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To Dance or Not to Dance? A Dancer's Journey to Becoming a Movement Therapist

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TO DANCE OR NOT TO DANCE? A DANCER'S JOURNEY TO BECOMING A

MOVEMENT THERAPIST

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Abstract

This thesis explores the impact of the word dance on people's idea of what dance/movement therapy is. Dance/movement therapy was created by dancers who realized that dance had the ability to be therapeutic. In the 1940s in the United States, when dance/movement therapy was established, dance was not what it is today. Dance has expanded and is now seen in competitions, television/movies, and social media, which places a strong emphasis on the validation from others. The author aims to look at this shift in dance and how ideas present within dance do not align with the focus of dance/movement therapy. Through an exploration of personal experience, the history of dance and dance/movement therapy, and professional identity, the author looks to examine how dance fits into their own practice of dance/movement therapy.

Keywords: dance/movement therapy, dance, movement, professional identity, experience, movement therapy

Acknowledgements

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In my process of becoming a dance/movement therapist, my biggest battle has been how to let my past support the work that I am doing without fully defining it. As more people learn about my journey in graduate school to study dance/movement therapy, I often get the question, "is it like a dance class?" While, in practice, dance/movement therapy can utilize elements of dance, dance is not the only tool used within the therapeutic space. In hearing these and similar questions in relation to what dance/movement therapy is, I find myself in a place of discovering and developing a professional identity that allows me to effectively share my work with others.

In most discussions I have been involved in surrounding the field, with those who are unfamiliar with the work, the word dance takes over and seems to be what people cling to in relation to understanding the work. There is an immediate association to either teaching dance or a dance class, as that is a popular way that dance is known within society. This conversation also occurs with individuals who are aware of my relationship and experience with dance in my past. Dance is something that was always a constant in my life and was a staple piece in developing who I am today. While my relationship to dance is what got me here today, that version of dance is no longer present in my work and experience.

With this shift in the presence of dance and movement in my current experience, I am beginning to look at the possibilities of the title that I will use when sharing about myself and my work. While I acknowledge that my official title of the work will always have the word dance in it, I am working to create a shift in the way that I verbally share who I am and what I do. Through a look into dance, dance/movement therapy, and professional identity, I work to consider my experience and its relation to these topics as I embark on a journey of discovering who I am within the field when having an internal debate with the current intersection of these elements.

My Dance Experience

   I started dance classes when I was two and a half years old. As a little girl I loved the one day a week that I got to put on my leotard and skirt and head to the studio. I took a ballet and tap combination class and it was always a playful and fun class. Classes became more structed as I got older, and I began to learn routines to perform in showcases throughout the year. As I continued to take class, I began to train in a new style, jazz. As my training continued, I realized that I wanted to do more. I found a new studio that supported this desire for more and offered a larger range of styles for me to train in. At this new studio I was training in ballet, tap, lyrical, jazz, jazz funk and supplementary classes, such as strength and conditioning, as well as dance tricks. At this time, I began to see my future with dance and performance.

   Shortly after I moved to this studio, competition dance became extremely popular. At first, I did not audition for any competition teams, but I slowly changed my mind and in my final year, I auditioned and made three teams. Each week I continued to train in my normal classes and then had additional classes for the competition teams as well. I was now at the studio five to six days a week. I was learning several routines that I would end up competing as well as performing in showcases throughout the year.

   Competition dance introduced me to a new dynamic amongst my peers. We no longer were just dancing because we enjoyed it, we were dancing to win. This element of competition was extremely present in all my classes now. There was fighting to get the best part, countless hours spent trying to master a new skill for a routine and a lot of drama if you weren't the one who got these parts. Very quickly, I became uncomfortable and struggled to still find the joy in dance when there was constant tension present in the space. This part of my dance career was all

about comparison and perfection and who can do what better, rather than supporting and encouraging each other like it used to be before we were competing.

With the desire to continue training, I made the decision to major in dance in college. I was taking classes five days a week and, at first, dance felt like it used to. I was learning new things, making new friends, and forming new connections with teachers. I was still getting a chance to perform, and I felt renewed within my dance. I was gaining new perspective and was training in styles I had never been exposed to before.

