

# Eastern Dance Meets Western World

The Therapeutic Effects of Belly Dance in Western Society  
& The Use of DMT to Support and Develop Those Experiences

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## Abstract

The present study is a literary investigation of the therapeutic capacities of Oriental dance and belly dance. Oriental dance is a solo improvisation dance style from the Middle East, North Africa and parts of Central Asia that has evolved in the Western world where it's referred to as belly dance. Belly dance is a popularized leisure activity and form of physical fitness that promotes many physical benefits as well as mental and emotional health benefits. We will discuss the transformation of Oriental dance into belly dance, the experience of belly dance in the Western world, and the holistic therapeutic effects lived by participants. Subsequently, we will discuss dance movement

therapy (DMT), a specialized creative arts psychotherapy, and the therapeutics of movement. We will end with a hypothesized synthesis of belly dance and dance movement therapy techniques.

El següent estudi és una investigació literària de les capacitats terapèutiques de la dansa oriental i del ventre. La dansa oriental és un estil de ball d'improvisació en solitari de l'Orient Mitjà, el nord d'Àfrica i parts d'Àsia Central que ha evolucionat en el món occidental on es coneix com a dansa del ventre. Belly dance es va posar de moda com activitat d'oci i forma de condicionament físic que promou molts beneficis físics, així com beneficis mentals i emocionals per a la salut. Anem a parlar de la transformació de la dansa oriental a la dansa del ventre, l'experiència de la dansa del ventre en el món occidental i els efectes terapèutics holístics viscuts pels participants. Posteriorment, parlarem de la Dansa Moviment Teràpia (DMT), una psicoteràpia artística creativa especialitzada i la teràpia a través del moviment. Acabarem amb una hipòtesi com resum de les tècniques de dansa del ventre i la dansa moviment teràpia.

**Keywords:** oriental dance, belly dance, therapeutic, dance movement therapy, embodied experience, holistic health

**Paraules clau:** dansa oriental, dansa del ventre, terapèutica, dansa moviment teràpia, salut integral.

## Introduction

For many people, the thought of belly dance provokes imagery of the Oriental harem, scantily clad women and sexualized dances. In reality, these notions have little to do with the folk dances from where belly dance draws its roots and its current practice. The misperceptions of belly dance in the Western world are pervasive and challenging. How do you understand a dance, let alone a culture

and a people, that have un-linear paths? How do we see these aspects clearly, when Western education and understanding is based in Eastern oppression? Orientalism has been used by the West to define itself in contrast to the East, the oriental, the other. As such, the West has dominated the perceptions, information, and understanding of the East, attempting to control its identity and thus has continued to skew our knowledge of these cultures. Oriental dance as will be discussed does not come from one place, one culture, one people, and this balks in the face of the Western culture's need to define and structure their understanding.

This study started as an attempt to understand the basis for therapeutic potential in Oriental dance and evolved as I moved through the available research. What I came to understand was different than what I knew, and created a more defined idea of Oriental dance in the West and the West's role in defining belly dance. More focus will be given to belly dance in the West because that is where my investigation took me. The evolving understanding that Orientalism and Western culture have played such a large part in the "evolution" of belly dance and that this directly correlated to the therapeutic capacities under investigation was a startling discovery. At this point, I turned my focus towards understanding these circumstances that correlated with my own experience of Oriental dance. I am from the United States and have studied belly dance for over 15 years. My story parallels many stories and circumstances that have defined the belly dance experience in the United States. As we will see, recent academic investigations about Oriental dance and belly dance have widely focused on the United States as well as coming out of the United States, though that trend is changing. In order to understand the therapeutic capacities and effects of belly dance, I had to understand where Oriental dance and belly dance differentiate paths.

As a person who has danced within this genre for over 15 years, I have seen firsthand the changes that occur in women and myself within this dance form. I've seen its profound effect, I've witnessed the empowerment and confidence it can build. I wanted to explore what research there was that

supported what I already felt about this dance genre and how it was changing lives. As such my research focus became, in what ways is Oriental dance offering therapeutic experiences in the Western world, and what do those experiences look like? How can an application of DMT techniques support and potentially deepen that experience? This deepened experience could include deeper self-reflection and awareness, larger awareness of group dynamics, heightened mind body spirit connection, increased self-empowerment.

Women may not have come to a belly dance class looking for greater mental health, but I will argue that many and most undergo positive physical, mental, emotional effects from their participation. Arguing the perspective that belly dance can be therapeutic for female populations given the setting and circumstance and that there are specific populations that would highly benefit from participation. With the information investigated, I will explore the possibility for the implementation of dance movement therapy techniques and methodology within the belly dance class setting. I see this as a possible way to promote a more embodied experience, more profound mental emotional development and greater holistic well-being for participants. We will discuss principals of dance movement therapy, specific pioneers of the field, and three potential techniques for application to belly dance. We will conclude with a proposed theoretical implementation of specific dance movement therapy techniques, objectives, and possible outcomes.

## Methodology

The investigation of this thesis has involved a variety of sources and methodology approaches. There has been a large focus on literature review which has been obtained through literary journal, books, academic studies, published research, online resources, published theses and dissertations we well as drawing on my own experience and participation in Oriental dance, belly dance and dance movement therapy. I have studied belly dance for over 15 years, been an instructor for over 10 and

have been a career dancer teacher and performer for 6 years, all pertaining specifically to belly dance and Oriental dance. My experience in dance movement therapy pertains to the education and practicum in this master's degree of which this thesis is in partial completion. The focus within the dance movement therapy field was guided by own experience working with clients and teaching dance classes. I've focused in on specific fundamental and foundational aspects of dance movement therapy that I see has correlating to and synthesizing well with the belly dance setting. This is not to exclude other methods, but inclusive of those I felt were appropriate and could correlate directly with the setting already defined in belly dance and support its current objectives and benefits.

## Oriental Dance, Belly Dance & Orientalism

To start I think it is imperative to define and elaborate on the history and background of Oriental Dance. It is also important to note that when I refer to Oriental Dance, I am referring to what is more commonly known as belly dance. To those not experienced with the dance, these two variations can seem as though they are the same thing (Seller-Young, 1992) but in reality, they differ in many ways as we will discuss. The general Western public tends to know very little about Oriental dance and what they do know is largely influenced by Orientalist images and colonialist themes that at times, hold very few truths and at other times are all but pure conjecture (Seller-Young, 1992). As Angela Moe describes it, "Unfortunately, few recognize or appreciate the diverse nature of this dance form, seeing it instead as an erotic form of entertainment, on par with striptease, burlesque and cabaret, with an air of harem fantasy" (Moe, 2012, p. 1). This definition will prove important because besides defining the basis historically and culturally for this dance form, we will also learn that as it has been introduced into the west, new derivative forms of the dance have evolved. Misinformation, lack access to correct information and a fantasy-based orientalist views have left a void within the dance. As we will discuss later, this void has actually been largely

beneficial to those participating in the belly dance in the Western world and will correlate directly to the social-emotional benefits of the dance.

For the purpose of this thesis, I will define belly dance and oriental dance as two distinct but interconnected dance forms.

#### Oriental Dance:

Oriental dance will be the term used to refer to the dance form with a defined and strong cultural and folkloric basis in the Middle East, North Africa & Central Asia. Within the Egyptian culture, they refer to the dance as simply, raqs (dance), raqs beledy (dance of the people, of the country) or raqs sharqi (Oriental Dance). Raqs beledy is a social dance and raqs sharqi is the professional performance style (Ward, 2018). This is the common dance as used by local communities and can be defined as cultural folk dance and as such, also has historically undefined roots (Ward, 2018; Haynes-Clark, 2010). Oriental Dance is still a Western term, but it has been a more widely accepted term than the originally imposed French term 'Danse du Ventre' that can be found as vulgar and misrepresentative (Haynes-Clark, 2010). As will be discussed, Oriental dance does not have a defined origin and this lack of definition, I will argue, is one of the reasons that it has been easy to appropriate and modify.

#### Belly Dance:

Belly dance will be the term used to refer to the dance form within the Western world, cut off from direct and clear connection to and from the Arab world. Including an incorporation of Western traditions or themes, a blending of dance styles from the Arab region that previously had not occurred or a "fusion" of props, Western music, and dances that are not associated with Arab, or Middle Eastern culture. "As is it has developed in the West, belly dance combines footwork,



movements, costumes, and performance conventions from a wide range of Middle Eastern and North African social, folk, and ritual dances with those of professional Egyptian nightclub dancing" (Dox, 2006, p. 53). Unlike its oriental dance counterpart which may appear visually similar, westernized belly dance may exhibit similar movements but lack infusion of the cultural history, music, musicians, singers, and artists in conjunction with the folkloric steps. Westernized belly dance is more likely to be based on fantasies of the middle east and Arabs, or even use integrations of Western movement (like ballroom or ballet) in conjunction with Oriental steps.

The rest of this paper progresses with the understanding and support of the view that any reference to Belly dance holds this definition in mind and that any reference to Oriental dance pertains to the previous definition. In case of using both words, it would indicate that while they are being identified as two distinct concepts, there is crossover between them, and aspects of this investigation may apply to both definitions.

Orientalism:

Orientalism is an overarching theory that involves much of how the world has seen and still sees the Middle East. The West uses the East to define its own identity, creating the East as an exotic Other from which to contrast itself (Haynes-Clark, 2010). It's an ideology that repeatedly presents the East as an exotic counterpart, perpetuated by stereotypes that encourages an "us" versus "them" outlook. According to Edward Said, a Palestinian American professor, literary critic and author of *Orientalism*,

Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident'... the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience...it

connotes the high-handed executive attitude of nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century European colonialism... (1978, p. 2)

There will be much discussion in this investigation of the ways in which Orientalism, fantasy, Othering and Orientalist imagery has played a large role in the evolution of belly dance in the Western world, as well as through what eyes Europeans witnessed Oriental dance in the Middle East.

## What is Oriental Dance?

"Perhaps no genre of dance has been as subject to misinterpretation and neglect by dance scholars as solo improvised dance in the Middle East. Its assumed sexuality and frequent association with striptease dance by the general public and many scholars, and its status as a form of popular culture are among the reasons for this scholarly avoidance." (Shay & Seller-Young, 2003, p. 14)

Oriental dance is, at its root, a folk dance that can be traced to various countries, regions, and cultures in North Africa, Middle East and Central Asia (Chang, Lin, & Sogawa, 2017). This has added to the debate of origin as the physical characteristics of this dance can be seen throughout a vast geographical space. Because it is difficult to articulate with one word or name from where this dance pertains to, we will at times use "Middle East", "Middle Eastern" or "Arab" as a reference to this geographic area and people, as you will also see these used in works referenced here, even though it is not sufficient considering the cultural and geographic reaches of this dance. In each of its areas of origin, the dance is characterized by improvised movements of the torso, hands, arms, and head (Chang, et al., 2017). "This genre is often the principal dance form of urban centers, and in Egypt of the entire population, and local populations call it simply "dance" (raqs)" (Shay & Seller-

Young, 2003, p. 14). Seller-Young describes one of the most important defining aspects of Oriental dance and how it differs largely from Western-style dances.

As a performance form in North African and the Middle East, Raks el Sharki is part of a large solo and improvisational tradition of Islamic dance that focuses on movement of the torso as opposed to movement of the arms and legs as in most Western-based forms. The arms are used to frame the movement of the torso. The legs are used to augment the movement of the torso. (1992, p. 141)

The most pointed details being in that it's focus draws towards the center and core of the body and the extremities are in aid of the center, not the other way around. Heather Ward offers an updated definition detailing common aspects and movements of the dance that previous definitions did not have terminology for. "The dance is characterized by a core repertoire of torso movements, including articulated hip and shoulder movements such as shimmies, circles and "figure eights" of the pelvis, and undulations of the abdomen" (2018, p. 6). She also acknowledges that the movements of raqs sharqi additionally include varied foot pattern steps, turns and classical European dance influence that have been gradually incorporated throughout the last century. A very important elaboration in her definition is a musical approach, musical interpretation represents an integrative and essential aspect of how one is expected to dance in this style. "Beyond the movement vocabulary the dance is distinguished by the significance accorded to effective musical interpretation. A skilled performer of raqs sharqi must be able to convey the rhythmic structure, instrumentation, phrasing, and a feeling of Egyptian music through the dance" (2018, p. 6). This adds a challenging dynamic, as you cannot simply dance the moves, but you must understand the music, the feeling, and what moves belong with what interpretation. This kinesthetic distinction activates and engages the body differently than most Western-based dance forms. The arms and legs become secondary to the movement that originates at the center of the body, the pelvis, and the chest. Perhaps just as

important is that we recognize the variation, diversity, and idiosyncrasy in this dance. As Shay & Seller explain:

The specific portion of the body that forms the focus of the dance varies throughout this vast area, and probably varied historically as well. For example, in current practice, professional Moroccan dancers, known as shikhat, as well as people dancing in domestic venues, perform a gentle lifting and lowering of the pelvis. In Tunisia, dancers execute large, sharp movements of the hip from one side forward, while in Egypt, the dance is largely focused on rolling, articulated movements of the abdomen and vibrations of the hips that can be rapid or slow. In Turkey, the cifte telli concentrates on both rapid and slow shoulder and breast shimmies. Iranian dancers utilize the torso, but graceful dancers are evaluated by the bearing of their upper body and the carriage of their arms. (2003, pp. 14-15)

Shay & Seller Young continue to discuss dances that move farther east into Asia, similarities and differences, making an important declaration, that "These very general observations must be tempered with the concept that this is a very idiosyncratic style of dance and individual styles vary greatly" (2003, p. 15). This has continued to be a large factor within the genre as specific dancers can make huge impacts in style and approach over time. While there are many idiosyncrasies throughout regions and cultures and individuality is promoted, the "feeling" behind the dance remains paramount to the movements being performed.

Another important observation is the openness to individualism that exists within this dance genre, giving each dancer the freedom of expression, which is underlined by how much individual styles can vary, leaving an open and flexible dance structure. Also noteworthy is the emphasis on solo improvisation versus choreography or group structured dance. These differences I would argue are

foundational, albeit sometimes less apparent, factors as to why this dance form has had such a large impact with Western female populations.

Most importantly, belly dance represents a disconnection from the cultural roots of Oriental dance, its music, and its people. Oriental dance is more than just a vocabulary, it's rooted in folk dance (Seller-Young, 1992). It encompasses more than just movements, but a rich cultural history, music, musicians, singers and artists that support it and define it. The historical implications of its life within that culture cannot be simply ripped away and disassociated.

