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Diversity and Dance: Exploring the Therapeutic Implications of World Dance

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study examined the potential power of world dance as a therapeutic tool. The lived experiences of adult females ($N = 16$) were explored to understand the purposive essence of dance and subsequent benefits to mental health. Findings revealed 15 themes in total: 11 themes highlighted potential benefits of world dance, such as social support and stress relief, and four themes noted potential obstacles to using world dance as a therapeutic tool, such as access or finances. Implications for using world dance within creative counseling practice are provided.

KEYWORDS

Creativity in counseling;
dance and movement;
diversity; expressive arts;
mental health; world dance

The mind, body, and emotional interaction within dance and mental health influence an individual's functionality (Leseho & Maxwell, 2010). The mental health benefits of dance include, but are not limited to, the ability to connect to an identity or culture, reduce grief or stress, connect to a spiritual power or support system, and to develop confidence and feelings of enjoyment (e.g., Bajaj & Vohra, 2011; Rylatt, 2012; Sucato, 2011). The potential healing ignited through dance and movement has been used throughout history across various world cultures (e.g., Capello, 2008, 2013, 2015; Wennerstrand, 2008). Although dance and movement therapy (DMT) is a popular method of using the therapeutic properties of dance, the utility of world dance within a western population is underexplored. The purpose of this research was to explore the lived experiences of adult American women who use world dance as a powerful healing mechanism. Further, the researchers wanted to explore the potential healing factors in world dance to provide implications for the field of creativity in counseling.

Benefits of dance

Dance integrates the coordination of intentional body movements. Synchronization with rhythmical stimuli permits the activation of both the conscious and the unconscious processes of the brain (Murcia, Kreutz, Clift,

& Bongard, 2010; Panhofer, 2011). The benefits of this combination have been well documented in the literature (e.g., Noice, Noice, & Kramer, 2013; Tiggeman, Coutts, & Clark, 2014; Vetter, Myllykangas, Donorfio, & Foose, 2011). A quasi-experimental group design-based study with older adults, ages 60–94, reviewed the positive outcomes of nonexercise related dance and the results indicated an enhancement in physical and cognitive functioning: improved resting heart rate, better posture and balance, faster reaction times, and improved tactile and motor performance. In addition, social dancing was the only physical leisure activity associated with a decrease in the risk of dementia (Noice et al., 2013).

The apparent linkage between mind and body within dance prompts a healing process; Tiggeman et al. (2014) observed increased positive outcomes in 112 belly dancers when compared to 102 nondancing college women, in areas of healing and well-being, spirituality, sense of community, and empowerment. In a study examining stress reduction with caregivers, Vetter et al. (2011) used dance as an intervention for catharsis. Caregivers reported feeling relieved, energized, and supported at the end of each dance class. Similarly, as participants' comfort with expression through dance increased, there was an increase in trust of self and others.

To date, little has been written about the therapeutic implications of contemporary world dance from a counseling perspective. A majority of the literature explores western dance and the concept of dance and movement therapy. Considering the healing qualities recognized in the literature, the researchers sought to explore the potential therapeutic properties of world dance at large. Therefore, this qualitative study was conducted to better understand the experiences of individuals involved in world dance, whether world dance has therapeutic benefits to participants, and if so, what implications can be derived for counseling practice.

Dance movement therapy

Dance movement therapy (DMT) is defined by the American Dance Therapy Association as “the psychotherapeutic use of movement to further the emotional, cognitive, physical and social integration of the individual” (American Dance Therapy Association, 2013, para. 1). This form of therapy is practiced in a number of settings, including, but not limited to, medical, educational, rehabilitation, and mental health (American Dance Therapy Association, 2013). There have been a number of studies conducted to examine how DMT influences health. In a meta-analysis exploring the effects of DMT on health-related psychological outcomes, Koch, Kunz, Lykou, and Cruz (2014) results suggested that DMT is effective for increasing quality of life, body image, positive mood, and affect. DMT is also effective in decreasing clinical symptoms such as depression and

anxiety. A separate meta-analysis by Neto, Menezes, and Carvalho (2014) examined the effects of DMT in patients with chronic heart failure compared to a conventional exercise regimen. Typical exercise regimens measure peak oxygen consumption (VO₂) to determine the effectiveness of the intervention. In general, improvements in VO₂ above 10% represents a good prognosis in patients with heart failure. Their meta-analysis showed a 26.4% improvement in peak VO₂ of the dance group; furthermore, the dance group showed a 12% improvement in quality of life.