Dance was always a place of vulnerability. I was learning routines that I would share with others, and I was putting myself into those movements. There was also the element of being seen in a mirror in only leotard and tights, lined up next to several other dancers. My body was always the focus of the work. Growing up this was difficult; I was always aware of how I looked in comparison to those around me. This was something that I told myself I just had to accept, and this would always be a part of me being a dancer. My first experience being confronted with this was in college, where I had professors tell me that someone who looked like me would never make it in the dance world. Dance was something that I did for me and was something that, even through all the ups and downs, I could find safety and comfort in. Dancing was something that allowed me to be present in my body; it was after that comment that it was hard to feel safe in my dancing. I became harder on myself and was pushing myself to constantly do more and to try and be better. I put my body through a lot of pain and kept pushing through so that I could prove that I was able to make it. Dance quickly turned into a space filled with self-doubt, comparison, and strong desire to strive for perfection in the hopes that I would be told that I can make it.

Discussion began about plans after college and the process of auditioning for dance companies and various shows. I slowly began to realize that was not the path that I wanted to

take anymore. I began to examine the downfalls that I experienced due to my involvement within dance. I realized that I lost the joy that I used to have when I walked into class and the adrenaline that I would get from performing was no longer what it used to be. This stemmed from the fact that, within college, my dancing was always justified by a grade and there were very clear expectations that did not always allow for me to be present in the dance. There was constant competition, fighting for the lead role and special parts. I was no longer dancing with my peers; I was competing against them. Comparison and perfection were two prevalent thought processes that occurred every day that I stepped into the studio and looked at myself in the mirror. I wanted to leave that behind, I wanted to find myself and rediscover the powerful connection to dance and movement that I once had.

Dance in American Culture

Dance can be seen and practiced within one's culture, it can be used for performance, or it can be a response to a favorite song. Dance in these moments allows for people to express a message with their bodies. Dance provides many benefits to the physical health of the body, allowing the individual to work on coordination and flexibility as well as focus on overall mood through the exploration of movement (Alpert, 2011). These aspects allow for the dancer to see physical differences in themselves through the continued practice of dance. These are aspects of the dancer that can be visually observed by the teacher or another individual and are elements that can be tracked over time.

There is also the connection between mind and body within dance that allows for release of emotion and a space to tap into creativity (Alpert, 2011). This is where the personal connection to the movement is brought in, as the individual begins to connect meaning to the dance. With body and mind in conversation, dance can allow an individual to be creative due to

the various ways an individual can explore and express themselves (Green, 2001). In addition to

this free aspect of moment exploration, there is also a structured element that taps into memory

and recall when learning sequences of steps to be repeated later for practice and performance

(Lovatt, 2018). The root of many dance forms is learning these structed sequences and ways to

move, which then get layered with the dancer's own creativity and personal connection. These

sequences of steps live in the dancer's memory and will come out in many ways throughout the

duration of their dance career in several different sequences and explorations.

Negative Aspects of Dance

Dance in the United States has evolved over the years to encompasses a much larger

audience. Between live performances, competition, social media and television, dance is being

seen in several new ways. Dance for performance allows the individual or group of dancers to

learn a number to then be performed in a show for both their enjoyment as well as audience

entertainment. Dance competitions take this performance one step further, and the dancer or

dancers perform for a panel of judges to receive feedback on their performance. Harrington

(2020) shares that a hierarchical structure is in play at competitions, with the dancer having paid

to perform and to receive feedback, all with the intention of receiving a high score and positive

feedback. In addition to competition, as the virtual realm continues to grow its presence in the

U.S., so does the accessibility of dance on these platforms. Dance on social media is a space

where the individual is in constant competition with their true self and their online self

(Harrington, 2020). The evolution of dance in the U.S. now places the importance of performing

on how it is received by others. In placing an emphasis on perfection, the individuality of the

dance can often be lost.

Between competition dance, social media and dance on television, the audience is seeing a version of a dancer who is working to achieve the ideal and sought after look within a performance. This means hours in rehearsal, countless takes and endless stress that is endured to strive for perfection. There is a common understanding shared amongst dancers that emphasizes the idea that to succeed there will also be several negative elements to tolerate along the way (Aalten, 2007). In an art form that celebrates creativity and expression, there is so much pressure put on being perfect, that it very quickly removes the individual from the work. It is within this cycle striving for perfection that dancers become over aware of other dancers and begin the process of comparison and self-judgement (Harrington, 2020). This contributes to an atmosphere where dancers are constantly in a state of comparison to one another, and creates competition amongst themselves that can, in turn, be harmful to all those involved. The idea that there needs to be a finished product that is perfected based on the opinions of others leads the dancer to lack a sense of self and individuality within their experience (Harrington, 2020). This emphasizes the desire to create and perform something that is so rehearsed and "perfected" that the dancer themselves begins to get lost within that work. Competition dance does this to a performer, as the goal is to exaggerate movement and meaning of the lyrics beyond what is comfortable in hopes of obtaining a high score from the judges (Harrington, 2020). The dancer's expression is exaggerated to fit the song and as the dancer moves through the choreography, they are consumed with the idea of putting on the grandest show for the judges.