## The Debate over the Origin of Oriental Dance

The myth, lack of information and the orientalist fantasy that exists in regard to the origin of Oriental dance is prolific. While reading through the available and prominent literature focused on Oriental dance and belly dance, it presents two very different trains of thought. The one aspect that it seems everyone in the field can agree on is that "the exact origin of belly dance is difficult to determine" (Moe, 2012, p. 3). As has been already discussed, belly dance and oriental dance are not the same things. A large disconnection has grown between the two and the supposed origin will prove as a foundation for this culture cutting of ties. This detail is important because it leads us towards seeing what Western society has interjected into this dance, and with what result.

Westerners have taken a lead role in the defining of Oriental Dance and as Karayanni puts it, "Frequently, the ultimate purpose of research into the origins of the dance has been the elevation of the art form—a trying and laborious process when the very appellation "belly dance" can provoke scorn and distaste" (Karayanni, 2009). This is an interesting insight, the elevation of the dance, but one might ask, why? Could it be that our Orientalist views that look down on Arab culture and society might deem this dance less than or inappropriate? That being an Arab folk dance is simply

not enough to gain validation and respect from the West? These are thoughts that we will continue to explore.

There continue to be two camps of thought on the origin of Oriental dance, it was an ancient ritual connected to femininity, birth rituals, spirituality and goddess worship or that it is a cultural folk dance from Middle Eastern communities that is lacking documentation to prove its defined origin. This continues to be an ongoing debate within the larger belly dance community, it seems as though the Westerners are far more concerned with identifying this origin point than the natives from which the dance has actually evolved and is integrated as a common and daily reality of life.

Many of the references in this work will refer to Egypt as a main reference point. Ward refers to Wood and Shay, "...dancers who would be billed as belly dancers elsewhere in the world are called Egyptian dancers by Middle Easterners" (Ward, 2018, p. 7). There is a direct correlation between Oriental dance and Egyptians for many Middle Easterners. Though this does not define Egypt as a definitive origin point, what we do know is that Egypt has many notable and world-famous artists, as well as National Folklore Troupes such as Reda Troupe, that have made Oriental Dance recognized throughout the world, claiming it as a part of Egyptian heritage (Ward, 2018).

One culturally sensitive and pertinent issue is that Arabs themselves do not perceive Raqs Sharqi or Raqs Beledi as art (Fraser, 2015). Magda Saleh (as cited by Fraser, 2015) discusses the relationship that Egyptians have with their folk dances and Oriental dance as extremely complex. While it is an integrated aspect of society, the conservative Islamic culture clashes with what can be seen is a powerful female image, putting her body on display in public. This could be one of the reasons for the lack of documentation that exists, as the society did not deem it necessary to track, as a folk dance, it's learned through life experience, and its expression is one of joy and celebration (Haynes-Clark, 2010). It is important to note that the need for a definition for their cultural folkloric dances

has not risen out of the community itself, instead, it is primarily Westerners that are interested in defining and investigating its origin as well as its history.

The majority of the academic literature for Oriental Dance comes from Western society (Chang, et al., 2017). Within these publications, we find that there is a large leaning towards validation and acceptance of Orientalist fantasy, ancient myths and worshiping of fertility goddesses. Such as Karayanni who cites Curt Sachs in *World History of the Dance* (1937) as saying:

The belly dance is no uniform phenomenon, to be sure. The later form swinging movements of the rectus abdominis has already been discussed. The older form consists of rotating motions of the entire pelvis, which travelers describe as belly dances, posterior dances, or hip dances...Frequently these arts may have only the purpose of sexual stimulation. But the original goal was magical: coitus movements, like all other sex motives, promote life and growth... (2009, pp. 451-452)

This characterization of Oriental dance puts on display the narrow-minded orientalist attitudes perpetuated while single-handedly disconnecting the culture and society from which it occurs. Oriental dance is reduced to nothing more than dance that goes from sexual excitement, to sexual act, to the product of said actions, birth. Promoting an ideology that women only move for the entertainment and excitement of men.

While the above is a representation of the extreme within the available literature. There are authors that mark a middle ground and more recent publications by Chang et al., have begun to criticize this approach as weakly supported and a perpetuation of Orientalism and is supported by other authors (Dox, 2006; Haynes-Clark, 2010; Shay and Shay & Sellers-Young, 2003; Chang et al., 2017).

Dance scholars such as Sachs (1937) and Buonaventura (1998) have related the origins of belly dance to ancient religion myths, and to the worship of the goddess of fertility.

However, other scholars have criticized this blind adherence to a weakly supported narrative of the ancient origins of belly dance that relies on Orientalist stereotypes. (2017, p. 36)

Based on new research, and its large emphasis on a combination of Arab and European language primary sources as the basis for its claims, we can see that the support for theories of ancient dances, birth rituals, and spirituality roots are largely exaggerated and could be associated directly with the Western worlds continued orientalist projection on to the Middle East (Ward, 2018).

Especially problematic is the remarkable lack of attention to Arabic-language sources from the last nineteenth and early twentieth centuries... Arabic-language primary sources are rarely invoked to support or question existing constructs of the history of raqs sharqi, and this points to the most glaring problem with these narratives: they ignore the voices of the late nineteenth/early twentieth century Egyptians who created the dance. (Ward, 2018, p. 11)

This observation has brought to the attention of many the extent at which even those who wished to go beyond Orientalist views were still succumbing to its limiting perspectives and narrow predisposition. Making blatantly apparent that for all that dance scholars may have wished to elaborate or expand our understanding of Oriental dance, very few published authors have used Middle Eastern language direct sources to investigate a Middle Eastern cultural dance, which is extremely telling about the limitations of access to credible and well-sourced information.

As noted throughout this discussion, the origin of Oriental dance is undefined and continues to exist as a debate within belly dance communities. The theories and documentation explored here might lead us to consider that for many years authors and scholars have helped to maintain Orientalist and



myth-based beliefs in regard to the dance. The lack of desire from Arab communities to document their own folk dances and the lack of motivation on the part of the Western scholars to find primary source material of interest had left a void of information. It could be perceived that Westerners have attempted to fill that void with their own interpretations. This assertion is supported by Shay and Seller-Young, "The vocabulary of the dance and its position within the framework of the West, especially the United States, as "other" provide an "empty" location, as in "not part of my culture" for the construction of exotic new fantasy identities" (2003, p. 14). This is one of the aspects that lends belly dance to be a tool for self-discovery and reinvention.

More recent research seems to be turning in the direction to reject these previously suggested theories of ancient fertility dances and harem fantasy. Now suggesting that Oriental dance is based in Arab folk dances without having a specified origin point, but a breadth of information to assert it spans a large geographic area and shares commonalities and distinctions with many neighboring social folk dances.

The purpose of this textual investigation is not to find the true origin of Oriental dance but to lay forth the available information, and the information that has been portrayed widely throughout the Western communities over the past several decades. Much clarity has been given in recent academic works as to whether or not Oriental dance is based in ancient ritual, goddess worshiping and the like, but this does not resolve the common knowledge misperception that it does have a connection. This is of great interest to this investigation because we will argue that Western communities have believed that it does, and this has made a lasting impact in the creation of belly dance in the Western world. Through this belief, the dance has been disconnected from its current and living cultural base in the Middle East. It has allowed for fantasy and orientalist projections to be played out through the dance genre. This, I argue, is one of the largest reasons Oriental dance transitioned into belly dance, which at times bears little resemblance of the cultural dance form in actuality. And this is important

because as we will discuss, belly dance in its current form is proving to be a powerful leisure activity that benefits women mentally, emotionally, physically, spiritually and used with therapeutic and holistic outcomes.

## Oriental Dance in the East, Oriental Dance arrives in the West

In the 1700's, as Europeans arrived in the Middle East, we start to see documented accounts from European businessmen, politicians, artists and tourists, of their encounters with Arab folk dances (Fraser, 2015). During the 19th Century there was a major arrival of foreigners into Egypt and North Africa, exporting visions of Orientalist fantasy back into the Western world (Chang, et al., 2017).

The influx of foreigners to Egypt included writers and painters in search of an exotic environment. These artists often became enamored with female performers not only of Egypt but other areas of North Africa and the Middle East. Their descriptions have varied from the clinical as in Edward Lane's *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* or the picturesque as in novels and dairies by Flaubert and paintings by David Roberts and Jean Leon Gerome. (Seller-Young, 1992, p. 142)

We cannot overstate the need to be aware of their Orientalist perceptions of what they viewed or encountered. Two recent authors, Ward & Fraser do thorough and exhaustive research with the available literature on sightings and encounters with Egyptian folk dance, with one major distinction. Fraser focuses largely on French and English foreigner accounts of Arab dance and Ward examines a large array of primary source Arab language material. Fraser makes an important point about recognizing the value of this European documentation. While the guise of these

Europeans may be tainted by Orientalism, it does not mean we cannot discern information and gain value from what they describe (Fraser, 2015).

Fraser's lengthy and laborious examination of what records and accounts could be accessed in reference to Oriental Dance led her to state that "Research literature on the dance traditions of the Middle East was virtually non-existent" (Fraser, 2015). Though this may be also an extension of the previously mentioned lack of primary source Arab language resources, or an acknowledgment of the lack of documentation done by native cultures. Fraser does refer to the work of Egyptian native Magda Ahmed Abdel Saleh, and her published work, *A Documentation of the Ethnic Dance Traditions of the Arab Republic of Egypt* (1979).

...(Magda) accords belly dance, or raqs baladi as she calls it, a legitimate place within this folk dance tradition... describes the paradox of dance research in Egypt. She explains that despite the fact that Egypt is known as a dance with rich folk dance tradition, both of its historical records of the past and research interests of the present pay little or no attention to its ethnic dancing. (Fraser, 2015)

While there is rich information provided by Fraser, I do believe that there has been a lack of focus on Arab language sources in the current research on Oriental dance and there is definite need for continued investigation into potential sources for past information and an improved approach towards obtaining Arab-language sources in regard to Oriental dance in future research. It is in addition obvious that the accounts of Europeans traveling or those working in the Middle East will offer a completely different perspective from the native Middle Easterners they encountered, and the lack of effort of scholars until this point to engage with these populations and document and

investigate their perspective, can be seen as a major failure in the effort to respect and support these communities.

As we have seen, throughout the 18th, 19th and 20th century, Europeans hold a much larger presence in the Middle East. Direct relations between Egypt, France and Britain are expanded greatly and as such we see French and British influence grow and Orientalism spread. We have access to many literary and artistic representations of Europeans' accounts of Arab folk dances throughout this era (Fraser, 2015; Ward, 2018).

It was in the 1800s that we see these dances branded by the French "Danse du Ventre" (Seller-Young, 1992), a name that would be translated into numerous languages and give us our modern English term, "belly dance". Though this obviously does not account for the diversity within Arab and North African folk dances, or even the diversity in Egypt, as they were all group together under this less than appealing umbrella term. In the late 1800's Oriental dance made its live debut in Europe and North America. It was at the Paris International Exhibition that "...a group of authentically clad Algerian performers" were first seen (Seller-Young, 1992). It was at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibit in 1876 and more famously at Chicago World's Columbian Exhibition in 1889 that these dances were first displayed in the United States (Seller-Young, 1992).

These events have been of much interest to the Western belly dance community, although they were poorly documented at the time. There continues to be much misinformation about who the actual performers were (Ward, 2018). While according to Seller-Young (1992), the dancers in Chicago were Syrian and Algerian but were billed as "Little Egypt". It seems as though at this time Orientalist notions took way, entertainment was the primary focus and the true details of the events were less fascinating than the exotic concepts they seemed to promote. Kraus refers to Carlton stating that after the fair, local acts continued to used belly dance in their shows. "Because the more erotic

performances enticed even greater audiences, some dancers' acts became vulgar and dances in burlesque houses began utilizing belly dance moves" (Kraus, 2009, pp. 600-601). This is also supported by Seller-Young who describes how the performer name Little Egypt was then used by burlesque dancers across the country as they performed the "hoochy-kooch" (Seller-Young, 1992), a crude reference to belly dance. "The movements, which primarily utilized the hips, stomach, and chest, were considered offensive within the Victorian Age that dictated women's bodies should be heavily clothed and tightly constrained" (Kraus, 2009, p. 600). This assertion of Kraus' will become important as we move forward into a present day and modern experience of belly dance. The reference to the Victorian Age is consistent through texts in reference to belly dance, oriental dance and its arrival in the Western world, as it provided the culture counter reference from which it was judged. Sexually, this era implied a double standard in society where men were allowed to be sexually adventurous and women were expected to remain chaste (Paul, 2006). The control and dominance that was socially exerted over women's bodies directly correlated to belly dance's use as liberating one's self from its confines (Dox, 2006), and its then asserted use as a universal dance for women (Karam, 2010). We can see this as a form of Othering, using belly dance as a way to explore and express freely what is not allowed within Western culture (Dox, 2006), but under the guise of Middle Eastern culture, Western women promote a universal dance for women, and thus have access to a new setting for their exploratory needs, sensual and sexual expression.

Society and religion have kept a tight watch on performers and dancers as a profession. Within Asian, European and Middle Eastern culture, certain trades have been given less credibility and therefore less morality (Nieuwkerk, 1995). The transient quality and questionable morality of performers has marginalized their profession throughout the world. Karen van Nieuwkerk's book, *A Trade Like Any Other* explores female singers and performers in Egypt. Per al-Qaradaqi (as cited in Nieuwkerk, 1995) "Islam does not permit any kind of profession which might excite the instincts,

whether through licentious songs, sexual dance, or other acts leading to the corruption of morals" (1995, p. 13). Nieuwkerk's work ascertained that it was not only religion but social dynamics as well. "The form and context of the entertainment and the sex of the performer were important criteria...Female performances are more controversial, and their acceptability depends on whether they cause males to experience arousal" (Nieuwkerk, 1995, pp. 12, 13). This observation is extremely telling. Women are deemed acceptable or not, based on a male reaction, taking away their agency and choice about how they display or use their bodies. According to Nieuwkerk, female dancing is considered the most shameful form of entertainment, though should this dancing be in a female only environment, it could be acceptable (1995). This then dictates when, where and how a woman can be and with what company. This transcends Middle Eastern culture as we can correlate these constraints to the same ones seen in the European Victorian era. Control and dominance being exerted over women's bodies, what they can do with them and where they can be, and how they can be shown. This has important implications for a modern-day experience, why women may choose to partake in belly dance and perceptions of Oriental dance and belly dance.

