An Exploration of the Subjective Experience of Recreational Dance; Implications for Counselling

Hana Hamaz

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Abstract

Background information: Dance transcends all cultures and has long existed as a form of ritual, celebration, communication, and healing. Whilst the therapeutic benefits of dance have been widely explored, primarily within the field of dance movement psychotherapy, the experience of recreational dance and its implications for counselling has received less attention. **Method:** Using purposive sampling, seven semi-structured interviews were conducted. An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) of the data was then carried out. **Findings:** Four themes emerged from the analysis of participants' experiences of recreational dance: dance as a metaphoric other; dance as connection to an actual other; relating to the self through dance; and the meaning in individual movement. **Conclusions:** Findings of this study suggest that how a client moves in dance could be a window onto how they move socially, emotionally, and relationally in the world. Exploration of a client's experience of dance within counselling sessions could therefore provide useful insight into how they "move" in the world. As an embodied form of communication dance/movement could also be used to facilitate verbal expression, both inside and outside of the counselling room.

Keywords: Recreational dance, movement, subjective experience, embodiment, counselling

Contents

List of Abbreviations

DMP	Dance Movement Psychotherapy
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
ATS	American Tribal Style

List of Terms

Recreational dance - non-professional, non-therapeutic dance**,** usually practiced in group classes/workshops for the purpose of leisure/pleasure.

Dance Movement Psychotherapy (DMP) - a therapeutic process in which client/s and therapist creatively use body movement and dance to facilitate integration of emotional, cognitive, physical, social and spiritual aspects of themselves (Association for Dance Movement Psychotherapy UK, 2019).

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Declaration of Authenticity

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Student's I.D. /Code 1601612

Student's Name & Surname HANA HAMAZ

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AN EXPLORATION OF THE SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCE OF RECREATIONAL DANCE; IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELLING

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Dance has long existed in virtually all known cultures as a form of ritual, celebration, communication, and healing (Acolin, 2016; Mills & Daniluk, 2002). Although interpreted differently across cultures and by individuals, dance transcends all cultures and as such can be said to have universal benefits (Ali et al., 2017).

Despite its small population, Malta has a vibrant and well-established dance culture. A simple internet search reveals more than 50 dance schools offering classes, mainly to children and young people. Ballet, modern, and jazz and the main genres taught, however, in recent years genres such as contemporary and hip-hop have seen an increase in popularity. Several schools, mostly private and church schools, offer ballet as an extra-curricular activity with some of them, until recently, making it a compulsory subject for girls. Malta has two professional dance companies that perform internationally and in 2010 the University of Malta set up the Department for Dance Studies. The prominence of dance in Malta is further illustrated by the presence of dance at almost every town feast, where one will almost always see performances by local dance schools. At the largest national event of the year - the carnival - at least one entire day is dedicated to a dance competition between all the dance schools from across Malta.

According to Cassar-Pullicino (1961) dance and music has always been an important part of Maltese culture, despite folkloric traditions, including

dance, being looked down upon by the aristocracy and its practice even curtailed by legislation by the Knights of St. John during their rule (1530 -1798) (p. 63). Writing in the 1960s Cassar-Pullicino argued that despite such attitudes and legislative repression, "[a]n appreciable musical folk-lore survives in the Maltese Islands" and "for to the vast majority of the people [folk dance, song and music] provided a vehicle of expression for their joys and sorrows and aspirations, and in many ways, it fulfilled a social need" (p. 63). Today, Maltese folk dance is less widely practiced, however, there are attempts to preserve and revive Maltese folk traditions, including its dances. For instance, one will still see *Il-Pirata* (a sword dance) *and Il-Maltija* (Maltese national dance) performed at Carnival and in shows for tourists.

More recently, there has been an increase in the number of classes for adults in dance styles already widely practiced in other countries, such as swing dance, salsa, bachata, kizomba, tango, reggaeton and belly dance. Most of these classes are taught by teachers who moved to Malta from abroad, bringing with them their knowledge of these dances. As most of these dances are primarily "social dances" (danced outside of the classroom at organised social events), there is an ever-growing social dance community in Malta. I am part of the Latin social dance community in Malta, attending classes and workshops in Salsa, Bachata and Kizomba and I also attend belly dance classes, having started to learn the Latin dances and belly dance in my home country, the UK. In Malta, one can also practice other dance forms, such as ecstatic (or

conscious) dance in Malta. There are also two dance therapists currently practicing in Malta, who run individual and group sessions with children, the elderly, and people with disabilities.

When viewed in the context of the history of healing, Western counselling and psychotherapy is relatively new. According to Moodley and West (2005), human societies have since the beginning of time "interrogated their conflicts, illnesses, and diseases" (p. xviii) and maintained the psychological and mental well-being of people in those societies through various forms of healing practices, including dance. In many cultures today, dance continues to play an important role in the prevention, healing and promotion of physical and mental health (Leseho & Maxwell, 2010). Moodley and West (2005) suggest that an increase in the number of people accessing "alternative" healing practices, including dance therapy, often alongside counselling and psychotherapy, is indicative of such practices enabling clients to "identify cultural metaphors, symbols, and archetypes that may be outside the parameters of Western counseling and psychotherapy" (p. xviii).

Increasingly, counsellors are working integratively in their practice, drawing on various approaches and utilising a range of techniques with clients (McLeod, 2013), including creative writing, drawing and role play, as well as mindfulness and techniques that use the imagination. Movement, however, is less utilised, despite growing evidence of the interdependence of the body and

the mind and of the psychotherapeutic benefits of movement activities, such as dance.

While the body-mind connection can be seen everywhere in human experience, it has been largely ignored by mainstream Western society and, only now, are other fields acquiring the knowledge about the body that body and movement psychotherapies have long held (Acolin, 2016). One does not need, however, to attend a therapeutic dance session to experience the psychotherapeutic effects of dancing (Leseho & Maxwell, 2010), yet, studies exploring the experience of recreational dance and its implications for counselling are significantly lacking.

Research Questions

What are the experiences of people who attend recreational dance classes (as opposed to classes with a therapeutic purpose)? What can we learn from their experiences about the impact dancing recreationally can have on one's psychological health? What can we learn about the interaction between the mind and the body from how participants feel emotionally and physically when they are dancing? Can a client's experience of recreational dance give insight into how they relate to themselves and others in the rest of their lives and thus be a useful tool for exploration within counselling sessions? Can dance/movement and recreational dance be used as an adjunct to counselling to help clients explore, process, and overcome social, emotional and relational difficulties? If so, how? These are the questions I aim to answer through this study.

Aims of the Study

The first aim of this study is to explore the subjective experiences of people who dance recreationally in dance classes/workshops and to consider how insights gained can help counsellors better understand their clients. The second aim is to consider specific techniques, formulated from participants' experiences, that can be used in counselling sessions to facilitate the exploration and working through of clients' difficulties. Dance, as a universal, non-verbal language (Levy, Ranjbar, & Dean, 2006; Ali et al., 2017), could be particularly useful when working with a range of, often complex, issues and when working cross-culturally.

Personal Positioning

My personal experience of dance is that it is immensely joyous, enriching, expressive and connecting. Dancing in classes since childhood has not only been a source of enjoyment and an opportunity to 'rest my mind', in recent years it has also helped me better understand myself, and in particular, my patterns of relating to others. While I believe in, and have personally experienced and witnessed in others, the immense exploratory and healing power of verbal expression, oftentimes I struggle to express myself through words and am more able to do so through dancing. With this study I wish to explore other people's personal experiences of recreational dance and consider whether the findings can be of significance to the counselling field.

Conceptual Framework

Postionality. In this study I take an interpretivist epistemological position as I am interested in learning about and from participants' unique experiences of recreational dance (Bright & Harrison, 2013). Interpretivism, as embedded in heuristic enquiry, enables the discovery of different, multiple realities as it looks for "culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world" (Crotty, 1998, p. 67). I also take a social constructivist position, viewing knowledge, reality, truth, and meaning as constructed by the interaction between an individual and their social environment. I am concerned with exploring the meanings participants attach to their experiences of recreational dance, including their specific movements, situating their experiences and meanings they attach to dance within their socio-cultural context. As Gray (2014) maintains, as individuals construct their own meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon, contradictory yet equally valid realities can exist. Because I am concerned with the contradictory, unique aspects of participants' experiences (Crotty, 1998), this study has an idiographic focus. As such, this study seeks to produce findings that are transferable rather than generalisable (Gray, 2014).

Theoretical framework. Underpinning this study is the theory of *holism,* which sees the body, mind, and emotions, as interconnected, and the individual as being part of a wider whole, that includes society. Adler (1927,1954)

understood the importance of holism when seeking to understand the individual, arguing that "it is always necessary to look for… reciprocal actions of the mind on the body, for both of them are parts of the whole with which we should be concerned" (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1967, p. 225). Holism is central to approaches such as Gestalt and branches of somatic psychology. The base theory of somatic psychology that "the body reflects the mind and the mind reflects the body, and that in working with the body-mind, we affect both" (Leseho & Maxwell, 2010, p. 18) also underpins this study. The field of somatic psychology has been heavily influenced by the ideas of German psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich (1962) who theorised that emotions are manifestations of "plasmatic movements of tangible bio-energy" and "that muscular holding habituates into 'body armor'" (DeMeo as cited in Leseho & Maxwell, 2010, p. 18); thus, imperative to restoring psychological health is restoring the body's ability to move freely and smoothly.

Embodiment theories are central to the study of the psychotherapeutic function of dance (Acolin, 2016) and also underpin this research study. Of the various definitions of embodiment, I find Shaw's (2003) definition - embodiment as "a dynamic concept where the body is not rigid or unmoving, but a fluid entity which is inscribed with individual as well as cultural meaning" (p. 32) - to be useful when exploring the subjective experience of recreational dance as it highlights the interaction between the mind and the body, and the individual and culture.

This study is also grounded in Carl Jung's (1961) theory that creative activity is a bridge between the conscious and the unconscious mind. Jung suggests that through dream work and activities that use the imagination, contents of the unconscious can be translated into narratives, images, or personified entities. This concept, which he named *active imagination,* heavily influenced the development of dance and movement as a psychotherapeutic technique (Leseho & Maxwell, 2010). Dance Movement Psychotherapy (DMP) is a therapeutic process in which client/s and therapist creatively use body movement and dance to facilitate integration of emotional, cognitive, physical, social and spiritual aspects of themselves (Association for Dance Movement Psychotherapy UK, 2019). Fundamental to DMP is the belief that "spontaneous movement is symbolic of unconscious processes" (Leseho & Maxwell, 2010, p. 19), and that these processes are not always accessible through talking therapy (Bernstein, 1995). DMP is an approach that evolved from Authentic Movement, a group process whereby participants engage in spontaneous expressive movement exploration. It is an integration of Jungian thought and dance that the founder named "active imagination in movement" (Aposhyan as cited in Leseho & Maxwell, 2010).

Methodology. In wanting to understand the unique and subjective experience of a particular phenomenon, I adopt a phenomenological approach to research in this study. Phenomenology "provides a description of how things are experienced first-hand by those involved" (Descombe as cited in

Bright & Harrison, 2013, pp. 87-88) and acknowledges the multiple realities that individuals construct. It insists that "any attempt to understand social reality has to be grounded in people's experiences of that social reality" (Gray, 2014, p. 24). My role as researcher is to try to understand what Edmund Husserl describes as the lifeworld of each participant as they themselves understand it to be (as cited in Bright & Harrison, 2013).

I also take an interpretivist methodological approach because I see meaning making as a process of interpretation between the participant and the researcher. Martin Heidegger further developed Husserl's ideas by pointing out that despite a researcher's best efforts to bracket their views and assumptions about the participant and the phenomena, it is not possible to fully do so because we live in an interpretative and interpreted world (as cited in Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). As the researcher I experience a "double hermeneutic" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 35), because I am trying to understand the participant trying to understand their experience.

Research Methods

Using purposive sampling I conducted seven semi-structured interviews. After transcribing the interviews, I carried out an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) of the data gathered. Reflexivity and continuous bracketing of my personal experiences, values, and beliefs about the topic and participants were needed in order to understand and represent the participants' experiences as best as possible (Bright & Harrison, 2013), reduce bias, and increase

trustworthiness in the research. To assist me, I kept a journal of my thoughts, feelings, and insights and discussed these with my supervisor.

Conclusion

In this chapter I provided a background to the study and stated my theoretical and personal positioning, as well as the research questions and aims. I outlined my philosophical stance and the theories underpinning the research and gave an overview of the methodology and research method used. In the following chapter, Chapter 2, I review the literature relevant to the research topic.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter, I review the literature on dance, dance and wellbeing, and the use of dance within the psychotherapeutic fields, and consider the contribution of this study to the existing literature and the gaps it fills**.** The review was conducted primarily using the University of Malta database and online databases. Important to note is that the search of literature was carried out using English language search criteria and databases, thus, this is a review of the literature on the topic as it has been studied and understood within English speaking contexts (primarily the UK and the US). Other literature and studies are likely to exist to which I do not have access because they have not been written in or translated into English.

I first carried out a search of dissertations published by the University of Malta to establish whether any research into recreational dance and wellbeing/mental health/counselling had already been conducted. I used the search terms "dance", "dancing", "movement", "movement therapy" and "dance therapy". From these results, I found no studies specifically on the topic on recreational dance and implications for counselling. Several studies on the broader topic of dance and dance movement therapy and its relationship to physical and psychological health and education have been conducted. One study conducted within the Department of Social Wellbeing examines the effects of physical activity, including dance, on anxiety levels, and three studies carried out within the Institute for Physical Education and Sport investigate how

physical activity, including dance, impacts body image of self and others; physical and psychological wellbeing; and perceptions of obesity amongst girls in Malta. From within the Department of Education, approximately six studies have been conducted into the use of dance in schools as part of Physical Education. Two studies explored its use and effectiveness in schools, two explored gender inequality in Maltese physical education lessons, specifically focussing on dance classes, and one study explored why Maltese young people choose to participate in dance classes. From the Department of Sciences, around five studies have been conducted into the effects of physical exercise, including dance, on physical health.

I found two studies carried out within the Department of Social Wellbeing that explore the use of creative arts therapies, including dance movement therapy, with children on the autistic spectrum and one study on their use with offenders. From the Department of Dance Studies, studies have been conducted that explore the use of dance to facilitate self-expression in people with learning and physical challenges; the enhancement of learning through dance and movement; dance and movement education in schools; dance movement and theatre as social empowerment; the shared experience in dance and mirror-neurons; and *flow-states* and the merging of the body and the mind in dance.

I then conducted a search of the University of Malta library and online journal database, and other online databases (such as Research Gate, Google

Scholar, Google Books) for other literature relevant to my study topic, using the search terms "recreational dance + counselling", "dance + counselling", "dance + mental health", "dance + therapeutic", "recreational dance + therapeutic", "social + dance + therapeutic". My initial search produced approximately 50, mostly journal articles, of which I retained approximately 35 in order to review in more depth as not all were relevant to my topic of study. The literature found in this initial search spanned from 1995 until 2017, with a significant number published in 2011 and 2015. Journal articles were initially reviewed by referring to the abstract and retained for a more thorough review if it dealt with the topic of dance (recreational or therapeutic) in relation to psychosocial health, counselling, well-being, dance movement, and creative therapy. For some of the literature it was necessary to review more fully to ascertain its applicability to my study.

The Study of Dance in Malta

Despite the prominence of dance in Malta, little has been written about dance as it is currently and has been historically practiced on the islands. While the University of Malta has a department dedicated to the study of dance, only two studies conducted by students explore dance practice in Malta, both of which look at hip-hop dance. Argentine social dancing in Malta is explored in a study carried out within the Department of Arts and studies into the experience of nightclub dancers in Malta; of ageing in Maltese club culture; and of teen parties in Malta have been carried out by the Department for Social Wellbeing.

A second study into teen parties was also carried out within the Department of Philosophy.

The lack of academic interest in and documentation of dance in Malta appears to be historic. Maltese academic, Anna Borg Cordana, argues that the lack of formal documentation of Maltese folklore by the Maltese may be because for the Maltese, folk music and dance was commonplace, therefore, they would often not write about their own instruments and music. Thus, her research into the history of folk music and dance in Malta and how it is practiced today was partly based on anecdotal evidence but mostly on documentation from foreign sources, such as travel books. Travellers, she said, "found the music and dancing captivating and wrote about it in their travel books and diaries." (p. 63). Ġuzé Cassar-Pullicino (1961) also writes that while folklore was discouraged by the elite and even curtailed by legislation under the rule of the Knights of St. John, folk music and dance remain a "living tradition in Malta and Gozo but it has not been adequately studied so far" (p. 63). Published in the Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society, his research into the song and dance of Malta and Gozo also draws on foreign sources that document Maltese song and dance.

What Is Dance and Why Do People dance?