My Journey to Dance/Movement Therapy

I once knew dance as a place that empowered me to be confident and connected to my body. As I immersed myself deeper into the artform, this wasn't the case. I was no longer dancing because I loved it, I was dancing to achieve an ideal that ultimately was something my body

would never get to. I was pushing myself beyond my limits day after day and eventually my body had enough. I was searching for a way for a way to reconnect with dance and find the power of movement in working to understand myself and others. I was curious as what process would allow me to use dance in a way to help others and work to create a positive relationship between mind and body.

    In college, I was a part of a program for individuals with physical and developmental disabilities that immersed them in dance, theatre, music, and art/animation. I was a buddy to an individual and we worked together each week to understand the best way for her to participate in the show. We had conversations on what felt best for her in terms of participation, if she wanted to be standing or sitting, and we would practice variations of this each week till we found a routine that worked best for her. Each week with trying new things, my buddy was able to find ways to interact with peers and participate in a way that supported her needs. This was the time where I began to develop a passion for this line of work and began to imagine what a future doing this would be.

    This was the work with dance that I was the most drawn to. I was curious as to what my role could be in establishing a relationship of understanding what one's body needs to feel present and experience a sense of accomplishment. It was within this curiosity and program that I found dance/movement therapy, where I connected with the values and process of the work. Using movement in way to support growth in the various realms of the human experience showed me that there are more sides to dance and movement other than the ones that I knew.

    This program immersed me in the nonlinear growth that is present in dance movement therapy. Everyone was on a different track and tasks were shifted to meet the needs of each person. This was the one of the first times in a group setting where I had seen the true

individuality within each person present in the space. This is something that it so important to me within dance/movement therapy. It promotes each person to be their true selves and to work from a place that supports and celebrates each individual need. With the position of being a dance/movement therapist, I can listen to each individual and work to establish a plan that encourages the process to move forward at a pace that is unique to each person.

Becoming a dance/movement therapist, I am reconnecting with myself. Through engaging with processes developed by dance/movement therapy practitioners, I am experiencing movement in a way that connects my mind and body. This connection of mind and body provides a harmony within me that has allowed movement to be what it used to be for me: powerful. My journey in dance/movement therapy has reintroduced the endless possibilities of movement and how there is such power to connect to self within movement explorations. With this reconnection to self, I am in a place that now allows me to work with others on establishing their mind body connection through the therapeutic process.

Dance/Movement Therapy

Dance/movement therapy planted its roots the United States starting in the 1940's (Koch et al., 2019). This foundation was created within the lives and conversations of modern dance artists who were realizing that there were other sides to dance (Bruno, 1990). A variety of approaches existed among early practitioners of the field in the United States. Marian Chace was one of the first practitioners who focused on dance as therapy. Chace would focus on the individual and would facilitate a group based on what was present in the space (Chaiklin, 2009). Chace began her sessions as soon as she entered the space and would use everything that she saw to decide on what came next (Chaiklin & Schmais, 1993). Chace was able to use short term goals that allowed for flexibility and adaptation to fit the needs of the individual and the group to work

towards the long-term goals of the therapeutic process (Chaiklin & Schmais, 1993). Mary

Whitehouse used active imagination, as well as a focus on the felt sensations of the body, to

create authentic movement (Chaiklin, 2009). Authentic Movement tasks the mover to physicalize

with movement what is living within the unconscious while being witnessed by others in the

space (Musicant, 1999). Within this process, Whitehouse was curious about what caused people

to move and the process in which they brought the unconscious to the forefront of their current

experience (Frieder,1999). This curiosity led Whitehouse to be focused on the process and

experience of the mover rather than achieving a set end goal (Frieder, 1999). Another

practitioner, Trudi Schoop, was connected to the practice of play and fantasy (Chaiklin, 2009).

Schoop had a focus on the whole person and believed in the necessity of experiencing opposites

within emotion and thought (Schoop, 2000). If an individual was only experiencing one thing all

the time, Schoop would work to reintroduce its opposite to provide the individual with another

way be within their experience (Schoop, 2000).

> With different areas of focus within the human experience, these individuals established

the foundation for dance/movement therapy. While each therapist may have a different focus,

Chaiklin (2009) states "dance/movement therapists use their skills and knowledge to work with

people toward self-validation, resolution of past trauma, and to learn how to better relate and

have positive interactions with others" (Chaiklin, 2009, p. 8). It is with the variance in areas of

focus that dance/movement therapists can work with a multitude of individuals who come from

several different backgrounds and experiences and provide a practice that best suits their needs.