## Belly Dance in 1970's & The Feminist Movement

"While men and women of Middle Eastern descent have usually framed the dance as an essential link to their ethnic heritage, non-Middle Eastern female enthusiasts have generally treated it as a universal dance for women." (Karam, 2010, p. 87)

With the effects of World War II, women were moved into the workforce, out of the home, gained increased power and mobility, as well as more time and finances could be dedicated to leisure activities (Seller-Young, 1992). "The popularity of the movies "Zorba the Greek" and "Never on Sunday" and a large influx of post-war Middle Eastern immigrants with their native restaurants and performers from the middle east, made what has been far away and inaccessible, close and easily

accessible" (Seller-Young, 1992, p. 143). A belly dance boom occurred, and Non-Middle Eastern women began to practice and perform the dance professionally. Social and religious stigma can be accounted for why there were Middle Eastern musicians available but no dancers. Enjoying the performance of or hiring a female dancer was quite acceptable, but that would turn to shame if one's own female family member, daughter, wife, sister, chose to perform professionally (Nieuwkerk, 1995). This position was quite willingly filled by non-Middle Eastern women in the United States. Karam citing the works of Rasmussen (1992) and Seller-Young (1992), "By the 1970s, [belly dance] had turned into a staple of "Middle Eastern nightclubs" among US Arab diasporic communities while non-Arab US women simultaneously adopted it to empower their own sexuality" (Karam, 2010, p. 89). We will later explore how DMT overlaps with a need to understand the sensual self and how belly dance can be a tool to connect with and empower sexuality.

The women's liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s played an important role in transforming the interpretation of belly dance in American society. Chang et al. notes that the dance was adopted by feminists as a more liberated approach towards physical expression and the exploration of femininity (2017). "This once unacceptable presentation of the female body became a powerful means of transcendence as a group of women decided to redefine belly dance as a symbol of personal and sexual liberation" (Shay & Seller-Young, 2003, p. 17). This marks an important disconnect between Oriental dance and Belly dance, as the dance became appropriated within the United States for its own uses, cutting ties in many ways with the cultures it originated from (Seller-Young, 1992). It was important in this work to explore the different theories of origin of Oriental dance because so few students of this dance are actually educated in a factually based way in regard to that origin. For many years the theories, stories, and myths about the origin of oriental dance have continued to be perpetuated around the world and heavily within the United States. Turning this dance into less of a cultural folkloric dance and more of an orientalist fantasy based, exotic form of movement with few strings attached.

Once used to confirm the rigid, turn-of-the-century Victorian ideals of female sexuality as well as the notion of the liberated (Western) feminine in the 1970s—[belly dance] today often considered a "universal" genre by mostly women dancers in the West. (Karam, 2010, p. 87)

In an interesting and astute summary, Karam recognizes how a dance that has been used to confirm ideals throughout time is really a Western projection towards the dance that has changed based on the needs through time. From upholding Victorian ideals, to supporting women's liberation, to becoming a universal dance for women that is utilized in parts or pieces as needed, this Middle Eastern folk dance has been collectively picked apart by Western society. The recognition of this disconnect that is created through this process is imperative as its appropriation as a universal dance for women will become an important fixture of belly dance and I would argue has directly correlated to its potential benefits for female participants.

Dancers and entertainers began to modify the dance for their own personal and professional needs, laying the path for belly dance in the United States that leads the dance to develop far and away from its Middle Eastern origins. Some modifications were for entertainment purposes, to please American audiences, and some were purely choices to use this dance as a form of self-expression that could be modified as needed. Here we see the beginnings of a new space designed for the needs of the participants involved, the development of their own environment that allowed them freedom of expression. We can draw parallels between this environment with the therapeutic setting, and how it is used for the needs of the client.

As an example, what would become to be commonly referred to in the industry as "fusion", Seller-Young (1992) describes a group from Washington state:



An example of their work is *Phases of the Moon: Faces of the Mother*. It combines the imagery of the Moon's phases with four separate aspects of the goddess. The four dancers dresses as representations of the faces of the goddess (Diana, The Virgin; Venus, the lover; Isis: the mother; and Haket, the destroyer) begin the performance connected by a large silk ribbon placed in the center of the floor and decorated with discs representing the phases of the moon. Moving together they lift the ribbon off the floor to start a spin that ultimately deposits Diana, the Virgin to the front of the stage while the rest watch from a group tableaux. The rest of the work is a series of solos each representing a different aspect... (Seller-Young, 1992, pp. 146-147)

Zamara (as cited by Seller-Young, 1992) describes a solo piece performed in the same show by the now famous American belly dancer Delilah. It was created in collaboration with a visual artist, the title "*The Calling of the Oracle*" was a "two-dimensional piece that explores the connection between nature and the inherent power women alone possess" (Seller-Young, 1992, p. 147). "The movement style for the entire piece is what has become identified as belly dancing: undulating torso, arms and hands with movements that constantly extend away from the solar plexus and then return to it" (Seller-Young, 1992, p. 147). This is a clear example of American women, not of Middle Eastern ethnicity, using the movement vocabulary of Oriental dance, but showing a direct appropriation of it for their own personal expression, no connection to Arab culture, music or tradition. This is also an example of how far away from the original folk dance that belly dance started to evolve. This production aligns itself with many that promoted the mother goddess, universal dance for women theory that we've discussed at length, and is an example of the use of belly dance as a form of expression and feminist empowerment.

Though it is important to note that not all dancers created such drastic fusions between Oriental dance and modern, contemporary American dynamics. Some were much more subtle and some attempted to maintain a traditional esthetic and nature in their work (Seller-Young, 1992).

Although, according to Dox, even though there are dancers that put great effort in emphasizing the context and traditional of the Middle East, "No less than Orientalist paintings, the "ethnology" of 19th-century World's Fair exhibits, and early 20th-century European travel writings, these permutations of Middle Eastern dance play out a desire to know the East by transposing it into Western modes of representation" (Dox, 2006, p. 54). These are two different approaches of belly dance in the United States. One using Oriental dance vocabulary for performances where Western concepts have taken over as the larger artistic perspective and approach, and the other using less extreme adaptations to create Western audience-pleasing performances, but maintain a more direct connection with the roots of the dance although still affected by larger Orientalist themes.

Western students tend to attach orientalist-based notions for this dance or generally have little direct connection to the folk dance and cultural origin in the Middle East which was shown in a study by Bock & Borland (2011). While we have seen and discussed above, both examples include an altering of the dance and this becomes common, acceptable and an unrecognizable process as most students that come to the dance will not be aware that this has and is occurring (Seller-Young, 1992).

By 1979, more than one million women in the United States were taking belly dancing classes (Seller-Young, 1992). In the 1980's in the United States and increasingly in other countries we see that belly dance becomes "a method for primarily women to explore their sensuality and the power that some believe is inherent to being female" (Seller-Young, 1992, p. 142). Classes are taught in by majority non-native Middle Easterners who had primarily discovered and studied Belly dance in the United States and class structure largely follows Oriental approach of watch and imitate. From a Western perspective, classes could be seen as very hodgepodge, the teacher teaching moves from one

country, and then another, ending with improvisation where students are encouraged to use the movements in their repertoire (Seller-Young, 1992).

The growing popularity of belly dance generated a pedagogical taxonomy of movements ("Tunisian hips," "Turkish backwalk," "basic Egyptian," "belly roll," etc.), which parsed Middle Eastern dances into individual movements for studio teaching and gave belly dance credibility as a legitimate dance form. (Dox, 2006, p. 53)

These movements changed names from teacher to teacher, even today there is no standard terminology for most movements in this dance form (Moe, 2014). I would argue that this set the environment for a belly dance culture in the United States where appropriation and fusion are indiscernible from more pure forms of the dance, and dare I say, inconsequential. Defining a new culture were an amalgam of dances is acceptable and the dance is defined not by the culture it comes from but by what it does for you. Maintaining close cultural ties became an unimportant aspect of the belly dance culture in the United States.

As with the instructional aspect of this dance, we see also see non-Middle Easterners filling the role as the professional performer. In a socially constrained Middle Eastern community, albeit in the United States or the Middle East, women are not accepted easily as professional performers, lease of all as a dancer where the body is heavily on display (Nieuwkerk, 1995). As the Middle Eastern community grows in the US, the feminist movement is taking place and American women are connecting with the Oriental dance movement style they see as liberating, as well as expanding upon its original form creating fusions, connecting with goddess mythology and slow but consistently breaking ties with its base. Non-Middle Eastern women take the role of the professional female performer in Middle Eastern venues throughout the country, and a primary role in the instruction of

the dance henceforth dominating a dance genre in the West which does not pertain to their own culture (Seller-Young, 1992).

## Modern Day Belly Dance & The “Belly Dance Experience”

"In its contemporary use, belly dance is a highly individualized, expressive, and often improvised form of movement. Its technique and stylization are in constant evolution, which makes it ideal for personalization." Shay & Sellers-Young (as cited by Moe, 2014, p. 327)

Most women these days practice belly dance as a form of leisure, exercise, and recreation (Moe, 2012). In the past few decades, belly dance has grown markedly as a worldwide participatory activity, in part because of its value as a form of women's exercise (Downey, Reel, SooHoo, & Zerbib, 2010). Belly dance practice has also been tied to positive mental health effects such as greater confidence, body acceptance, self-esteem and happiness (Paul, 2006). As Moe describes, "[Belly dance] has also been associated with reducing stress and encouraging physical fitness, personal growth, and spirituality" (Moe, 2014), and this is supported by multiple authors (Bock & Borland, 2011; Downey, et al., 2010; Kraus, 2010; Moe, 2011; Paul, 2006).

We also see the development of several sub-genres within the American Belly dance community, like "spiritual belly dance," "goddess dancing," "belly dance workouts" that are adapting "belly dance to other trends in New Age spirituality, fantasy entertainments, and fitness" (Dox, 2006, p. 54). The largest and most notable sub-genre would have to be the creation of American tribal belly dance, which is in great contrast to Oriental dance in that it incorporates large changes to the music used, interpretive style and costuming such as heavy drapes, pack animal tassels, turbans as associated

with nomadic peoples. This sub-genre is now a major part of the worldwide belly dance community (Dox, 2006).

As a form of physical fitness, belly dance offers itself up to a wide array of participants. Important characteristics seem to be "moderate movements" and "no experience required", making the dance accessible to a larger range of age and mobility groups, with the largest of them being middle-aged women (Chang, et al., 2017). A study conducted in Taiwan by authors Chang, et al., gives us another perspective from outside Europe and North America about the perceptions and uses of this dance. Citing authors Crobsy, 2000; Downey et al., 2010; Holland, 2004; Sellers-Young, 2005, they show that within the last 10 years, the physical and psychological benefits of belly dancing have become to be ascertained and reported on through Western research, and such benefits include toning, fitness, improved posture, improved self-esteem, improved body image, social support (Chang, et al., 2017). Physical benefits among others, belly dance is now promoted as a form of exercise and fitness in physical education for adolescents in the United States (Marquis & Gurvitch, 2015).

In regard to their specific investigation in Taiwan, this research found that,

The beliefs of traditional Chinese medicine largely affected people's interpretation of exercise and well-being. Most interviewees in this study presume that belly dancing is good for both their body and mind, since they identify the dance mainly as exercise rather than as an art form. (Chang, et al., 2017, p. 42)

They also found that, "This study confirms that most knowledge about belly dance in Taiwan is inspired by the global belly dance community in which the United States occupies the leading role" (Chang, et al., 2017, p. 42). This information can help us to see why the history of belly dance in the

United States is so important, as it has affected global perceptions, understanding and tone about the dance. In addition, this study helps to fill a gap in research as most of the research studies that are done today are focused on the United States, North African and Middle East countries (Chang, et al., 2017). It offers us insight to another culture's approach towards belly dance, seeing it as more fitness than art, and as such, still associating it as healthy for both mind and body based on a traditional Chinese medicine influence. In large, the physical benefits of a belly dance practice can be related to increased strength, posture modifications, improved fitness, but as we will go on to explore, can sometimes pale in comparison to the psychological, emotional and social benefits of the dance. "Women come to and experience belly dance for a variety of reasons, many of which relate to enjoyment, building social ties, and exercise. However, there are additional benefits that are not always obvious, expected, or discussed publicly" (Moe, 2014, p. 329).

One of the areas where you could argue that belly dance has a unique effect is with body image. In comparison with other dances, belly dance has created a unique culture surrounding body image that has made it one of the most commonly referred to benefits of the dance. "Belly dancers have been shown to hold more inclusive body image norms, express a lack of pressure to conform to the thin ideal, and consequently have low levels of body dissatisfaction" (Swami & Harris, 2012, p. 41). This is in contrast to dance types, such as ballet, where adhering to norms about body image and weight are prevalent and result in more negative body image (Swami & Harris, 2012).

This inclusive body image and lack of pressure to conform to social ideals is expressed often in belly dance research (Downey, et al., 2010; Moe, 2012; Moe, 2014; Tiggemann, 2015), with special attention given to how it's used as a space markedly opposing to how Western society imposes body ideals (Bock & Borland, 2011). Jarmakani (as cited by Chang et al., 2017) has said

More recently, some members of the American belly dance community have promoted an inclusive body image, empowerment and self-acceptance as core values. In order to obtain a sense of empowered femininity and confidence, the belly dance community encourages a form of liberation attained through elevated self-image judged from within. (Chang, et al., 2017, p. 37)

This is an extremely large factor, as research shows that for women, body image and self-concept are directly correlated to each other (Cocklin, 1988). According to Cocklin,

It was noted that the cultural emphasis on physical attractiveness in females makes it almost a prerequisite of a woman's self-esteem. The importance of a favorable body image to women's overall feelings of well-being resulted in a preoccupation with the appearance and functions of the body. (Cocklin, 1988, p. 22)

According to Bock & Borland, "Borrowed cultural practices can resist dominant ideologies of personhood and challenge dichotomous notions of cultural difference" (2011, p. 2). We can directly relate this with the potential for how much of an impact that a belly dance practice could have for female participants as they are borrowing another cultural practice (Bock & Borland, 2011), defining a new setting within Western society for its use, and resisting pervasive Western ideologies. In the exploration of positive body image across various social identities and special populations, belly dance was considered a special population. Tiggemann found that, even with belly dance being perceived as a potentially sexualized dance and a highlighted visually alluring pretense, they found that belly dancers "scored higher on body appreciation and lower on self-objectification than non-dancer controls" (Tiggemann, 2015, p. 5). In this belly dance experience, social body image pressures are, to a part, suspended. Women are able to experience a more inclusive and supportive

environment for body image by culture borrowing and othering, which allows them to challenge social norms and creating a potential for greater mental health.

A study done by Angela Moe and published in the *Journal of Women and Social Work* in 2014 highlights the healing benefits of belly dance. In her work, we are able to hear more first-hand accounts of the not always obvious or expected changes that women undergo within belly dance. Moe's work, supported by Bock & Borland (2011), underscore "...the relevance of individualized creativity and stylization (in belly dance, and that) these benefits have been associated directly to the level of freedom and autonomy allowed through belly dancing" (Moe, 2014, p. 329). Freedom of expression, liberty in dance and movement will become running themes that correlate directly with participants experiences in belly dance, which are incidentally important concepts in DMT. But Moe is quick to admit that substantive and direct connections between belly dance and holistic healing are still lacking.