Dance and movement therapy has been implemented in various settings with diverse populations. For example, DMT has shown promising results with children with autism spectrum disorder in both individual and group settings. In case studies, DMT has been shown to promote creative expression, toleration of physical touch, maintenance of eye contact, and social engagement (Scharoun, Reinders, Bryden, & Fletcher, 2014). In addition, DMT has been effective in relieving symptoms of depression and anxiety and increasing positive affect, such as smiling, laughing, feeling hopeful, acceptance from self and others, and feeling strong (Gordon, 2014). The use of DMT for the geriatric population has also shown in improvements in general mental health. In a study exploring the use of DMT in older adults, participants demonstrated statistically significant increases in performance on standard cognitive and physiological measures. Furthermore, participants scored higher on a questionnaire that evaluated general health, subjective well-being, and tasks of daily living, when compared to nondancers (Noice et al., 2013). These results indicate that DMT not only has benefits for clients' mental health, but also for the physiological well-being.

Therapeutic dance

Although DMT is a specific style of intervention used in a number of different settings by trained and certified therapists, many professionals inspired by the benefits of dance use therapeutic dance as an adjunct to counseling with their clients. Dance is universal in that it transcends all cultures. In Western cultures, it is often a tool used for self-expression and to convey personality and ideas. In Eastern cultures, dance often serves as a form of spiritual expression (Bajaj & Vohra, 2011). Although it is interpreted differently in diverse cultures and individuals, the benefits of dance are universal. Mills and Daniluk (2002) conducted a study and found that therapeutic dance influenced social support and healing in female survivors of child sexual abuse; the physical movements allowed them to connect to their inner selves and release painful emotions. In another study, the use of therapeutic dance increased psychiatric clients' capability to communicate and express themselves (Heber, 1993). In our study, we aimed to further explore the potential mental health benefits of therapeutic world dance.

Theoretical lens

We used a social constructivist framework for this study. This lens allows us to recognize that individuals develop subjective interpretations of the world through their experiences, hence, meanings are vast and varied (Creswell, 2013). A social constructivist perspective allows us to acknowledge the complexity of meaning and to guide our analyses as we employ a method that seeks to understand the spectrum of experiences rather than to narrow, refine, or potentially minimize experiences. Therefore, we used broad, general questions to allow for the freedom of expression. The social constructivist perspective allowed us to conduct aesthetic research in which an empathic relationship was fostered between the researchers and participants (Kim, 2014). The variance in answers provided is explored in relation to the participants' worldview. In addition, context is examined in relation to the position of future clients and potential implications for creative counseling. Overall, a social constructive lens was chosen as the conceptualization provides an appropriate framework for phenomenological research (Moustakas, 1994). Because our aim was to explore the phenomenon of world dance and mental health we used a phenomenological approach to our study (Moustakas, 1994). This inquiry permitted us to examine the lived and shared experiences in addition to underlying meaning. The phenomenological approach of examining "what" and "how" helped to guide us in our methodology, data collection, and data analysis (Creswell, 2013).

Method

We chose to use a qualitative methodology in our discover-oriented, holistic research (Forman, Creswell, Damschroder, Kowalski, & Krein, 2008). A focus group research design was selected to permit collaboration and assist in the understanding of personal experiences and opinions regarding world dance (Gibbs, 1997; Morgan, 1997; Sagoe, 2012). The interaction that occurred within the focus groups allowed rich, meaningful data to be harvested that would not have been obtained in individual interviews (Krueger & Casey, 2009). Further, the focus group format permits exploration and clarification of views that would be less accessible in an interview style (Kitzinger, 1995). Participants were recruited from a dance studio in central Florida; however, because of the variety of world dance interest, more than half of the participants attended more than one local dance studio. This homogeneity allows for the richness of the data (Creswell, 2013). The focus groups were held in the dance studio in which all participants were members to provide a point of neutrality, control for artificial environment, and strengthen research quality (Sagoe, 2012).