The question of what dance is and why people dance continues to be heavily debated (Copeland & Cohen, 1983; O'Shea, 2010) across various fields, including, more recently, the counselling field (Issari, 2011; Leseho & Maxwell,

2010). An understanding of dance is relevant to this study because this study seeks to understand why the participants dance and the meaning they attach to their experience of dance. Varying definitions of dance found in English language dictionaries not only highlight the contested nature of dance, as well as the subtle differences in the understandings of dance; they also highlight the narrow, Eurocentric understanding of dance in mainstream Western society. As Selma Cohen's (2005) study of dances from around the world highlights, many forms of dance exist both *across* and *within* countries, cultures, ages, and time and for varying purposes (e.g. social, ceremonial, religious, educative, political, artistic and therapeutic reasons). The (mis)understanding and (mis)representation of dance in the West highlights the power of definition, because how a phenomenon (in this case, dance) is defined influences its meaning and how people understand and engage with the phenomenon (Atkins-Sayre as cited in Kraus, 2010).

Early anthropological studies of the colonial "other" greatly impacted the understanding and study of dance today and left the study of dance with a problematic legacy (O'Shea, 2010). On the one hand these studies enabled the exploration of marginalised aspects of society and broadened the field of study from structuralist and functionalist studies to symbolic and semiotic studies, including ritual and the body, thus allowing for the integration of "bodily practices into the study of culture" (p. 3). On the other hand, the approach to research taken in these studies is now recognised as "linked to imperialist

taxonomies and ethnocentric values" (p. 3) yet they significantly influenced later research and dance projects. As O'Shea and Carter (2010) highlight, there is a difference between "the documentation of an event and the event itself" (p. 15). Thus, how dancing is experienced by the dancer and how it is perceived and interpreted by the observer to be experienced by the dancer is not always the same.

The Phenomenology of Dance

A phenomenological approach to dance sees the dancer as "a unified 'consciousness-body'" (Copeland & Cohen, 1983, p. 8) and sees the objectivity or subjectivity of a dance as irrelevant. This approach does not see the dancer and the dance as separate entities (p. 8). As Maxine Sheets maintains in her study of the phenomenology of dance, when viewing dance, we "do not see separate objective factors with no unifying centre [but] an invisible wholeness" (as cited in Copeland & Cohen, 1983, p. 8). This phenomenological view of dance supports the phenomenological approach to dance taken in this study as it is concerned with the subjective, lived experience of dancing by the participants and with how their experiences can be understood from a counselling point of view.

Dance as Creative Expression

Art as a form of expression is the dominant view taken by today's dance writers (O'Shea, 2010) and practitioners of arts therapies. Amongst proponents of dance as a form of expression there is, however, debate, as to whether what is

being expressed is one's own emotions or emotions that are not necessarily one's own. Susanne Langer (1953), known for her theories on the connection between art and aesthetics and the human mind, argues that movements in dance are not self-expressive but symbolically or logically expressive (Copeland & Cohen 1983; O'Shea, 2010). For O'Shea (2010) Langer's theory is useful because it "opens up the possibility of a semiotic analysis of dance, something later writers embraced explicitly" (p. 10); however, her theory has also been criticised for not acknowledging that dance can arise in the emotion of the dancer.

Haig Khatchadourian defines dance as "non-action voluntary activities that consist in patterns of movement – either pure movement or movement representing certain imagined actions of imagined characters, imaginary situations, and so on – made by parts or the whole of the human body, creating dynamic visual, or visual and auditory, forms" (as cited in Copeland & Cohen, 1983, p. 25). While Khatchadourian's definition points towards an understanding of dance that involves the imagination, some argue that *representation* of a character is not the same as *expression* of a character (p. 7). This debate is relevant to this study because the expression of emotion through a character and story-telling is common in many dance genres (Issari, 2011; Leseho & Maxwell, 2010; Pavitra & Shubrata, 2014).

Creative expression as therapeutic. According to Pavitra and Shubrata (2014) the element of "fantasy or make believe [is] inherent in dance" and this

can bring psychotherapeutic benefits to the dancer. In a study of Bharatanatyam (a form of Indian classical dance), in which mythological stories are re-enacted through dance, Pavitra and Shubrata (2014) argue that dancers are able to do things which they fantasise about but are not able to do in real life, which can lead to emotional release. In Bharatanatyam, they argue that socially "forbidden" emotions, such as hostility, aggression, and the "universal and elemental" (p. 109) sexual impulse, are openly expressed and the sequence of arousal and discharge "clears up several inner blocks and inhibitions with which one may have been struggling for a long time." (p. 109). The view that dance allows one to connect to, work through, and release conscious or unconscious emotions, thus making it therapeutic, is shared by others across various fields of study, including the psychotherapeutic fields. Carl Jung saw the therapeutic value of creative expression and theorised that spontaneous creative activities are "confrontations with the unconscious" (as cited in Leseho & Maxwell, 2010, p. 17). His concept of *active imagination* heavily influenced the development of dance and movement therapy (Leseho & Maxwell, 2010). Gestalt psychotherapy, which sees experience and action as essential precursors to understanding, uses the imagination as a therapeutic tool to "activate experience to form novel awareness in the here and now" (Feldman, 2017, p. 83).

Dance and Wellbeing

It is acknowledged by those studying dance from a counselling

perspective that dance and movement have had various functions throughout history and across cultures, including celebration, ritual, communication, and physical and psychological healing (Acolin, 2016; Ali et al., 2017; Mills & Daniluk, 2002; Payne, 2006). Ali et al. (2017) maintain that although dance is interpreted differently across cultures and individuals, its benefits are universal because it "transcends all cultures" (p. 33).

The past decade has seen a significant increase in studies conducted from across various fields on the effects of dance on wellbeing. Research shows that in Europe and the US dance is being increasingly accepted, practiced, and promoted as a form of physical exercise and offered as a recreational activity in schools and community settings (Ward, 2008; Karkou, Oliver & Lycouris, 2017). Karkou et al. (2017) welcome, yet find surprising, the rise in empirical investigations into the benefits of dance, given that dance is still often stigmatised both as a low-level leisure activity and an unhealthy profession. While there appears to be greater understanding of the physical health benefits of dance, Ward (2008) argues that there needs to be greater acknowledgement of the psychological benefits of dance, as well as how our bodies and "the expressive language of movement" (p. 33) communicate the practices, beliefs and ideas of a culture.

Dance Movement Psychotherapy (DMP). A field that has been at the forefront of research into the effects of dance on psychological wellbeing is that of dance movement psychotherapy (DMP). DMP is a psychotherapeutic

approach and branch of somatic psychology that addresses "the sensed, kinaesthetic and somatic connections between cognitive, emotional and social processes with the aim of self-awareness, expression and integration" (Goodwill as cited in Feldman, 2017, p. 83).

Helen Payne (2006), who is both a psychotherapist and dance movement psychotherapist, describes the body as both a *container* and an *expresser* of emotions, and sees "an interplay of inner and outer worlds" (p. 175) in dance, highlighting the complex intertwines between the body and emotion. In DMP, spontaneous movement is understood as symbolic of unconscious processes which are not always easily brought into consciousness through talking therapy (Bernstein, 1995). This suggests that individuals who have difficulty connecting to and/or verbally expressing certain emotions or experiences might find dance useful in facilitating self-expression. In describing movement as being able to "touch centers of our being beyond the reach of vocabularies of reason or coercion" (Stewart as cited in Leseho & Maxwell, 2010, p. 19), Stewart highlights both the emotional safety that can be found within the body and the potential difficulties in expressing emotions stored in the body.

Embodiment within dance and counselling. Central to body-orientated psychotherapeutic approaches is the idea of *embodiment*. In simplistic terms embodiment is the idea that the body and mind are interconnected and, while defined in various ways across different fields, it is increasingly understood that

the body plays a role in affective and cognitive functions and in wellbeing (Koch, Kolter, Fuchs, Sattel, & Kelbel, 2017).

The phenomenological view of embodiment, taken by many in the psychotherapeutic field (Panhofer, 2011; Shaw, 2003), sees the body as the basis of experience. Shaw's (2003) definition of embodiment as "a dynamic concept where the body is not rigid or unmoving, but a fluid entity which is inscribed with individual as well as cultural meaning" (pp. 32–33) is particularly relevant to this study which is concerned with exploring the individual meaning ascribed to the experience of recreational dance. Feldman (2017) argues that the principles of DMP and Gestalt "blend together harmoniously" (p. 94) because in Gestalt, being embodied means experiencing the body as *self-experience* and owning our experience, and in DMP embodiment is "the experience of having a body and being in your body" (p. 85).

While the mind-body connection can be found everywhere in human experience, and folk wisdom and philosophy have long attempted to explain it, it has largely been ignored by mainstream Western society (Acolin, 2016) and is a concept that has historically challenged Western thought (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). Acarón (2011) argues that there is an "inherent resistance to the body-mind connection" (p. 245) in the West that has led to a disconnection from our bodies in modern society. They argue, however, that people have been looking for ways to heal this disconnect, and sees growing trends in body-orientated activities as evidence of this.

The neuroscience behind dance. In recent years fields such as neuroscience as well as counselling and psychotherapy have begun to understand the knowledge about the body that the field of somatic psychology has long held (Acolin, 2016). Renewed attention on the body from neuroscience is shifting understanding of the relationship between the body and the mind and the body is no longer being viewed as inferior to the mind (Koch et al., 2017). Research from this field has provided significant support to the body psychotherapies and heightened awareness of the body-mind interaction within the counselling field. There is also a growing body of research on the neuroscience of trauma and the effectiveness of the creative arts and body-orientated therapies in working with the effects of trauma (e.g Meekums, 2005; Van der Kolk, 1996).

Highly significant to an understanding of the relationship between the body and the mind is Antonio Damasio's (1991, 2008) hypothesis that physiological changes (e.g. heart rate, posture, facial expression) are relayed to the brain and then transformed into emotions that then give the person information about the stimulus they have encountered. His theory suggests that an emotion and its corresponding psychological change can become consciously or unconsciously associated with a particular situation and its past outcome, which then guides (as well as constrains) future behaviour. Not only does Damasio's theory suggest that our own bodily cues and emotional responses have an effect on cognition, it also suggests that when we do not

feel, listen to, or show these cues and emotional reactions, our ability to make judgements and decisions can be severely impaired.

Rizzolatti et al.'s (1996) discovery that neurons in the brain *mirror* a person's action - as well as the intention and emotion behind the action - when they perform it themselves *and* when they passively observe the same action being performed by someone else, is also significant in the mind-body connection debate. This is because the existence of these mirror neurons potentially builds the basis for empathy and understanding (as cited in Jola & Colmeiro, 2017). While Rizzolatti's (1996) work was also one of the main influences on early neuroscientific studies (e.g. Jeong et al., 2005) into functional brain changes in people who dance (Jola & Colmeiro, 2017), and has provided scientific evidence of the therapeutic nature of dance, it is significant to note that the concept of mirroring is fundamental to DMP which used it as a psychotherapeutic tool long before it became a subject of neuroscience (Berrol, 2006). Jola and Colmeiro (2017) highlight, however, the fact that studies into how changes in the mirror neuron system of dancers may be linked to their health and wellbeing are limited and call for greater research into the embodied experience of dance.

Karkou et al. (2017) argue that there are different types of body memories, which could be argued is evidence of the unspoken dimensions of the body. One type is inter-corporal memory, which is the knowledge between two bodies. It emphasises the fact that all learning happens with and through

our bodies and our environments. This is particularly relevant when exploring the experience of dancing with others. Some theories also suggest that someone watching a dancer can "feel" what the dancer is feeling. Jola and Colmeiro (2017) challenge such theories, arguing that the perceptual, emotional, and cognitive response processes of the person dancing and the person watching them dance are different.

Karkou et al. (2017) welcome the important shift from a Cartesian split between the body and the mind to a more holistic and integrated conceptualization of the body and mind, as put forth by the embodiment approaches. Despite a surge in research on the positive physical, physiological, and neurological effects of dance, they argue that a reductionist scientific approach to dance and psychological wellbeing remains predominant in such research; thus, the complexity of dance is still not being captured.

Dance as Connection - The Applicability of Dance to Counselling Principles

Dance as connection to self. Across the literature, dance has been understood as a vehicle to connect with and express oneself. Leseho and Maxwell's (2010) study found dance to be a process of self-discovery for the participants, which they experienced as empowering, transformative, healing, and as connecting them to their "Spirit" (or the Self). Leseho and Maxwell (2010) argue that creative activities, such as dance, hasten the connection to our Spirit and their findings suggest that "it is this spiritual groundedness that fosters resiliency and healing in women". Their findings suggest that regardless of the

type of recreational dance practiced, something happens in dance that can be therapeutic and can build resilience. They found that dance helped the participants cope with the daily stressors of life as well as heal from traumatic experiences in several ways: by creating an inner space for a story to be "constructed and lived out"; by bringing unconscious material into conscious awareness, which could then be "expressed, examined, and healed" (p. 26) by the participants; by connecting participants to their bodies, leading to a rediscovery of "what is natural and powerful" (p. 26) within themselves; and by using movement, music/sound and breath, which brought participants into the present. There is a growing body of literature that suggests that the creative art therapies, including DMP, due to their non-verbal, resource oriented, and transcultural applicability, can help reduce the effects of trauma as well as build resilience in the dancer. In their study of DMP and resilience building amongst female asylum seekers and refugees, Katia Verreault (2017) found that the focus in DMP on the body, in relation to other bodies, "appears to strengthen existing resources within individuals in a group setting while also addressing vulnerabilities." (p. 127).

Findings of Pavitra and Shubrata's (2014) study suggest that through recreational dance, one can learn to control the body, which can lead to both greater confidence in controlling one's movements and actions as well as a greater understanding of the self. Through dance, they argue, one can explore body movements, learn to express oneself, and learn to respond to and

communicate more fully with others. This, they suggest, can increase self-awareness in relation to space, others, and the wider world, which has a direct bearing on the dancers' capacity to deal with oppression in their lives. Similar to the findings of Leseho and Maxwell's (2010) study, Pavitra and Shubrata's (2014) study also highlights the effect music and rhythmic movement can have on the body and mind and the ability of dance to connect one to the spiritual self, a function of dance also noted by others (e.g. Akunna, 2011; Bajaj & Vohra, 2011; Mills & Daniluk, 2002; O'Shea, 2010).

Dance as connection to others. Dance has been found to foster connection to others and many studies, from across various disciplines, including counselling and psychotherapy, support this view. Studies have found that the social aspect of dancing is a significant factor in increased levels of psychological wellbeing amongst people who dance recreationally and in their choice to attend and continue participation in dance classes. In a study of Greek-Americans partaking in Greek cultural dance classes (Issari, 2011), classes were found to provide an opportunity to socialise, make friends and meet potential partners. An significant factor in participation in these classes was the greater sense of cultural belonging and identity participants experienced and the transmission of cultural values through participating in the dance classes. Furthermore, findings of the study suggest that changes in the dances themselves may reflect socio-cultural changes in the Greek-American community and identity.

Lima and Vieira's (2007) study of ballroom dancing amongst senior citizens also found that, as well as being fun, having health benefits, and bringing back good dancing memories, participation in the classes also provided participants opportunities to socialise and fostered cultural connections to the larger Brazilian dancing culture. Lima and Viera suggest that the culture of inclusion of the dance classes, which embraces both an understanding and acceptance of senior citizens, might improve quality of life.

Goulimaris et al.'s (2014) study of the relationship between the basic psychological needs and the psychological well-being of people participating in recreational Greek dancing found high satisfaction of basic psychological needs. Relatedness scored the highest and positive well-being scored highly while participants recorded an almost complete lack of stress and fatigue.

Recreational dance is typically a group activity, and there is extensive research from the counselling field on the therapeutic nature of groups. The Gestalt group process is one such group (Feder & Ronall, 1980) and Feldman (2017) suggests that, similar to the Gestalt approach to group work, dance classes are one other space where a psychotherapeutic group approach, that addresses sociability and interpersonal disconnections, can also be applied. In their study of an NHS recreational dance programme Froggett and Little (2002) highlight the importance of the group aspect in the experiences of the participants yet argue that clinical studies on the effects of recreational dance

in a clinical setting "have not captured complex contextual and relational elements, such as setting and group interaction" (p. 94).

A recent study by medical anthropologists suggests that dancing together may have served to ensure the survival of the human species (BBC, Why Do Humans Dance?, 2018), which could explain why humans enjoy dancing together, rather than alone (BBC, Why do we love to dance with each other?, 2018). According to Tarr (2018), it is possible that dancing was a "completely random and indulgent act of our ancestors", however, more likely, she argues, is that dancing has an evolutionary purpose. Many theories exist on how dance has ensured our survival, however, one of the more convincing theories, according to Tarr (2018), is that dancing and making music together helps foster social bonding. It is this social bonding that would have formed the basis of those social groups that would have been better at carrying out those tasks needed to ensure the survival of our species, such as rearing the young, finding good mates, defending territory, building shelters, all of which are tasks that Tarr (2018) argues are "done better together". Lumsden (2010) supports this argument, suggesting that movement is not only important for physical fitness, but is fundamental to the organisation of individuals and societies. She argues that, as such, movement can be a means through which to explore our relationship with our physical and emotional selves and our relationship to others. Because, in dance, these relationships are explored in "metaphorical

terms" she argues that what we learn and seek to change can be "more readily integrated into the developing self" (p. 231) through dance.