Her research methodology was based in feminist standpoint theory, "which necessitates epistemic privilege, or the honoring of the marginalized voices (of research participants) over other dominant-hegemonic discourses" (2014, p. 328). Her focus on "the emic (personal experience) as opposed to the etic (external social observation)", which gives us direct insight into the experiences of the participants. This approach narrows in on specific participants in the current research, and while we hear personalized accounts of experience in belly dance, it's important to remember that a varied experience for participants of belly dance is to be expected. However, the emic approach that Moe takes allows us to see what it can do for participants, not dictating that it happens for all.

In this research 67 women were interviewed from a Midwest area of the United States and asked questions such as, "How does belly dancing make you feel? Think? Act?", "Do you feel as if you've benefited from belly dancing? How? When did you begin to notice these benefits? Have they affected



other aspects of your life?", "Is belly dance different in this way (facilitating change) than other dance forms?" "Do you associate belly dance with healing? Has it helped you deal with anything that has happened in your life? Describe this healing?"

Through this study, healing from interpersonal harm emerged as a topic of great interest as 20 out of 67 participants expressed how belly dance had benefited them in regard to the recuperation, coping with or the overcoming of interpersonal harm. Participants in the research spoke about how versus classical dance, belly dance was inclusive, that anyone at any time could partake. There were common responses about community and how the dance helped connect to oneself and to others. One participant in the study remarked that,

It's the most expressive for me, the most accepting. Belly dancing is very size positive. It's very empowering, and it allows you to be creative. With belly dancing, the majority of it comes from existing. Everyone can exist in that moment and express themselves to this music without fear. (Moe, 2014, p. 332)

And importantly, how the setting and space allowed them to work through outside issues and experiences without needing to be specific. A belly dance instructor remarked that,

Almost anything that needs to be worked out elsewhere can be worked out in a microcosm of a dance. I don't know how to explain it, but the emotion, the backed up emotion, just becomes fuel for the performance. It gives you safety to be in that zone without risking things which are more important. (Moe, 2014, p. 331)

The themes discussed here are important aspects of belly dance experiences that go beyond the physical benefits of taking a dance class. Women find community and connection with themselves

and others. Though indirectly, women with past trauma are able to use the dance and setting to cope and recover. These experiences may differ for a belly dance experience versus a traditional classical dance class experience, as we can see othering as a vehicle to working past the limitations of one's own culture (Bock & Borland, 2011).

Notably, leisure activities can be overlooked as a healthy and necessary component of life. Gibbons and Plath researched the role of leisure activities in the lives of women undergoing breast cancer treatment and recovery and found that they could provide coping mechanisms, mood enhancement, social network support, as well as being able "to improve family cohesion, maintain contact with friends, exercise, relax, and have fun" (Shannon & Bourque, 2008, p. 86).

Another study done in Hungary explored the efficacy of belly dancing as a tool for rehabilitation in female patients receiving care for malignant diseases. The main focuses of the study were to determine the health-related quality of life, perceived social support, and overall life satisfaction in patients with and without partaking in belly dancing. Serlin et al., and Bojner-Horwitz, et al., (as cited by Szalai, Levay, & Szirmai, 2015) discussed the defined positive effects of belly dance with female cancer patients that included "reinforcement of the sense of femininity, the rediscovery of spiritualism, increase of self-esteem and self-confidence and the relief of stress" in addition to improved healthy body image (Szalai, et al., 2015, p. 61). The results of their study indicated that the participating of cancer patients in a belly dance program experiences better health-related quality of life, perceived social support, and overall life satisfaction than patients not receiving any complementary treatments. They also promote the potential use of belly dance with DMT, "In addition to their benefits on physical well-being and exercise capacity, movement and dance therapies including belly dancing may improve psychological well-being as they decrease negative symptoms and also reinforce self-esteem" (Szalai, et al., 2015, p. 63). As such, they find that belly dance may be an efficient approach that can support the rehabilitation of women diagnosed with

cancer. Chang et al., show that belly dance is already being integrated into the DMT field, “some licensed dance/movement therapists who know belly dance have even brought the movement and its ideals into their work with clients suffering from disorders related to body image or sexual identity” (2017, p. 37). We can see body image, sexual identity, and healing surfacing as large themes within the spectrum of the benefits from these belly dance experiences, and how this is starting to be integrated into holistic health treatment plans with proven benefits.

Another aspect of the belly dance experience to be considered is spirituality. Be it through the belief in belly dance's origin pertaining to fertility goddesses or ancient rituals, be it a deeper connection to one's self, a new-found feminine power, or a sense of community, spirituality has become a component for many participants of belly dance (Kraus, 2009; Dox, 2006). Kraus finds that through her research, there is a consensus on spirituality being defined as "a personal search to connect with the sacred" (2009, p. 599). Differing from religion based on the path taken to find spirituality and the nature of the sacred, such paths not needing to be traditional and art is found as a way for people to experience spirituality. Wuthnow (as cited in Kraus, 2009),

Engaging in artistic pursuits helps establish a mood needed for relating to the sacred by setting aside a particular time and space that is different from normal activity. They provide blocks of time for meditation, prayer, and deep reflection and an outlet to express feelings and emotions that cannot otherwise be expressed through everyday language. (Kraus, 2009, pp. 603, 604)

There are also sub-genres of belly dance that exist and specifically pertain to a more spiritualistic approach to the dance such as "goddess belly dancing" (Dox, 2006). Moe notes that it may be perplexing for those who do not understand Goddess worshipping to find that women are finding spirituality through a "mystical embodiment of a divine feminine" (Moe, 2012, p. 15). But she argues

that it's important to entertain this position because it may help in understanding women's specific interest in belly dance (Moe, 2012). Also referenced by Kraus and Moe is an empirical study done by Cosby (2000) that finds "belly dancers associate the dance with Goddess imagery and use the dance to embody the Goddess and connect to other women" (Kraus, 2009, p. 604). Moe finds that "the embodiment aspect may be conceptualized as a celebration of the female body" and as Crosby (as cited in Mow, 2012) put it, a reference to the "Archetypical feminine power which is strong, graceful, playful, seductive, transcendent, and joyous" (Moe, 2012, p. 15). Considering these aspects of the archetypical feminine power are important, as many of these characteristics are descriptions of women's experiences and connections in belly dance (Seller-Young, 1992; Moe, 2014; Kraus, 2009; Dox, 2006). This could be perhaps one of the reasons that participants are having spiritual experiences with belly dance. Embodiment becomes another important theme, as kinesthetic awareness and embodied experience are highlighted aspects of DMT and will correlate directly to the integration of how belly dance and DMT can work together.

A study testing belly dance as an embodying activity refers to Menzel and Levine (as cited in Tiggemann, Coutts, & Clark, 2014) defining embodiment as, "refer[ing] to the sense of ownership of the body and experiencing it as trustworthy and deserving of respect, as well as a key means of expressing competence, interpersonal relatedness, self-expression, and power" (Tiggemann, et al., 2014, p. 199). This study found that the most common response for participation in belly dance was that it was fun and offered a sense of being in the moment (Tiggemann, et al., 2014). This study supports the notion that that belly dance while perceived as outwardly sexual, is something done by the participant, for the participant, emphasis on how it makes the participant feel, rather than "the actual or implied gaze of others" (Tiggemann, et al., 2014, p. 204). And agreeing with Moe (2012) that, "belly dance may allow women a (rare) safe and creative opportunity for exploring and expressing their sensual and sexual selves" (Tiggemann, et al., 2014, p. 204).

As has been previously articulated, many participants of belly dance believe that the origin of the dance lays in totality or partiality with ancient rituals, female goddess and feminine power. For many of them, this dance connects them to something inherently feminine, and as many of the participants are females, they are intrinsically connecting to an aspect of themselves. The results of Kraus's study found that for those who found belly dance spiritual, it was perceived to be spiritual when, "dancers can let go, lose themselves in the dance, get into a zone, be more introspective" (Kraus, 2009, p. 612). The study additionally found that belly dance was understood to be spiritual for participants when it helped them form a variety of connections. "One type of connection that many dancers experience is a deeper relationship with themselves. Belly dance helps some people express and feel good about themselves and feel more content with their lives" (Kraus, 2009, p. 613). It's important to note that spirituality with belly dance was not a connection that everyone felt and we saw in other studies like research by Chang et al. (2017) where there was no spiritual emphasis placed on belly dance beyond its holistic health benefits. The studies that focus more specifically on body image (Downey, et al., 2010), cultural borrowing/othering (Bock & Borland, 2011), healing (Moe, 2014), spirituality (Kraus, 2009), have all taken place within the United States and the populations are generally white, middle class females with some variation, but this also mirrors the demographics of the larger belly dance community in the United States (Haynes-Clark, 2010). Kraus was able to discern circumstances in which a spiritual experience was more likely to occur, such as a dancer's attention being turned inward and connecting with something on a primal level. It was perceived that belly dance would not be spiritual if the focus was placed outward and on what was occurring around them, be it performance related, concentration on technique or non-related circumstances. Thus, whether or not a spiritual experience is lived can depend on the setting and state of the participant (Kraus, 2009). In later research on the same subject, Kraus discerned that within her study group there was a wide variety and range of how many people found belly dance spiritual and in what circumstances. Around 20% noted that belly dance was never a spiritual experience for them, and those who found it spiritual were most likely to feel that way at home

while dancing alone (Kraus, 2013). There is also variety across style, some dancers of a sub-genre may feel spirituality and connection within their style, but do not feel it within a different sub-genre. One of the common threads through participants who do experience spirituality with belly dance is connection. The connection that is made seems to relate to a deeper connection with themselves, those around them, or a sense of community.

The studies that have been referenced here show the holistic effects of belly dance over a variety of venues. For each participant those effects may encompass some, all or few of the topics discussed.

Moreover, given the eclectic and autonomous nature of belly dance, women may opt to experience it in a completely different way, putting their own meanings on the activity and subverting more common interpretations. The narratives here show the capacity of women to refuse stereotypical views of the dance and instead see it as something uniquely related to self-exploration and discovery. (Moe, 2014, p. 336)

This becomes a pivotal point in regard to the efficacy of belly dance. Because the dance has become so eclectic, autonomous, flexible and open to creating an individualized experience, participants are able to place their own needs in the class. Some of which become, self-discovery, self-exploration, personal expression, as these are all aspects of the belly dance experience that are promoted and supported. These are also not primary objectives of Oriental dance or Arab folk dance, not to say that there aren't therapeutic and holistic aspects to the folk dance from which belly dance originated, but that the experience created in belly dance in the Western world has created a space for this specific exploration.

Additionally, none of these studies here are claiming that belly dance alone is a treatment plan or clinical therapy. We should keep in sight that the sample sizes in these studies were on a small scale.

The academic community would benefit from future research in regard to belly dance with larger reference pools so that these findings could then be assessed in other settings and obtain more conclusive results. These studies, however, are showing in-depth experiences and multifaceted results about the quality of life changes that belly dance has offered to participants. The distinction between ethnic folk dance and universal dance for women, Oriental dance and belly dance, lies not only in culture but also in purpose and use. Belly dance is being used in the Western world in ways that the native folk dance is not. Through the development of a derivative form of the dance, women created a setting and space through which they can explore and work through mental, emotional and physical realities that pertain to their social and personal experiences in the Western world.

## Dance Movement Therapy

"Dance has long been fundamental to man's existence as an expression of life itself. To be alive is to move, to function harmoniously with the rhythms of one's own body and the surrounding universe."

(Chaiklin, 1975, p. 701)

DMT is a modern-day creative arts therapy facilitated with and through movement. According to Berstien (as cited in Panhofer, 2005), it is a specialty psychotherapy that utilizes the body, its non-verbal expressions as a process to promote the emotional, cognitive and physical integration of the individual. According to the American Psychology Association, psychotherapy is a collaborative treatment based on the relationship between an individual and a psychologist. The psychologist applies research-based techniques to help people develop more effective habits, helping people of all ages live happier, healthier and more productive lives. (American Psychology Association, 2018) In this instance, the psychologist would be a degreed and licensed dance movement therapist.

DMT belongs to a group of creative arts in psychotherapy such as art therapy, music therapy, drama therapy and it defines itself as the psychotherapeutic use of movement and dance within a process that pursues the psychophysical integration of the individual (Panhofer, 2005). Kossak expresses that, "The overriding consideration in expressive arts therapy is a sensitivity to each client's needs, rooted in the capacity of the human imagination to reveal creative solutions to complex problems" (Kossak, 2009, p. 13). DMT has grown directly from the modern dance tradition versus other forms of dance such as folk, ballet or social dances. "Modern dance has as its intention the desire to express the totality of the human experience through movement without limitations" (Schmais, 1986, p. 24). Many of the pioneers of DMT were motivated out of their modern dance experiences to continue a deeper exploration with themselves and their students. "[DMT] continues to evolve based on the confluence of knowledge built upon the therapeutic and spiritual use of dance through the ages, cultural anthropology, psychodynamic theories, neuromotor sciences, the psychology of the arts, and the creative process" (Chaiklin & Wengrower, 2009, pp. XV, XVI).

### Pioneers

Here we will discuss pivotal figures from the history of DMT in correlation with their methodology and application potential towards this investigation. This is not an extensive list by any means, there are many people, majority women, who have expanded and fortified this specialty, enabling it to reach its current status as a respected creative arts therapy in many parts of the world.

Marian Chace is typically established as the forefront pioneer of DMT. She, like most other pioneers that emerged at this time, had a heavy background in dance performance and instruction, but eventually shifted to a less performance esthetic and technical approach (Chaiklin, 1975). "She observed in her teaching that students who had no intention of becoming professional dancers, kept returning for dance classes. She carefully took note of their individual movement communications



and began to heed their separate motivations and psychological needs" (Chaiklin, 1975, p. 702). Her approach began to be client centered dance, which is incidentally a general approach within modern DMT, putting emphasis with the client's movements and needs within the space versus obtaining a specific movement objective or outcome (Schmais, 1986). She helped establish the American Dance Therapy Association, was its first president and worked extensively to promote, teach and share DMT within the United States and abroad. Some of the significant contributions of Marian Chace's work to DMT include; The Chace Technique, her proposed methodology, and organization for movement therapy sessions which are still highly influential in modern practicing dance movement therapists (Levy, 1988). The therapeutic movement relationship, the use of ongoing verbal narration as a form of reflection as referent to the group and or individual process, rhythmic movement as an organizing and clarifying force, and the use of dance as a cohesive group process, a form of group psychotherapy, were all important contributions and staples of her work (Levy, 1988).