Participants

Approval was granted by the institutional review board prior to data collection. Criterion sampling was used to identify and understand cases that were information-rich (Patton, 2002). Participants were identified on the following factors (a) adult above the age of 18, (b) experience with at least one world dance, and (c) and a weekly minimum average of 1 hour of dance. The total sample included sixteen women who ranged in age from 20s to 60s. No additional demographic information was used in this analysis. The sample was divided into 2 hr-long focus groups in an effort to increase the quality of exchange among members (Brown, 1999; Krueger & Casey, 2009). The participants covered a vast range of world dances; the styles of dance reported included bachata, bellydance, bollywood, chacha, country, disco, foxtrot, Greek, hustle, Indian classical dance, jazz, Middle Eastern folk dance, Persian, Romani, rumba, salsa, swing, tap, and the waltz. Participants ranged in world dance engagement per week; the minimum involvement level was one class per week, whereas the maximum noted was an average of 20 hours weekly. The women also ranged in dance experience; some women reported dancing since youth whereas others reported starting within the past year. Range of expertise also varied as a majority of the participants identified as students, however, four participants identified as professional dancers with seven to thirty-five years of dance experience.

Data collection

Participants who expressed interest were sent a packet including the (a) informed consent, (b) description of research, and (c) preliminary questions form. The preliminary questions included details about dance experience, types of dance, and weekly dance participation. Shainna Ali served as the moderator and conducted the interviews. Three main open-ended inquiries led the discussion. Participants were asked to share their (a) experiences with world dance, (b) motivations to partake in world dance, and (c) perceived benefits from world dance. In an effort to ensure accuracy, a digital recording device was used to record the depth of information exchanged within the focus groups (Barnett, 2002). The two audio files were exported to an external transcription service to transcribe verbatim.

Trustworthiness

Researchers are seen as instruments in qualitative method (Guba & Lincoln, 2008). To account for researcher and overall bias, multiple steps were taken throughout the process in order to improve data quality (Creswell, 2013). Methods used to enhance trustworthiness included (a) prolonged engagement, (b) reflective notes, (c) bracketing, and (d) triangulation.

Trust is imperative in fostering rapport with participants (Creswell, 2013). Purposeful sampling was used to permit participation from individuals who may have previously known the primary researcher. Although not all participants were familiar with the primary researcher, several participants did know the facilitator prior to the initiation of the research study. Because of the shared experience of dance, this method was taken to allow individuals to feel safe and comfortable to share their experiences. In addition, this method allowed for openness, which permitted participants to contact the researcher after the focus groups to provide further information and to check the quality of the data.

To account for the potential bias of the primary researcher, reflective notes were used to track thoughts, assumptions, feelings, and inquiries that arose during the research study. This reflexive practice allowed the primary researcher to explore potential influences and biases and to conceptualize the data (Cope, 2014). These notes were shared with the second and third researchers after the first round of coding. This sequence of steps was intentional as it allowed the additional researchers to be uninfluenced by the primary investigator's experience and impressions. In addition, at this time the research team reflected as a group to explore biases and to determine how to minimize such influences for the duration of the research analysis.

In addition to the reflective journal, bracketing was used to recognize potential biases that apply to the each member of the research team (Creswell, 2013). The team engaged in a bracketing exercise to assist in heightening awareness to potential predispositions. The bracketing discussion occurred on three levels: members discussed (a) their assumptions and partialities regarding topic and population, (b) their assumptions and projections about the results of the study, and (c) their identity as a person and researcher and how said identity could potentially influence the research process. The discussion promoted openness among the team members and provided opportunities for accountability in the data collection and analysis. This exercise was completed to allow researchers to be actively aware of, and engage, their past experiences in reference to the study (Giorgi, 2009).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that triangulation is the most critical way to establish credibility in qualitative research. As a form of analyst triangulation the three researchers reviewed findings separately to reduce bias (Patton, 1999). The team then processed their findings and sought to achieve inter-coder agreement (Creswell, 2013). Since qualitative methods are iterative we revisited the table of themes and codes after the second transcription (Forman et al., 2008). If the table needed to be changed to align with the overall data, the team would arrive at a consensus as to how to proceed with alterations. In addition to revisiting data within the research team, participants were also given the power to provide feedback in the process.