> The American Dance Therapy Association (ADTA) defines dance/movement therapy as

"the psychotherapeutic use of movement to promote emotional, social, cognitive, and physical

integration of the individual, for the purpose of improving health and well- being" (ADTA,

2020b). Within further research into the American Dance Therapy Association, it is also stated

that "movement is the primary medium dance/movement therapists use for observation,

assessment, research, therapeutic interaction and interventions" (ADTA, 2020a). The definition

of dance/movement therapy varies within the different countries in which it is practiced. The

Association for Dance Movement Psychotherapy U.K. (ADMPUK) states "Dance Movement

Psychotherapy (DMP) is a relational process in which client(s) and therapists use body

movement and dance as an instrument of communication during the therapy process"

(ADMPUK, 2023). This definition is different from the ADTA, as it specifically addresses the

relationship between client and therapist and includes the word dance as a part of the therapeutic

process. The European Association of Dance Movement Therapy (EADMT) defines dance/

movement therapy as "the therapeutic use of movement to further the emotional, cognitive,

physical, spiritual and social integration of the individual" (EADMT, 2021). This definition is

like that of the ADTA, but includes a spiritual component in relation to the individual. The ADTA

as well as the EADMT do not mention the word dance within their definition and both focus on

the use of movement in relation to the practice. These definitions share a common goal of

promoting the growth and integration of the individual, and dance/movement therapists will

work with a client to both physically and verbally express what is happening within their bodies.

It is through this movement that the therapist takes a step into the client's current state of

expression and can use what is being provided to make the next steps within the therapeutic

process.

  A key component of dance/movement therapy is the focus on discovering elements of an

individual's experience that live in the unconscious realm of the body (Serlin, 1993). Through

both the conscious and the unconscious, clients generate movement that is prompted by what is

currently present within their body and mind (Bruno, 1990). This can be done through the process of moving and being present with the body and then taking part in a verbal processing with the therapist or others in the group. Improvisation is the tool that allows for this process of unconscious to conscious as it allows for movement to flow from one's felt sensations and then encourages that to be expressed with movement (Chaiklin, 2009). The process of physical representation followed by verbal processing is what encourages growth and learning to be present within the therapeutic experience.

Wengrower (2009) discusses the differences between verbal psychotherapy and dance/movement therapy and how dance/movement therapy emphasizes non-verbal communication between client and therapist. The ability to work on non-verbal communication and physical expression allows for the individual to become more in-tune with their bodies to then encourage discussion in the verbal realm. Improvements within the physical and psychological aspects of an individual are present within dance/movement therapy and can be seen in the connection within the group, various ways of expressing emotions, understanding of self, and an expansion of possibilities through physically activating the body (Ritter & Low, 1996). Depending on the individual, one or multiple of these categories may be an area of focus for dance movement therapy sessions. Dance/movement therapy sessions aim to help the individual see how they relate to others as well as notice their needs within these interactions (Chaiklin, 2009). Dance/movement therapists have an overall goal of entering the client's world and working with what is present and, from there, establishing goals to work towards in future sessions.

Dance in Dance/Movement Therapy

Dance/movement therapy is a practice that is connected to dance and the various ways that dance and movement can support the therapeutic process (Chaiklin, 2009). The dance experience of the early practitioners is what helped to create dance/movement therapy, due to dance's focus on the emotional, cognitive, physical, and social areas of the human experience (Wengrower, 2009). In verbal psychotherapy, these elements can be discussed and, within dance/movement therapy, these elements are explored through nonverbal and a physical expression in combination with a verbal component (Wengrower, 2009). Dance and movement within the therapeutic process is important, as dance encourages the individual to translate thoughts and feelings into movement as another way of expressing the self (Byczowska-Owczarek, 2019). The dance in dance/movement therapy is one that stems from an individual's inner impulse and is a response to a current feeling or idea. Through exploring this movement, connections and meaning can be made (Wengrower, 2009).

Straying Away from Dance

While dance provides an outlet for expression and is working to actively engage the body through movement, there is a lot held within the perception of dance that can make it difficult to bring these ideas into the therapeutic space. The main difference between dance and dance/movement therapy is that dance/movement therapy is not focused on creating an end goal and allows for anyone, no matter their experience with movement, to be involved in the therapeutic process (Wengrower, 2009). Dance in the United States, for the most part, has a goal of creating something for others to see and requires skill and cohesion amongst the performers. Dance/movement therapy takes out the necessity for skill and allows for the movement to be explored in a way that best fits the client. Dance/movement therapy does not place a focus on creating a final product; there is room for continued exploration on what is present in the space.