At the same time that Marian Chace was developing DMT on the east coast, Mary Whitehouse was developing "movement-in-depth" on the west coast (Levy, 1988). "The individuals working with Chase, like those who came to Whitehouse, had little interest in dance as performance. They were seeking something more personal" (Levy, 1988, p. 51). Whitehouse was largely influenced by her modern dance training with the Mary Wigman School in Dresden, Germany and her involvement with Jungian psychoanalysis. These two spheres of influence would continue to balance and push one another as she explored them together throughout her career creating foundations for what would become DMT. Whitehouse's background in dance with the Mary Wigman School focused much more heavily on improvisation in movement than American approaches at that time and it left a lasting impact. There was a large significance placed on improvisation, creativity, and personal expression and this shaped her approach as a DMT (Levy, 1988). A combination between her dance perspective and her Jungian analyst influence, she crafted a unique approach to DMT that produced

6 major focal points; Kinesthetic Awareness, Polarity, Active Imagination, Authentic Movement, Therapeutic Relationship/Intuition (Levy, 1988).

## The Principals Behind Dance Movement Therapy

"Dance has long been deemed a holistic movement modality, especially styles that are premised on self-experimentation, improvisation, discovery, and empowerment." (Moe, 2014, p. 336)

Generally, DMT takes a holistic approach with the goal of focusing on an integration of the cognitive, emotional and spiritual forms of the individual.

Psychological and physical improvements have been attributed to DMT and can be categorized into five areas: resocialization and integration within a larger group system; nonverbal creative expression for emotional expression; total self- and body-awareness and enhanced self-esteem; muscular coordination, broader movement capabilities and tension release; and enjoyment through relaxation. (Ritter & Low, 1996, p. 249)

DMT bases itself in the recognition that movement is our most foundational communication and mind body integration is a key component of mental health (Chaiklin, 1975).

We come into the world moving; we are precisely not stillborn. The chronological epistemological development of all humans, their learning on all fronts, is first by movement and then by word of mouth. In other words, infants are not prelinguistic, as it commonly declared, on the contrary, language is post-kinetic. (Sheets-Johnstone, 2010, p. 2)

Sheets-Johnson iterates an important focal point for DMT, that movement and the body are our first forms of communication with the world and with each other. While traditional psychotherapy places a hard emphasis on verbal communication, DMT reintroduces movement, our primary and original form of communication, into the discussion, with the conclusion that this integration of the body in mental health had long been forgotten in the Western world (Chaiklin, 1975).

As defined by Chaiklin & Wengrower in their fundamental book, *The Art & Science of Dance Movement Therapy*, these are the principals that define DMT:

1. The human being is a bodymind unity and dance/movement is its manifestation.
2. Gesture, posture, and movement express the person and allow for self-knowledge and psychotherapeutical change.
3. Acknowledgment of the therapeutical effects of the creative process.
4. Dance and movement are utilized as a way to the unconscious and as a facilitator of different aspects of health and well-being.
5. There is a differentiation between the work done with an artist or dance teacher and that by a therapist. For us, dance is at the service of promoting health and change.
6. Dance therapists establish contact, plan treatment and evaluate it in terms of integrated knowledge of movement, dance, and psychotherapy. (Chaiklin & Wengrower, 2009, pp. XVI, XVII)

It is important to underline how DMT defines itself and what its principals are in order to contrast and compare it with other dance mediums that may have therapeutic effects or outcomes but do not claim to be therapy in it of themselves. Although participants of activities may claim that "such and

such" activity is "therapy" for them, from an academic standpoint we must hold a more refined definition of the difference between potentially therapeutic activity and clinical therapy.

With these defined principals offered by Chaiklin & Wengrower, we can see a holistic approach to health within its first principal and by the declaration of the bodymind unity that is paramount within the field. The recognition that gesture, posture and movement expression allow for self-knowledge and psychotherapeutically change. These assertions, as foundations of thought, hold true in a multitude of settings, not specifically only to a DMT setting, assuming that self-knowledge and psychotherapeutical change does not only occur within a DMT dynamic but that there is opportunity constantly throughout our lives, within our bodies. In its third principal we see the recognition of the power of the creative process, largely promoted and emphasized from modern dance, but application to many non-dance and dance scenarios alike. In the fourth principle we see the assertion of the power of dance and movement as a connector with the unconscious and a facilitator of health, which emphasizes again the place that movement, mind body connection, holds within a holistic frame of health, and as promoter of well-being. This is also not specific to the DMT setting, but one could argue that the objectives of the DMT setting are better suited for the promotion and facilitation of this experience. The role of a therapist goes beyond the expectations and requirements of a dance teacher and this is an important distinction, even while some of these principals have crossover in experience. Each is facilitating different experiences although there may be crossover between them. By designating the promotion of "health and change" the objective, it changes extensively the choices made by the guiding professional. In continuation, contrasting the therapeutic role and approach with that of a dance teacher or artists reflects the professional distinction between them. Dance instruction does not engage planned treatment for participants, and rarely bases instruction on the grounds of psychotherapy or psychoanalysis.

Within this definition offered by Chaiklin & Wengrower, we can see a holistic approach to health and well-being and various principals that are applicable to other settings besides DMT. One could assert that within therapeutic experiences, some of these principals are being played out, even if that experience occurs in a non-therapy setting, such as we can see in belly dance (Moe, 2014).

Nevertheless, the focus on the facilitation of health and change as a primary objective, along with the therapeutic methodology and psychotherapeutic approach towards assisting in this development, separates starkly the therapist from the teacher regardless of medium.

DMT is a specialized psychotherapeutic practice and as such, uses many of the principals of traditional psychotherapy. Donald Winnicott has become a foundational psychoanalyst for the underlying psychology support for DMT with his concepts in regard to; the mother-baby-dyad, nonverbal communication and body experience as it relates to the development of the psychological self (Tortora, 2011). Carl Jung has also largely influenced the field, originally through the work of Mary Whitehouse, which we will discuss later on. The strategies of intervention for DMT therapists are constructed by "creating opportunities to explore psychic material through the body, dance and movement" (Tortora, 2011, p. Body Experience). The main distinction between traditional psychotherapy and DMT being the emphasis on the body, its movement and a holistic focus on integration of the mind, body, spirit.

Movement change and psychological change are integrally connected. Cognition and intellectual awareness are of course necessary for change. In dance therapy, the body and its movement are the prime tools that work toward that awareness and the unity of self.

(Chaiklin, 1975, p. 703)

The goals of DMT are similar and also distinct from other psychotherapies.

Self-awareness, comfort with the self, clearer perceptions of others, development of satisfying relationships and an ability to acknowledge and develop choices for oneself are basically a result of the therapeutic process. Simultaneously, the dance therapist works with her client towards achieving a "healthy" body; a body not frozen with conflicts, tensions, distortions, and unable to act as an openly expressive part of the self. (Chaiklin, 1975, pp. 706, 707)

While DMT addresses the basic psychological needs and continuum of the therapeutic process as should any psychotherapy, it does so based on engaging directly with the body and movements of the client, knowing that engaging with the body is engaging with the mind and this process brings about a greater holistic health and mind body unity.

## Methodology, Concepts & Techniques

As with the pioneers, the aspects of DMT that will be discussed in this section were selected for their foundational pertinence to the field, as well as their potential adaptability and composition with belly dance.

### Mirroring, Kinesthetic Empathy and Being Seen

“Language is inadequate to the task of communicating internal states”

Stern (as cited by Tortora, 2011)

One of the important contributions that Marian Chace made to DMT has been the mirroring technique, or empathetic reflection. This technique was developed by Chace during her work with schizophrenic and psychotic patients in the 1940s (Chaiklin, 2009). She would observe their movements and create a mimicry, not focusing on physical imitation solely, but the intent and

communication behind the movements. This is now also referred to kinesthetic empathy and can occur between therapist and client or between clients in a group setting. Tortora (2011) references Winnicott's important theory for this, "Early on Winnicott (1958) acknowledged that the underlying basis of how a person comes to gain a sense of self comes from early body experiences between oneself, mother, and the environment" (2011, p. The Importance of Being Seen). Through the mother-baby dyad, the reception and reflection of the mother to the baby that takes place and shows the baby that he/she exists. This mother-baby relationship helps create a sense of self and situates the self in the body (Tortora, 2011). This becomes the first mirroring process that is experienced.

The discovery of the mirror neuron system gave way to a scientific explanation for why the mirroring technique was perceived to increase empathy and emotional connection. New research has focused on more empirical evidence for what has become a highly used and relied upon technique in DMT. Rizzolatti & Craighero express (as cited in McGarry & Russo, 2011) "Research on the mirror neuron system (MNS) suggests that the brain areas involved in perception and production of movement overlap, and that these brain areas are also involved in the understanding of movement intention" (McGarry & Russo, 2011, p. 178). This would mean that the MNS is helping clients and therapists not only empathize to the movements being made but understand the intention of the movement. In combination with information from Winnicott, this allows for a cyclical interaction of being seen, recognizing one's self in the other, and deepened empathy and emotional connection towards others. "In addition to gaining greater understanding for the client, when a therapist mirrors the client's emotional movements, the therapist is communicating this understanding and acceptance nonverbally" (McGarry & Russo, 2011, p. 180). Mirroring has led to larger concepts in DMT such as kinesthetic empathy and attunement, all based on an interaction with no verbalization required. "Nonverbal observation, attunement, and mirroring are core communicative tools dance/movement therapists consciously use. The information thus obtained is utilized to create dance/ movement and play-based therapeutic explorations to support deeper

expression and understanding" (Tortora, 2011, p. Nonverbal Communication). Stern and the Boston Change Study Group (as cited in Tortora, 2011) explain the exchange as "implicit relational knowing", our implicit understanding of how to be with one another. It is stated that this "implicit knowledge is non-verbal, non-symbolic, non-conscious, and occurs through body-based experiences" (2011, pp. Sensing Body-to-Body). Tortora refers to this as "body-to-body dialogue" and exists as a multi-sensory action that is done unconsciously and does not require verbal communication (2011).

Chace had a unique ability to "kinesthetically perceive, reflect and react" (Levy, 1988, p. 22) to her clients in real time, using her own movement and voice tone to reflect back to the patient. This landmark discovery is referred to as "therapeutic movement relationship" and the "mirroring" process was seen as simple and yet highly effective (Levy, 1988).

By taking the patient's nonverbal and symbolic communications seriously and helping to broaden, expand and clarify them, Chace demonstrates her immediate desire and ability to meet the patient "where he/she is" emotionally and thus to understand and accept the patient on a deep and genuine level. In essence, Chace said to her patients through movement, "I understand you, I hear you and it's okay." In this sense, she helped to validate the patient's immediate experience of him/herself. (Levy, 1988, p. 22)

This bedrock approach towards clients has continued to be the primary way that DMT's connect and communicate with clients (Tortora, 2011).

We listen, attune, and respond to the tones, rhythms, and multi-layered textures of our patient's expressions both nonverbally and verbally. We translate this information we have obtained through our embodied sensibility into psychotherapeutic methodology using the



body, dance, and movement. This is our way of seeing the person we are working with.

(Tortora, 2011, pp. Sensing Body-to-Body)

### Authentic Movement

"Authentic movement at its core constructs an experience of authenticity." (Schug, 2010, p. 4)

Authentic Movement was born out of multiple facets of Mary Whitehouse's exploration in dance and psychology (Levy, 1988). She was largely influenced by Carl Jung who upon distancing himself from Freudian theory, developed his own theories on the human psyche and thus founded Analytical Psychology. The research that he performed in a clinical setting and with himself led him to believe that "the structure and the process of a certain artistic production" (Farah, 2016, p. 542), such as writing, painting, drawing, as well as others, had the potential to be therapeutic instruments helping to give form to symbolic images that appeared during treatment (Farah, 2016). We see Jung's openness to the capacity of the creative process and art as a means to support the therapeutic process. Active Imagination is "a Jungian method of freeing one's associations to allow in all levels of conscious and unconscious experience" (Levy, 1988, p. 54). "The construction of a theory for the functioning of the psyche and its proposal for therapeutic intervention through art, which he called Active Imagination, allowed [Jung] and other people to create epistemological bridges for their works" (Farah, 2016, p. 542). One of those bridges was to dance and opened the door for Mary Whitehouse's pioneering work with Jungian theory as applied to movement in her sessions with clients and herself. This development leads to what was first known as Movement in deep and then Authentic Movement (Levy, 1988; Farah, 2016).

In authentic movement, there are two primary roles, mover and witness. The movers perform an improvised dance with the eyes closed while the witness(es) observe them from the periphery of the

space. "Similar to the process of psychoanalysis, movers do not direct or plan their performances but rather learn a receptive stance in which impulses and free flowing images provide the basis of the movement improvisations" (Schug, 2010, p. 5). These roles are interchanged, witnesses become movers, movers become witnesses, and there is a verbalization exchange between the movers and witnesses after the performances have concluded. They share their personal reflections in regard to the performance, movers expressing what they experienced, and witnesses commenting on what they saw and how that relates to their own internal feelings. Responses are focused on one's own feelings and experience as mover and as witness, not a judgment or critique what they have seen (Schug, 2010).

Active imagination can become a movement experience only if it is expressed on a level of movement that is not consciously directed (Levy, 1988). Within Authentic Movement, Mary Whitehouse worked with two terms, "I move" and "I am moved". The latter referring to an unconscious movement experience motivated by the "Self", the unconscious non-ego self, and the former what she referred to as "invisible movement" which is not void of muscular engagement but underlying emotions or thoughts (Levy, 1988). Mary Whitehouse's statements (as cited in Levy, 1988) about this experience,

‘I move’ is clear knowledge that I personally, am moving. I choose to move...’, whereas ‘I am moved’ is a moment when the individual relinquishes control and choice, allowing the ‘Self’ precedent in moving the body freely.’ (Levy, 1988, p. 56)

If you're consciously directing your movement, you're not accessing the "Self". We can easily see the polarity in "invisible" and "authentic" movements, one being asserted through the mind and a conscious process to move the body, the other being motivated by an internal impulse that requires releasing of the outward ego in order for it to arise. There is a debate as to what point the conscious

self participates in authentic movement. Originally Mary Whitehouse (as cited in Levy, 1988) expressed it as such,

The core of the movement experience is the sensation of moving and being moved... Ideally, both are present in the same instant and it may be literally an instant. It is a moment of total awareness, the coming together of what I am doing and what is happening to me. It cannot be anticipated, explained, specifically worked for, nor repeated exactly. (Levy, 1988, p. 56)

Later her work seemed to place more emphasis on "I am moved". Given the influence that polarity has had in her work, this quote here may seem very symbolic of the interchanging flow of the two opposite poles in this scenario. Maintaining a perfect balance between "I am moved" and "I move" would seem a fluid process, as she references the possibility for it to literally be only "an instant". She was also never interested in fully taking consciousness out of movement (Levy, 1988) so we can assume that this polarity in play is necessary, that there exists a natural flux between invisible and authentic movement, being moved and moving.