Studies suggest that dance can increase the sense of connectedness between dancers (Burgess, Grogan, & Burwitz, 2006). Partner dances have been found to enhance psychosocial wellbeing because they involve touch and entrainment, which Jola and Colmeiro (2017) define as the spontaneous synchronisation to the rhythm of others which fosters a strong sense of connectedness, liveliness and presence.

Eales and Goodwin's (2015) study of a recreational dance community's "care-sharing" practices offers a new perspective on therapeutic practice and recreation. Members of the community have a range of capabilities and embodiments, and all, regardless of ability, offer and receive certain forms of care and support both while dancing and when not dancing. Much of the group's time is dedicated to acts of interdependence, such as building consensus and discussing discomfort, or concern with another's idea or movement choice, and interdependence is seen by the group as a radical act of social justice.

Dance's intersection with power. Dance intersects with race, nation, gender and colonialism and politics (O'Shea & Carter, 2010). As such, it has been argued that dance can be a means through which to explore and address issues of power and oppression. In an exploration of the consideration of race (or lack of) within the creative art therapies, Mayor (2012) takes the view

that race is created in relationship because it is "produced and performed, embodied and enacted in the encounter of at least two bodies" (p. 215). This encounter, he maintains, is laden with colonialism, capitalism, racism, and personal experiences. As race is created in relationship, then transformation and individual and collective healing, Mayor argues, can also occur through relationship. Thus dance, being relational, could be a tool with which to explore issues of power and oppression.

Mayor (2012) suggests that psychotherapeutic approaches that use touch, movement and "in being in one's body in relation to another" (p. 216) can have great therapeutic potential, especially in exploring relational issues and trauma. There is growing evidence from psychotherapeutic and neuroscientific research of the effectiveness of working with the body when addressing the effects of trauma (Meekums, 2005; Mills & Daniluk, 2002; Roberts, 2016; Van Der Kolk, 1996). A common effect of trauma is not feeling connected to one's body or *disembodiment* (Mayor, 2010) and, as such, the body can be experienced as unsafe. Mayor (2010) suggests that embodied therapeutic practices, such as DMP, could facilitate the (re)connection to the body for people experiencing disembodiment.

Because dance is relational and involves the body Gray (2001) too suggests that dance could be effective when working with survivors of abuse as all abuse occurs in relationship and a person's relationship to themselves and to others is often dramatically affected by abuse. Thus, integral to their healing

process, Gray argues, is restoring safety in their body and rebuilding relationship capacity, which DMP can facilitate.

Roberts's (2016) study found that DMP could be therapeutic for those dealing with the effects of a concealable stigma (e.g. the effects of domestic violence, displacement, depression). They argue that DMP can bring to awareness adaptive or maladaptive behaviours and "the demands of the self and those of the dominant culture [can be] embodied, amplified, nurtured or challenged'' (Pallaro as cited in Roberts, 2010, p. 68) through dance therapy. They argue that concealable stigmas can affect a person both on a psychological and somatic level because "while stigma directly relates to the societal constructs that deem those stigmatised as 'less than', it also directly relates to the appearance, function, expression, and experience of the body" (p. 80). Thus, carriers of a concealable stigma can experience disconnection from their body, feel unsafe in their bodies, feel they are 'hiding' a part of their identity while in public, and can experience a lack of self-acceptance. Because of the concealed nature of the stigma, the need for support and the experience of marginalization, oppression, and discrimination can often go unrecognized.

Dance as Therapeutic

According to Chace and Chaiklin (1975) dance can be therapeutic because it is a communication of feeling, both motivated by and expressive of our emotions. Studies conducted across various academic fields exploring the

effects of dance (recreational and therapeutic) on different populations, have recorded increases in self-awareness and self-esteem (Burkhardt & Brennan, 2012; Payne, 2006) and reduced levels of depression and anxiety (Burkhardt & Brennan, 2012; Leseho & Maxwell, 2010) amongst participants. Negative body image, as Karkou et al. (2017) maintain, has been associated with low self-esteem, obesity, depression and eating disorders, and studies on the effects of dance participation amongst children (e.g Burkhardt & Brennan, 2012) and those with those with eating disorders (Eli & Kay, 2015; Feldman, 2017) have shown that dance can facilitate a healthier relationship to the body, which, in turn, positively effects psychological and physical health. As well as an increase in self-esteem, Murcia, Kreutz, Clift and Bongard's (2009) study found that increased perceptions of wellbeing were also linked to coping strategies.

Most research into the therapeutic nature of dance has come from the field of DMP, an approach that is already being used with clinical and non-clinical populations of all ages and in various settings (Leseho & Maxwell, 2010). However, there appears to be growing interest in the mind-body connection, and of dance and movement within the field of counselling and psychotherapy. An understanding of the body as a vehicle for expression, especially when verbal expression is difficult, is particularly relevant to counselling, and gives support to a more holistic and integrative approach to psychological wellbeing in the counselling field. Findings from Eli and Kay's (2015) study of how a group of women creatively explore their experience of living with an eating disorder

through dance, highlight how experience can often "remain obscured by exclusively verbal or textual inquiry" and how dance can be used as a tool to explore the "inarticulate, sensory experiences of illness"(p. 63).

Recreational dance as therapeutic. The benefits of dance and creative movement can also be experienced without the aid of a dance therapist (Leseho & Maxwell, 2010). However, the psychotherapeutic effects of recreational dance practiced in a non-clinical environment and by a non-clinical population, have received far less attention than the effects of DMP. Leseho & Maxwell (2010), along with Ali et al. (2017), advocate for greater consideration of and use of recreational dance and movement as an adjunct counselling.

In their study of a recreational dance programme delivered in an NHS acute mental health setting, Froggett and Little (2002) argue that its value was related to dance's "in-between" status: the inner and outer experience of participants were connected through dance, because dance engaged the imagination and translated it into movement. Findings of the study indicated that dance contributed to a hopeful, yet realistic, sense of connection between the mind and the body, and to people inside and outside the hospital. Froggett and Little (2002) point out the lack of research on dance in NHS acute mental health settings and suggest further research on the subject.

A study by Lewis, Annett, Davenport, Hall and Lovatt (2016) into the psychological benefits in older people and those with Parkinson's disease

participating in a recreational dance programme in a non-clinical setting found a reduction in mood disturbances, especially anger, and a reduction in fatigue amongst those who initially scored higher for depression. Given their findings, they suggest that the psychotherapeutic benefits of dance should be further explored.

Goulimaris et al.'s (2014) quantitative study and Lima and Vieira's (2007) mixed-methods study both explore the psychological effects of recreational dance in a non-clinical environment on a non-clinical population. A review by Burkhardt and Brennan (2012) of controlled studies of recreational dance activities involving 5–21-year-olds, supports the findings of Goulimaris et al.'s (2014) and Lima and Vieira's (2007) studies; however, they argue that further high-quality research is needed to support their results.

As demonstrated by the literature, recreational dance is mostly associated with increased psychological and physical well-being, however, some studies indicate no improvement in mood during or after dance activities (Lewis et al., 2016), and for some people dance can bring up difficult, even highly distressing emotions (Leseho & Maxwell, 2010). For some, dance may not have any positive impact or could even have a negative impact on their psychological health. This suggests that dance may not be therapeutic for everyone and that the use of dance and movement in counselling should be considered carefully and on a case by case basis.

Dance addiction: when dance can be damaging. Little is known about the harmful effects of excessive recreational dancing, according to Maraz, Urbán, Griffiths and Demetrovics (2015). In a study of 447 Ballroom and Latin dancers attending weekly recreational dance classes, they found that dance addiction was associated with mild psychopathology. A high number of eating disorder symptoms and, to a lesser extent, traits of borderline personality disorder were also recorded, which they argue is in line with results of other studies on "problematic exercisers". The study found that one of that main motives for dancing was to avoid feeling empty or dealing with everyday problems. Escapism, they argue, is a strong indicator of dance addiction and is a high motivational factor in other types of addictions. While they remind us that recreational dance is very clearly a healthy activity for most individuals, they argue that their study shows that for a small minority excessive dancing could have problematic or harmful effects, and they recommend further research into these negative effects. While this study sheds light on the 'dark side of dance' and highlights the need for caution when considering the use of dance/ movement in or as an adjunct to counselling, it also provides support to the theories on the interdependence of the body and the mind . It also suggests that how a person engages with dance can provide insight into how they relate to themselves and others.

Implications for Counselling of Recreational Dance

Three studies (Ali et al., 2017; Issari, 2011; Leseho & Maxwell, 2010) exist that explore the psychotherapeutic effects of recreational dance in a non-clinical environment, on a non-clinical population, *and* explicitly consider the implications for counselling. Unlike the studies previously mentioned that use either a quantitative or mixed method approaches, all three of these studies use a qualitative approach.

Ali et al.'s (2017) study found several therapeutic benefits to attending "world dance" classes: a sense of acceptance and achievement; creativity; connecting to childhood; culture; expression; happiness; healing; health; social support; and stress relief. They explore how these findings can be relevant to counselling and suggest dance as an adjunct to counselling, either within sessions or as 'homework' for clients.

Leseho and Maxwell's (2010) study found that recreational dance, of varying genres, can evoke deep feelings, leading to cathartic release, transformation in emotional states, and psychological growth. Significantly, participants reported experiencing many of the same benefits in a non-therapeutic environment as has been reported in the literature on dancing in both therapeutic and non-therapeutic settings. Two major implications for the counselling field were explored in the study. Firstly, they suggest that insight can be gained into clients who dance because themes that emerged from the analysis of the participants' experiences "clearly articulate what has helped

[them] through the healing process" and what makes a better quality of life for them. Secondly, they stress the importance of training in and use of alternative and expressive therapies as an adjunct to traditional therapeutic practices for clients who are verbally "stuck", and especially when working with issues that affect the body, such as trauma and physical illness.

Through her study on the role that Greek cultural dance plays in the formation of cultural identity and transmission of sociocultural knowledge and practices, Issari (2011) aims to provide insight into the Greek-American population in order to improve counselling services for this community. In order to work more transculturally, she argues counsellors need to be more aware of their client's cultural values and identity, life experiences and history. For Issari (2011) the construction, sustenance and performance of ethnic identity can be examined through dance because "the 'language' of dance is not all about dance" (p. 263).

The Contribution of the Study to the Literature

In seeking to understand the embodied, lived experience of dance, this study draws on theories of embodiment and the mind-body connection, as it is understood in neuroscience and somatic psychology, and draws on Jungian theory of creative expression being a bridge to our unconscious. As demonstrated, of the studies on recreational dance, the vast majority use quantitative research methods to record changes in perceived wellbeing. The majority of qualitative studies on the therapeutic implications of dance have

come from the field of DMP, yet these studies have not tended to focus on the therapeutic aspect of recreational dance. Qualitative studies that aim to understand the subjective, lived experience of people who dance recreationally, in a non-therapeutic environment, with the aim to inform counselling practice, are very few and with this study I aim to contribute to this unresearched area of study.

Panhofer (2011) calls for greater research within the counselling and psychotherapy fields into the therapeutic benefits of dancing. By exploring, documenting, and analysing participants' experiences of recreational dance, and putting participants' words into text, this study contributes to the kind of research Panhofer (2011) calls for. Panhofer (2011) questions, however, the extent to which the lived, embodied experience can be worded and, as such, suggests greater use of research methodologies in counselling and psychotherapy research that include embodied perceptual practices. They point out that the lack of existing research on dance is in part due to the fact that the exact phenomenon being studied is non-verbal and non-text, and the researchers themselves are often dancers, who themselves choose to express themselves with their body.

Conclusion

In this chapter I reviewed the existing literature on dance within the Maltese context and outlined the main literature on the definition of dance and why we dance. I then carried out an in-depth review of the literature on the

applicability of dance to counselling principles, the therapeutic qualities of recreational dance, as well as the 'dark side' of dance, and the implications of recreational dance for the counselling profession. I discussed gaps in the literature and the contribution this study makes to the existing literature.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodological approach taken in this study, the research design, and method used. It also explores issues of validity, reliability, and trustworthiness as well as ethical considerations, such as informed consent and confidentiality.

Methodological Approach

In this study I consider whether a client's subjective, lived, embodied experience of recreational dance can provide insight into them as individuals, and whether dance/movement could be a tool with which to explore and address social, emotional, and relational issues within counselling. In seeking to understand the subjective experience of participants, a phenomenological approach was deemed most fitting. This is because phenomenological enquiry allows for the description of a phenomenon as it is experienced first-hand by those involved (Descombe as cited in Bright & Harrison, 2013) and acknowledges the existence of multiple realities. It insists that any attempt to understand, what Edmund Husserl terms a person's *lifeworld,* needs to be grounded in how the person understands it to be (Bright & Harrison, 2013; Gray, 2014). My role as researcher is thus to explore how the same phenomenon - that of recreational dance - is uniquely experienced by each participant.

Bracketing and Reflexivity

To allow the phenomenon to speak for itself (Gray, 2014), *bracketing* and *reflexivity* on the part of the researcher is crucial. Bracketing is the process whereby a researcher "suspends internal and external suppositions, thereby

allowing the focusing in on a specific phenomenon to understand or see it as it is" (Given, 2008, p. 64). The ability of the researcher to fully bracket and not have any influence over the research process has, however, been widely criticised for being unrealistic. Qualitative research is a heuristic process, in that it germinates within and emanates from the researcher (Moustakas, 1990), and we live in "an interpretative and interpreted world" (Martin Heidegger as cited in McLeod, 2015). As such, it is inevitable that the researcher will have some level of influence over the research process (McLeod, 2015), because it is not possible for any researcher to fully *bracket their* views and assumptions about the participant and the phenomenon (Bright & Harrison, 2010). Smith (2007) furthers Heidegger's hermeneutic slant to phenomenology by arguing that, in fact, a "double hermeneutic" (p. 35) is at play in phenomenological enquiry, as the researcher is "trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what is happening to them" (p. 3).

Rather than ignoring the inevitability of researcher influence, Heidegger argues it should become part of the process; which is possible when adopting an interpretative phenomenological approach to research. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) draws both on phenomenology and hermeneutics (Smith, 2007) as it seeks to both produce rich data grounded in the participants' experiences, as well as critically consider meaning within particular social constructions. Thus, IPA fits well both with my interpretivist and social constructivist ontological and epistemological position, and this study's

ideographic focus.

IPA requires me to take both a phenomenological, insider position, by listening to the participants' experiences and prioritising their world view at the core of the account, as well as an interpretative, outsider, position, by attempting to make sense of the participants' experiences and exploring them in a way that answers a particular research question.

In my own research journey, I attempted to bracket my own experience, views, and assumptions on the topic and participants, as best as I could. However, I was aware that it would not be possible to do so fully, which became increasingly apparent as the process went on. Thus, rather than ignoring them, I wrote them down, and, when appropriate to the research method, included them in my analysis and discussion of data. I was aware that by not acknowledging and, therefore, not being able to process my thoughts, assumptions etc. they would influence the research in ways that neither I as the researcher, nor the reader, could be cognisant of. This is part of the process of *reflexivity,* which is crucial to IPA research. Reflexivity is the process of examining oneself as a researcher as well as in the research relationship. It involves recognising that as researchers we are part of the social world that we are studying, and it involves continuous recognition, examination and understanding about our own values, assumptions, preconceptions, social background etc., and how these affect the research practice. Reflexivity also involves examining one's relationship to the participants and making explicit

how the relationship dynamics may affect the participants interaction in the process (Mills, Durepos & Wiebe, 2010).

As a qualitative researcher, I am "co-creating knowledge" (Finlay & Evans, 2009), and engaging in a "dynamic process of interaction" (Etherington as cited in Bright, 2013, p. 63) between myself, the research participants, the literature, and the research process. Being highly reflexive and able to bracket as much as possible is crucial to the creation of the conditions for this dynamic, and to be able to get as close as possible to the participant's subjective experience "in a way that more fully respects the person, his or her story and the meanings the person attaches to it" (Bright & Harrison, 2013, p. 89).