This work is created within the safety of an individual or group space, and that is where the work can stay and be shared if that is what the individual wants. The movement within dance/movement therapy does not follow any specific technique or guidelines; it simply is what is explored in response to the individual's current state of being.

Within dance's relationship with the body there has been a long-standing focus the physical presentation of the dancer. In terms of a female body within the dance space, dance has a long history of putting pressure on the presentation of the female body within the art form (Harrington, 2020). Copeland (1993) discusses how dance was known as a silent art and the sole focus was the physical appearance of the performer. This view of the body on stage is something that causes a lot of tension between the dancer and their physical appearance, as they work to obtain an ideal and a figure that they believe the audience wants to see. There is the comparison of one dancer to another and this causes dancers to look at their body and find the things it cannot do rather than the things it can do.

Gender roles also appear within the dance space. Dance presents a strong separation between the movement of male and female dancers, the quality in which each of these dancers performs, as well as a clear difference in design elements related to costume and makeup (Byczkowska-Owczarek, 2019). While dance is for everyone, there are very clear roles for male and female dancers that have previously and are currently still known within the art form. These gender roles do not always fit the needs of each dancer and are not always an accurate depiction of who the dancer is. These clear gender roles and expectations have the potential to hinder someone's desire to enter a space where this idea is present. The expectation of moving in a certain way or taking on certain qualities may not be accessible to each individual and has the potential to limit exploration, due to trying to fit into these expectations.

There is a history of debate within the field about the use of the word dance in dance/movement therapist, as this can imply that experience with dance is a requirement to participate within the therapeutic process (Bruno, 1990). Dance is an art form that is often rehearsed and learned within a class setting and is a place where there is a right and a wrong way. In the free and self-directed area of movement within dance/movement therapy, this idea of being right or knowing how to do something can impact one's ability to fully be present within the moment.

There are other techniques and interventions that can be implemented in dance/movement therapy that are not focused on creating full body movement but still allow the individual to tap into this inner experience. The very base of this inward exploration and connection to self is described by one's ability to pay attention to the breath and other senses to attend to the present moment (Tord & Bräuninger, 2015). On tapping into the natural rhythm of breath, the individual is to sense the body and connect inward to notice what is present. While there is movement present, this action of breath does not task the individual with creating something new. The movement of breath is always present within the body and is a natural process. Breathwork is at the forefront of the meditative process. To relax one's mind, there is a need for a focus on the breath to reach a calm state. It is from this state that the individual begins to focus on the present moment and remain curious as to what is occurring in the body (Shonin & Van Gordon, 2019).

Visualization techniques have been developed that encourage the individual to see and create inner pictures that represent the body moving as well as to feel the body's response to this imagined exploration (Bräuninger, 2014). This visualization space allows for the mind to take control and to see and feel the body without worrying about physically moving. Working on this visual exploration also expands the opportunity for everyone to be involved, as there is not a

requirement to move and be physically active. Imagination can allow for the individual to see

something happen and allow them to plan out the process of what is to come.

My Experience of Dance in Dance/Movement Therapy

Dance is the first word that people hear when I tell them what I do, and it very often

results in a fixation on the dance itself, with the therapy element often left behind. In my

experience thus far as a dance/movement therapist, I have had many times where my role is

perceived as a dance teacher or that I am there to dance with the individuals that I am working

with. This representation of me as just a dance teacher or just here to dance leaves out the rest of

the therapeutic process.

This preconceived idea or assumption of the work has impacted my confidence as a new

dance/movement therapist. In a space where there is a lack of understanding as to what my role

is, I find myself doubting the work that I am doing. Focusing on this idea that I am bringing

dance into the space creates a conflict in myself when I am planning for a group. There is a

feeling that I need to stick with what those in the space believe the work to be to help myself feel

validated or seen. In the moments where I bring in interventions that do not resemble dance, I

often feel that I am creating an even bigger disconnect from what people perceive the work to be.

There is also a benefit to bringing in interventions that do not fully resemble the expectation of

those in the space, as this allows for an exposure to the other possibilities of the therapeutic

process.

As a dance/movement therapist, it is my goal to find interventions that allow the person

to connect to themselves as well as others. Social dance is something that allows for this connection

to others to be present and is a way for people to connect on a nonverbal level. When social

dance is presented, I have witnessed people either fully engage or fully disengage from the

group. For some, dance is comfortable and fun and, for others, it is not something that they want to participate in. Dance creates moments of shared experience; the individuals can feed off one another and try new things based on what they see in the space. For those who choose not to participate, they tend to remove themselves from the group. Most of the time it is because they don't like to dance or don't want to dance so they make the choice to not interact with the group. While the decision to participate is up to the individual, I have experienced it is hard to regain this individual's attention once they have left the group. While dance has the power to bring people together, I have also experienced it causing a strong divide in group spaces. While the choice not to participate can be present within any intervention, I have found it more difficult to bring someone back into group after dance has been introduced.