### Verbalization

Since Marian Chace started her exploration into what is now DMT, movement was not the only form of communication employed. DMT works from and through the body as a form of expression and process, however, verbalization has been a part of that process as well. As Tortora has expressed, to the extent to which our life experience is nonverbal, Winnicott and the formation of the "Self", implicit relational knowing, body to body relating, the mirror neuron system, all of these exist and develop without verbal communication. Her article explicitly supports the ways in which "non-verbal" processes are involved in the "being seen". Stein (as cited by Tortora, 2011) made an argument that verbalization can even be inadequate to express certain feelings and experiences of the

body and as such, movement is a much more apt form of communication (Tortora, 2011). However, DMT does not consider itself verbal or non-verbal (Bräuninger, 2014), and verbal communication continues to be an accepted and frequent aspect of DMT sessions and methodology.

There are many ways that verbalization can be utilized in DMT sessions, with great variety based on population, client need and functional level. Verbalization by therapist and client before, during and after sessions can be a potent and necessary element of the therapeutic process (Capello, 2009). Verbalization can infer many operation definitions such as; comments, approvals, images, sounds, observations, names, prods, interpretations and directive statements (Stark & Lohn, 1989). There is a lot that can be used and navigated based on the needs of client populations.

It is our premise that the use of verbalizations and sounds can serve to enhance the integrating effect of dance/movement therapy, and we propose two major categories of verbalization use: (a) as a stimulus for body action, differentiation of self, recognition and expression of feelings; and (b) to aid in clarifying and providing insight into the personal content of the material in order to facilitate self-understanding. (Stark & Lohn, 1989, p. 106)

As noted previously, Marian Chace used verbalization in her sessions at St. Elizabeth's. She used verbalization in support of theme development and guiding flow of the session, as well as using tone of voice during the session as an instrument of mirroring (Levy, 1988). With this baseline, we see that verbalization can be a tool, not the tool. Especially depending on the population, verbalization can either support or perhaps work against the session depending on the techniques employed, the functional level of the clients and or the needs of the group.

"While movement is the prime tool, verbalization should not be ignored. There is a need to develop cognitive and thought process in relation to movement in order to maximize its potential" (Chaiklin,

1975, p. 710). As Chaiklin states here, there is an aspect of verbal communication that supports the cognitive process in order for greater connections to be made. Mary Whitehouse also talks about verbalization as a necessary part of authentic movement and the therapeutic process. She would use facilitating questions for her clients, following her own intuition, "Where did you go?", "What did you find out?". She also verbalized moments of interest, not in an interpretive way, as an observation of the movement to facilitate more awareness and provoke connection for the client (Levy, 1988). Janet Adler, a protege of Mary Whitehouse's, who has gone on to publish works on authentic movement, expressed via personal communication in 1980 that "[Mary Whitehouse] encouraged talking to integrate what happened into the individual's consciousness; she was not impressed with catharsis alone" (Levy, 1988, p. 59). While Mary Whitehouse's own use of verbalization could be limited at times, she and well as others, reference verbalization of the movement experience as an important aspect of the growth process in order to include a cognitive and thought process that helps the participant internalize their movement experience (Chaiklin, 1975; Stark & Lohn, 1989). It was not enough to just experience the catharsis, it needed to be processed cognitively in order for it to create behavioral change, and through the process of verbalization, clients connected process and meaning to their experiences, thus allowing the experience to be internalized. When asked about whether movement therapy was transitory, Mary Whitehouse responded,

When it is catharsis and release, it cannot be anything but transitory; you have to come back and do it again. What you get is relief of tension and no consciousness. If the process in which you and your student discover things is made conscious, it is no more transitory than other kinds of self knowledge. The carry over depends on whether the value is placed upon raising something to consciousness, or whether it is placed on getting "out" something. (Frank, 1972, p. 45)

Mary Whitehouse used verbalization to support the consciousness of the experience, and like dance movement therapists, she utilized verbal communication and verbalization when appropriate or productive but maintain the primary method of communication and therapeutic process through non-verbal means.

## The Therapeutic Use of Movement

"If we are indifferent to the art of dancing, we have failed to understand, not merely the supreme manifestation of physical life, but also the supreme symbol of spiritual life." Ellis (as cited in Chaiklin, 2009, p. 3)

One of the paramount principals of DMT is its belief that movement by its very nature is therapeutic and in this section, we will reflect on the basis of that deduction. Along with the acceptance of this statement, movement in its very nature is therapeutic, we then know that movement does not need a therapy setting for this to occur. Dance has been used as an innate form of communication, expression, unity, and connection to divinity throughout time. "Within the earliest tribal communities, dance was seen as a link to understanding and directing the rhythms of the universe whether in the many manifestations of nature or as a statement of self and one's place within that world" (Chaiklin, 2009, p. 4). These dances took different forms in different cultures and focused on the natural rhythms that existed in life as well as giving structure and representation to important essential rituals such as new life, death, puberty, and marriage. Manning & Fabrega (as cited in Hanna, 1990), "Since the body is composed of universal features, most members of the medical and therapeutic professions erroneously assume that the body is experienced in a universal manner" (Hanna, 1990, p. 118). We can see distinctive patterns of movement and expression by looking at the

ritual dances that have come out of different regions of the world, an integration relative to geography and way of life (Chaiklin, 2009). We can reflect on the movement described in reference to Oriental dance and belly dance and how that differs quite largely from dances that have evolved out of Europe such as ballet.

As portrayed by Chaiklin, "Dance/movement therapy has a different philosophical stance. It sees dance as naturally therapeutic due to its physical, emotional, and spiritual components" (2009, p. 5). In the effect that dance encompasses the mind body spirit continuum, dance itself is naturally therapeutic within it of itself. This would support experiences of dance movement being therapeutic, dance being therapy, without it necessarily pertaining to a dance therapy setting. In her work, *Why Is Movement Therapeutic?* Sheets-Johnstone explores the levels of correlation and effect within the human movement dynamic and the reasons for which it is therapeutic,

...Movement validates and gives expression to an "I" not in the sense of self, a reified, conceptual entity, but in the sense of agency, of capability, hence in the sense of a kinesthetic/kinetic reality. Movement is indeed the basis of our experience of ourselves as capable and effective agents in the world. We can do things, accomplish things, make things happen-- and correlatively, we have the possibilities of changing the way we do things, accomplish things, and make things happen. (Sheets-Johnstone, 2010, pp. 5, 6)

As it pertains to this work, I see the importance of movement validating the self, capacity, and agency affirming one's self to be highly correlative with the experiences of participants in belly dance. Sheets-Johnson focuses on why movement itself is therapeutic, not the administration of therapy, and as Chaiklin has described, dance in its inherent form is naturally therapeutic, as such,

we can associate the potential for movement in belly dance to have therapeutic effect, along with all other forms of movement.

## Potential Implications for Belly Dance

"Dancing is not merely an exercise to be accomplished, but rather a statement of one's feelings and energy and desire to externalize something from within." (Chaiklin, 2009, p. 6)

Within DMT, and accordingly psychotherapy, I see the design of the setting as fundamental in its capabilities to provide for the client's needs. The use of the space, the time and the relationship are based on the needs of the client, it is there and open for how one needs it (Chaiklin & Wengrower, 2009). This design allows for a multitude of fundamental dynamics to occur in order for the patient therapist relationship to be established, and through that relationship, the therapeutic process can take place. What I think is interesting is that to a certain extent we see in belly dance the design of their own setting. We could infer that from some of the outcomes of belly dance participation, though they were at times not intentional or direct objectives of the activity, over a span of time a new space has been cultivated that allows for these dynamics to be engaged. "Of particular note is that these benefits seem to be related specifically to the level of freedom and creativity allowed in this particular form of dance, as compared to more codified and managed genres (e.g., ballet, tap, and jazz)" (Moe, 2012, p. 6). The existence of this space is also made apparent because we know that Oriental dance and raqs beledy, the social common form of this dance, are not invoked in the same ways by native participants (Seller-Young, 1992; Karam, 2010) as Westerners are using belly dance. These folk dances undoubtedly carry cultural meaning and significance, but what we've seen is an appropriation of these dances as they have been exported into the Western world, taking on new



meanings, new possibilities and as we're exploring here, the potential space for the exploration of new cultural needs and expressions within the Western world.

From the research that has been done, we can imply that there are common themes for participants such as; body image, empowerment, spirituality, sexuality, creativity in movement and fantasy being prevalent. Assimilating this information and its potential implications for belly dance, I feel impelled to return and refer to the holistic approach that is at the core of DMT. The main holistic health concept for DMT is in its direct approach towards mind body unity, accessing the mind through the body, the body being a reflection of the mind, and bringing awareness to the physical and psychic self through their integration. In such, creating a deeper connection between the mind and the body, a greater awareness of the body and self, providing deeper insight into the mind and spirit. Moe states, "Dance has long been deemed a holistic movement modality, especially styles that are premised on self-experimentation, improvisation, discovery, and empowerment" (2014, p. 336). DMT relies heavily on a modern dance background and foundations of self-expression, creativity, exploration, and individualism. While DMT's approach towards holistic health goes beyond this definition and the scope of modern dance, this description would seem to fall within the spectrum of the experience that participants can receive in a belly dance setting. As discussed, individuality, self-expression, and improvisation are large components of belly dance, and participants commonly describe attributes of greater empowerment and self-discovery as a result of participation.

There is also a component of spirituality that exists in the Western context of belly dance that becomes an important consideration in regard to holistic health. As has been discussed we've seen a large tendency in Western literature on Oriental dance to follow less evidence supported line of thought, and the United States being a large promoter of these concepts within its powerful position in the larger Oriental dance and belly dance community (Chang, et al., 2017). Within this microcosm of belly dance in the United States grew a new foundation of thought which allowed for

new needs to be met within the dance. One of these needs has been spirituality, connection with one's self and one's body (Kraus, 2009).

Cultural experience is an important aspect of life and as such, should be considered by the DMT field in regard to the therapeutic relationship and perceptions on the part of the therapist about patient needs and experiences. "Within a holistic perspective movement should be considered in the context of how an individual learns to move and moves appropriately to his or her culture, sex, age, and/or social class" (Hanna, 1990, p. 117). While Hanna refers to this dynamic primarily in efforts for a broader view of patient populations and the need to look beyond the Anglo middle class normative, I also see this in regard to the potential needs of Western females and their Western cultural experience. As seen within the Western belly dance community, many women find an outlet for their social emotional needs within the class setting. Though not originally designed for such uses, we can see how the adaptation of Oriental dance has been used in these settings for a physical and emotional experience that women are lacking in their other Western environments (Bock & Borland, 2011). The movement style in Oriental dance is in some respects in opposition, polarity, to Western dances that focus extensively on arms and legs and traveling in space. If we refer to Hanna's observation that we must consider how an individual learns to move and moves within their own culture, in this circumstance we're referring to Western women majority Caucasian, the introduction to a dance style that actively engages and moves from the core could bring them into contact with themselves in new ways. Fluidity and rapid activity through the pelvis, active use of the chest, abdominal engagement and dexterity, contrary to typical Western dance styles. Referring back to the holistic approach, the mind body unity, we must entertain the possibility and potential reality that these new movements, postures, control, and engagement would then additionally engage and active psychological aspects of the participants.

It may go without say, but need not be subtext, that the physical kinetics of Oriental dance and belly dance activate what are considered sexualized areas of the body. Hips, anterior and posterior of the pelvis, chest, breasts, stomach. As previously noted, the influence of the Victorian Era, female body and sexual control, contrasted itself with the seemingly free and sexualized movements of belly dance. As has been discussed considerably, belly dance is commonly linked by participants to femininity. Per Moe, belly dance is a physically creative endeavor that is linked with a gender association.

It allows women to tap into their physicality in ways that allow critical examination of both sensuality and sexuality. Certainly part of the attraction to the dance seems to be the consent it provides women to explore and claim a sense of sensuality and sexuality on their own terms. (Moe, 2012, p. 21)

This is an important notion and could refer to why Western women choose to participate in belly dance as a leisure activity. In simplified terms, DMT consistently refers to exploring movement in the body, and how new behaviors can be created based on that exploration. Oriental dance actively engages these areas of the body in ways that are not culturally typical movement for many parts of the world, thus we could potentially expect a psychological reaction to this new bodily experience. Belly dance could be one available setting for explorations of this type.

## Applications of DMT to Belly Dance - What does it look like?

"The structure changes to serve the purpose." (Chaiklin, 1975, p. 712)

I am inspired by this quote by Chaiklin in reference to the flexibility of DMT and its capacity to adapt to the needs of the populations and individuals that it serves. In my eyes, one of the greatest gifts of DMT is that in its adaptability, flexibility, and versatility, many seemingly simple moments can be achieved and there is a recognition of the power and strength in these experiences.

This was made most apparent to me when I worked with mentally disabled elderly in an occupational workshop during my second year of practicum. Moments of play, self-expression, moments to be seen and show one's self, allowing a relationship to form that supports the development of another's confidence. This setting showed me the simple ways in which a relationship and setting that support another person's needs and invites exploration, self-expression and supports the 'here and now' of the person, can give so much. I am reminded of Marian Chace, "I understand you, I hear you and it's okay" (Levy, 1988, p. 22). The reflection of this to the client in kinesthetic empathy and demeanor facilitate the groundwork for trust, communication and supported exploration.

The objective of applying DMT techniques and methodology to belly dance would not be to create another creative arts therapy. It would be to further support the holistic and therapeutic dynamics that are already occurring. As has been discussed up until this point, belly dance can be spiritual, healing, support empowerment, self-evolution, improved body image, increase kinesthetic awareness, provide a safe setting for exploration of sensuality and sexuality, in addition to the physical exercise benefits. These experiences are varied, and one of the powerful dynamics of the belly dance experience is that women are using it to their own design (Moe, 2014). This reflects heavily to DMT where the space is there to be flexible to the needs of the client. Thus, I propose an incorporation of various discussed techniques from DMT to a belly dance setting to provide the potential to expand on the present experiences.

## Mirroring & Kinesthetic Empathy, Being Seen in Belly Dance

Kinesthetic empathy is a common technique and a fundamental way in which DMT's communicate with clients and facilitate the therapeutic process (Tortora, 2011). Mirroring can be a dynamic that occurs between patient and client, client and client, or an entire group with the potential inclusion of the therapist. Through Winnicott's essential groundwork we can understand and conceptualize the importance of being seen in reference to the development of the psychological self, non-verbal communication, and body experience. Janet Adler (as cited in Tortora, 2010) "The term seeing in dance/movement therapy, the need to be seen, implies that we all have a desire, and a need to be known and understood for who we really are" (Tortora, 2011, pp. Conclusion–The Importance of Being Seen In). These three concepts offer a tremendous amount of amplitude, as these can be implemented in a variety of dynamics. For a potential implementation with belly dance, I think that an introduction of mirroring within the class setting could be engaging and beneficial.