Research Design and Method

Purposive sampling. IPA's ideographic focus means it is typical to have between 6 and 8 participants (McLeod, 2014) and a sample group that is fairly homogenous. In this study participants needed to be 18 years of age or above, be living in Malta at the time of the interview and, be able to communicate well in English (as I do not speak Maltese). For depth of material, participants needed to have danced recreationally on a regular basis for at least six months preceding the interview. In wanting in-depth data, purposive sampling was deemed most appropriate, because it involves identifying and selecting participants that are experienced with the phenomenon being studied, and is a sampling method that places importance on the ability to communicate experiences in an expressive and reflective manner (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green,

Wisdom, Duan & Hoagwood, 2015). As I am interested in the intersectionality of dance, I did not want to limit the research criteria to one gender, nationality or ethnicity etc, however, the requirement to speak English meant that only a certain sub-section of Maltese society was able to participate in the study; which will inevitably have implications on the study's findings. Pringle et al. (2011) argue that having a too narrow and homogenous sample could make the transferability of findings to other areas or groups more difficult. However, this limitation can be overcome by ensuring that the data is rich and transparent, sufficiently related to and grounded in current literature, and that the researcher acknowledges the limitations relating to participants.

To ensure participants could opt-in to participate in the study, recruitment was carried out through gatekeepers (Ya Habibi Belly Dance School, Mares Tribal Fusion Dance School, and the Malta Association for the Counselling Profession), all of which were sent via email an information letter (Appendix A) and a copy of the participant consent form (Appendix B) to disseminate amongst their students/members. The information letter asked interested participants to contact me directly if they wished to take part in the study or obtain further information, and my contact details were provided in the letter.

Data collection. At the start of each interview any questions the participant had were discussed and then the consent form was signed. 7 one-to-one, audio recorded interviews that lasted between 1 hour 15 minutes and 1 hour 30 minutes were conducted. As I am concerned with allowing data to

emerge, rather than looking for answers, an advantage of the inductive collection of large amounts of data is that factors that were not part of the original research focus are more likely to be picked up in the analysis process (Gray, 2011). One-to-one interviews allow for the building of rapport between the researcher and participant and for in-depth discussions of personal experiences. They also give participants time to reflect and be listened to.

Semi-structured interviews were used as they are collaborative yet emphasise the role of the participant as the expert. They also allow for flexibility in the direction of the interview. A benefit of the depth and space that semi-structured interviews allow for is that if participants are feeling comfortable and not rushed they are more likely to share their experiences and, in more detail (Coolican, 2009). I tried to help participants feel more comfortable in various ways, including following where they wanted to go with the discussion and not interrupting, and ensuring I ask my interview questions in a natural way and at the appropriate time. In creating a comfortable atmosphere I also wanted to reduce my influence over the meanings they attributed to their experiences. At the end of each interview, there was an opportunity to debrief, during which partcipants could add anything they deemed important (McLeod, 2015).

To test the clarity and validity of the interview questions, and to familiarise myself with them in order to avoid over-relying on the interview guide during the interviews, I carried out a pilot interview. Brocki and Wearden (2006) criticise many IPA studies for the lack of information on and transparency regarding the

questions asked in interviews; thus, for greater transparency and trustworthiness, I have included a copy of the interview guide (Appendix C).

After all the interviews had been conducted, each was transcribed at a semantic level. All words spoken, including false starts, significant pauses, laughs, that are worth recording, were transcribed as they all contained individual meaning (Smith & Osborn, 2003). During transcription, I started to note emerging themes. The transcripts were then emailed to the participants to review and amend, to ensure that they accurately reflected their experiences. To help immerse myself in the data, I chose to transcribe most of the interviews myself. One interview was transcribed by a professional transcriber (see Appendix D for signed confidentiality form).

Data analysis. As is typical in IPA informed studies, after the interviews were transcribed, I used the structure proposed by Smith and Osborn (2003) as an analysis guide. These authors remind us that their method is not prescriptive and that each researcher will have their own way of working. Qualitative analysis, they argue, is "inevitably a personal process, and the analysis itself is the interpretative work which the investigator does at each of the stages." (p. 67). In line with their guide, I split each transcript into three columns. In the first column I wrote my comments on what the participant had said, which included attempts at summarising or paraphrasing, associations and connections, preliminary interpretations, comments on the specific language used, and the sense of the person themselves that was coming across to me through their

words. The middle column contained the transcription of the participants' words. In the third column I documented emerging themes. I chose to elicit themes through manual coding, because such a method helped me develop "an intimacy [with the data] that might not have been achieved otherwise" (Clarke as cited in Pringle et al., 2011).

As suggested by Smith and Osborn (2003), I then listed the emergent themes in chronological order, searched for connections, and continuously re-ordered them based on analytical or theoretical connections. Some themes clustered together, and others emerged as superordinate themes. I then carried out the same process of analysis for each interview, noting new themes that emerged, as well as keeping in mind the themes that had already emerged from previous transcripts, in order to identify repeating patterns. By working in this way, I aimed "to respect convergences and divergences in the data – recognizing ways in which accounts from participants are similar but also different." (Smith & Osborn 2003, p. 73). Superordinate themes and subordinate themes were clustered and re-clustered several times, simultaneously drawing on my interpretations to make sense of what the participant was saying, while also checking my own understanding against the participant's exact words, by going back to the interviews (Smith & Osborn, 2003). I then produced a table of superordinate themes, each broken down into subordinate themes, and noting transcript page numbers referring to corresponding quotes from participants. Through discussions with my supervisor, further readings of the transcripts, and of

literature on specific themes, this table was reworked several times throughout the analysis process, based on whether themes could stand alone as themes, or whether they could be understood better as part of a wider, more encompassing theme. IPA asks of researchers not to look for answers, but to allow data to emerge; and an advantage of phenomenological inquiry is the emphasis it places on the inductive collection of large amounts of data which means that themes not part of the original research focus can emerge (Gray, 2011).

I then wrote up my findings. This stage of the process helped me expand and then home in on my analysis. I support and illustrate the themes and meanings derived from the experience of the participants through verbatim extracts from the transcripts, ensuring a clear distinction between what the participant said and my interpretation or account of what they said. I present the results and discussion together, discussing the links to the literature as I present each subordinate theme. I chose to present them together in one chapter for two reasons. Firstly, given the amount and depth of the data gathered, by presenting and discussing the findings simultaneously I was able to stay within the word count. This allowed me to explore the findings and implications for counselling in greater detail. Secondly, I felt that the applicability of the findings to counselling would be more clearly understood if they were discussed simultaneously rather than separately. This was particularly important, given that the connection between dance and counselling may not be obvious

for many readers. I then sent the entire Results and Discussion chapter to the participants via email to give them the opportunity to clarify, amend, or remove anything they may have said. None of the participants suggested or requested any changes.

I chose IPA over other analytical approaches due to its dual focus. While Thematic Analysis, for instance, focuses primarily on patterning of meaning across participants, IPA focuses both on the patterning of meaning of dance across participants as well as the individual meaning attributed to dance by participants. Understanding the individual experience of recreational dance was equally, if not more, important to me than understanding the commonalties in participants' experiences. Another reason I chose IPA is because of its phenomenological basis. The main aim of this study is to understand how the same phenomenon (recreational dance) is uniquely experienced by the participants. Thus, while Thematic Analysis is phenomenologically-informed, IPA is grounded in and specifically orientated towards understanding the phenomenological experience of participants.

Limitations and critique of IPA. Whilst IPA researchers must ensure findings are firmly anchored in direct quotes from participants, as a method that aims to go beyond a standard thematic analysis, IPA has been criticised for drawing the researcher away from the meaning attached to a phenomenon by the person experiencing it (Pringle et al., 2011). This, some argue, has implications for the

significance of findings of IPA studies, and raises questions of the ethics of interpretative research methods and methodologies (Smith, 1999). The difficulty in bracketing raises questions of researcher bias. However, much I tried to bracket, it is inevitable that my assumptions and preconceptions, based on my own experiences and world view, influenced how I engaged with the research process.

Validity, Reliability and Trustworthiness

Some argue that IPA's ideographic focus and small sample sizes is a weakness in the approach. Questions about the validity of IPA studies have been raised on the grounds that generalisations in IPA studies are, for the most part, not feasible and that idiographic studies have the potential to be "subjective, intuitive and impressionistic" (Wadeley, Birch & Malim, 1992). However, as Bright and Harrison (2013) argue, IPA neither claims nor aims to "make grand claims, which form generalisable knowledge" (p. 92). As a researcher, concerned with the subjective experience of participants and interested in whether insights gained can be of use to the counselling field, I am interested in the "theoretical transferability rather than empirical generalizability" of findings (Smith et al., 2009). Furthermore, as Reid, Flowers and Larkin (2005) maintain, although broad generalisations may not be possible (nor desirable), commonalities across participants' experiences and my analytic commentary could lead to some useful insights which can have wider implications. By contextualising the contribution that this study makes to the wider literature,

"and by gaining insight into the individual, insight into the whole can also be achieved." (Pringle et al., 2011, p. 11).

Trustworthiness in research is achieved when study findings reflect as closely as possible the meanings as described by participants (Lietz et al., 2006). To this aim, I ensure my analysis and discussion are firmly rooted in and supported by direct quotes from the participants, and I make clear what the participants have said and what are my interpretations of or thoughts on what they have said. I also kept a journal to help me recognise, monitor, and reduce my influence on the process as much as possible. Rather than deny my inevitable influence on the process, through constant reflexivity and attempts at *bracketing* I hope to have created a more transparent research process and increased the trustworthiness of the study. I also tried to avoid over-prompting in interviews to avoid them becoming too structured and, in doing so, potentially restricting the participants expression of their experience (Bright & Harrison, 2013), which could have implications for the trustworthiness of the study.

In order to increase rigour and the reliability of my research, throughout the process, I continuously went back and forth between chapters to ensure that my conceptual framework, methodology, research questions, data collection and analysis, and literature review were all in line with one another.

As suggested by Brocki and Wearden (2006), for greater transparency and trustworthiness I have included a copy of the interview guide used and I carried out a pilot interview to test the clarity and validity of the interview

questions. To further ensure the credibility of the research I employed an audit trail (Smith et al., 2009). Participants were sent via email a copy of their interview transcript and the Results and Discussion chapter to review and make any amendments, to further ensure that their words and experiences had been represented correctly. On completion of the study, participants were sent a copy of the entire study via email.

Informed Consent and Confidentiality

Before starting the research process, I submitted all required documents to the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) and started the research process on receiving full ethical clearance (Appendix F). Participants were recruited through gatekeepers to ensure an opt-in, informed-decision-making recruitment procedure. A recruitment letter (Appendix A), which included details on the purpose of the study, participant criteria, how the study would be conducted, and an invitation to attend a preliminary meeting to ask questions or address any concerns about the study, was sent via email to gatekeepers to disseminate to potential participants. Along with the recruitment letter, a copy of the consent form (Appendix B) was also sent to participants. The consent form confirms that participation in the study is voluntary, and that participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any point without explanation, in which case data relating to them will cease to be gathered and any existing data would be destroyed immediately. The letter also states that interview transcripts and the analysis of them will be given to the participants for verification and for

them to make any amendments they wished and that their right to anonymity would be respected through the use of pseudonyms.

To ensure that each participant fully understood the purpose of the study and of the interview, all the information outlined in the information letter and consent form was reiterated to them at the start of the interview, and they were given the opportunity to ask any questions or address any concerns they may have had (McLeod, 2003). Each participant was then asked to sign the consent form before the interview and audio-recording commenced.

Given the research question, I did not perceive the participants to be at risk of harm by taking part in the study. However, I chose to provide debriefing after each interview, because, as Smith and Obsorn (2003) remind us, interviews may enter an area of discussion that has not been predicted by the researcher or the participant and might bring up painful or distressing emotions for the participant. Debriefing thus gave participants the opportunity to process and reflect upon the interview and to ask any further questions. I also informed them that a list of counsellors could be provided to them if they wished to explore further or receive support for difficult feelings that may have been brought up during or may emerge after the interview.

Participants were given the opportunity to choose pseudonyms for themselves and anyone they mentioned in their interviews. Once I finished the entire process, study participants were sent a copy of the complete study via email.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I outlined the methodological approach taken in this study and the research design. I discussed issues pertaining to the validity, reliability and trustworthiness of the study, as well as consent and confidentiality. In the next chapter I present and discuss the findings from the analysis of the data.

Chapter 4: Findings, Analysis and Discussion

In this chapter I present the qualitative findings from my analysis of the seven interviews conducted. I discuss the findings in relation to the literature and consider whether recreational dance could provide insight into a client's social, emotional and relational patterns, and whether dance/movement could be used as an adjunct to counselling to support clients.

Participant Profiles

Table 1 provides the name (pseudonym), age, and occupation of each participant, as well as the dance style/s they each currently practice and the number of years they have been dancing recreationally. To ensure the anonymity of the participants pseudonyms have been used.

Table 1

Participant Profiles

Name	Age	Occupation	Dance Style	Years dancing recreationally
Miriam	70s	Mental health sector	Ballroom	30+
Linda	20s	Student	Contemporary	20+
Charlotte	20s	Disability sector	Jazz	20+
Cristina	20s	Social work sector	Ballet	20+
Raven	30s	Finance sector & self-employed	American Tribal Style & Tribal Fusion	4+
Zara	20s	Education sector	Hip-hop	5+
Sarah	20s	Student	Ballet	10+

Table of Themes

The themes that emerged during the analysis process have been divided into four superordinate themes, each of which have been broken down further into subordinate themes (outlined in the Table 2 below).

Table 2

Table of Themes

Dance as a Metaphoric Other	Dance as Connection to an Actual Other	Relating to the Self Through Dance	The Meaning in Movement
Dance as a nurturer	The support from dancing relationships	Dance as time and space with oneself	Movement as need for control
Dance as a continuous presence	The intimacy of dance	Dance as self-expression	The sense of shame in movement
Dance as companionship	The subjective experience of shared wellbeing through dance	Dance as connection to the body	Movement as wish for interconnectedness
			Movement as a means of avoidance
			Movement as need for freedom

Dance as a Metaphoric Other

The way in which most of the participants described dance seems to allude to dance fulfilling the functions of a metaphoric partner. Within popular culture and some academic fields, relationships are often compared to a

"dance". Within the counselling field direct parallels have been made between the dynamics of dance and that of relationships (e.g. Pistole, 2003; Mathieson, Jordan, Carter & Stubbe, 2015). However, there appears to be no discussion in the literature on dance itself being experienced by the dancer as if it were a person. This could be a unique finding from this study which could provide a novel way of exploring the experience of dance from a counselling perspective.

Four participants personified dance, using words to suggest a relationship with dance that is intimate, dynamic, and involves a communication of feeling. Sarah said dancing "is like you are talking to your spouse, like when you do certain movements, or um… it's like a play with your energy". This is one of the elements of dance which Sarah said made her "love" dance. When talking about her love for dance, she repeatedly put her hand on her heart, and in doing so appeared to be expressing her love for it, not only though her words, but also through her body language. I, sitting across from her, experienced her emotions.

Other participants also described their "love" for dance. This expression of love for dance could support the argument that dance is *more* than "just exercise" (a view that is still widely held in society) because it involves emotions (Ward, 2008), and was a view vocalised by some of the participants. Sarah, for example, said dance is "different than just going to the gym or going for a run, you know... it is something where I feel, aside from the physical exercise it's a lot more to it than that. […] [t]he fact that you can share emotions". The element of

emotion in her experience of dance suggests a similarity between dance relationships and non-dance relationships. Thus, an exploration of how someone relates to dance could provide insight into how they relate in other relationships, their needs of others in relationships, and the expectations they may have of others, including the counsellor. Insight of this type is, in fact, recognised across various theoretical counselling approaches as an important vehicle of change (Castonguay & Hill, 2007).

Dance as a nurturer. The words used and body language displayed by participants when talking about their experiences of dance gave me a sense that they were talking about a nurturing person. All the participants described dance as having helped them grow as people and supported them through challenging times in their lives. Sarah, for instance, expressed that dance had helped her grow as person and that it "always kept me going" and "I still look for it in my everyday life". I found her choice of words interesting here as it is as if she were talking about a person.

For some, dance seems to be source of comfort. Zara compared the feeling she gets when dancing to the feeling of talking to a stranger about one's problems and said "I don't know why but it's really comforting talking about my current problems to a total stranger. It's the same as in dance. You're kind of talking about your problems but um... you're dancing them out instead". I found her metaphor striking and it made me wonder what it is about talking to a stranger about her problems that is so comforting to her, more so, it seems, than

talking to someone she knows. The relationship Zara is describing here also has parallels to the counselling relationship as many people say they find it easier to express themselves to a counsellor than to someone closer to them. Zara also described how when she hears music in public she immediately starts to dance. She laughed when describing this, giving me the impression that hearing music is like bumping into a familiar friend, an experience that is joyful, and that they "talk" to each other though dance. Therefore, not only does dance appear to nurture and support the participants but the participants also seem to pour out their emotions and concerns in (to) dance. In this respect, it could be said that dance assumes the functions of the counselling relationship whose fundamental importance to the client also includes aspects of nurturance and a safe place to confide about emotions and concerns.