Professional Identity

Professional identity development is a process in which one works to solidify who they are, what they believe in, and what is required of them to uphold their role within their profession (Goltz et al., 2014). This is the development of a personal professional identity, which places the professional at the core and defines who they are based off their values and beliefs (Heled & Davidovitch, 2021). This process is a cycle that keeps the personal and professional self in conversation with one another to determine how the individual presents within a professional space. Crigger and Godfrey (2014) describes this connection though the discussion of the social and psychological realms of professional identity. The socialization aspect is defined by the work that is being done (Crigger & Godfrey, 2014). This is the part of the professional's life that is spent within the work and developing who they are within that space. The psychological realm relates back to the idea of self and of one developing their values and their own set of personal and professional ethics that allows them to be within the work (Crigger

& Godfrey, 2014). Within this cycle of personal and professional, Gibson et al. (2014) talk about

the final element of professional identity being the response that is received from others. The

response element is what will continue to keep the professional in conversation with the parts of

their professional identity to determine what is the best practice within their work environment.

This process begins while the therapist is still in training and will continue to grow and evolve

throughout their professional career.

Myers et al. (2002) discuss the importance for the development of one's professional

identify in being able to validate the work being done to those in a position of power. Developing

a professional identity that represents the individual allows for the therapist to feel confident in

their work and what they are going to bring into the space. This is a crucial element within the

counseling field, as it is important for professionals to have a solid description of the services

they are going to provide and how these services will impact those they are working with. One's

professional identity is what will draw clients towards working with that professional. It is

important to lay out all elements of the services provided in a way that is accessible to ensure

that client can clearly understand the process. Without this clear presentation of information, the

individual has the potential to shy away from seeking services due to a lack of understanding

(Myers et al., 2002). While the development of one's professional identity centers the

professional and allows them to create their space in the larger profession, it also is a grounding

factor for potential and current clients to connect to. If clients can see the therapists' values and

beliefs, this allows the clients to see if they are a good match for their needs.

Much of the literature surrounding professional identity for therapists uses the terms

counselor and counseling profession to encompass the wide range of positions within this

umbrella. Mellin et al. (2011) discuss that, with the newness of the counseling profession, there

is an uncertainty surrounding the development of professional identity as well as the duties of the counselor. With an unclear image of the profession, it can be difficult for the individual to find their place within the larger picture. Myers et al. (2002) share the importance of developing a unified identity amongst counselors. This unified identify is known as the group professional identity which allows society to understand the work based on the history and purpose of the profession (Heled & Davidovitch, 2021). The counseling profession is a large field that encompasses many modalities. Within this, there is a need for each sub section to have a clear identity so that, from there, each professional can establish their own identity. This larger identity connects the professional back to the larger field and the overarching goals and, from there, the professional identity highlights the individual and what they bring in combination with the larger ideas.

Discussion

I have found myself struggling to develop a professional identity, partially because I am new to the profession and am just starting to gain experience. The other part is a fear of going against what is set in place for me. When I graduate, I will be a registered dance/movement therapist (R-DMT). On one hand, I acknowledge the importance that dance has played in the development of the field as well as my journey to the work. On the other hand, I have also seen how much confusion the word dance causes with people's understanding of the work. It is my goal that, while developing my professional identity, I can incorporate dance in a way that supports my work without it being the sole focus.

I have an inner battle with the word dance as well. My experience with dance was not always positive and it caused me a lot of pain. Dance taught me to ignore what my body was feeling and to continue pushing through whatever I was experiencing. Most of the time, this experience was

pain, and I would continue to dance because I thought I had to. This pushing through is common

in dancers, as it is expected that pain be a part of the day-to-day experience of a dancer (Aalten,

2007). This constant push and working through the pain causes damage that can last forever in a

dancer's body. This ignoring of what is happening in the body and the push to keep working can

stem from the fact that a dancer's instrument is their body, and it is through the body that a story

is told (Byczkowska-Owczarek, 2019). There is not space given to rest and allow the body to

heal, because there needs to be practice being good. These are two experiences common in the

dance community and ones that do not align with the therapeutic process. Dance/movement

therapy is centered around listening to the body and letting what is happening on the inside

become physicalized on the outside. Koch (2017) describes this as expressive and impressive:

sharing inner thoughts allows for feedback into the individual's experience. The body is

constantly in conversation and using information to make the next step within the therapeutic

process. The therapeutic process urges the investigation of one's experience, whereas dance has

the potential to disregard that experience for the purpose of creating the product.