Within a class dynamic, it is typical to have the teacher at the front of the class, students behind, in a mirrored space. Generally, much of the class is spent in front of the mirror, seeing yourself move or seeing the teacher move. Most classes give time for exploration of the techniques or a style, leaving open time for improvisation. There is generally little direct contact with others in the class besides chatting, if the teacher is correcting technique, or a student asks a question. I propose two dynamics in which mirroring could be implemented into a class setting.

### **Dynamic 1 - Student to Student**

In the student to student dynamic, a mirroring exercise would occur between two participants. Finding their own space within the setting and placing themselves apart by a desired amount of

space, around 1 meter. Student 1 would lead the movement while Student 2 follows. The main difference here is that the orientation of the focus of the exercise would be shifted. While most improvisation in belly dance is about using the techniques learned and interpreting the music, this exercise would focus on connection with the partner. Student 1 is allowed to move as desired, feeling free to create and change movements as they come, but allowing Student 2 to participate, follow, connect and feel. The role of the instructor might be to verbalize tones and ideas that are occurring in the space, as well as help focus the objectives for the exercise. "How do you want to move right now?" "What do your movements feel like?" I think that bringing the focus back to these points will be important because it is not necessarily the primarily advocated objective within belly dance. After this exercise has been introduced and students are assimilating, questions and comments about connection could be introduced. "What am I connecting to right now?" Both Student 1 and 2 would have an opportunity to lead and follow. I think that it would be necessary to leave time open after the experience in order for partners to exchange comments with the experience. While this may seem to break from the traditional dance class scenario, within fusion genres such as tribal and tribal fusion, discussion in regard to experience in movement, with partner work or in groups can occur in workshops and I personally have instilled sharing experiences in classes with general success.

### **Dynamic 2 - Group**

Making a circle, each student would take a turn leading the circle in movement. In the group dynamic, the instructor could choose to participate or maintain at the periphery. The dynamic would be consistent with that of the Student to Student, except the entire group will follow one person. The circle is flexible, students can change positions and go into other spaces in the room. The leader determines how much time they want to lead, leadership is passed to the right. Each student is allowed to move, and express as they want, incorporating as little or as much of belly

dance vocabulary as they choose. Because many women who come to belly dance have little experience in other dance styles, they would rely heavily on belly dance vocabulary for expression and movement. Verbalization on the part of the instructor could still be implemented, perceiving the flow of the group and focusing questions based on the objectives of the exercise.

This could be introduced with and without music and selection of genre could vary depending on mood. Within belly dance, the music is directly connected to the dancing and the lack of music might be jarring for participants. I would suggest that this technique, if implemented over time, would start with the use of music, and later grow to allow for the potential absence of music. The absence of music is not traditional in belly dance, specifically because Oriental dance adheres to a specific methodology for musical interpretation and thus movement expression. But depending on the goals of the mirroring process, after participants become more comfortable with the exercise, this could be a way to continue to develop the exercise.

### Objectives of Mirroring in Belly Dance

The objectives set forth for Mirroring in Belly Dance could be similar to those that occur in DMT but with modification for a change in setting and client desired use of space.

- Embodied Experience, Kinesthetic Awareness - In this circumstance one objective of mirroring would be to deepen an embodied experience for the leader and follower(s). The focus of the exercises becomes what they communicate with their body, and what they are connecting to and with, creating an internal focus on kinesthetic awareness in their own body. This conversation implies "implicit relational knowing", guiding this non-verbal

conversation, and creating a "body to body" experience (Tortora, 2011). This would be in contrast to a standard class dynamic where the objective is, 'I dance, you follow me, do what I do'. In this scenario it becomes, 'I move, you see me. What I am telling you? Let's have a dialogue.' This dialogue is an embodied conversation lead by one person but received and responded to in the form of mirroring by the other participant(s). From the position of the leader, you are made more aware of your own body, what it communicates, what you want to communicate and a recognition of what you see reflected back to you. From the position of the follower, you are more acutely aware of what is being communicated to you through the movement, bringing a kinesthetic awareness as you try and place what is embodied in the other, inside your own body.

- Being Seen – Being seen is an important objective of this activity. To be received in an open and receptive way from others, in this case, the participants following the leader, affirms the leader, and we see the leader reflected back, confirming the self. As discussed by Tortora, we all have an innate desire to be seen for what we really are, witnessed and accepted. Chace too believed that everyone, no matter how buried, had the desire to communicate (Levy, 1988). This exercise exchange allows for the leader to feel affirmed, empowered and accepted, as if to say, "as you are is enough". Per Winnicott's mother-baby-dyad, as the baby looks to the mother and perceives themselves and their existence, students will affirm their own existence (being seen), importance (being accepted), and their own communication by their movement being reflected back to them (connection to others).
- Increased Empathy - Another objective would be increased empathy and connection. Through mirroring, the mirror neuron system activates and can increase empathy and connection towards those involved (McGarry & Russo, 2011). In the mirroring dynamic the leader moves while the follower mimics the movement, the mirror neuron system is then activated by engaging in or seeing an action performed. The mirror neuron system helps perceive action and the meaning behind actions. The leader experiences greater empathy for



the follower(s). The follower perceives the feeling behind the movement, creates an understanding of what is been seen and experienced in the other and thus an increased kinesthetic empathy for the leader. The increase empathy that is experienced on both ends allows for greater connection and understanding in relationships and with community. This connection and empathy allow for the continuation and development of a safe space, and the possibility for increased self-exploration.

### Authentic Movement in Belly Dance

"Whitehouse's basic goal was to release unconscious emotions which she believed became "buried in the body, in tissues, muscles and joints..." that is, to make the unconscious conscious. She believed that this could occur if the individual was provided with the proper supportive environment, movement vocabulary and facilitation." Wallock (as cited in Levy, 1988, p. 55)

The objective here of "releasing unconscious emotions" which are believed to be trapped inside the body I feel has an immediate and current application for belly dance. As we've seen through the research at our disposal, women are already activating new experiences through a new vocabulary and cultural borrowing. Western women in Western culture, in confined definitions of bodies, what they can be and how they are allowed to move them, experience new engagement of their bodies in belly dance and experience it as an embodied activity (Tiggemann, et al., 2014). I think this draws directly correlation to sexuality, feminine power and body image that are common aspects we see women connecting with within the belly dance experience. Working with the pelvis, the chest, the hips, and abdomen, as having never used them before, we could see the potential outcome of an awakening, "buried in the body, in tissue, muscles and joints" (Levy, 1988, p. 55). Many women come to belly dance classes for exercise or Orientalist notions of exotic dance, but over time the experience gives them unexpected possibilities to know themselves differently, activate what has

been culturally repressed and immobilized. As Mary Whitehouse believed, providing the "proper supportive environment, movement vocabulary and facilitation" (Levy, 1988, p. 55), authentic movement could take place. It can be seen how the proper supportive environment has been created by Western women, facilitating a new setting for their culturally denied needs. The movement vocabulary, introduced by another culture with a cultural movement distinct to that in the Western world, has given a voice in movement to the needs of these women. Undulating through the torso, activation of the pelvic floor, movement in the chest and breasts, rapid and dynamic control of the pelvis, this new vocabulary can open up new expression externally and thus new connection internally. Identifying with the physical self in new ways, restricted and socially unsupported ways, within a new supportive environment, allows for new self-exploration and definition. *This is me, this is how I move. I am beautiful, I am empowered, I am sexual, I am myself.*

As has been discussed, Oriental solo dance is typically if not always traditionally improvisation based and the music also commonly incorporates improvisation (Haynes-Clark, 2010). The concept of Tarab, "ecstasy" is described as profound connection between the music, one's self and the setting (audience), producing a collective ecstasy (Haynes-Clark, 2010, p. 21). The objective, as if this was even defined, is to connect and explore the profound emotions and feelings found in the moment. I see the potential for authentic movement to support this original structure that is found in Oriental dance but has been lost in translation in its exportation overseas. Many classes allow for improvisation during or at the end of class, focusing on self-expression with the music and application of technique and ideas. Students usually focus forward, towards the mirror, and there is definitely an emphasis on the aesthetic quality of the movement. This could be a prime moment for the integration of authentic movement concepts.

### **Dynamic 1 – Student Solo Exercise**

In the time that is dedicated to solo improvisation, students are free to find themselves a space throughout the room. Students would be then asked to close their eyes and find a starting position, start from stillness and wait for an impulse to move. As this impulse arises, follow its movement and let this internally developed theme evolve within the body. Maintaining the eyes closed, allowing for moments of excessive or absent movements, connecting with the feeling in the body, its response, and desires, not the outward visual appeal. The movement vocabulary is not limited to belly dance but could include it. In the case of belly dance, music is an integral part of the setting, as such this unconscious movement could be motivated by music, or in the absence of music, motivated from a purer, less influenced source.

### Objectives of Authentic Movement in Belly Dance

- Increased Internal Connection – The premise of authentic movement is to engage with Jung's Active Imagination and allow for spontaneous and unconscious material to appear from the "Self". In the case of authentic movement, this occurs in the form of movement or dance. In this scenario with belly dance, we're looking to engage the same principals, waiting for the desire to move to occur, and allow it to take form how it sees fit. By closing the eyes, we are partially stripping away the external influences, "How does this move look?", "What are other people doing?", "Is this right?", and we place the focus inside of the dancer. By placing the focus internally, and giving freedom for exploration, we ask the participant to listen to themselves and trust themselves. Trust that their movement is the "right" movement, that their internal desire deserves to be listened to, and that this internally motivated expression is the desired expression, not something superficial (invisible). In turn, we can expect that this self-exploration could result in higher levels of confidence, empowerment, and increased self-esteem. This becomes a process of affirmation and validation. Whereas authentic movement focuses on bringing out unconscious material to

work through and process, this application of the technique would be used to support the participant in trusting their own instincts, connecting with their bodies needs and validating their expressions and experiences.

- Embodied Experience – In this exercise, we are placing the emphasis on an internal expression that results in a physical reaction. Whereas many dance classes focus blindly on technique and execution, this activity is designed to create connection between the mind-body-spirit, resulting in an encompassing embodied activity that allows for greater connection.
- Increased Confidence & Empowerment – This exercise is also focused on supporting the development of confidence in movement for the participant. Trusting intuition, instincts and listening to one's self, participants will engage questions such as "What should I do?", "What do I want to do", "What do I need?", and this exercise is designed to affirm their needs and choices. There is no esthetically correct choice, participants cannot see themselves or others, they are forced to let their impulses resonate inside of their bodies and act on them. This could be in the choice of invisible movement or authentic movement, it is to be expected that they will both be present and both necessary parts of the process, representing a polarity in psyche and body movement. Participants should not be expected to arrive at authentic movement from the first attempt or maybe even 100th. The process to move from invisible to authentic movement is one of self-exploration and trust. Through the environment, this dynamic aspires to support the participant to trust their inner impulses and through this process become more confident in their expressions and more empowered to move as they feel.
- Increased Kinesthetic Awareness – As with mirroring, this dynamic is designed to bring more consciousness to the body and to create more connection between the mind and body of the participant. As the participant closes their eyes and the emphasis of their senses change, the kinesthetic sense will take more weight and participants will be more focused on

their body. Starting from a place of stillness clears the pallet of the participant and allows them to start from the body and not the mind. As they move through the exercise, the participant will encounter a heightened sense of the body and how its movements resonate within.

### Verbalization in Belly Dance

"What I am interested in is a process that furthers personal growth. That is true whether the person is developing toward their artistic statement or toward the interest and self-knowledge that we mean by therapy or analysis." Mary Whitehouse (as cited in Frank, 1972, p. 43)

The rationale for the integration of verbalization with belly dance is in further aiding the development of those involved. Verbalization is common in belly dance in the form of the instructor elaborating on technique details, making corrections, and giving insight to stylistic or perhaps cultural details. I see the verbalization techniques used in DMT as an instrument to help students continue to grow and explore the space for their own needs. Verbalization also on the part of the participants could be integrated in a larger capacity. Currently, students can ask questions, ask for clarifications or perhaps make casual comments about their experience. As Chaiklin put it, "imagery and verbalization in response to movement involves individuals further" (1975, p. 710). This involvement allows the participant to pass their experience from physical existence to a cognitive process and then verbalization. In order to verbalize an experience, a cognitive process is necessary in order to internalize and make sense or meaning out what has happened. Increasing verbalization in a class setting doesn't mean that everyone needs to participate or will, but that time can be made during the class setting for reflection and sharing. This would provide the space for students to cognitively analyze based on their own experience, potentially hear and integrate shared experiences of others, and a deeper internalization of their own movement experience.

In a standard belly dance class setting, the teacher might verbally acknowledge the students as they arrive. It is typical that the teacher verbally guides the class through technique drills, combinations, and dances the class with the students while situated at the front of the room. Teachers may make corrections and details about technique based on their reading of the room and what they see occurring in the students. The class may leave time for improvisation, typically where a song is played, and the students are challenged to dance to the track until the song ends, this may most likely be an unknown song to the students. The class may also incorporate choreography where students learn a set dance made by the teacher.

### **Dynamic 1 – Teacher Verbalizes to Class**

In this scenario, a teacher could be watching their students' practice technique individually or experiment with improvisation to a song. The teacher can verbalize towards the class, taking in the needs of the students and place a focus in a certain concept. This concept can be physical, "Remember to point your toes!", but here because we're looking for a more embodied experience, it might look something more like, "Where do you feel the move?", "How do you connect with it?". During improvisation sections instead of, "Listen to the music!", "Take your time!", teachers could focus on helping students created an integrated self-motivated experience. "How does this music inspire you?", "What does it connect with?", "Where does your impulse to move come from?", focusing on facilitation of an experience and connection versus esthetic outcome.

### **Dynamic 2 – Students Verbalize Experiences**

In this scenario the class is finishing, the cooldown has started. At this point, the teacher could take the opportunity to lead the cooldown while slowly starting to integrate reflective commentary about

the class. These introspective comments can ask about challenges, specific exercises or personal responses to the experiences. In this time of stretching and cool down, students will have the opportunity to consider these questions. As the cooldown finishes, there can be an open space for personal experience sharing such as technical triumphs, continued challenges, connections made, sensations experienced, and explorations undergone.