Raven seemed to experience dance as nurturing and life-giving when she compared dance to "love" and "breathing"; as something that is a "part of life, because it comes natural". Her experience supports the argument that movement is fundamental to human beings and society (Lumsden, 2010) and that dancing together may have served and continues to serve an evolutionary function (BBC, Why Do Humans Dance?, 2018). Given such arguments on the socio-historic importance of dance/movement to us as human beings, I argue that dance requires greater attention from the counselling field in its effort to understand and support individuals.

Dance as continuous presence. For all participants dance has been a continuous presence in their lives since childhood. It has been *there for them* at the same time and same place every week. It is a predictable and reliable presence, which for some participants breaks up the week and which others said they looked forward to amidst the stresses of daily life. Zara described not wanting the feeling she gets when dancing to ever leave her. In fact, she explained that after dancing "because of the adrenaline... I just have this hype of 'I just want to keep dancing forever and ever and ever and keep going'".

Having practiced ballet since the age of three, Cristina said that ballet has become an integral part of her life and something she chose to continue even through busy and stressful periods of her life. She described not wanting to try other genres of dance because ballet was her "comfort zone" and trying other dances would be "stepping outside of her comfort zone". Sarah, who started dancing ballet at the age of five and currently attends ballet classes, also chose to continue ballet over the genre she said she enjoys more (hip-hop). She explained that this was because she had been dancing ballet since she was five years old and therefore was the genre that had helped her greatly as a dancer and in mastering other dance styles. In both Cristina and Sarah's accounts, I see a strong attachment to the dance style that first introduced them to dancing and nurtured them as dancers as children. Both Sarah and Cristina started their relationship with dance in their early childhood years and describe it as being part, not only of their formation as dancers, but also as

individuals. Attachment theory suggests that early relationships can create a template for future patterns of relating (Bowby, 1969). Thus, it could be said, that this early relationship to dance may have created a template for patterns of relating to themselves and others later in their lives. For instance, both Christina and Sarah spoke about the sense of mastership and the discipline that their ballet practice instilled in them and they both described seeing these traits in how they have approached their work and academic studies. Thus, in a counselling session, an exploration of both Christina and Sarah's early relationship to dance could be useful in understanding their ways of relating in adulthood which could be replicated with other clients.

Just as the counselling relationship for clients could be described as a "secure base" (Bowby, 1969), the dance relationship could also be said to be providing participants with a secure base. Dance may well have been that "secure base" for those participants who practiced it as children, providing them with both a physical and emotional place of safety. The participants' relationship to dance is one that appears to be, and to have been, predictable, reliable, and continuously present in their lives as they were growing up. How they have learnt to relate in dance could be a window onto how they relate to other people in their lives, including the counsellor.

Dance as companionship. All the participants described strong feelings when not dancing or when thinking of not dancing, with some of them appearing to experience a sense of loss. Having not danced for three weeks at

the time of the interview, Zara said, "I can feel myself missing it already". When describing the feeling further she compared it to "like you miss someone who's been abroad". She said she knew she "won't be able to stay away from it for long" and described feeling "very miserable" when she did not dance. Like a good companion might make one feel, when she danced, she described feeling more positive about herself because she was doing something she was good at, and because she was able to express herself. Without dance as a companion, it seems Zara's self-esteem is negatively affected, and has no outlet for her emotions.

Sarah too said she would find it difficult if dance were no longer in her life, that she missed dancing hip-hop, and that if she were to stop dancing ballet she would "miss it 100%" because it has been an important part of her life and something she loves. She said, "[dance] is something I look for in my life so with it not being there I think it would be difficult for me to get used to it". Without dance she said life would "a bit more boring", suggesting dance also fulfils a need for enjoyment and diversity in her life.

Miriam used very emotive language when describing how she had felt when she stopped attending ballroom classes for some years. She described dance as being "gone" and that she felt she had "lost touch" with dance. It was as if she were talking about an important person who had gone away and with whom she had lost touch. She said she "craved for it" during those years and when she now misses one of her ballroom classes she described still

"craving" it and feeling "like I must make the best of it...even to make up for lost time ... because I've been so mu-, so to say, like, starved, for such a long time". Miriam's experience is another example of the strong emotional attachment participants appear to have to dance and suggests that dance is fulfilling a strong need in her. Early on in her interview, she described dance as meaning "expression" and "togetherness" to her and I wonder whether, perhaps, at some point in her life dance substituted a need for closeness that was not being fulfilled elsewhere.

Certainly, dance appears to be fulfilling a need in the lives of the participants, including a need for a stable, familiar, nurturing presence, and for companionship. An exploration of a client's relationship to dance could provide insight and increase awareness of their needs and whether these are being met in the rest of their lives.

Dance as Connection to an Actual Other

As noted widely in the literature (e.g. Issari, 2011; Lima & Vieira, 2007; Pavitra & Shubrata, 2014; Goulimaris et al., 2014; Eales & Goodwin, 2015) and supported by the participants' experiences, dance can foster social, emotional, and physical connection to others. The social and emotional aspect of dance was a particularly important part of Raven and Miriam's experience of dance, and their experiences support Issari's (2011) findings that dance can provide the opportunity for friendship, fellowship and courtship. Raven said she forged strong

friendships with the other members of her American Tribal Style (AST) dance group. In fact, for Raven, as she descibed:

> [Dance] goes beyond dancing together. There's a genuine friendship that is borne out if it so... again it goes back to it being a less lonely world. […] it helps... if you feel... isolated, especially when dealing with stressful scenarios it's very easy to give up. Knowing that.... that you're not alone, it gives you a little... you a little bit of hope that eventually, maybe one day, things... will be resolved or if not completely resolved they will improve. That there is yet hope in the world. Faith in humanity.

For Miriam, dancing is about "togetherness", which is why to her dancing has always involved a partner and dancing with others. She attends ballroom classes with her husband, whom she met at dance classes as a young woman and these classes, she described, were the socially accepted way of courting at the time. She said that her desire for togetherness is reflected in the rest of her life. She said:

> I could never imagine, I... from an early age, like an early age, in my teens, you know, eh, life on my own […] sharing my life... with somebody else... in a close relationship. So, doing things together. So, doing things together. And maybe... I was... how shall I say, I was never a soloist.

How a client experiences moving their body with or in front of others when dancing, how they respond to being led or leading others, and how they respond to touch, could provide insight into how they relate to others in the rest of their lives. As dance can involve the use of touch, movement, and "in being in one's body in relation to another" (Mayor, 2012, p. 216), the use of dance/movement in or alongside counselling could have therapeutic potential, especially in exploring relational issues (Mayor, 2012). According to Payne (2006) dance/movement can also be a "vehicle for the co-creation of a therapeutic alliance" because it "is an animate, active form of embodied communication, or *inter-corporality*" (p. 4).

The support from dancing relationships. Several of the participants described the collaborative, supportive nature of their dance relationships, a theme noted in other studies on recreational dance conducted within the counselling field (Ali et al., 2017). For some participants, such a relationship was reflected and/or desired in other relationships in their lives. An exploration of how their dance relationships are/are not reflected in their other relationships could be a useful way to explore a client's social, emotional and relational issues in counselling.

Raven experiences her ATS classes as a supportive "community", which she also often referred to as a "sisterhood" and a "tribe,". Interdependent relationships appear to be reflected in the social relationships between the dancers, both inside and outside of the dance class, as well as reflected in the

dance movements themselves. Early in the interview, she described the emotional and practical support her fellow dancers provide her outside of the dance class in dealing with difficulties she faces caring for her daughter who has chronic health issues. Raven's experience has parallels with the integrated dance community that Eales and Goodwin (2015) studied, whose members practice acts of interdependence inside and outside of the dance space, which are considered to be an act of social justice.

Raven described ATS, a dance in which the leader and followers are constantly changing, as a "conversation" of movements that the group "build together". She spoke in depth about the collaborative nature of the dance and what she does, as a member of the dance troupe, to ensure fairness and to be of support to others. For example, she expressed that she needs "to be mindful that I should not be hogging the leader position", which she said is "unfair". While being mindful of the varying abilities of her fellow dancers, she also described playfully challenging those with less experience with complicated movements when she is leading a dance. Being supportive, yet challenging and playful, having an awareness of others, and the clear importance to her of the support she gives and receives in her dance practice, could be indicative of how Raven relates to others in the rest of her life and the importance she places on interdependence in her life. Her way of relating in dance also appears to be indicative of the kind of relationships she wishes to have more of in her life. She expressed a wish for a more interconnected world where, like in dance,

relationships are experienced physically rather than through technology. She said she believes an understanding body language, something she said is crucial to dance, has been lost in relationships today due to technology, and that women supporting women is not how female relationships are portrayed in society today. Raven's experience of dance supports Acarón's (2011) argument that in modern society we are disconnected from our bodies and, because of this, we are increasingly searching for ways to heal this disconnection through taking up body-centred practices, such as dance.

Miriam is the only participant that practices a dance style (ballroom dance) that requires a partner. Partner dance requires interdependence in order to physically execute the movements as well as to build a good rapport between dance partners. Partner dances not only require one person to lead and the other to follow, they also require each partner to emotionally support the other in their roles as leader and follower (Eriksen, 2011). Miriam explained that a point of contention in her and her husband's dance relationship was how her husband communicated to her, through his lead, how she should move. How someone communicates with their dance partner, how they experience being led, and how they wish to be led, could, within a counselling context, provide insight into how the person relates or wishes to relate to others in other relationships. Dance is being increasingly understood as a form of embodied communication (Chace & Chaiklin, 1975; Acolin, 2016; Issari, 2011), a notion that is supported by the participants' experiences of dance, and something which

Sarah explicitly stated: "I feel dance is a bit like a communication, like you watch [online videos], where you say like 'wow it's like this person is talking to me' or even like a couply dance, you know?".

The intimacy of dance. According to Eriksen (2011) there is intimacy in partner dance because it involves an emotional, as well as a physical, connection that many may not experience outside of an intimate, romantic relationship. They argue that this intimacy can be experienced as both uncomfortable and pleasurable. How a client deals with intimacy within their dance relationships could shed light on how they deal with intimacy in other relationships in their lives.

During what Miriam described as a "low time" in her marriage, she said that "the first thing that was given up is uh... 'I don't want to come dancing any longer with you!'". Her experience suggests that when we lose touch emotionally, we can also lose touch physically, and vice-versa (Westland, 2009). Miriam said that dancing together with her husband "faded into nothing" once they married and had children, and eventually, they altogether stopped attending dance classes together. She described having "lost touch" with dance as a result, but of "craving" it, feeling "starved", which made me wonder whether she craved intimacy, both in dance and in life.

Feeling safe and secure in the arms of her dance partner was very important to Miriam and she said that to feel safe, she needs that "their hold and their touch are strong, strong you know, it's light but it's ... it's not, it's not uh…

So, with them I feel safe.". She said that to feel safe she also needs to know that her partner is competent enough and said she finds "it difficult to allow myself into the grip of somebody else, into the hold of someone whom I'm not sure knows where he's going". The word "grip" strikes me, as it suggests a feeling of being held with a certain degree of force, having reduced control over one's own body, and not being able to escape. To me, this highlights the important issue of power in dance (O'Shea & Carter, 2010), especially the power dynamic within partner dances, where one person (usually a male) is leading another person (usually a female). In many dances, one person's body is being controlled by another person's body.

Miriam finds that "experimenting with others" makes her feel tense and that even the uncertainty about someone's competency as a leader makes her question whether they would be a good "match for each other". She said she would consider going to classes alone if "there's a safe person", which she defined as someone who is "competent", so that she "wouldn't be on my own, waiting for chance.... not to enjoy myself, in bad-, in wrong movements". In exploring this further in the interview she became aware that her fear of being led by a partner whose competency she does not know, comes from a fear of failing, a fear she said she has had since childhood. She said:

> With somebody who I don't know what he's going to do then I'm afraid of failing.... Ahhhh (laughs). Oh god! (laughs then breathes out). Afraid of failing... ahh... I'm afraid of not doing...failing! (laughs) oh gosh (laughs).

> So, what's failure to me? (laughs). What's failure to me? (long pause). It's a waste of time…

Miriam's account gives an insight into her need to feel safe which, for her, comes from being led by someone she trusts. On becoming aware during the interview of her need for certainty in dance, she also realised that how she relates in dance is mirrored in how she relates in other parts of her life. Such insight could be paralleled in counselling.

Dancing alongside, or in front, of others can also be an intimate experience because it still involves "an embodied encounter" (Mayor, 2010, p. 216) between two or more bodies. Linda, who dances contemporary dance, described movement, and moving in front of or with someone, as a "very, like, kind of, intimate... thing, when you do certain movements in front of someone else who's not doing it and who's just observing you and it can make you vulnerable" because you are "opening up" to that person when you dance.

Several times in her interview Linda said she feels safe in her dance classes because she does not feel her movements are being judged by the other dancers. Her experience further indicates the importance of safety in all kinds of dance relationships. As in any relationship, including the counselling relationship, trust and emotional and physical safety are important. How someone physically and/or emotionally responds to touch and physical proximity in dance can provide insight into how they experience touch and physical proximity and,

intimacy generally, in other relationships, including the counselling relationship. Healthy relationships can be deeply therapeutic, as can be touch (Stromsted, 2007; Willis, 2007). Yet, the relational aspect of dance, can however, also bring up difficult emotions and be experienced as unsafe by some (Leseho & Maxwell, 2010), especially by those who have experienced relational trauma. When used sensitively and with caution, however, dance/movement could be useful as a tool within and/or alongside counselling to both explore the experience of and to heal relational trauma (Gray, 2001; Mayor, 2010).

The subjective experience of shared wellbeing through dance.

Participants appear to experience a shared sense of wellbeing when they dance. Several of them expressed that something they enjoy and keeps them going back to their classes is that everyone is there for the same purpose; a finding supported by other studies on recreational dance (e.g. Ali et al., 2017; Knestaut, Devine & Verlezza, 2010). For Zara, the reason she goes to dance classes is "to dance and be free", describing her fellow hip-hop dancers as collectively taking their current problems, putting them to the back of their minds, and focusing on the dancing.

For Miriam dancing is about shared experience and shared, reciprocal enjoyment: "I'm enjoying myself, you do the same, with what I'm offering you". It appears that for her dance is an offering of joy to others and, in return, she would also like to be offered joy. Miriam's experience suggests that our

experience of a phenomenon is also dependent on how others experience the same phenomena.

Sarah described being able feel the movements and emotions of her fellow dancers, without even having to look at them, which in turn encourages her to bring out the same emotion. Her experience supports Rizoletti's (1996) theory on mirror neurons as well as Jola and Colmeiro's (2017) view that synchronisation of movement creates a sense of connectedness, liveliness and presence in dancers.

The participants' subjective experience of shared wellbeing when they dance could support the view that emotional interdependence is an important factor in any healthy relationship (Sels, Ceulemans, Bulteel & Kuppens, 2016). Like the dancing relationship, central to the work of counsellors, is the building of healthy relationships, including the ability to work together and to empathise to know when to challenge and when to follow the client.

Relating to the Self Through Dance

That the body is both a *container* and an *expresser* of emotion, and that spontaneous movement is symbolic of unconscious processes (Payne, 2006) are arguments supported by the participants' experiences of dance in this study. All the participants described their bodies as holding their emotions as well as being able to express their emotions using their body through dance. Participants described feeling more connected to themselves and more complete when they danced, which is in line with Leseho and Maxwell's (2010)

study findings of recreational dance fostering self-discovery. Participants' experiences support the theory of *holism* that sees the body and mind as part of a whole; an idea that is integral to DMP as well as counselling approaches, such as Gestalt (Feldman, 2017). Leseho and Maxwell (2010) add the "Spirit", or soul, to the experience of the "full self", which is supported by Charlotte's experience. Charlotte said she connects most with Jazz dance because, unlike in other genres, in Jazz she experiences a connection of "the mind and soul and my body".

Zara described feeling "complete" when she dances because she can "be herself", and she said she is able to be herself in dance because she is able to express herself. This suggests that feeling one's "full self" depends on being able to express oneself. Miriam also highlighted the importance of *expression* in the feeling of being oneself, when she said: dance is a "part of me"; it "is me" because it is a "full expression of my mind with my body". Dance, she said, "involves all of me […] all me, that's me, that's me, that's mine". Dance is "self-expression. It's self-expression. It's being me. It's being me.". Furthermore, it appears that Miriam experiences no separation between her and the dance: "I like to be it. All of it. All of it. Not just be there. But be it. Be the dance.". Cristina and Sarah also described dance as something that is a part of them, a part of their identity. Such experiences support a phenomenological understanding of dance that sees the dance and the dancer not as separate entities but as a unified whole (Copeland & Cohen, 1983). Dance/movement could thus be

used as a method of exploration in counselling sessions to heighten awareness of the self and to facilitate self-expression.

