as being able to live outside of cisnormative gender norms and question the constructs of the world around them, leading to personal growth. Participants also reported that moving into their gender identities improved their quality of life, allowing for more self-confidence and body positivity as they began embodying and expressing their gender authentically—with or without medical interventions—rather than conforming to cisnormative or even transnormative expectations. Additionally, they reported that being transgender/gender diverse provided them with access to supportive relationships within the transgender/gender diverse community, increasing joy as a result of having meaningful connections with others. Finding peace and confidence as transgender/gender diverse people also allowed many to open up to others outside of the transgender/gender diverse community, improving relationships with family, friends, and romantic partners (Shuster & Westbrook, 2022).

Riggle et al. (2011) identified eight themes regarding positive aspects of being transgender/gender diverse: congruence of self, personal growth and resilience, increased empathy, enhanced interpersonal relationships, a unique perspective on multiple genders, living beyond binary gender norms, increased activism, and connection to the LGBTQIA+ community. In a study conducted with transgender adults, many participants reported that embracing their

gender identities allowed them to move toward a sense of congruence between their inner and outer or social gendered experiences, resulting in joy and a sense of unity within themselves. They also reported that overcoming challenges led to a sense of resilience and personal growth, allowing them to feel stronger and more confident in themselves. Many also reported that their lives as transgender/gender diverse individuals increased their empathy and acceptance of others, particularly those in marginalized groups, and that this was a positive development in their lives. Upon coming out to family and friends, some reported positive experiences of acceptance that led to strengthening important interpersonal relationships. Also contributing to interpersonal relationships were many participants' personal perspectives on the experiences of multiple genders, having lived in another gender role prior to coming out as transgender/gender diverse. Some participants expressed satisfaction with being able to live outside of the cisnormative gender binary, reporting that being fluid allowed them to express themselves more fully. Others reported feeling a sense of purpose in educating others about transgender/gender diverse identities and experiences through activism. A sense of support and connection within the transgender/gender diverse and wider LGBTQIA+ communities was common, which participants reported led to greater self-acceptance and understanding (Riggle et al., 2011).

Tebbe et al. (2022) explored happiness in transgender and non-binary adults and identified four main components: authenticity, connection with others, perspective shift, and agency. Tebbe et al. (2022) defined authenticity as, "the ability to be oneself in the world" (p. 12), which they found encompassed happiness from connection to self through self-awareness and self-acceptance, expressing and embodying one's authentic gendered self, finding pride as a member of the transgender/gender diverse community, living as oneself despite judgment from others, and authenticity leading to more connection with others. Participants identified that living

authentically was a path to connection to the transgender/gender diverse and other communities, in which participation led to happiness. They conveyed the importance of being able to connect with others with shared identities, as well as with others with similar values. A sense of social belonging and knowing they were not alone fostered happiness from being supported and understood by others. Similar to Shuster and Westbrook (2022) and Riggle et al. (2011), Tebbe et al. (2022) also found that shifts in perspectives on gender as a social construct contributed to their participants' happiness, allowing them to challenge cisnormative definitions of gender, develop empathy from greater understanding of gender and social identity, and find a sense of purpose through advocacy. Participants also described the importance of having agency over their lives and well-being, including having autonomy in gender transition and engaging in self-care and activities that make themselves happy on a daily basis. Tebbe et al. (2022) developed a model of happiness for transgender/gender diverse individuals which views the four components of happiness—authenticity, connection with others, perspective shift, and agency—as being interconnected, whereas increase in well-being in one area can influence an increase in others. Though several factors may exist to detract from well-being, such as barriers to transitioning, negative interpersonal experiences, or life stressors, bolstering support around self-care, finding meaning in life, building healthy relationships, and cultivating hope can improve well-being in one or more areas and increase experiences of happiness as a transgender/gender diverse person (Tebbe et al., 2022).

Trans Resilience: Strength Amid Challenges

Resilience refers to a person's ability to overcome challenges or adversities (Matsuno & Israel, 2018; Puckett et al., 2019). For transgender/gender diverse people, resilience also presents as declaring and living in one's gender identity despite societal oppression (Puckett et al., 2019).

Resilience is an important factor in transgender/gender diverse identity development, as its presence can determine whether a transgender/gender diverse individual sees themselves as a strong person capable of thriving despite the challenges of minority stress. According to the Gender Minority Stress and Resilience (GMSR) measure, types of minority stress for transgender/gender diverse people include gender-related discrimination, gender-related rejection, gender-related victimization, and non-affirmation of gender identity as distal stressors, as well as internalized transphobia, negative expectations of future events, and nondisclosure or concealment of gender identity as proximal stressors (Testa et al., 2015). Resilience factors, such as community connectedness and identity pride (Testa et al., 2015), buffer against the negative effects of minority stress, such as anxiety and depression. In doing so, they improve transgender/gender diverse individuals' capacity for resilience, leading to personal growth, well-being, and a strong sense of identity (Matsuno & Israel, 2018).