As suggested by Krueger and Casey (2009), the main points of the discussion were summarized at the conclusion of the focus group interviews. Participants

were asked if the summary was accurate and comments, amendments, or corrections were invited. After coding the transcripts the draft table of themes was provided to focus group participants to allow them to provide feedback (i.e., agreements and discrepancies) on our findings (Patton, 1999). The member checking process provided us with mostly compatible information. Two aspects of feedback were noteworthy; one response expanded our understanding of social support and another highlighted an obstacle that had not clearly emerged from the literature (i.e., stereotypes).

Data analysis

Through the process of horizontalization, researchers searched for significant statements that were linked to the phenomenon of mental health benefits of world dance (Moustakas, 1994).

Researchers first coded separately and then collaborated in determining intercoder agreement (Creswell, 1999). Our narrow units were coded into meaning units, thus creating a table of themes. For integrity analysis we considered alternatives and possibilities to our initial codes and determined which option best fit the research inquiries (Patton, 1999)

Three main research questions led the discussion; participants were asked to share their (a) experiences with world dance, (b) motivations to partake in world dance, and (c) perceived benefits from world dance. Although we had questions to guide our inquiry, our phenomenological approach allowed us to openly code the data (Moustakas, 1994). Our inquiry of motivations for dance provided deeper data than expected; rather than a simple reason for dancing, the deeper purpose attached to dance in the participants' lives became visible. The purpose blended with the theme of benefits. Because of the unique meaning-making experience of world dance, themes listed in benefits ranged from positive aspects of dance to deeper, meaningful aspects of dance. In exploring the gains from world dance, a natural contrast emerged from the discussions that highlighted obstacles from world dance. These obstacles were seen as aspects of life that inhibited an individual's ability or enjoyment of dance.

Results

The results of our analysis display the common lived experiences of women who partake in world dance. The essence of the data equates to benefits and obstacles of world dance. Emergent themes included 11 benefits and four obstacles.

Benefits

Eleven benefits emerged from our data: (a) acceptance, (b) achievement, (c) creativity, (d) career, (e) culture, (f) expression, (g) happiness, (h) healing, (i)

health, (j), social support, and (k) stress relief. From the transcripts, it was evident that there were multiple benefits. We revisited the data several times to determine the appropriate labels to encompass the experience of the participants. In addition, member checking allowed us to clarify and substantiate our themes.

Acceptance

Participants shared that their experience with world dance provided them with increased acceptance. Several participants disclosed having concerns with body-image and self-perception. Many of the global styles in which the participants engaged in do not assert a certain body type; instead, the beauty of diversity in dance and bodies are highlighted. One participant shared that exposure to her body in different mediums (i.e., mirror, photos, and videos) helped to increase her self-acceptance:

For many years, I've been obsessed with my weight, obsessed ... but I think it wasn't until I started dancing and seeing either photos of myself or recordings or just ... even watching myself in the mirror, that, like, I began to appreciate myself.

For me, it's the best feeling in the world because I was in tears every day looking at myself. Because when I looked in the mirror, I did not see what everybody else did.

Dance provided participants with an opportunity to recognize the variety of body shapes and to be comfortable in their own skin and to appreciate diverse shapes in others as well. For example, one participant shared that dance allowed her to “let [herself] go and be.” Another participant stated, “You see more of the beauty of yourself and you see the beauty in other women.”

Achievement

Participants shared that world dance provides a healthy challenge. Regardless of learning style or ability, working on goals within dance allowed the women to feel challenged and subsequently enjoy the rewards of achievement. “Sometimes it's really challenging. I'm not the fastest learner at that time, but, like, I'll try, I'll try until I get it. I like that as a challenge, and it's fun.” In addition, the social environment provided for modeling, support, and encouragement. In reflecting on seeing her peer one participant shared her inspiration to achieve. “I just thought, that's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen; I've got to have that.”

Creativity

Participants recognized the power of world dance as an expressive art and shared that dance provided them with a creative outlet. One participant recognized that dance allowed her to conflate several aspects that she has

found enjoyable throughout her life. “Eventually I realized this, that it combined elements of artistry, music ... and athleticism. I really love all those things and dance combines all of that.” Further, an individual who had no prior related experience shared that the creative aspect of world dance was appealing to her as well. She noted that world dance can be beneficial to individuals without prior experience once the individual is open to the therapeutic values.