Dance as time and space with oneself. All the participants described dance as giving them the time and space to be with themselves. For some, their dance class is the only time they have solely for themselves; for others it has become a space vital to maintaining their psychological wellbeing and is used as a form of self-care. Some described needing to disconnect from their daily lives and from others, in order to connect more with themselves. Dancing is time and space that Miriam appears to claim as hers and that she is permitted to take. She said:

> It's a moment for myself...it's an hour, and hour and a half, this is mine... and nothing can […] it's time for me. It's time for me. […] It's not just that I want it, but I'm given permission to use the space.

The time and space Miriam has to herself when she dances is clearly extremely important to her, and it makes me wonder whether she would experience the loss of dance in her life as losing a part of herself or losing connection to herself. If Miriam were a client, one could further explore what it is she feels she would lose if she were to stop dancing and what needs are being met and desires fulfilled by dance in her life.

Raven said she knew she needed to do something for herself, for her physical and psychological wellbeing which led her to try out a dance class.

Dance, she said, is the one thing that disconnects her from everything going on in her life because it requires her to focus on the dancing, and nothing else. When dancing "nothing else exists", she said. For Cristina, her dance class is also a space where she can "cut off" from other people and other things she is doing in life, "listen to herself", "reflect", and it is a "the time to process" her thoughts and feelings. She said:

> I get to listen to what I'm saying and what I'm thinking […] And I think growing up it gave me the space to reflect. Whereas I think when we're young you don't always have this space to, to think about it, you know, nobody tells you 'okay think about that and then tell me tomorrow' because, you know, children are children.

Interestingly, listening to oneself, reflecting and processing are all aims of counselling which makes one wonder whether dance and counselling may, and therefore could, have similar functions for some individuals. Cristina said that in dance she is able to ask herself "'why are you doing it? Why is it important to you?'. Sort of straightening out those thoughts, whereas before, they would be a jumble". She said she has realised though her dance practice that "it's okay to just cut off […] being in your own... space and not talking". For her, the dance space is for "being with yourself, being with your own, what you are comfortable with", as opposed to what you are not comfortable with and doing what others tell you to do. Clearly, dance gives Cristina an opportunity to re-connect with

her thoughts and feelings. If viewed from a Rogerian perspective, dance also appears to be strengthening her internal locus of evaluation (Rogers, 1995), which is in line with other studies on recreational dance and dance psychotherapy that found dance to connect the dancer to themselves, to their inner strength and build self-confidence (e.g. Leseho & Maxwell, 2010; Payne, 2006).

Some of the participants described entering another world when they dance; a place that is free from the influence, needs and expectations of others, and where they are more aware of and receptive to their own wants and needs. It is a space that appears to me to be experienced as safer and more peaceful than the outside world. Cristina described going "into a different kind world" when she dances, a world in which she said she did not have to deal with the "stress projected onto you from the people". Miriam described "feeling in another world" and feeling "elevated" when she dances, describing the feeling as "a spiritual something". As with the use of creative writing or art techniques that allow clients to enter an imaginative world (Jung, 1961), dance/movement could be used to help counselling clients connect to their imagination in order to provide emotional relief as well as help bring unconscious material to the fore for it be further explored.

Dance as self-expression. Dance as a vehicle for expression of personality and feeling was a major theme across all participants, supporting literature that sees the body in dance as a "vehicle for self-expression and a bridge between

emotion and motion for integration and healing" (Payne, 2004, p. 4). While dance continues to be viewed across many fields primarily as a sport or leisure activity with primarily physical health benefits (Ward, 2008), almost all the participants commented that they found dance to be different to other forms of exercise and movement because it involves the expression and sharing of emotion.

Cristina interpreted the way in which she dances as being a reflection of her personality, suggesting that how someone moves can provide insight into their personality. She said, "I saw differences in the way I... I danced and the way dancing affected me because of my personality". She said she "could see that there is a personality difference. I liked... I paid attention to detail whereas other people maybe didn't". Raven also links dance movement to personality when she said as "you get to know the person a bit more […] you'll understand why they will go for one movement".

All of the participants saw dance as an expression of something. Zara, for instance, said:

> whether it's trying to prevent anxiety or a good feeling or you want show your power, how confident you are, um you're trying to show something, in the same way that when you speak to someone you don't know about your problems... you're going to show them maybe... um... you lack confidence or you need help or you, you know, you need to talk to someone. In this case, instead of talking to someone we dance.

Zara makes an insightful comparison between her need to dance and the need of someone experiencing difficulties to express themselves to a stranger:

> when I don't know who's in the audience it makes me want to...want to dance even… even stronger because it's like, you know, 'wow, look at that girl really expressing herself' in the same way that a stranger would say 'illalu. This girl is really expressing herself to me even though she doesn't know me'.

Zara also expressed that dance is the only thing that reduces her anxiety. Her comparison makes me wonder whether, through dance, she is expressing a need for help and to be listened to, and whether she finds it easier to express herself non-verbally and to people she does not know. If so, I wonder what the reasons for this may be. If Zara were a counselling client, exploring such questions within counselling could provide useful insight into her needs in dance and in life. Such exploration could also be useful for other clients experiencing similar issues and her experience supports the view that non-verbal techniques, such as movement, may be useful for some clients as an adjunct to counselling to facilitate exploration of difficult feelings or experiences.

Some participants feel they are expressing themselves fully only when they dance precisely *because* they are not using words when they are dancing. Charlotte, Zara, and Sarah all stated that, for them, dance is *expression without*

words, indicating to me the importance to them of this aspect of dance. If they were counselling clients, an exploration of why and how the non-verbal aspect of dance allows them to be expressive, could give insight into and bring about awareness on their relating patterns and needs which would be useful for the counselling process. For instance, Charlotte said she tends to "use dance for... for... for counselling for myself" as through dance she can "express all my feelings", something she said she sometimes struggles to do through words. She said that in dance "you are not using your words so he can't... the person can't really judge you". As Charlotte stated, she struggles to express herself using words and suggests that she feels judged when she expresses herself verbally. Fear of judgement and how she navigates these feelings in life could be areas for further exploration in counselling.

During the interview several of the participants said that they found it difficult to put into words how they felt when they danced, supporting Panhofer's (2011) argument that verbal and written research methods in counselling and psychotherapy are inadequate, precisely for this reason. When asked in the interview why she likes to dance, Raven said that it is like asking someone "why do you love me?". "Because I do." Why do you breathe? Because I do, because it's part of life, because it comes natural". It's the same thing. It's... it's very difficult to put in words.". The participants' experiences support the argument that sometimes words are not enough and that non-verbal means of expression can, for some, facilitate connection to and

expression of those "centres beyond reach of vocabularies of reason or coercion" (Stewart cited in Leseho & Maxwell, 2010, p. 19).

Participants described feelings of release and freedom as a result of being able to express themselves in dance, which supports findings of other studies (e.g. Leseho & Maxwell, 2010). For instance, when experiencing bullying as a child, Zara said that when she dances she is able to "express and let out the strong emotions inside of her and be free".

Some of the participants described connecting with and expressing their emotions through personas taken on in dance. This supports Pavrita and Shubatra (2014) argument that by taking on a persona and expressing its emotions, dancers can also process and express their own emotions. Sarah stated:

> [I]f I am upset by someone or I have been hurt by someone, especially Hip-Hop […] allowed me to bring out these emotions whilst dancing so I feel like I have let them out and, you know, I've told them to someone without actually saying them out loud.

While Sarah appears to be aware of the emotions she was expressing through the character she took on when dancing, Pavrita and Shubatra (2014) also suggest that we can process and express unconscious emotions in dance. So, for instance, Zara said, "I don't usually go to dance to take on the persona of a depressed person but find it extremely fun doing so because it is expressing

these emotions through the medium of dance". She also said that by "changing your attitude literally as you change the style of music" it makes her feel like "you can do anything (laughs), you can be anyone." I wonder whether, unconsciously, Zara may be connecting to and expressing her own feelings of depression (that she mentioned dealing with earlier on in the interview), and that perhaps it feels safer for her to express these emotions through something she enjoys, i.e. dance.

For both Sarah and Zara, taking on a persona appears to, consciously or unconsciously, connect them to and help them express their emotions. This supports Jung's (1961) theory that creative activity can facilitate "confrontations with the unconscious" (p. 170-199). Issari (2011) argues that dance is a form of embodied storytelling and Leseho and Maxwell (2010) suggest that dance can be used to create an inner story that can then be explored through dance or verbally. Art and creative writing are already being used by some counselling professionals within their practice, and dance/movement could be another tool counsellors could utilise to help clients bring unconscious material into conscious awareness to be expressed and explored verbally.

Dance as connection to the body. All participants described a disconnection from or slowing down of negative or preoccupying thoughts when they dance because they are focusing on their movements and on moving their bodies. Improved sleep; reduced stressed and anxiety; feeling happier and more positive about themselves and their lives; and feeling better

able to cope with challenges, were all recorded by participants as the effects of their dance practice. These experiences are consistent with the findings of several other studies on the effects of recreational dance on wellbeing (e.g. Ward, 2008; Karkou, Oliver & Lycouris, 2017). The findings also support embodiment theories that see the body as playing an important role in affective and cognitive function and wellbeing (Koch et al., 2017).

Linda, for instance, described leaving her dance class with greater capacity to think more positively. She said that this was because when she dances, she does not "think of anything else", the past or the future, "only the here and now", because she is focusing on the music and feeling, and on which movements go with the music. She described dancing as meditative and as having the same effect on her as mindfulness because it "relieves" her mind of negative thoughts and relaxes her body.

Others also described dance as bringing them into the here and now. Cristina said she enjoyed exploring her body, being "in the moment", and "just be[ing]" with the feeling of a particular move or stretch. Raven said she was able to "switch my brain off for an hour um... and just... dance, it helps even with energy levels, then I kind of ground myself, a little bit". She said that faster movements were most effective in helping her to "snap out" of worrying because she did not have time to focus on her thoughts.

Several of the participants speak about giving control over to their bodies to move to the music as it wishes. This supports evidence that music and sound

can bring one into the present moment (Leseho & Maxwell, 2010) and be grounding. Grounding helps re-orientate a person to the here-and-now and into reality, and can be helpful in managing overwhelming feelings or intense anxiety (de Tord & Bräuninger, 2015). Thus, moving to music could be a useful technique to help ground clients who are experiencing anxiety or disassociating during a counselling session.

Zara described dancing as having a similar effect to anti-depressants on her negative thought processes and said that:

> [W]hen I went back to hip-hop I used to say it was the only place where I feel that I don't need to take my medication because... basically what my medication would do is slow down my, my thought processes because my thought processes were, uh, very negative and uh I would basically have like people shouting in my head (laughs), kind of, negative things and um... I was just always kind of sad, so dancing was the only place where... I could... like... those thoughts wouldn't even enter my head, so I can think about the next move, the next step, how I'm going to dance with the flow, how I'm going to make it look better, um.... and it, it would just leave.

Charlotte described feeling "scared" when she does not feel connected to her body while dancing. Her experience highlights that feeling disconnected from one's body can have a significant impact on one's emotional state. This

has significant implications for counselling since *disembodiment* – the feeling of not being *in* one's body and *with* one's own body (Mayor, 2010) - is a common effect of trauma and can lead to the body being experienced as unsafe. While needing to be used with caution and care, Mayor (2010) suggests that embodied practices, such as dance/movement, could be effective in working with the effects of trauma as they could help clients become (re)embodied.

The participants' experiences show how, as a process, dance connects the person dancing to their body which leads to disconnection from their thoughts. Thus, dance could be used within counselling, or suggested as an adjunct to counselling (e.g. attending dance classes, or DMP sessions), as an embodied method to help clients connect to and explore their feelings and bring about awareness of how they relate to themselves. The participants' experiences also suggest that dance/movement could be an effective grounding technique, that could also be used inside and outside the counselling room, to help clients feel more in control of both their minds and their bodies (Pavitra & Shubrata, 2014).

The Meaning in Movement

While the participants' reasons for choosing their particular dance style were not specifically explored in the interviews, their preferred and least preferred movements, and the meanings they attached to these, were explored. Raven said that every person in her class has their favourite move and as "you get to know the person a bit more […] you'll understand why they will go

for one movement". The more she danced with her fellow dancers, the more, she said, she got to know which movements to expect from each of them. She also said that the same movement can executed differently by different people. Her experience shows that we all move in different and unique ways and that dance movement has individual meaning (Shaw, 2003; Mayor, 2010). It also supports the findings of Sawada, Suda & Ishii's (2003) neuroscientific study that showed that different dancers used different arm movements to express the same emotion.

Shaw (2003) and Mayor (2010) also argue that our bodies are inscribed with cultural meaning. All four of the seven participants who practice ballet or practiced it as children grew up in Malta. Two of them said that ballet was compulsory for girls in primary school, which continues to be the case in many schools in Malta. Thus, it would seem that, from a very young age, many girls in Malta are learning to move their bodies in a particular way. Cristina, for instance said that ballet "conditioned" her to move in a certain way:

> [W]ith ballet your arms are in a certain way, your feet are in a certain way, um... so naturally now my body has become accustomed to that […] whereas with other disciplines, for example your head needs to be more lose, your body, your arms need to be more lose. With mine they've become too structured.

Cristina said that she has applied the discipline and structure she learnt from her ballet practice to other areas of her life, such as her work and studies, indicating that how we move our bodies has an impact on how we relate in the world.

As Gray (2014) argues, how someone interprets and makes meaning of their experiences cannot be viewed in isolation from their external environment and their gender, ethnicity, culture etc. Ward (2008) and Issari (2011) argue, in fact, that dance is an embodiment of culture. I wonder, therefore, how the culture of dance in Malta intertwines with broader Maltese culture and how this in turn influences individual movement. From a transcultural perspective, how a person moves in dance could provide insight into how they move physically and emotionally in the world. Dance/movement could thus also serve as a tool with which to explore and increase awareness about how a client relates to themselves and others within their social and cultural context. As Pallaro (1997) suggests, through dance clients can embody, amplify, nurture, or challenge the demands of the self and those of the dominant culture (as cited in Roberts, 2016).

The exploration of participants' experiences of dance and the meaning they attach to their movements provided several of the participants with new insight about themselves; insight that can be paralleled in counselling. When reflecting upon the interview process, and specifically the exploration of the meanings she attaches to certain movements she carries out while dancing, Charlotte for instance, she said "I never actually think... I never actually did this

type of thinking, to be honest. And I never questioned it. No one questioned it. So... it's good... it was good for me as well.".

Movement as a need for control. Six of the seven participants expressed a need for control through their dance movement. From a counselling perspective, the control, or lack of it, that a client experiences in dance, how they control their movements, and the thought processes behind them, can give useful insight into the aspect of control in the rest of their lives, which can be explored in counselling.

Although Sarah's preferred dance style is hip-hop, she said she liked ballet because movements require "a controlled release of energy which is quite nice… it's a nice feeling because you are in control". Zara appears to feel a lot more in control of herself when she is dancing, saying "once I start dancing and then... then there's *no* thought that can enter my head, to disrupt me, so, I guess, you're kind of replacing one flow of thoughts… with another flow of thoughts (laughs) but this one is one that I know how to master and I know how to control and the other one is not something I can control".

Charlotte described being drawn to Jazz because it requires more technique and control of movements than other more "fluid" styles. She paralleled this to her personality and her desire for control in the rest of her life. She described herself as "really energetic, positive, on the go, always on the go [which] a person can understand when... when he... when the person is seeing me dancing […] I'm structured and rigid. I love to be a bit in control (makes a

facial expression) of my life". She explained that, because of her high energy, she prefers a style that can "move [her] away from my normal routine... life routine to be a bit more calmer. […] a bit more in control of the body". She went on to say:

> [S]ince obviously in life you can't um... you control everything. Imma... em... I think that's why. If you ask me, since I am always on the go, em... from one place to another, I really have a tight schedule, so... and since I am a bit rigid, with all... I think even that one would... would explain why I prefer Jazz. […] I'm quite structured person, so with Jazz it's a structured dance.

It appears that, for at least some of the participants, dance allows them to feel momentarily in control, in contrast to how they feel in the rest of their lives. Several participants also said that the discipline they learnt in dance is replicated in or has helped them be more disciplined in other areas of their lives, such as in their work and academic studies.

Like Charlotte, Cristina likes the control and technique of ballet, saying "the smaller movements, the quick ones, are the ones I liked a lot. And the movements which required ... control and technique". She described finding improvisation difficult because of the lack of structure in improvisational dance, and because of not knowing if she is moving in the 'right' way. This further highlights Christina's need for control, that is reflected in how she dances and experiences certain movements. She described getting "stuck" in movements

and feeling "confused" when she has had to improvise, because she had been "trained to have the structure and to have the steps and I wasn't able to break them down and put them together my own way" and "I couldn't work, hekk, on improving on what I'm doing and refining it, as opposed to... um... just doing it for fun".