According to a study by Testa et al. (2014), having awareness of and engagement with transgender/gender diverse people prior to first identifying as transgender/gender diverse can significantly improve an individual's affective experience during early transgender/gender diverse identity development. Participants in the study were more likely to report feeling less fearful or suicidal upon realizing they were transgender if they had prior awareness of or engagement with other transgender people before this realization. They were also more likely to report feeling comfortable when first identifying as transgender if they had prior awareness of or engagement with other transgender people. This suggests that having role models and building connections within the transgender/gender diverse community serve as sources of resilience, particularly in the early stages of transgender/gender diverse identity development when an individual is first gaining confidence in their gender identity (Testa et al., 2014).

Puckett et al. (2019) found that social support from family, friends, and the transgender/gender diverse community contribute to lower rates of depression and anxiety and higher rates of resilience. They found that while all three sources of support are important for transgender/gender diverse well-being, support from family was the strongest predictor of improved affect and increased resilience. In the absence of family support, they found that transgender/gender diverse people seek support from friends, which was also shown to improve anxiety and depression symptoms. This particular study did not demonstrate strong direct correlations between transgender/gender diverse community connectedness, anxiety and depression, and resilience, though they did find that support from friends was highly correlated with community connectedness. They posited that this indicates that friends may be found within the transgender/gender diverse community, making community connectedness important to accessing supports needed to boost well-being (Puckett et al., 2019).

In contrast to Puckett et al. (2019), Matsuno and Israel (2018) found that community belonging is a strong group-level resilience factor for transgender/gender diverse people, along with social support, family acceptance, participating in activism, having positive role models, and being a positive role model. At the individual level, resilience factors include self-worth, self-acceptance and identity pride, self-defined identity, hope, and social or medical transition. Matsuno and Israel (2018) developed a model for understanding and building transgender/gender diverse resilience, called the Transgender Resilience Intervention Model (TRIM). In this model, group-level resilience factors work to buffer the effects of distal gender minority stressors (i.e., gender-related discrimination, gender-related rejection, gender-related victimization, and non-affirmation of gender identity), as well as prevent proximal gender minority stressors from developing. Individual-level resilience factors work to buffer the effects of proximal gender

minority stressors (i.e., identity concealment, expectations of rejection, and internalized transphobia) as well as distal gender minority stressors. Additionally, group-level resilience factors contribute to the presence of individual-level resilience factors, indicating that boosting group-level resilience factors through therapeutic interventions can also boost individual-level resilience factors. Interventions at the macro community level, such as providing inclusivity education and trainings in institutional settings and engaging in social advocacy, aim to boost group-level resilience factors by changing the community environment. Group interventions aim to increase group-level resilience factors by improving interpersonal relationships, such as through family and couples therapy, group therapy and support groups, and mentorship programs. Individual interventions directly support individual-level resilience factors and include gender affirming therapy, workbooks, online resources, and gender affirming medical interventions. This model provides a clear framework for addressing gender minority stressors through cultivating and supporting the development of applicable resilience factors—factors which contribute to the integration of resilience into a transgender/gender diverse individual's sense of identity (Matsuno & Israel, 2018).

Dance/Movement Therapy, Identity, and the Transgender/Gender Diverse Community

Dance/movement therapy is an embodied, enactive psychotherapeutic practice in which individuals can explore internal states and external expressions as they manifest in the body and in movement (Koch & Fischman, 2011). It is rooted in the relationship between the body and mind, whereas internal states and emotions are reflected in bodily sensations and movement, and whereas movement can influence internal states and emotions (Levy, 2005). Exploration of bodily sensations and movement impulses as they connect with inner experiences of emotions and thoughts allows individuals to begin to integrate their internal and external selves, bringing

attention to the ways in which one's unconscious inner self might be represented in the body (Frieder, 2007). Engaging in movement interactions with a dance/movement therapist who can attune to and mirror an individual without judgment can help an individual build self-awareness, leading to discoveries about their desires, values, and personal narratives (Koch & Fischman, 2011). This facilitates a process of integration of various aspects of the self into a core self that is able to create and move with change toward new and healthier realities (Koch & Fischman, 2011; Lauffenburger, 2020).

As it pertains to identity development, dance/movement therapy is well positioned to guide individuals through an experiential process of self-exploration and identity formation. Pass Erickson (2021) has offered a dance/movement therapy-based model of identity development as an embodied process, called embodied identity development. Pass Erickson (2021) describes this process as “an ongoing conversation between embodied self-awareness, conceptual self-awareness, and movement behaviours” (p. 208). Embodied identity development is an ongoing, cyclical process through which a person explores and develops a sense of self. The process begins with embodied self-awareness achieved through interoception, which interacts with cognition and conceptual self-awareness to allow an individual to form a hypothesis about their identity. The individual then tests the hypothesis in the body through action and movement while continued interoception provides “a felt sense of if this action and its results are a ‘good fit’, thus either confirming or refuting one’s initial hypothesis” (p. 208). The cycle is repeated continuously, with each cycle providing new information about one’s identity. Enacted repeatedly over time, the process serves to align “embodied self-awareness, conceptual self-awareness, and outward action in one’s environment and relationships” (p. 208).