When I began studying dance/movement therapy, my limited knowledge of the field

related to my small scope of understanding of the possibility within the work. I was in a place

where I was connected to the word dance and wondering how I was going to use this artform as a

therapeutic practice. In the early stages of my development as a dance/movement therapist, I was

strongly connected to interventions based heavily in movement. I was so focused on thinking

about implementing movement within each session that the other elements of the process had the

potential to feel like an afterthought rather than connected to the movement. I was focused on

movement as the bigger picture rather that finding movement where it already exists.

As I began to experience the work in my own body as well as in a therapist role, I began to focus on new ways to incorporate and observe movement within a dance/movement therapy session. I was able to look at movement in its most basic presence, breath. I watched the pace and the posture that accompanied breath and how that related to the individual and their presentation. I could also observe movement within conversation through the position of one's body in relation to others. There is the ability to observe how one locomotes through space. In taking a step back and seeing these ideas in action, I was able to change my scope of what I felt I needed to do to feel successful as a therapist. In entering the field, I set extremely big shoes for myself to fill and, now that I have scaled back my idea and opened my mind to new possibilities, I am finding comfortability and confidence in my work. This step back centered me and encouraged me to start small and work my way up to something rather than starting at a big idea.

In the beginning of this schooling process, I was involved both in an academic and an embodied practice that allowed me to experience some of the therapeutic techniques that can be used within the therapeutic space. In letting these ideas live in my body, I was able to learn more about each of them. I experienced the importance of breathwork in connecting and grounding myself, the gentleness of physical touch and the power of connection with those in the space with me and how play can bring a room to life. I was able to experience these ideas in my body with my peers and learn how many possibilities live within this. At first it felt familiar, and I was comfortable in the improvisation of movement that was being explored. As these ideas expanded, so did my idea of the work. I was exploring how props can be a bridge to connection and how different settings shift the way the work looks. Dance/movement therapy was no longer what I thought it was. It was more. I was now seeing beyond the dance, which places the other elements of the therapeutic process at the forefront of my practice.

I was exposed to building a one-to-one relationship that allowed me to take a step back from the focus of movement and encouraged me to be present in exploration, imagination, and conversation. This interaction was often based in play and the creation of a place to be explored by others in the space. With the use of props, a café was created where water for the group was served. Artwork was made to bring the walls to life and make the space feel more welcome. The process started as imaginative play in combination with discussion surrounding the creation of a space; the development of the therapeutic relationship allowed for this idea to physicalize and come to life. While movement was involved in the creation of this space, it was not all about the movement in this moment. This creation stemmed from numerous conversations and curiosities about what else could be added into the space.

This interaction was one of my first experiences developing a therapeutic relationship, and the idea that movement was not at the forefront was something that I often went back and forth on. I often found myself encouraging a movement exploration and pushing for that to be present which, in turn, was taking away from the current process of exploring imagination. Once I took a step back and allowed for the individual I was working with to take the lead and guide me in the process, the thing that was created was something I never could have imagined. In these moments I found myself being more observant and aware of what was occurring in the space, and I was allowed to be a more active presence in the process rather than trying to shift what was happening to fit the expectations that I had created for myself. This experience working one-to-one expanded my horizons on what is possible within the therapeutic process. I was immersed into imagination and creation and through this was able to help foster an environment for ideas to grow and for people to connect.

In addition to this one-to-one relationship, I have also experienced dance/movement therapy in a group setting as well. Through my internship, I worked with adults with physical and developmental disabilities, and I was able to find several new ways to engage with these individuals through a dance/movement therapy lens. Being in this setting, I have experienced the need for structure and clear instruction. This idea in relation to movement is something that I struggled with as the therapist. In times of offering movement prompts such as sway like a tree, brush your teeth, move like a robot or swimming in a pool, I noticed that the individuals were more comfortable discussing these ideas rather than exploring them on a movement level. This need for conversation from some was helpful as it then allowed for them to engage in a movement exploration, but for some, the physicalizing of an idea was not something they wanted to participate in and there was an urgency to move on or do something else. This structured use of movement to explore an idea was not something that felt accessible to the individuals that I was working with.