### Objectives of Verbalization in Belly Dance

- Facilitation of an Embodied Experience – The purpose of the teacher verbalizing through the session and during the cooldown is to continue to facilitate an embodied experience for the participants. Because a typical class does not place the same weight in an embodied experience, this verbalization helps to reinforce that objective. Without being heavy-handed, teachers can place the focus of the session on the experience that is lived in the student, not just the technique or choreography that is being learned. This can stimulate further growth and reflection in the students about their experiences in the classroom and what effects those experiences may have.
- Cognitive Integration of Movement Experiences – The promotion of verbalization and analysis in students helps facilitate a deepened growth experience. Having a cathartic experience is not enough, with that experience needs to be a cognitive thought process to create meaning and definition to the experience. Through the process of verbalization and reflection, students will integrate their movement experiences with observations and create a more integrated and defined experience. While verbalization can be limiting and does not always allow for a full expression of experience, it can take a cathartic experience from pure catharsis to cognitive recognition. This allows the participant to conceptualize their experience, give meaning to it for themselves, and potential opportunity for new behaviors.

- Supportive and Encouraging Environment – In order for a positive growth experience to take place, it's necessary to provide a supportive and encouraging environment for participants. The verbalization from the teacher that guides the practice is done so as well as a way to support the desires of the students. Following personal intuition can be scary, moving from an internal or vulnerable place is not simple or to be taken lightly. In order to facilitate this experience, it's imperative to support the participants with verbalization that is meant to affirm and support their choices.
- Fostering a Setting of Exploration and Expression – In the desire to support participants, the setting that is defined and encouraged is essential. Belly dance in the Western world is typically within a setting that encourages self-expression, exploration, and creativity. Because the prospects of facilitating a more introspective experience would heighten the possible need for support, defining a space that is open for exploration and expression is crucial. By verbalizing during improvisations, the teacher is present with the student. By verbalizations placing emphasis on a personal experience and discovery, students are supported to feel that these experiences are encouraged and sustained. As belly dance does quite well already, students feel comfortable to express and utilize the space as they see fit (Moe, 2014), the verbalization, in this case, is only meant to further that.

## Summarizing DMT in Belly Dance

How do these techniques implemented within a belly dance setting differ from the original concepts? In the case of mirroring and verbalization, we can see that the same activities could enhance and deepen the existing practice without taking it so far as to make the pure focus therapeutic development. With authentic movement, it maintains its qualities in the aspects that we're looking to move from a place that is deeper than the "self". The "self" that is pure ego, all construct, all socially



constructed. "Self" reflects a true expression, which can also promote catharsis and self-exploration. These exercises are flexible to the desires of the participant, allowing their objectives to shape the way they approach the exercise. We all have the innate desire to be seen and understood for what we truly are (Tortora, 2011) and this is an opportunity for flexible self-exploration and communication in a validating and supportive environment.

It is an important reflection also that individuality, self-expression, and improvisation are highlighted aspects of belly dance participation in the United States. This open space allows for exploration of this new vocabulary, how it resonates internally and externally. This flexibility and already integrated exploratory quality make it foreseeable how an integration of DMT concepts could be applied. Another consideration to take into account is that authentic movement and DMT have largely evolved from the basis of modern dance, assuming that this would facilitate, through available vocabulary and movement, open and free expression allowing Jung's active imagination to take place. While Schmais (1986) sees other dance forms such as folk and social as limited by their structures and in contrast modern dance as the limitless alternative giving way to DMT. We see here that belly dance provides a structure that is needed for the enablement of the participants to experience themselves in new ways. We could also potentially consider that modern dance vocabulary is after all limited in certain respects and that there are movements and vocabulary in other dance forms and styles that offer embodied experiences that modern dance does not encompass and thus offer something to participants. As Hanna notes, we must look outside of our baseline populations to see what cultural needs are and are not being met (1990). I would argue that belly dance within the microcosm setting it has created in the Western world, has been able to promote, sustain and entertain ideas of female exploration in ways that perhaps other Western dances have not, in addition to a positive body image environment that rebukes the norm of classical dances. While there is research that shows that belly dance is in contrast to other dance styles that do not offer such a body positive environment, much of the research that explores whether or not the

exploration of sexual themes is present in belly dance does not reflect on whether or not other dance styles provide that outlet. We can see that belly dance can be characterized as inclusive, the average belly dance participant is middle-aged, it is a genre that makes itself available to non-dancers, no previous experience required.

I feel it is important to recognize that this is being facilitated through a partial appropriation of cultural dance, Othering, culture borrowing and Orientalist fantasy. Have women needed the possibility of Othering and fantasy in order to explore what has been culturally denied? This may be a reflection of the lack of space and setting for them to explore these dynamics in an acceptable fashion in the Western world. Behind the guise of Middle Eastern dance, women have been able to assert new control, exploration and freedom (Bock & Borland, 2011), while simultaneously diverging into new found territory that does not and did not pertain to the cultural origin of the dance (Moe, 2014; Kraus, 2009).

We do not need to see DMT techniques haphazardly applied to belly dance as if they were the same things or paralleled exactly. What I see is the possibility for theoretical integration where the motivation and the objective can be applied in part to belly dance. There are much individuality and exploration promoted in belly dance, but maybe at times this can be esthetic and focused on outward appearance of movement and not kinesthetic feeling or resonance. I believe that a focus on aspects like authentic movement's, "I am moved" within belly dance, encouraging but not limiting to belly dance vocabulary, with setting in mind, could offer a deeper connection with one's self through these movements. It could also potentially bring into fuller consciousness the impact of these movements and how they move within the body and thus affect the "Self". We see that over time, women internalize many different aspects of their experience in belly dance, indicating many of the benefits we've already discussed here. Could a partial application of DMT techniques help internalize more

fully these experiences, maybe deepen them and expand consciousness through movement, and thus broaden the potency of the benefits already experienced?

### Demand

Why is this implementation needed or desired? In the therapeutic relationship, there is a necessity for demand. Where is the demand from the client for intervention and support? Because this is a dance class and not a therapy setting, we must look at the demand differently. Why would someone who signs up for a belly dance class, want to partake in these exercises? Many participants of belly dance come to class initially for one reason, and through their relationship and development within the dance, their participation can become motivated for different reasons. Many participants perceive mental health benefits along with physical health benefits from their involvement. These implementations are an attempt at broadening the scope of those benefits. I see the potential, through these proposed exercises, to allow for the benefits that are currently existing to continue to evolve in a setting that incorporates facets of DMT without altering the setting so much that it becomes primarily therapeutic.

### The Client

An important focus and question in regard to this potential synthesis are, who is the client? What does the client want? While many of the pioneers of DMT started with an extensive background in dance performance and instruction, they realized that many of their students weren't there to become professional dancers. Regardless, they returned to class week after week with an interest in working on something else, something more (Levy, 1988). Though at a different time, and different setting, we can see parallels with participants of belly dance. Where the environment of the class becomes more about the experience and what the dance gives you and less about pursuing a future or career in the field (Kraus, 2009; Moe, 2014).

It would be advisable to articulate and advertise the objectives of this approach to possible students and to those wishing to join the class, giving insight into the potential for more internal resonance that could occur within these dynamics. One of the interesting aspects of a belly dance setting is the flexibility it allows for students to assert their own needs within the class. Without a determined outset, many participants come to a place of working through their issues and needs within the environment, even though others may be working through distinct needs and issues (Moe, 2014). The setting that is created based on Othering, Orientalism, a promotion of self-expression and creativity, a safe space for the exploration of sexuality and developing of positive body images, in extension allows for a microcosm of exploration to be undergone. The application of DMT approaches and methodology would offer the opportunity for participants to not necessarily undergo a different process, but support and deepen the process that is already being facilitated by the class. I do not wish to turn belly dance into a therapy setting, but one could argue that within a certain framework, the dance is already therapeutic. Without crossing the line from potential therapeutic environment into therapy setting, which would incur a set of guidelines and normative in order to protect the safety and confidentiality of the clients, I believe there is still a lot that can be explored.

I see the client ranging from a hobbyist belly dance student to those within the semi-professional and professional level. Kraus (2009) found that the longer a participant partakes in a belly dance practice, the more likely they are to connect with the dance in a spiritual way. The same could be true for other aspects, such as mental-emotional benefits, as they take time to occur. I think the client would have to have an interest in creating a deeper mind body spirit connection and have a general disposition for body exploration that could directly correlate with mental-emotional exploration. It would be imperative that the students understand that this exploration would not only be physical but psychological.

What people experience from a belly dance class is generally different from what they expect and that would be even more so should they participate in a belly dance setting with more DMT dynamics infused. This would not prevent non-belly dance students from participating in these classes, but I am motivated by the research of Moe and Kraus that discusses the therapeutic and spiritual results from a belly dance participation in the United States. As such I believe that this application of DMT techniques to a belly dance class would be particularly apt for those people who already experience the environment as therapeutic and wish to develop that experience further.

## Conclusion

Oriental dance continues to be seen as an exotic dance from a foreign land that inspires fantasy and wonder, but most of these perceptions are based on Orientalist influence and misinformation. The absence of a clear origin point for Oriental dance is a large contributing factor, as many believe that this is an "ancient" dance that refers to goddess worship, divine femininity, while others argue it is based in folk dances originating in North Africa, Middle East, and Central Asia. Much of the misinformation in regard to Oriental dance and belly dance is perpetuated by Western culture's pervasive Orientalist perspective, lack of direct contact for investigation and research, as well as what can clearly be seen as an appropriation of Oriental dance and the cultures it pertains to. Even in the way that Oriental dance was baptized "belly dance" by the Western world, they have branded and stylized Oriental dance to their liking. Belly dance has thus evolved from Oriental dance and deviated in an extreme way from its origin sources, such as Tribal Fusion, Goddess Belly dance, and such other subgenres. Belly dance is now a leisure activity throughout the world, promoted as a fitness activity for women, in ways a far cry from the cultural folk dance it comes from. We have presented information from both arguments in regard to Oriental dance's origin, and while an exact

origin is still in question, this investigation focused on what the interpretation of Westerners has been and how that has affected the dance at large.

This transformation into belly dance is characterized by the infusion of Western culture into its very use and expression. The United States stands as a leader in this transformation as many of the new subgenres were born there and the cultural influence is heavily noted. The combination of the women's feminist movement in the '60s and '70s and the commonly promoted idea that belly dance is a universal dance for women, set belly dance on a path for which we can see the results today. The dance style has transformed into what in some ways bears little resemblance to Oriental dance but is still referred to in kind.

Belly dance has evolved into a dance space where women can be creative, expressive and exploratory. Class settings promote improvisation, individualism and allow for the exploration of sensual and sexual themes in a supportive and majority women-only environment. The dynamics surrounding belly dance have created a setting that promotes positive body image, confidence and develop feelings of empowerment, community, and connection. It has also been found to provide holistic healing environments as well as a source of spirituality. Women have taken belly dance in a very individualistic way, sourcing their needs within the space and using the setting to support them in a personal growth process. Some individuals, on the other hand, go to class for the exercise, for the "me time", as a leisure activity and "because it's fun" (Tiggemann, et al., 2014).

We can observe the outcomes and benefits of a belly dance practice in contrast to other environments that promote other behaviors. Belly dance has been found to be an embodiment activity (Tiggemann, et al., 2014) that allow for a positive space for emotional development and healing (Moe, 2014). When compared to classical dances like ballet, belly dance offers participants a supportive environment for positive body image (Downey, et al., 2010) and produced a setting

where women have greater body acceptance (Tiggemann, 2015). The idea that belly dance is a universal dance for women has led Westerners to annex portions of Oriental dance and leave the deep cultural connection behind. What many Arabs see as an integral part of their cultural identity, Westerners have promoted as a universal dance for women (Karam, 2010) and under this guise have appropriated its movements, its supposed history, its music, and themes, for their own needs (Seller-Young, 1992). The result of this appropriation is somewhat surprising as it has resulted in a new Western designed setting for belly dance that has enabled many of these therapeutic potentials. Through the appropriation of the dance and cultural borrowing, women are finding a safe space and setting designed to support their needs which range from spirituality, exploration, and connection with sensual and sexual selves, community, self-exploration, creativity, individuality, and self-expression. It seems as though women have rejected stigmatized stereotypes about the dance (Moe, 2012) and at the same time, have disconnected it from its origin (Seller-Young, 1992), evolving into something that uniquely suits them, their self-exploration and discovery.

As belly dance provides a space to promote therapeutic experiences and opportunities for those involved, we look to DMT as defined marker of therapy in movement and a therapeutic setting. As a specialized creative arts psychotherapy, DMT uses movement and non-verbal expressions as a therapeutic process to promote integrative health, creating greater connection emotionally, cognitively and physically. We've introduced two main pioneers of DMT, Marian Chace and Mary Whitehouse whose groundwork techniques have paved the way for the current DMT practice. Focusing on the principals of DMT we can see how to differentiate between what is dance and what is therapy; it is setting, objective and role that play the largest part. While movement itself has innate therapeutic qualities (Sheets-Johnstone, 2010) and dance is an intrinsic part of expression in culture (Chaiklin, 1975), the objective of DMT is personal growth and development in an environment that is supported by a therapist, whereas the general objective of a dance class is more externally focused on technique, execution, fitness. One has an internal focus and a therapeutic relationship that is

facilitated through movement and non-verbal experiences, the other has an external focus and a class setting that promotes external examination and comprehension.

I have focused in on three specific techniques and methods within DMT, mirroring, authentic movement and verbalization, all three of which are integrated techniques in DMT that are widely used. Each of these techniques was selected for its applicability, foundational position within DMT, and flexibility. We've explored what hypothesized dynamics with these techniques would look like, potential objectives and desired outcomes. While these are theoretical explorations, examining the current setting in belly dance, the objectives of the techniques within DMT, the current potential outcomes for participants of a belly dance practice, I see these techniques as an enabling tool to create a deeper embodied experience for participants. Many of the objectives that occur in the belly dance experience are supported by these exercises. What these techniques could provide in addition, would be a heightened focus on participant personal experience, internal self-examination, an environment that supports bodily exploration and cognitive conceptualization, support for a deepened holistic well-being outcome, increased kinesthetic awareness, increased empathy, connection to others and deepened connection to one's self and one's body.

In conclusion, we can see that a belly dance practice offers the possibility of a multitude of potential mental, emotional and physical benefits. The space is flexible and dynamic, allowing for women to source their needs and explore themselves in a supportive environment. This environment is unique in that it's open to participants of any age, no experience required, it's largely female only, it promotes an inclusive body image, is physically challenging, has potential for spiritual components, is a safe space for self-exploration including sensual and sexual selves, as well as a focus on individualism, creativity and self-expression. DMT techniques could potentially heighten that experience. Using verbalization, mirroring and authentic movement approaches to facilitate more cognitive awareness of internal experiences, deeper internal exploration and embodied experiences,



as well as greater kinesthetic awareness, outward connection to others and inward connection to one's self. The objective of this integration is to support the experiences that already exist within the belly dance setting and facilitate the potential expansion of those experiences for greater holistic health.

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