Dance/movement therapists have the capacity to support individuals as they move through this

natural process, providing a safe space for developing interoceptive awareness, cognitive and conceptual self-awareness, and experimenting with embodied expression of potential identity factors in real time. Since a significant portion of transgender/gender identity development involves embodied processes of self-exploration, this model is particularly useful for guiding identity work with transgender/gender diverse people.

Little has been written in the dance/movement therapy literature about working with transgender/gender diverse individuals. However, the literature is clear that the embodied nature of dance/movement therapy has a unique potential to help transgender/gender diverse individuals explore, express, and affirm their gender identities. Hanan (2013) identified six common themes that emerged over the course of four dance/movement therapy sessions with six transgender individuals: the importance of expressing one's unique and authentic self, supporting others' expressions of their unique and authentic selves, the body's experience of discrimination and violence, studying and practicing gendered movements, working to shape the body as vehicle for self-expression, and joy, relief, and celebration in experiences of social and medical gender transition. During sessions, participants were able to share their perceptions of themselves with others through creative movement, find a sense of belonging and affirmation through the experience of being mirrored in movement by the group, process experiences of discrimination and violence in a safe, communal space, and practice new ways of moving their bodies that felt more authentic to their gendered experiences through exploration of effort and shape qualities in Laban Movement Analysis—a method of studying and describing movement quality in terms of shaping of the body in space and exertion of effort along continuums of free to bound flow, light to strong weight, sustained to quick time, and indirect to direct space focus. Participants were also able to identify goals for embodiment and explore times when their embodiment accurately

reflected their gender identities, as well as express the joy and satisfaction they felt from choosing to embrace and embody their gender identities. Overall, Hanan (2013) found that dance/movement therapy interventions such as mirroring, exploring Laban Movement Analysis, and generating creative self-directed movement supported transgender individuals' explorations of body image, as well as provided opportunities for interpersonal support and affirmation around gender identity and expression. As a result, experiences of the gendered self as expressed somatically and kinesthetically could then be integrated into each participant's sense of embodied identity (Hanan, 2013). One limitation of this study is that it was conducted only with binary-identified transgender individuals (i.e., transgender women and transgender men), therefore it may not have captured potential themes prevalent among non-binary individuals.

A study by Karcher and Caldwell (2014) focused on exploring transgender identity and the somatic effects of oppression. Karcher and Caldwell (2014) engaged in a collaborative artistic inquiry through which they explored Karcher's gender identity development as he engaged in social and medical transition throughout the study. Through art, improvisational dance, and the creation of a multimedia performance, Karcher was able to communicate his somatic experiences of recognizing his inner felt sense of gender, embodying his gender identity through wearing a chest binder and undergoing chest masculinization surgery, and coming out to family and friends. He was able to explore a myriad of emotions related to his transition process, using art and movement to externalize painful experiences as well as create moments of joy. He also explored the negative messages and transnormativity he was internalizing as his gender identity was forming, as well as his feelings about discrimination and violence against the transgender/gender diverse community. Ultimately, representing his identity development through artistic means helped him understand and express his experience on a somatic level. His

experiences could then be shared with others through performance in the hopes of creating social awareness and change (Karcher & Caldwell, 2014).

Jackman (2022) discusses the applicability of dance/movement therapy in supporting transgender/gender diverse people through minority stress, gender affirmation, and identity development. In regard to minority stress, Jackman (2022) states that since dance/movement therapy is effective in addressing depression, anxiety, and trauma, it could be used to help transgender/gender diverse people process experiences of discrimination or violence and find healing. Jackman (2022) also states that dance/movement therapy could be used to enhance resilience by creating community through group work. For example, mirroring could be used to build kinesthetic empathy and attunement between group members to foster supportive connections. According to Jackman (2022), dance/movement therapy can support gender affirmation through exploration of physical changes in the body related to gender affirming medical interventions, and it can improve body image. Dance/movement therapy can also help transgender/gender diverse individuals explore their identities through body movement, such as by exploring effort qualities in Laban Movement Analysis to find those which feel most congruent with their gender identities. Furthermore, Jackman (2022) states that dance/movement therapists can encourage individuals to “...move freely, coming from an inner place...” (p. 5) to support self-expression and self-understanding, leading to insights about how one’s authentic self is communicated to others. This approach is similar to the practice of Authentic Movement, in which a mover follows their inner impulses to bring unconscious aspects of themselves into consciousness through movement in the presence of a witness (Adler, 1999). Finally, dance/movement therapy can help transgender/gender diverse individuals integrate their past and present selves into a cohesive self-narrative, supporting identity integration (Jackman, 2022).

Discussion

In the United States, pathologization of transgender/gender diverse people has contributed to the development of transnormative narratives that dictate the ways in which a transgender/gender diverse person “should” experience their identity. However, every person’s gendered experiences are unique, as are their ways of expressing and embodying their gender identities. Transgender/gender diverse people benefit from being affirmed and supported in their individual experiences, as well as from being encouraged to embrace their own self-narratives within the diversity of the transgender/gender diverse community. Furthermore, transgender/gender diverse people benefit from incorporating gender euphoria, joy, and resilience into their identity development processes, especially within the context of transnegativity and prevailing narratives of distress and victimization. Dance/movement therapy is well suited to provide transgender/gender diverse people with a supportive space to explore gender euphoria, joy, and resilience in their embodied experiences, creating opportunities for these themes to be integrated into one’s sense of self in an empowering way.