Anybody can come in, and as long as they’re willing to relax and learn something about it and experience that music and that feel and that movement. It’s something almost like a basic instinct that you feel when you hear drum beat or when you hear the music going through that, you know, I can get into this. I can relax.

Career

It is important to note that in our sample, although all participants identified as students, some participants also identified as professional artists. These individuals were quite open about the curative factors of dance throughout their lives. Participants shared that world dance allows them to fulfill their dreams of being professional artists, provides them with fulfilling, meaningful careers that promote their development and growth while allowing them to benefit from the curative factors of world dance. “It was never a question for me. I majored in dance in college, and I knew from age five that, specifically, I wanted to be a choreographer. That was always my dream since I was little.”

Culture

Several participants spoke of world dance as a medium to connect to their culture and to better understand and appreciate others’ cultures. For some participants, world music and dance were pervasive in their younger years and dance was a way to connect to their family, values, and youth. In addition, participants spoke of the importance of connecting to their culture in America and how world dance allowed for that integration. Beyond personal cultural attachment, all participants shared how world dance provided them with an outlet into a cultural realm. Individuals who were not of the culture from which the dance form emerged from recognized that dance provided them with the path to begin to understand and respect the corresponding culture. All participants shared that world dance provided them with the incentive to explore cultures beyond their own and to appreciate diversity.

Expression

World dance provided participants with an arena to express inner thoughts and feelings in which words could not. Participants spoke of the difficulty of expressing complex cognitions and sentiments through words; several of these individuals shared a sense of empowerment from being able to express

without using words. “I come to the studio and I have the freedom of movement that I don’t have on the inside of my home by myself ... And I feel alive. And there’s nothing more beautiful than that.” In addition, the theme of catharsis through dance was noted in all participants. For many, this sensation, although valuable, was difficult to describe. One participant shared, “It’s just like expressing the love of being who you are to the music, and it’s the best feeling.”

Happiness

Whereas the theme of expression displayed results pertaining to the ability to release emotions through dance, the theme of happiness notes that joy was a consistent positive outcome from world dance. All participants drew links between their happiness and general well-being to their ability to dance. One participant explicitly stated, “I’m happy when I’m dancing more.”

Healing

Participants shared that world dance has healed them in a multitude of ways. Dance provided all participants with a helpful method to soothe and ameliorate internal struggles. One participant shared how dance assisted in healing her through a divorce; she noted “I forgot about everything that entire hour.” Another participant shared how her passion for dance facilitates physical healing as well:

About when I was 11 or 12 years old, I started having serious physical issues. They diagnosed me with arthritis and fibromyalgia, and I still danced. There’s days where I can’t get out of bed, but I do my best. I come to the studio and I have the freedom of movement that I don’t have inside of my home by myself.

Health

Participants shared that a benefit of world dance was the physicality and overall ability to remain active and fit. Many participants noted that their original motivations for beginning world dance as an adult were for physical health reasons; however, with time, additional benefits became more meaningful. A majority of the participants spoke of the health aspect of dance pertaining to general well-being, however one participant also shared her involvement with world dance was also a preventative health measure, “I have Alzheimer’s in my family, which means that I do want to continue dancing and moving to keep my mind working.”

Social support

A strong theme noted across participants was the enhancement of social support. For many, world dance is a method to connect to peers with similar aspirations in a mutually supportive manner. One participant shared, “As

hard as I was trying, the person next to me was trying just as hard.” Moreover, social support was pervasive when considering joint goals in addition to personal goals: “There is something about having your own goal and a group goal.” Beyond peers, the benefit of social support extended to individuals who support the participant. For example, one participant noted how dance allowed her to share and connect with her family and feel supported:

My grandmother lives with me part of the year; she’ll sit in the living room and she’s like, okay, I’m ready for my show, and she watches me rehearse constantly, or practicing. She gets so excited and she just spends the whole time smiling, no matter what I do.