The sense of shame in movement. How some of the participants experience movement highlights the sense of shame that can be attached to the body and to movement, as well as how the body can help to overcome shame. As Kraus's (2017) study on the stigmatisation of belly dance shows, there can be a stigma attached to movement. If dance is understood to be intersectional (O'Shea & Carter, 2010), then the meanings attached to dance movements, not only by the dancer but also by those observing, will be loaded with cultural preconceptions, assumptions and biases.

Cristina described feeling judged by others in her class if she has not executed a movement in the correct way, saying she has felt "stupid" and "a bit silly". When she was dancing alone, however, she said she was freer in her movements, and I wonder if this is because when no one can see her, she feels free from the judgement of others. She said:

> When I'm on my own I'm more free. So, there is that element of freedom, sort of, is more... if I am on my own it's... it's more lose, more free, more… […] It's sort of more exploratory. […] Whereas when I am with other people em, it's maybe more... by the book or more in line with what, trying

> to be in line with what… the instructor is probably. More structured, for sure.

This exploration that took place in the interview could be replicated in counselling. Counsellors could also suggest to clients to dance and move their bodies at home and that they explore their bodies. movements, and the attached sensations.

Cristina and Zara both described practicing a move or a routine over and over again, often pushing their bodies to the physical limit, in order to perfect the move. Cristina said that in ballet "you do it, you do it again, you do it again, until you get perfection" and that she enjoyed pushing her body to the limit to see what it could do. This element of pushing the body to the limit is something she said she also enjoyed in other physical activities:

> [I]f I don't come out sweating, dripping, tired, exhausted um... you know, with pain the next day, then for me it feels like I haven't done much because that's the... the sort of the feeling I used to get after... after dancing, when I was dancing ballet, so if I don't feel like I'm… my body and my muscles drained then it feels like 'okay I did nothing worthwhile'.

Cristina's experience indicates that how someone moves in dance could shed light on and increase awareness into how they move, and the meaning they attach to the movement, in the rest of their lives. This insight and awareness can be replicated in counselling through an exploration of a client's relationship to dance, movement, and their bodies both in dance and outside of dance.

The participants' experiences of dance suggest that movement can also mean the *overcoming* of shame. This supports findings of other studies, such as Feldman's (2017) study into the use of DMP with people suffering from anorexia nervosa. Feldman (2017) found dance to be a useful tool for working with clients who experience shame, self-critical thoughts, body and self-consciousness, and rigid and concrete thinking because it fosters spontaneity, connection, trust, and choice-making in the present.

Linda said she found her dance class to be a safe space and, as such, felt comfortable practicing and trying out new movements, and felt comfortable not doing them perfectly. She felt that the sense of safety she experiences comes from the fact that she feels others in the class are concentrating on their own movements and are not there to judge hers. Not being judged in her movement, and thus feeling safe, appears to be an important part of Linda's dance experience because she mentions these several times in her interview. For instance, at another point in the interview she said, "you don't want other people, or at least that's what I feel, to look at you and observe you during it because people could laugh about you".

Almost all of the participants recorded an increase in self-confidence and self-esteem when they danced, which is in line with the findings of numerous other studies on the effects of dance and recreational dance (e.g. Karkou et al., 2017, Payne, 2006; Leseho & Maxwell, 2010; Pavitra & Shubrata, 2014; Burkhardt & Brennan, 2012; Murcia et al., 2009). For some participants, this

increase appeared to be, in part, due to the repetitive element in recreational dance which gives them a sense of achievement and satisfaction, which were also found to be significant reasons for partaking in recreational dance for participants of other studies (e.g. Ali, Cushey & Siddiqui, 2017).

For others, the dance movements themselves seemed to be empowering. Zara described hip-hop as "aggressive" which "gives you a feeling of empowerment, especially since you know 'I know what I am doing, I know the next step, and I'm going to kill this choreography'". She said that she used "the force of my problems um... as energy to put into the moves" and that the "rush of emotion also helps you put more power into the movements". Having experienced bullying as a child, and currently dealing with intrusive negative thoughts, it is as if through her dance Zara is fighting the judgements of others (and possibly of herself) and the accompanying sense of shame. Through dance, she appears to be taking back her power, something that supports the literature on dance being an effective tool for exploring and overcoming oppression, abuse and trauma (O'Shea & Carter, 2010; Mayor, 2010; Pavitra & Shubrata, 2014; Leseho & Maxwell, 2010; Roberts, 2016).

Similarly, Raven's favourite movements indicate a sense of power. However, unlike Zara, rather than force being behind the movements, there seems to be a sense of groundedness and sovereignty to Raven's movements. She described one such movement as like a wave, "slow", "simple" and requiring "good posture" with "quite strong" fingers, yet it also "looks soft and is

a gentle move", alternatively it can have an accent on it making it "very decisive". This combination of softness and strength is further highlighted by her reason for liking the movement: because she likes rainbows and because "[i]t's very simple but it looks, it looks quite powerful when you're doing it". She described another movement as "quite a powerful movement" that has "good presence" which she likes because "it is a statement move". When she demonstrated these moves during the interview, they appeared to me to be quite statuesque. While this was my perception, the meaning clients give to their own movements is what is of importance from a counselling perspective and an exploration of these meanings could provide insight into a client's emotional state (Sawada, Suda & Ishii, 2003) and into how they express themselves and relate in the world.

Raven said that in the past she used to like fast movements because they hid her mistakes, thus, she felt more confident in those movements, while now she prefers slower movements. She suggested this was because she was now more confident and did not mind her mistakes being "out in the open". A change in movement preference appears to indicate a shift in Raven's view of herself and how she deals with the judgement of others. It could also be argued, that her dance practice has helped increase her confidence and has changed her self-perception, and how she deals with judgement from others. Such exploration could be replicated in counselling with other clients who dance recreationally. How a client moves in dance and the changes in their

preferred/less preferred movements could provide insight into clients, as well as be used to help clients overcome shame, self-critical thoughts, body and self-consciousness, and rigid thinking and concrete thinking (Feldman, 2017).

Movement as wish for interconnectedness. Many of the participants expressed a wish for connection to others, a wish fulfilled by and indicated in their movements. Raven and Miriam's dance styles require interconnection between at least two people. When Miriam dances ballroom there is a physical connection between dance partners through the movement, which could be seen as contributing to the fulfilment of her stated wish for "togetherness" in dance and in life.

Raven described how in ATS a change in movement or leader is communicated by the leader to the followers through cues that are hidden in the movements. She described the set of movements in ATS as a "vocabulary of movements" and as a "universal language" because dancers, anywhere in the world, can dance ATS together because the movements and cues are the same. This supports the view that dance is a universal language and, as such, could be used to communicate emotion and experience in counselling (Ali et al., 2017). Not only do the movements themselves connect Raven to other dancers in her class; they also connect her, or open up the possibility for connection, to people around the world. Raven expressed a wish for a more interconnected world and her chosen dance style appears to fulfil this wish.

Sarah's experience highlights the synchronicity of movement, rhythm and

emotion that is common within dance which, according to Jola & Colmeiro (2017), can create a sense of connectedness between dancers. Sarah said:

> [Y]ou don't necessarily need to be looking at each other like head on. Even just like having someone near who's doing the movement with you, you.... I don't know how to explain, but you tend to *feel* their movement and you do the movement together.

Sarah also said that the "energy" that others put into their movements, and their facial expressions, encouraged her to put the same energy into her movements and bring out similar emotions:

> [D]uring dance you tend to feel the people around you […] [t]iming and even like, um, the emotions that are being expressed. Like they encourage you to bring out certain um... emotion.

Sarah's experience supports the theory that someone watching another person dance can *feel* the emotions of that person (Carroll & Seeley, 2013), a theory, however, that Jola & Colmeiro (2017) question. It also supports arguments for the use of mirroring in the psychotherapies (Berrol, 2006), as mirroring has been shown to potentially increase empathy (Rizzolatti et al., 1996). In counselling the *I-Thou* relationship is central. It is the greatest form of understanding because it communicates that "I see you". The *I-Thou* therapeutic relationship is characterised by dialogue and mutuality, although within the counselling relationship, mutuality is "limited by the inherent asymmetry" (Scott et al., 2009,

p. 1) of the relationship. While mirroring of emotions and body language is more common within the counselling relationship, the *I-Thou* relationship could be further strengthened by the use of techniques, such as dance/movement, that involve the mirroring of movement.

Movement as means of avoidance. Some of the participants' experiences indicate that movement can also mean the avoidance or numbing of feelings. According to Maraz, Urbán, Griffiths and Demetrovics (2015), in some cases dancing as a way to avoid feelings could be indicative of dance addiction. Zara, for instance, seems to have engaged in prolonged and repetitive movement as a way of avoiding negative thoughts and feelings, when she said:

> [If I] had particularly bad days, I'd go to the lesson, enjoy myself so much that I'd be really sweaty and really gross (laughs) and instead of going home and getting into the shower I'd just keep practicing, until...until I perfected what I did, and whatever thought was bugging me for that day I was too tired (laughs) to think about it afterwards.

She described a "black cloud" following her around when she did not dance. When she danced, this cloud was "not small, it's gone". However, "it comes back straight after I step out the dance class, but I know that there's another dance class". This suggests that dancing, rather than helping Zara process her feelings, may be acting as a distraction from them, and she seeks dance as much as possible in order to avoid these negative feelings. She also described,

however, a recent period during which dancing no longer reduced her anxiety, but rather increased it. She said how she was dancing became a source of anxiety, so much so that she had to take a break from it. Her experience suggests that focusing solely on the body as a way to not engage with thoughts can lead to disconnection of the body and mind; and as argued in somatic psychology, psychological health requires both the body and the mind to be taken care of (Leseho & Maxwell, 2010).

Movement as need for freedom. All the participants described feeling free, being able to let go, and releasing physical and emotional tension through dance (Leseho & Maxwell, 2010; Pavitra & Shubrata, 2014), and these feelings were indicated in their movements. Several of the participants described *feeling* freer as well as *moving* more freely when they improvised or did a choreography, as opposed to when they were learning or practicing specific movements or a dance routine. As addressed in an earlier theme, almost all of the participants described enjoyment in letting their bodies move to the music as it wished, indicating a surrendering of control of their bodies to their bodies.

When asked about her preferred movements, Linda described a particular sequence of stretching movements that they performed to the same piece of music at the start of each class. She said that when she stretched her body she felt "more free somehow, or more… released. [..] when you stretch it all out, it's... you make yourself bigger" which, she said, made her feel "really good" and "more relaxed". She compared this sequence of movements to

mediation because you are "letting everything go and being in the here and now." Linda described another one of her favourite movements: "you first do a soft and very slow movement and then out of a sudden, you speed it up". She liked this movement because there is a "certain energy", like "you let go of something and then […] take it back". As both Linda and Zara state, in contemporary dance each movement correlates with an emotion. Linda seems to enjoy movements that involve an outward release of movement, which could indicate a desire or need to release emotion, and which her dance practice allows her to do. An exploration in counselling sessions of the meaning clients attach to their dance (and non-dance) movements could give an insight into their needs and desires and how the client expresses these in both dance and in life.

Miriam said she prefers ballroom dance, with its "flowy" movements and large steps that take up a lot of floor space, to other dances that take up less space because when she dances, she wants to take up space and feel "expansive". She said, that despite being bound by a set of steps in ballroom dance, "it's liberating... it's freedom […] it's, it's so flowy, you don't notice". While wanting to feel connected to others, Miriam also said she needs enough physical space to dance freely, otherwise she feels restricted in her movements and unable to express herself fully. Her need for both connection and freedom in dance is shared by other participants and supports the findings of other

studies that indicate that recreational dance can simultaneously foster a sense of freedom and a sense of connectedness in dancers.

An exploration of the meaning in movement provides viable possibilities of how dance can be used as a metaphor in counselling to connect with, understand, and move beyond social, emotional, and relational difficulties.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored the themes that emerged from the analysis of the data gathered through the seven interviews; discussing them in relation to the literature and how they apply to the field of counselling. Themes that emerged from the analysis process suggest that dance can be experienced as a metaphoric partner, can facilitate connection to other people and to the self, and that individual meaning can be found in the movements themselves.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This chapter concludes the research study by summarising the key findings of the study and the limitations encountered during the research process. It also provides recommendations for counselling practice, training, and research.

Summary of Findings

Several significant themes emerged from the analysis of the participants' experiences of recreational dance. Firstly, dance appeared to be experienced as a metaphoric partner by the participants. It seemed to be experienced as a nurturing presence in their lives, one which provided them with emotional holding and containment; as a companion, to whom they can express themselves; and as a continuous and reliable presence in their lives.

Secondly, dance was found to connect participants to other people. Dance relationships were experienced as supportive and a sense of shared wellbeing was indicated in participants' accounts. Dance relationships and the movement of the body were experienced as intimate acts. Thirdly, findings showed that dance connected participants to themselves, by disconnecting them from mostly negative thoughts and bringing them into their bodies, and that it facilitated self-expression.

Finally, findings suggested that subjective meaning can be found in the actual dance movements. A need for control was indicated by some of the participants movements, as well as a wish for interconnectedness and freedom. The sense of shame that can accompany movement, as well as movement

meaning the overcoming of shame, were also indicated in participants' accounts. Movement was also found to be used to avoid difficult feelings.

The findings suggest that an exploration of a client's experience of recreational dance could provide significant insight into how they relate to themselves and others. They also highlight that words are not always enough, and that dance/movement, as an embodied activity, could facilitate verbal expression, both inside and outside of the counselling room.

Limitations of the Study

IPA has been criticised for moving away from original meaning by interpreting the experiences of participants. How I interpreted a participant's experience of dance and how it was experienced by them may not have been the same (O'Shea & Carter, 2010), and at various points throughout the research process knowledge of this caused me significant discomfort. While I understood that IPA enables depth of analysis, and is particularly useful when exploring embodied experiences, and while I strove to firmly ground my interpretations in the words of the participants, at times using an interpretative method did not feel congruent with my personal views on ethical research. I found the analytical stage of the research particularly challenging for this reason.

Critics of qualitative research argue that the inevitability of researcher influence in qualitative research creates bias and reduces trustworthiness in the research. Despite knowing from my own personal experience of recreational

dance that dancing is a highly unique experience and, despite attempting to maintain reflexivity and bracket my own experiences and assumptions, I soon became aware, as Heidegger reminds us, that it was not possible for me to do so fully. My own assumption, for instance, that the majority of people who attend Latin social dance classes (Salsa, Bachata, Kizomba) may not have the level of insight into their experience of dance required by the study because of another assumption, that most attend purely for "fun", led to me to exclude dance schools teaching these styles as gatekeepers. Despite practicing these dances myself, my own biases and prejudices impacted the recruitment process and ultimately the data collected. Had requests for participants been sent to these, and other schools, different themes may have emerged.

Although I am concerned with the individual experience of dance, and with the transferability rather than the generalizability of findings, the requirement for participants to speak English meant that only a certain section of Maltese society was represented in the findings. Six of the seven participants grew up and lived in Malta and one was from Germany, living in Malta temporarily; all were female; and all but one were under the age of 35. Thus, in terms of nationality, gender, and age, the sample is not representative of the dancing population in Malta. Had males or people of other nationalities been interviewed, findings may have differed. Findings may have also differed had a second researcher analysed the data.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study I make the following recommendations for counselling practice, training, and future research.

Recommendations for training and practice. A more holistic, integrative, and interdisciplinary approach in counsellor training and practice is recommended in order to fully understand and fully support clients.

Firstly, findings of this study support experiential and scientific evidence of the interdependence of the body and the mind; thus, a more *holistic approach* to well-being is recommended. This can be achieved by greater consideration of the body by counsellors and within training. While body language is already considered, to varying degrees, within counselling practice and training a more direct focus on and use of the body in all counselling approaches is lacking. Embodiment theories and techniques that use the body to provide insight and increase awareness can be taught to counsellors, thus equipping them to use such knowledge in their practice.

The interviews uncovered parallels between how participants relate to themselves and others in dance and how they relate to themselves and others outside of dance. Several participants expressed having gained new insights into themselves through our exploration of their relationship to dance during their interviews, and such insight can be replicated in counselling sessions. Exploring how a client experiences dancing alone and with others, and when learning, performing and improvising; how they respond to touch and physical

proximity and to leading or being led; how they perceive and feel in their bodies when dancing; what they are expressing through dance; how they move and relate in dance, compared to how they move and relate when not dancing, including within the counselling room, could all be extremely insightful in how a client relates to themselves and others in their life.

Holism considers the person within their social context, and dance is the embodiment of culture, history, gender etc. (Issari, 2011; Pavitra & Shubrata, 2014; Ward, 2008). Thus, a client's practice of recreational dance could also provide insight into their socio-cultural context. Furthermore, how they experience dance and their bodies in relation to their wider context; how dance is viewed implicitly or explicitly within their cultures, families, friendships groups, communities etc; and what their relationship to dance and to bodily expression was in childhood, could provide useful information on how they relate to themselves and others in adulthood. From a transcultural counselling perspective, in order to understand and support a client fully, the cultural part of their "whole" must be considered.