Embodied Exploration of Transgender/Gender Diverse Identity

Transgender/gender diverse identity development is an embodied process that requires the ability to sense one’s inner experience of gender and, usually, explore ways of expressing and embodying that gender that feel authentic to one’s inner experience. It also typically consists of disclosing one’s gender identity to others and building connections with others in a new gender role or as a member of the transgender/gender diverse community. Early transgender/gender diverse identity development can invoke feelings of anxiety or discomfort, especially since transnormative narratives have created a narrow view of legitimate transgender/gender diverse experiences that many transgender/gender diverse people feel

pressured to conform to in order to be seen as valid. This pressure can lead to feelings of alienation, discrimination, and internalized stigma, which contribute to minority stress and further create expectations for negative experiences associated with one's transgender/gender diverse identity. However, it is possible for transgender/gender diverse people to develop their own unique identity narratives through a process of internal, external, and social exploration of their authentic selves. As conveyed in the literature about transgender/gender diverse identity development, transgender/gender diverse people tend to develop a sense of self-acceptance, confidence, and pride in their identities over time (Bockting & Coleman, 2016; Devor, 2004; Lev, 2004). Being able to embody their authentic selves in whatever ways feel most congruent to their own unique gendered experiences is an important part of finding identity integration and life satisfaction.

Dance/movement therapy provides a unique platform for transgender/gender diverse individuals to explore and express their gender identities in an embodied way, allowing for a deeper understanding of themselves beyond societal expectations. It provides an advantage over traditional talk therapy, which requires transgender/gender diverse people to test their hypotheses about themselves outside of the therapy room and report back to the therapist. In dance/movement therapy, transgender/gender diverse individuals can try new ways of expressing and embodying their gender identities through movement in the therapy space as they are witnessed in real time by the dance/movement therapist. Within this structure, dance/movement therapists can support a transgender/gender diverse person's identity development by helping them attune to their inner sense of what embodied expressions or actions fit with their conceptualization of themselves. Emotions resulting from experiencing oneself expressed in an

embodied way can also be thoroughly examined, leading to insights about one's desires for embodiment, roles in relationships, and perceptions of oneself from others.

As a strength-based practice, dance/movement therapy can address the needs of transgender/gender diverse people in a way that cultivates positive experiences of living as a transgender/gender diverse person as a counter to narratives of distress and victimization. Dance/movement therapists can and should examine the impact of gender dysphoria, discrimination, violence, and oppression with transgender/gender diverse clients, offering them a safe and supportive space to process difficult emotions while being witnessed and validated. However, dance/movement therapists can also help transgender/gender diverse individuals explore aspects of their identities that are uplifting, rejuvenating, affirming, and pride-inducing. This is an important component of working with transgender/gender diverse individuals, as being able to see oneself in relation to positive experiences supports the development of a strong, positive self-identity. Exploring positive experiences also provides a more holistic view of transgender/gender diverse identities, as transgender/gender diverse people are capable of experiencing a full range of human experiences and emotions beyond the narratives that are prevalent in society. Among these positive experiences are gender euphoria, joy, and resilience. Dance/movement therapy provides a framework for supporting transgender/gender diverse individuals by exploring gender euphoria, cultivating joy, and building resilience through movement and body-based interventions. In doing so, these themes can be incorporated into a transgender/gender diverse person's sense of identity to form a positive connection to self.

Gender Euphoria and Identity Affirmation

Gender euphoria is an important component of transgender/gender diverse identity development. While gender dysphoria may indicate who a transgender/gender diverse person is

not, gender euphoria can indicate who a transgender/gender diverse person *is*. It is a powerful experience of affirmation of one's gender identity, expression, and embodiment, whether it manifests as momentary elation or as an ongoing sense of satisfaction with oneself. As Beischel et al. (2022) discovered, some transgender/gender diverse people experience a pull toward their transgender/gender diverse identity through experiences of gender euphoria in addition to or instead of experiencing a push away from their sex assigned at birth through gender dysphoria. This carries important implications for understanding the process of transgender/gender diverse identity development, as the predominant narrative that gender dysphoria motivates gender transition does not account for the role of positive feelings of rightness in one's transgender/gender diverse identity. It is important for therapists to consider the role of gender euphoria when working with transgender/gender diverse people, as gender euphoria can be a useful guide toward affirming gender expression and embodiment, as well as a confirmation to a transgender/gender diverse person that their sense of themselves as transgender/gender diverse is valid. Feelings of being "not trans enough" to accept or declare oneself as transgender/gender diverse can be moderated by tapping into gender euphoria and the ways in which it affirms one's transgender/gender diverse identity. As a transgender/gender diverse person progresses through their identity development, gender euphoria can help them navigate their process of exploration of gender expression and embodiment, marking the aspects of their exploration that feel right to them and helping them build confidence in their authentic selves.