Stress relief

World dance provided all participants with a tactic to reduce worries and anxieties. Several participants expressed their general concerns with anxiety and rumination and the remedy of dance. One participant shared “I can get out of my head,” and another shared, “I walk in here and my stress falls off.” Within stress relief, it was noted that dance provided the women with an escape from the world. One participant noted “This is a for real no judgment zone.” Another participant shared how the dance environment facilitates her stress reduction:

This is the highlight of my day is when I make it to this studio. You have the crappiest, most awful week in the world and come here and it’s, like, all washed away because I can listen to the music and be with the ladies that love the same things I love to the extent that I do.

Obstacles

A trend that emerged from the data was that there were aspects of life that hindered participants’ ability to experience benefits of world dance. We revisited the data several times in order to determine the appropriate labels to encompass the experience of the participants. We concurred on the overall label of obstacles, which encompasses four subthemes: (a) access, (b) environment, (c) responsibilities, and (d) finances. Furthermore, member checking allowed us to clarify and substantiate our themes beyond our research interpretations.

Access

Participants shared their passion and desire to partake in dance; however, they were often not able to easily access classes because of their geographic location. One participant who perceived dance as beneficial for her mental health shared that she had to drive 2 hours in order to participate in a world dance class: “I

felt that I could get that [ability to express myself] from dance, and then that was when I really started dancing, and then coming here—which I drive an hour and 40 minutes about two to three times a week just to come here.”

Others shared an inability to dance when they were younger because there were not dance studios in their hometowns. “That is no dance in my background, grew up in a very small town. We didn’t have karate even. No karate, no gymnastics, no anything, so this is it.”

Environment

Although many participants struggled to find access to dance in a geographically convenient location, other participants discussed challenges in accessing a dance studio in which there was a positive, warm environment. The struggles of dancing at studios where other members were competitive and deleterious were shared. For the participants, an unaccepting environment made it difficult for them to build social connections and maintain or improve self-confidence:

People were awful. I mean, absolutely awful. The worst of the worst. I think that competition and jealousy really brings out the worst in people. I had people scratch my CDs, like other dancers that would be performing in the restaurant. I had one of my costumes cut up by another dancer. And it’s all jealousy and just really bad feelings.

Responsibilities

A number of participants struggled with balancing dance with other priorities such as education, career, and/or family. Participants shared that outside obligations hindered them from participating in dance classes, or enjoying the class as much as they would like:

You have a kid you have to get to school in the morning, then you have to do homework and you have to do dinner and then you’re leaving to go to dance, then you have to get a babysitter and you start feeling guilty.

Finances

Participants shared struggles with having the financial resources to support their dance throughout their life. Some participants discussed challenges in having the financial means to pay for their dance classes as an adult: “It was a big thing for me and I kept on like thinking I wanted to really stay, to let it go, because I was addicted then and like money-wise that’s so much more expensive.” Other participants shared challenges their parents’ faced when the participants wanted to dance as children: “I always wanted to dance but, unfortunately, you know, that was a long time ago, and my parents weren’t financially able to let me take classes like all the nice kids get to do now.”

Limitations

As with all research, the aforementioned findings need to be considered in light of certain limitations. First, although several participants were from multiple dance studios, the group occurred in one studio in central Florida and may not apply to other women partaking in world dance in other geographical locations. Because all participants were women, the results may differ for those of the opposite gender. Moreover, the participants were selected based on criterion sampling which is prone to researcher bias and may affect the generalizability of the results (Creswell, 2013).

The researcher as the moderator poses another limitation to data collection as participants' responses and behavior could be affected by the actual or perceived attributes of the moderator (Smithson, 2000). Furthermore, the researcher could affect the discussions by biased language and choice of questions.

In addition, focus groups tend to be dominated by an individual or of group of individuals, in which case other opinions within the group might be suppressed; the results gathered run the risk of being polarized (Creswell, 2013). The issue of dominant voices is also significant for this research because the participants had varying levels of expertise in the field of dance; students versus experts (Smithson, 2000).

Discussion

This qualitative study sought to explore the mental health benefits of world dance and understand how those benefits could be translated into an adjunct to counseling. The researchers guided the discussion with three main questions: what were the participants' (a) experiences with world dance, (b) motivations to partake in world dance, and (c) perceived benefits from world dance. The results generated deeper data than the researchers anticipated; instead of just a rationale for dancing, the participants revealed the purpose of dance in their lives.