To provide more structure and clear direction, I began to think about what else I could bring into the space to provide guidance as well as room for individual instruction. As a therapist, I have found that game-based interventions have been extremely helpful in exploring movement within the body. In these game-based activities there is a clear goal that the individuals are working toward which helps to ground them in their exploration. At first, this began with passing a ball to promote connection and gaining someone's attention before throwing the ball. This seemed to be something that engaged the individuals and expanded their focus outward into the group. As the focus of the group expanded, the game was able to expand and I was able to bring in a balloon to replace the ball. This required more focus, as the direction of the balloon was not as direct as the ball. To expand on the balloon further, pool noodles can be used as the object that

is used to hit the balloon. This increases the level of focus needed to complete the task and requires more hand-eye coordination to hit the balloon. In addition to the ball, the individuals connect to bowling. This is an activity that a lot of them have a previous connection to and is something they often ask for. Everyone can take a turn and be seen by their peers when it is there turn. Bowling is also a place where each person can showcase their own style for how they bowl. Each person has their own style and assumes a different position before each throw. In being able to watch their peers, some individuals will try out different methods of throwing the ball based on what the people before them have done. In being able to witness their peers, there is room for trying out new ideas and connecting with others in the space. There is also an increased element of support, as they are cheering each other on with each turn. Each of these games targets the social, emotional, cognitive, and physical elements of dance/movement therapy without the intervention being rooted in dance. In being able to shift the types of interventions brought into the group space, I have seen an increase in participation. There is time where a group will incorporate one of these games and close with social dance, and I will often see fewer members participating once the dance begins.

A movement practice, not rooted in structure, that I have found engaging in this setting has been social dance. In simply putting music on and allowing the individuals to move, they can showcase their own personality and style. At first, I noticed that this was a very individual exploration and there was not a lot of interaction but, as our time together has increased, there is more connection amongst the members of the group. I was creating playlists based on songs that I had heard in group spaces before and based on suggestions form the individuals. As time went on, I would receive requests on what songs people wanted to listen to. This element of incorporating their choices allowed for there to be another level of comfort while exploring

movement within the space. Within this open social exploration of movement, props have been a tool used to aid in the expansion of movement. With the use of scarves and ribbons, movement is now seen beyond the hands and expanding out into space. With the use of a prop there is also something to see as a result of one's movement.

In my experience as a dance/movement therapist thus far, I found myself engaged in a lot of practices not rooted in dance. While social dance is present to some capacity, the majority of my main interventions focus on the movement present within game or play-based interventions. This experience of using these interventions has kept me in an ongoing conversation of how I talk about the work and what I feel is important for people to know. As a former dancer coming into dance/movement therapy, I had a strong connection to the word dance and the use of this artform within the therapeutic space. As I began to experience the work hands on, there was a shift in my connection to this word, as it placed a lot of pressure on myself to try and maintain this idea that I created. I developed a stronger connection to the word movement, as I believe it is more open ended and encompasses more of the work. In using the word movement as well, I as a therapist can release the expectations associated with the word dance.

This struggle of wanting to honor the development of the field of dance/movement therapy and its history rooted in dance, while also acknowledging the many other possibilities that occur within the therapeutic process, has caused me to struggle when developing my professional identity. Additionally, in my experience with people who do not know the field of dance/movement therapy, I often find the work boiled down to just being related to dance. This then places me in a position of being seen as a dance teacher. This idea of my role is not only confusing for those I am working with, but also confusing for me as the therapist. In not feeling connected to that idea of me being a dance teacher, my confidence in being the therapist and

leader can be affected. There is also then the struggle of providing an intervention and

exploration that does not resemble dance and causing more confusion.

   As a therapist, it is my goal to create a description of the work that I do that introduces

people to the large variety of possibilities as to what the work can look like. When describing the

work, I often find myself leaving out the word dance and emphasizing the connection to

movement in several ways. In being able to share the interventions I have tried that look different

than dance, I am able to begin the broadening of the idea of what dance/movement therapy is. In

my experience, dance has the potential to be an off-putting word or intervention and often causes

people to feel they need to know how to dance to participate. It is my goal to create an

environment that anyone feels like they can be a part of, and I feel I can best do this with the

focus on movement rather than dance.

   To create an environment that feels open and flexible, I am interested in referring to

myself as a movement therapist. In doing this, I am working to break down the ideas that I have

often heard associated with dance/movement therapy. I feel that the shifting of language has the

potential to make the therapeutic process more approachable, as dance is not the first word that is

heard. In this word not being in the title, it can help in lessening the idea or feeling that one needs

to know how to dance to participate or that the work is just a dance class. I feel that the word

dance has the potential to be limiting in terms of what the work is and how it can be explored.

The idea of dance can lead to a thought process of feeling that there is a right and wrong way to

explore ideas within the work. In lessening the amount I use the word dance, it is my hope that

people can approach the work with a clean slate and be exposed to its possibilities without

having a preconceived idea as to what they think will or should happen.

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