Dance/movement therapists have access to a broad range of techniques that can be used to help transgender/gender diverse people tap into gender euphoria. Among these are techniques aimed at fostering a connection to one's body, exploring movement qualities, and facilitating free self-expression. Dance/movement therapists can provide a safe, supportive environment in

which transgender/gender diverse people are free to explore ways of embodying their gender through enacting new body movements or tuning into desires for embodiment. Dance/movement therapists can facilitate experiences of gender euphoria by creating opportunities for transgender/gender diverse individuals to express their gender identities in ways that feel authentic to them, leading to feelings of joy, rightness, and satisfaction with their bodies and movements. Within the dance/movement therapy process, dance/movement therapists can provide experiences of gender affirmation through validating and supporting transgender/gender diverse individuals' expressions of self, leading to further increased gender euphoria and confidence to embody their gender identities outside of the dance/movement therapy space.

Since gender euphoria consists of positive emotions resulting from gender affirming experiences, transgender/gender diverse people must be able to sense those emotions through the use of interoception to identify gender euphoria. Dance/movement therapists can help transgender/gender diverse people build interoceptive awareness so that they can successfully tune into fleeting or subtle inner experiences of gender euphoric emotions. Interventions such as deep breathing exercises or meditation can bring awareness to inner sensations and build one's capacity to attune to these sensations. During these interventions, a dance/movement therapist asks a client to focus their attention on their breath and notice how their body feels as it travels through them. As the client builds the ability to notice their breath, they can begin to notice other bodily sensations, such as tension in their muscles, warmth in their chest, or the beating of their heart. They can begin to identify somatic sensations associated with certain emotions, such as a rapid heartbeat and stomach tightness to indicate nervousness or a sense of lightness and being energized to indicate joy. This can help them identify and connect with their emotions, as well as notice changes in their inner state in response to emerging thoughts or external stimuli. This

awareness of inner emotions through the interoceptive sense can help a transgender/gender diverse person notice gender euphoria when it occurs, which is an important component of recognizing what aspects of gender expression and embodiment fit as one progresses through their process of gender identity exploration.

Authentic Movement provides further opportunities for connection to one's inner self. In Authentic Movement, a mover is encouraged to attend to their inner impulses and to allow them to guide their outward movements in the presence of a witness. As the mover follows their inner impulses, their movements can begin to externalize their innermost desires and needs, bringing their unconscious inner self into conscious awareness. Concurrently, the witness holds the space as a container for the mover's expression, offering them the opportunity to be seen and accepted without judgment (Adler, 1999; Frieder, 2007). With transgender/gender diverse individuals, Authentic Movement can strengthen a person's awareness of internal cues that may be helpful in directing their choices for outward gender expression or embodiment, potentially leading to experiences of gender euphoria. Authentic Movement can also help a transgender/gender diverse person explore how their inner self is represented in their body, fostering a deeper understanding of and connection to their gender identity, expression, and embodiment. Furthermore, being witnessed and accepted by an attuned dance/movement therapist can provide a transgender/gender diverse mover with a sense of affirmation of their authentic self, producing gender euphoric emotions and contributing to greater self-confidence in their gender expression.

As transgender/gender diverse individuals begin to explore new ways of embodying their gender identities, dance/movement therapists can provide opportunities for experimenting with movements in the body through the use of Laban Movement Analysis. As Hanan (2013) and Jackman (2022) presented, exploring effort and shape qualities in Laban Movement Analysis can

help transgender/gender diverse individuals identify and practice new ways of moving their bodies that feel congruent with their authentic selves. In Laban Movement Analysis, effort and shape qualities can be conceptualized as gender neutral, allowing individuals to experiment with movements without the imposition of socially attributed definitions of masculinity and femininity. This allows for a position of gender fluidity in movement exploration, which can support a transgender/gender diverse individual's development of a movement profile that is uniquely their own rather than one that is prescribed by binary gender categories. As an individual explores various efforts and shapes, some movements may spark a sense of gender euphoria. When this happens, a dance/movement therapist can guide the individual through deeper exploration of that movement quality and what bringing it into one's embodiment may mean for their sense of authentic self. Further exploration and practice over time can help a transgender/gender diverse individual fully embody their gender identity in a way that feels affirming and euphoric to them, not just through social or medical transition, but also through movement and posture.

Finally, dance/movement therapists can lead transgender/gender diverse individuals in improvisational movement to promote free self-expression and exploration of gender identity development. Improvised movement can follow a prompt of the transgender/gender diverse individual's choosing, such as to tell one's story through movement or express one's feelings after experiencing a moment of gender affirmation. Improvisation can include the use of props to provide individuals with more opportunities to express aspects of themselves, with props being particularly useful for transgender/gender diverse youth. Mirroring by a dance/movement therapist can reflect a transgender/gender diverse individual's self-expression back to them, providing an opportunity for the individual to see their authentic selves reflected and affirmed by

another person, potentially leading to feelings of gender euphoria. In group dance/movement therapy with other transgender/gender diverse individuals, the group's mirroring and expansion of a person's self-expression through movement can provide a profound experience of affirmation, support, and a sense of belonging. All of these experiences can produce gender euphoria, and this gender euphoria can act as sustenance for the transgender/gender diverse individual as they move through the world outside of the dance/movement therapy space. This sustenance is vital as a person explores their transgender/gender diverse identity, helping them to persist in their development toward affirming gender expression and embodiment.