The data generated several benefits that can be addressed via dance, including: acceptance, achievement, creativity, connecting to childhood, culture, expression, happiness, healing, health, social support, and stress relief. Two of the most common and powerful themes were acceptance and social support. Similar to Lesoho and Maxwell's (2010) findings, through experiencing dance both individually and in a class with others, participants discussed their ability to not only accept themselves but learn to appreciate acceptance from others.

Participants also emphasized decreased feelings of loneliness and isolation through the increased social support they found within their dancing community. Similar to previous research (e.g., Gordon, 2014; Koch et al., 2014), the findings from this study suggest that therapeutic world dance may be a

helpful medium to assist clients who are suffering from issues such as self-esteem, lack of confidence, loneliness, isolation, and/or depression.

Implications

This qualitative study revealed a number of implications for counselors. Counselors can utilize these benefits of dance through implementing it as an adjunct to a client's counseling. In addition, if the counselor does not believe he or she is competent to use therapeutic dance within a counseling session, counselors may suggest dance as a homework assignment and use processing and reflection to bring the benefits of dance into the counseling realm. This allows a creative component to enter the counseling environment, and thus, counselors are able to reach clients on a new level. Providing an outlet for an individual to physically express their feelings, struggles, or challenges may assist clients who are having difficulty verbally communicating in session.

Therapeutic dance also provides a setting in which clients can reconnect to their childhood if they have a history of dance, as well as providing a sense of achievement for clients who are exploring dance for the first time. Therapeutic dance may be applicable to a wide range of individuals, world dance may be a particularly helpful medium for clients who have previously engaged in, and enjoy, dance. Therefore, a strengths-based approach can be used in which world dance is used to facilitate curative factors within a client who is already drawn to world dance.

Although therapeutic dance can have a number of benefits for a client, there are also pertinent considerations for a counselor. First, if a counselor does not have the appropriate environment, comfort-level, or skills for executing therapeutic dance in session, it is possible to recommend a dance class to a client. Second, clients may live in an area where dance classes are not easily accessible. Counselors should conduct an adequate search prior to suggesting this method for clients. Similarly, classes may be too expensive or advanced for a client's skill set. As with any new clinical recommendation, counselors should adequately assess if this therapeutic method is appropriate for the client prior to implementing in counseling. Finally, this study revealed that some dance studios perpetuate a negative, competitive environment; it is therefore important for a counselor to investigate and research available classes before recommending them to a client. Furthermore, counselor education programs can assist the implementation of therapeutic dance by providing students with knowledge in the utility of world dance for adult women.

Future research

Although this study provided a unique insight into the therapeutic benefits of different types of dance, future research is needed to further substantiate these findings. While the importance of qualitative research is supported by CACREP

(2016), quantitative research in the area of therapeutic dance is limited. An increase of quantitative research supporting the benefits of therapeutic dance will assist in building this technique and potential adjunct to counseling as an evidence-based practice. Furthermore, additional research in different states and countries, with different types of genres of dance, and with different populations such as men and children, will help diversify and solidify research findings across cultures, types of dance, and populations.

Conclusion

The benefits of dance have been recognized in reference to a variety of concerns including, but not limited to, stress (Vetter et al., 2011), depression, anxiety (Koch et al., 2014), spirituality (Bajaj & Vohra, 2011), Autism Spectrum Disorder (Scharoun et al., 2014), Huntington's disease, Parkinson's disease (Kloos, Fritz, Kostyk, Young, & Kegelmeyer, 2013), chronic heart failure (Neto et al., 2014), and cancer (Selman, Williams, & Simms, 2012).

Moreover, beyond the individual, dance can be a cultural experience (e.g., Murrock & Gary, 2008; Phillips-Silver, 2009; Ravelin, Kylmä, & Korhonen, 2006). The results of the present study highlight several areas in which individuals may benefit from world dance such as acceptance of self and others, achievement, creativity, career, culture, expression, happiness, healing, health, social support and stress relief. In addition, the data showed that participants did not just perceive simplistic benefits from dance, however, participants found deeper healing purposes within their world dance practice. Therefore, the present study provides helpful evidence for utilizing the therapeutic benefits of world dance in counseling.

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