Trans Joy and Identity Celebration

Trans joy is a powerful antidote to the harmful effects of transnegativity. As Shuster and Westbrook (2022) found, attention to joy in the transgender/gender diverse community is necessary for a holistic understanding of transgender/gender diverse experiences, as failing to explore joy results in overemphasis on negative aspects of living in a marginalized gender identity. Joy is an essential and prevalent aspect of transgender/gender diverse experiences. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge and celebrate this joy. In terms of identity development, a transgender/gender diverse person can form a positive connection to self through experiences of happiness and well-being in their lives, either as a direct result of living in a transgender/gender diverse identity or through other positive life experiences. Experiences of gender affirmation, connection to others within the transgender/gender diverse community, and engagement in activities and practices that one enjoys are some common contributors to trans joy. The transgender/gender diverse community is full of people whose lives have been greatly improved by expressing and embodying their authentic selves, even in oppressive contexts. It is important for therapists to explore joyful experiences and possibilities for joy with

transgender/gender diverse people, as joy can contribute to increased self-confidence, self-acceptance, and a positive outlook on life. Celebrating a transgender/gender diverse person's identity and the positive experiences that come with it supports the individual's development of a positive self-concept, consequently helping them embrace their identity and move through the world as their authentic self.

Dance/movement therapy offers multiple routes for exploring and cultivating joy. Dance in itself has historically been used as a form of celebration, and it continues to serve this purpose today in many cultures. It is also used as a way to build community and promote healing and well-being. Dance/movement therapists have the capacity to foster environments of celebration within the dance/movement therapy space, whether they are working with an individual or with a group. Creating interventions that support freedom of emotional expression through dances shared between the individual or group and the dance/movement therapist can bring release and a sense of liberation to transgender/gender diverse people, contributing to an overall sense of well-being. Nonjudgmental, open acceptance of emotional expression through movement can help a transgender/gender diverse person feel supported and validated, especially when movements are mirrored and expanded upon by a group of fellow transgender/gender diverse people. Shared expression fosters a sense of community, and within this community, celebration and joy can emerge as a shared experience. Joy can also emerge from interventions that support an individual's expression of desires and goals for their lives, as visualizing possibilities for the future can guide an individual toward actions that achieve those possibilities. Dance/movement therapy can also promote a sense of appreciation for one's current life through movement-based exploration of positive experiences, gender affirmation, valued relationships, and achievements. Furthermore, dance/movement therapy can strengthen a transgender/gender diverse person's

connection to their body and the ways in which they express and embody their gender identity, leading to self-appreciation and joy in the experience of being themselves.

Dance/movement therapists can guide transgender/gender diverse individuals in the creation and enactment of celebratory dances to celebrate important milestones, achievements, and moments of self-discovery in the person's identity development or greater life experiences. As a transgender/gender diverse person progresses through their own unique identity development process, each new way in which they express and embody their gender is worthy of being celebrated. Moments of feeling affirmed in one's gender identity are significant, especially for those in the early stages of identity exploration. The first time someone tries on a chest binder, wears makeup, or uses their chosen name are key milestones, as are experiences such as changing their name and gender marker on legal documents, starting hormones, or having a gender affirming surgery. Milestones and achievements beyond gender identity are also important, such as graduating high school or college, starting new relationships, or being hired into a new job. Creating space in dance/movement therapy to celebrate these milestones through dance supports a transgender/gender diverse individual's self-confidence and fosters a sense of joy in their identity development process and life experiences. As a person engages in the dance/movement therapy process, any self-discoveries are also worth being celebrated, as doing so encourages further self-exploration and self-expression. Any experience that a transgender/gender diverse person wants to celebrate can be celebrated through dance and movement, and this celebration can lead to profound experiences of joy.

Incorporating playfulness and imagination into dance/movement therapy sessions can also cultivate joy, as well as feelings of liberation in one's self-expression. Lighthearted interventions using movement games and props can encourage transgender/gender diverse

individuals to explore the role of fun in their lives and provide an outlet for play needs. This is true for youth and adults, though adults' needs for play are often overlooked. Play offers opportunities for creativity, expansion of self-expression, and engagement of the physical body and imagination in tandem. It can relieve stress, improve mood, and provide a temporary escape from responsibilities or hardships. For transgender/gender diverse people, imagination and playfulness in dance/movement therapy can provide joyful experiences in an affirming space, which can contribute to a person's belief that joy is possible for them as they embrace their authentic self. Shared playfulness through movement in a group of transgender/gender diverse individuals can foster collective joy, contributing to a sense of joy in community connection. Playful interventions can be valuable tools for cultivating joy for transgender/gender diverse people, whether used with individuals or in groups. Creating experiences of joy through such interventions can provide relief from stressors outside of the dance/movement therapy space and support the integration of joy into a transgender/gender diverse person's sense of self.

Dance/movement therapists can provide opportunities for connection and community celebration by facilitating group dance with transgender/gender diverse people. In the context of a dance/movement therapy group, free dance can be used to celebrate diverse gender expressions and identities, allowing each individual to express themselves with whatever movements feel satisfying to them. Dancing together in a circle can provide each person with the chance to be witnessed and celebrated by the group, contributing to a sense of acceptance and belonging as they express their authentic self. Mirroring or collaborative choreography in the circle formation can build connection between group members and create a sense of collective celebration. Incorporating music and rhythm through the use of drums, stomping, or clapping can evoke a sense of energy and vitality that pulses throughout the group, breathing more life into the

celebration and strengthening the group's sense of unity. As the group dances together, this celebration has the potential to produce intense feelings of joy and contribute to a transgender/gender diverse person's sense of themselves as worthy of celebration. This can lead to increased self-confidence, self-acceptance, and a sense of pride in one's transgender/gender diverse identity—all important aspects of developing a positive self-concept and thriving as a transgender/gender diverse person.

Resilience and Identity Empowerment

In a society in which restrictive narratives and negative messages about transgender/gender diverse people abound, resilience is key to a transgender/gender diverse person's ability to thrive. Gender euphoria and trans joy are important contributors to resilience, as both support a transgender/gender diverse person's development of resilience factors, such as self-acceptance, self-worth, and identity pride (Matsuno & Israel, 2018). These factors combined with interpersonal and community supports can help transgender/gender diverse people overcome challenges to live their best lives. Exploring resilience is particularly important in the early stages of transgender/gender diverse identity development, as resilience can protect against the harmful effects of minority stress and strengthen a transgender/gender diverse person's resolve to be their authentic self. However, the development of resilience is an ongoing process that must be explored throughout a transgender/gender diverse person's life as circumstances change. It is important for therapists to recognize that transgender/gender diverse individuals possess inherent strengths to help them navigate stressors and reach their personal goals—willpower, hope, self-definition, and community belonging being just a few of these strengths. Incorporating resilience work into the therapeutic process honors a transgender/gender diverse

person's strengths and empowers them with skills and resources to persist in their identity development despite adversity.

The ability to declare oneself according to one's own self-definitions is foundational to building resilience. Dance/movement therapy provides opportunities for transgender/gender diverse people to explore their identities and develop confidence in their unique self-definitions. With this confidence, transgender/gender diverse people can assert themselves through gender expression and embodiment as a challenge to cisnormative societal expectations. Experiences of discrimination or rejection can be explored in dance/movement therapy and framed as failings of society rather than failings of the transgender/gender diverse individual. Support from the dance/movement therapist or a group of peers can serve to uplift the individual as they navigate such experiences and gather their strength to move forward in their self-development. Exploring resilience in dance/movement therapy allows transgender/gender diverse people to connect with their embodied strengths and find ways to stand up for themselves and their values.

Dance/movement therapists can help transgender/gender diverse people tap into their resilience by exploring resilience factors, developing coping skills, and building support systems to buffer against transnegativity and provide them with a sense of empowerment over their own lives.

Grounding techniques are valuable as a starting point for building resilience.

Dance/movement therapists can guide transgender/gender diverse individuals in the use of grounding techniques as coping skills during times of stress or emotional difficulty to increase their capacity to be present and persist through challenges. Interventions such as deep breathing, box-breathing (i.e., inhaling for four counts, holding for four counts, exhaling for four counts, and holding for four counts), and meditation can help individuals feel grounded in their bodies and find emotional regulation. Breathing techniques could be particularly useful during

challenging moments outside of the dance/movement therapy space, helping individuals remain regulated so they can access their resilience and stand up for themselves, if needed.

Dance/movement therapists could also use floorwork as a form of grounding, allowing individuals to explore their connection to the floor as a source of support for their bodies and movement. Further exploring this support by encouraging individuals to stand and root their feet into the floor as the rest of their body moves freely can provide a sense of being grounded in their foundation of self. Encouraging movement throughout the space while intermittently returning to a rooted stance can provide individuals with a sense of themselves as agile yet still connected to their foundation. This can support a transgender/gender diverse person's confidence in their ability to navigate challenges while being true to themselves—an important component of resilience.

To build a sense of identity pride as a resilience factor, dance/movement therapists can guide transgender/gender diverse individuals in the exploration of their intersecting identities (e.g., gender identity, race, ethnicity, spirituality, disability, class, sexual orientation) and how they define themselves in contrast to societally imposed definitions or stereotypes. Using improvised movement, transgender/gender diverse individuals can explore the negative messages they have received from others regarding their identities and begin to challenge them with positive messages they should have received. According to Singh (2018), the process of exploring negative messages and challenging them with positive messages can help transgender/gender diverse individuals recognize the negative messages as discrimination rather than fact, leading to healing of internalized stigma and supporting the internalization of positive messages. The use of creative arts materials in this process could be beneficial, perhaps as the transgender/gender diverse person draws or writes the negative messages and casts them away as

crumpled papers tossed into the far corners of the room. Representing positive messages in drawings and movements could help the individual connect to them on a deeper level, helping them integrate these messages into a sense of pride in themselves that further supports their resilience outside of the dance/movement therapy space.

Interventions focused on exploring and embodying qualities of strength, resilience, and empowerment can help transgender/gender diverse people feel these qualities in their bodies and tap into them in moments of need. Dance/movement therapists can prompt transgender/gender diverse individuals to explore strength through improvised movement, encouraging them to embody strength as a weight effort (i.e., strong weight effort in Laban Movement Analysis) or as a body attitude or posture. Resilience and empowerment can also be explored through body attitude and posture, as well as through improvised movement throughout the space. Guided imagery could be used to help individuals visualize themselves bouncing back from challenges and living their lives according to their own goals. Exploring the potential for transformation and growth after overcoming challenges can reduce fear of future negative experiences, helping transgender/gender diverse individuals approach their lives with more confidence and empowerment to be themselves.

Finally, since community connectedness has been found to be a strong factor of resilience for transgender/gender diverse people (Matsuno & Israel, 2018; Puckett et al., 2019; Testa et al., 2014), dance/movement therapists can support resilience in transgender/gender diverse individuals by bringing them together in dance/movement therapy groups. Transgender/gender diverse groups can foster a sense of community connection, belonging, mutual support, and solidarity for transgender/gender diverse people—all important contributors to resilience. Interventions such as paired and group movement improvisation can help transgender/gender

diverse individuals experience being supported by their community while also supporting others. Contact improvisation can be used to explore weight sharing and counterbalance, such as when movers grasp each other's forearms and lean away from each other. In this counterbalance, each mover relies on the connection with the other mover to keep them from falling to the floor. To explore weight sharing, movers can alternate leaning on each other while the other maintains a foundation of support. Through these explorations, transgender/gender diverse people can strengthen their sense of support and trust in their community while also developing confidence in their own ability to support others. As the group continues to support and uplift each other, they can develop a sense of collective resilience that each individual can carry with them beyond the group space. This resilience can provide each transgender/gender diverse individual with the strength to continue in their process of identity development despite societal challenges, helping them embody their authentic selves and live a joyful, fulfilled life.

Conclusion

Dance/movement therapy is a powerful method for supporting identity development in transgender/gender diverse people. It provides transgender/gender diverse people with opportunities to explore their identities in an embodied way, allowing for deeper connections to themselves through integration of their internal, bodily, and social experiences. Societal narratives of transgender/gender diverse identities can limit one's understanding of transgender/gender diverse people, framing transnormative expectations and transnegativity as paramount to the transgender/gender diverse experience. However, transgender/gender diverse identities are incredibly diverse and come with rich experiences of happiness, community connection, pride, and well-being. As a strengths-based, embodied practice, dance/movement therapy offers a unique framework for understanding transgender/gender diverse identities

through a holistic lens which incorporates gender euphoria, joy, and resilience into identity exploration. Through a process of embodied exploration of self through this lens, a transgender/gender diverse person can incorporate these themes into their identity development and form a strong, positive sense of their authentic self.

In clinical practice in dance/movement therapy and transgender health, the approach presented here provides an additional layer to current practices in gender affirming healthcare and mental healthcare. Gender euphoria, joy, and resilience are important aspects of transgender/gender diverse experiences and thus should be acknowledged and honored in therapeutic and medical practices. Practices of exploring gender dysphoria, transnegativity, and minority stress should continue when appropriate, but clinicians should not limit their work to these themes as doing so perpetuates narratives of pathology, distress, and victimization of transgender/gender diverse people. Incorporating and centering exploration of gender euphoria, joy, and resilience into clinical practice provides transgender/gender diverse people with the opportunity to express their entire experience of themselves and become empowered to live their lives as their authentic selves. It provides them with the chance to progress through their own process of identity development without being confined to transnormative expectations or defined by marginalization, but rather by embracing their individuality, their strengths, and their capacity to live a joyful life.

Much more research is needed on the use of dance/movement therapy with transgender/gender diverse individuals, as well as on the roles of gender euphoria, joy, and resilience in transgender/gender diverse identity development. Future research could explore the effectiveness of embodied dance/movement therapy practices on increasing self-understanding, self-acceptance, and self-confidence in transgender/gender diverse people. Research could also

explore the role of group dance and movement on fostering a sense of joy and resilience within the transgender/gender diverse community. In terms of identity development, researchers could focus their attention on the ways in which embodied exploration of identity factors supports a transgender/gender diverse individual's progression through stages and cycles of transgender/gender diverse identity development. Any future research should acknowledge the diversity of experiences and identities within the transgender/gender diverse community and seek to include Black transgender/gender diverse people, transgender/gender diverse people of color, transgender/gender diverse people with disabilities, and transgender/gender diverse people with non-binary gender identities (e.g., non-binary, genderqueer, gender fluid, agender, Two-Spirit). Over time, this research could expand clinical and societal understandings of transgender/gender diverse people, as well as position dance/movement therapy as a valuable and effective component of gender affirming care.

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