Secondly, a more *integrative approach* to counselling, that includes movement, is recommended. Increasingly, counsellors are working from an integrative perspective and counsellor training includes various approaches. While creative writing, art, breathing exercises, mindfulness and guided imagery are already being used by some counsellors, movement is yet to be given the same consideration. This may be due to lack of awareness of and training on

the mind-body connection and the therapeutic potential of dance, as well as lack of training on how to use dance/movement with clients. Thus, it is recommended that greater attention is given to the body and its interdependence with the mind in counsellor training courses in order to enable counsellors to be integrative in their approach used with clients. I recommend that all integrative counselling training include, at the very least, introductory teaching on somatic psychology, the embodiment theories, and neuropsychology as it relates to dance, movement, and the mind-body connection.

I also recommend that all counsellor training (and certainly courses that identify themselves as "intercultural" or "transcultural" counselling courses), broaden their teaching of the history of counselling and understandings of mental health and psychological healing, beyond the current Eurocentric teaching still found in the majority of counselling courses. As a historical healing practice, dance would need to be included in such teaching. Just as some courses include modules on how to use the arts and writing in counselling sessions, I recommend that students are also taught the basics of DMP theory and practice and how to use simple dance/movement techniques in counselling sessions with their clients to facilitate the therapeutic work.

Techniques. Based on the findings, some dance inspired techniques are suggested that can be used by counsellors and taught in counsellor training courses, to gain insight, increase awareness and facilitate change. These

techniques can be used within sessions or suggested as 'homework', and can be used with individual clients, couples, families, and groups. Some of the following techniques were suggested by participants, based on how they thought dance could be incorporated into counselling sessions.

1. *Mirroring of movements.* The counsellor could suggest that the client mirror their movements, that they mirror the client's movements, or that they take turns in mirroring each other's movements. The counsellor could also suggest that clients mirror one another if they in couple, family, or group counselling. While it is a technique already used by some couple, family, and group counsellors, I recommend greater use in individual counselling. It is a technique that can be used inside and outside of sessions.

   The aim of the technique would be to help build rapport and increase trust between the client and counsellor/between clients; to increase a client's self-confidence; and/or to assess or bring to the client's awareness intimacy issues and better understand their relationship to themselves and others. The mirroring technique could also be a tool to work though issues relating to intimacy or self-confidence. For instance, the counsellor may notice that the client is apprehensive in leading or following movements or finds it difficult to make eye contact during the technique. They may, therefore, suggest that they regularly carry out this technique as a way to increase, over time, the client's ability to be vulnerable.

2. *Moving alone or together*. The counsellor could suggest that they and the client or the couple/family/group move together, with or without music, or that the client moves alone (at home). Suggesting that the client dances/moves alone, while the counsellor does not also move, is not advised because of the inherent power imbalance. The client could feel they are being observed or judged, rather than accompanied. Linda brought this up in her interview, saying that one can feel vulnerable and uncomfortable moving one's body in front of another person who is watching and not participating.

This is a technique a client could also do at home with their spouse/family member, during which touch and greater physical proximity could be incorporated. The use of touch or there being close physical proximity between the client and counsellor when doing this technique should be considered carefully as, depending on the approach as well as jurisdiction in which the counsellor is practicing, there are likely to be professional, ethical and legal guidelines regarding physical touch that must be adhered to.

The counsellor could ask the client(s) to take note of their physical and/or emotional responses while dancing, when they are doing particular movements, when there is physical touch or physical proximity, and when eye contact is made. This technique could be used to build trust and rapport between clients and between the client and counsellor. Linda thought that as movement is an intimate act, doing it together could build trust. It could help those with body-related issues become more at ease with and connected to

their physical bodies.

It is a technique that could also be used to ground clients if they are feeling anxious, for example, which could work well when working with clients using a CBT approach. It could also be used to heighten awareness of feelings in the present. This could work particularly well when working from a Gestalt perspective because working on experience in the here and now is central to Gestalt. Just as in Gestalt therapy clients may be asked to describe what a feeling looks like with words, they could also be asked to describe what the feeling looks like using movement. The client's physical/emotional responses and the level of comfort/discomfort and so on, could provide insight into how they relate to themselves and others, and it could be explored in comparison to their body language inside and outside of sessions.

3. *Chair-based movements*. The counsellor could suggest to the client to move to music or without music while they remain seated. The aim of this technique would be similar to the previous technique, but would enable those not able or not wishing to stand, to do the technique.

As suggested by Charlotte in her interview, this technique could also be used at the start of a session to ground or relax a client if they are feeling anxious or are struggling to start talking about how they are feeling/what brings them to counselling. Rather than asking clients to introduce themselves and speak about their presenting issue immediately, Charlotte suggests that they could instead be invited to close their eyes and do some movements

with their hands. How they move, even just their hands, can be informative for the counsellor, according to Charlotte because "with dance... with hand movements... you can immediately notice that... if a person is a bit scared, angry, there's a... going through some... some... some problems, it shows.".

As with the previous technique, this technique could work well when using a CBT approach, as well as a phenomenological approach, such as Gestalt, as it can be used as both a calming strategy, as well as a strategy to increase awareness and work with the client in the here and now.

4. *Storytelling through movement*. The counsellor could suggest to their client(s) that they tell a story (real or imagined) using dance movements. The aim of this technique would be to help a client bring unconscious material into conscious awareness so that it can then be explored verbally, or to enable them to explore difficult emotions or experiences that they may find too difficult to express using words. This technique would work well in individual, couple, family, or group counselling both with adults and with children.

5. *Exploring, strengthening, and softening physical and emotional boundaries though movement*. Movement could be used, for instance, with a client who has low self-esteem, and which may be reflected in closed body language. With the guidance of the counsellor, the client could practice taking up more physical space by doing movements that take up physical space (for example, standing with legs wide apart and arms stretched out). How the

client experiences this movement could be explored verbally and the size of movements could be increased over several sessions. As suggested by Raven, dance can also increase spatial awareness and such a technique could be used to also help clients who may dominate physical space. Such a technique could work particularly well in couple, family, or group counselling as it can be used to highlight differences in body language to each member and it can be used to work though issues of and rebalance power in relationships.

All the above techniques can be used in individual or group sessions, with clients of all ages, genders, and in all settings (Ward, 2008). Research has shown that movement can be particularly useful when working with individuals who have experienced trauma (Meekums, 2005; Mills & Daniluk, 2002; Van Der Kolk, 1996) because trauma can affect verbal expression. It can also be useful when working with clients for whom verbal communication is difficult due to speech and hearing, cognitive, or language differences. As a form of non-verbal communication, practiced in all known cultures, the benefits of dance are universal (Ali et al., 2017) and, as such, it could be a useful tool within counselling to facilitate verbal expression of all populations.

By introducing movement into counselling sessions, counsellors should be aware of how moving together, or asking clients to move their bodies, could be experienced and/or perceived by the client(s), as well as how they experience and perceive them in the role as counsellor. Moving one's body is an intimate

act and could make one feel vulnerable. Even if the client is a dancer themselves, they may still feel exposed and vulnerable moving their body in front of someone they do not know and/or a professional, or moving in an intimate setting like the counselling room. Thus, techniques should be suggested with caution and techniques tailored to the individual client. Particular caution should be taken when working with client's who have experienced PTSD, physical, sexual, and emotional violence, and those experiencing body-related issues, and, if used, should be introduced at an appropriate stage of the counselling process. For some clients, this may be once there is greater trust within the therapeutic relationship. As with Gestalt experiments, the use of dance/movement techniques should always be a suggestion, it should be fully explained to the client before starting, and the client be made aware that they can decline and can stop at any time.

Thirdly, greater interdisciplinary working within the counselling profession is recommended. While transcultural approaches, and those that centre social justice, place importance on counsellors working alongside other professionals in order to support their clients, an interdisciplinary approach is still lacking across all therapeutic fields, including counselling.

Recreational dance classes can be suggested to clients to support the therapeutic work taking place in counselling sessions. As demonstrated by this study, recreational dance has the potential to shed light on and increase an individual's awareness of their social, emotional and relational patterns.

Furthermore, it could also be a source of emotional release and support for clients outside of the therapy room. DMP, and other body and movement orientated practices known to be effective when working with particular issues, could also be suggested to clients to support their therapeutic process. For some clients, particularly those who have experienced trauma, dance and movement can bring up distressing emotions (Leseho & Maxwell, 2010; Mayor 2012) and be experienced as unsafe; thus, the use and suggestion of dance/movement by counsellors should be made with caution and based on the individual's needs and experiences.

Recommendations for future research. Based on the findings of this study and on existing research, to further explore the implications of recreational dance for the counselling profession I recommend the following research.

1. Studies that investigate a larger sample of the population to verify the findings of this study and to possibly shed light on other aspects of recreational dance that this study has not identified;

2. Studies that explore the experience of recreational dance by other (and specific) populations (e.g. people who are differently abled, have different gender identities, children, adolescents, and those above the age of 35);

3. Further research into the meaning that individuals, as well as groups, attach to dance and specific dance movement(s), and the parallels between how

a person or group moves in dance and how they "move" relationally and emotionally in the rest of their lives;

4. Further research, both quantitative and qualitative, into the connection between the body and the mind, and how such learnings can be integrated into counselling practice and training. The study could draw on and build upon existing research from neuroscience, somatic psychology, and the creative arts therapies, to build upon this study's findings on the relationship between the physical and the emotional in recreational dance practice;

5. Research into the use of dance/movement in counselling to support clients dealing with the effects of trauma and abuse. Findings of my study suggest that the use of dance/movement in counselling could be effective when working with the effects of relational trauma, however, further research is needed to explore this in more depth. As Gray (2001) argues all abuse occurs in relationship, and a person's relationship to themselves and to others is often dramatically affected by abuse. As such, an integral part of the healing process for survivors of abuse is restoring safety in the body and rebuilding relationship capacity, which Gray (2001) argues, can be facilitated by dance because dance is relational and involves the body;

6. Research into how the body, movement, and dance have been historically understood and experienced in Western/European culture(s) and how this has influenced the Western model of counselling. As it is widely documented,

one function of dance across time and cultures has been to facilitate psychological healing, yet this continues to be largely ignored within Western counselling models. Research into the West's relationship to the body and movement could shed light on this and provide useful insight that could help the counselling profession, especially as client populations are becoming increasingly diverse.

Concluding Reflection

I entered the research process wanting to understand each participant's unique experience of recreational dance and did not start the process with the assumption that their experience would be similar to my own. It was of utmost importance to me that participants were telling their own story. However, at each stage of the process I was made aware of just how much influence I, as the researcher, have over the data collected and the overall research findings and conclusions. This was very challenging and I experienced great discomfort at times, especially during the analysis stage, as certain aspects of the process felt incongruent with my beliefs on ethical research; yet at the same time it was enlightening to the depth of influence any researcher has on the research process, from start to finish.

Several studies exist on the (largely) positive effects that recreational dance can have on psychological wellbeing, notably the connection it fosters to the self and to others. The finding in this study that dance could be experienced as a metaphorical person appears to be unique, and is a finding

that I find particularly interesting. I had not thought about my own relationship to dance in this way, and it has made me reflect on the nurturance and stability that dance may have also provided me both in childhood and may continue to do so in adulthood.

I also found *how* participants spoke about dance and their relationship to it (the words they used and their body language) particularly striking, and at times, very moving. The *feeling* with which all the participants spoke about their experience of dance reinforced my own belief that dancing is not simply the mechanical movement of body parts, but it is the movement of the body guided by and expressive of emotion. While dance in the West has been historically, and continues to be, misunderstood and misrepresented, I believe significant and profound insight into the mind-body connection and how we relate to ourselves and others can be gained from the experience of recreational dance. With this piece of research, I have aimed to shed light on the complexity of dance and its relevance to the counselling field.

Appendices

Appendix A

INFORMATION LETTER

Dissertation study: Dancing and mental health – implications for counselling

Dear potential participant,

I am a trainee counsellor currently studying for a Masters in Transcultural Counselling at the University of Malta and am embarking on a research project for my dissertation.

The aim of my research is to explore the experience of people who dance recreationally in dance classes and/or workshops and consider how insights gained from their experiences can be applied to counselling, including which techniques could be used with clients in counselling sessions. While a lot of research has been done within the Dance and Movement Therapy field into the wellbeing benefits of dance and movement more generally very little research has been carried out in the Counselling field into the effects on mental health of dancing in recreational dance classes and/or workshops. With this research I hope to contribute to this under-studied area.

I will be carrying out this study under the supervision of Dr. Roberta Attard from the Department of Counselling at the University of Malta.

I am looking for people above the age of 18 who live in Malta and who have been attending dance classes or regular dance workshops in Malta or abroad for 6 months or more to interview about their experience of dancing. As I do not speak Maltese interviews will be carried out in English so participants must also be able to communicate well in English.

To collect data I will be carrying out individual interviews which will last between 30 and 60 minutes and will take place at a time and place convenient to the participant. These interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed and recordings will be destroyed after I have analysed the data from interviews and the dissertation process is complete (April 2018).

Please note the following:

1. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and participants are free to decide not to participate.

2. Participants can withdraw from the study at any time throughout the dissertation process without having to provide reasons why. In such cases, data already collected will not be used and will be destroyed.

3. Anonymity of participants will be respected through the use of pseudonyms (participants have the option to choose their own pseudonym) and identities will not be disclosed at any point.

4. Participants have the right not to answer any questions they are asked

during the interview.

5. Raw data will be seen only by myself and my supervisor.

6. Debriefing will be provided after each interview and, in the unlikely event that participants experience distress during or after the interview, the dissertation supervisor (who is a clinical psychologist) will be consulted and participants will be assisted in finding psychological support.

7. Participants will be given a copy of the transcript of their interview and the results chapter to review and they reserve the right to view and amend transcripts and to withdraw any information which they feel uncomfortable with and wish to be deleted and not used. They will also receive a copy of the complete dissertation once completed.

If you are interested in taking part in the study then please get in touch. Should you have any questions or queries a meeting can be arranged at a place and time convenient to you to discuss these or you can contact me at hana.hamaz.16@um.edu.mt and I will be very happy to answer any questions that you may have.

I look forward to listening to you.

Kind regards,

Hana Hamaz

Appendix B

CONSENT FORM

Dissertation title: *Dancing and mental health – implications for counselling*

Thank you for choosing to participate in this study. The study will involve a 30-60 minute interview to be held at a time and place convenient to you. The interviews will be transcribed and you will given the transcripts and analysis chapter to view and amend. You will be presented with the findings on completion of the research. Your identity will be protected at all stages of the research process.

Please be informed that you are free to withdraw from participating in the study at any point without explanation. In such cases, data already collected will not be used and will be destroyed immediately.

Please take your time to read and complete this form. Should you have any questions please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Please initial each box, if you agree

I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet dated_____ for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these questions answered satisfactorily.	

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.	
I understand that relevant sections of any of the data collected during the study, may be looked at by responsible individuals and regulatory authorities from the University of Malta. I give permission for these individuals to have access to this data.	
I am aware that anonymity will be respected throughout the research process through the use of pseudonyms, that I have the option to choose my own pseudonym, and that my identity will not be disclosed at any point. I understand that recordings will be destroyed in line with research ethics procedures to further ensure anonymity and if I choose to withdraw from the study data already collected will not be used and will be immediately destroyed.	
I agree to take part in the above study which involves a 30-60 minute interview at a time and place suitable to me.	

_____ _____ _____

Name of Participant Date Signature

_____ _____ _____

Name of Researcher Date Signature

_____ _____ _____

Name of Supervisor Date Signature

Appendix C

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. What does dance do for you?
    1. What works for you?
    2. Why does it work for you?
    3. How does it work for you?
2. How, if in any way, has dancing helped you through a difficult time in your life?
3. What sorts of movements do you do when you are dancing and how do you feel when you do these movements?
4. Are there any particular movements that resonate with you and if so which ones and why?
5. Movements you do not like to do? Why?
6. How do you perceive your own body when you dance (as opposed to when you're not dancing)?
7. How do you experience your body when you dance (as opposed to when you're not dancing)?
8. Do you think dancing might be helpful for people in counselling to help with particular issues? What do you think might be helpful?

Appendix D

Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement

1. I, [redacted] transcriptionist, agree to maintain full confidentiality of all research data received from researcher, Hana Hamaz, related to this research study.

2. I will hold in strictest confidence the identity of any individual that may be revealed during the transcription of interviews or in any associated documents.

3. I will not make copies of any audio-recordings, video-recordings, or other research data, unless specifically requested to do so by the researcher.

4. I will not provide the research data to any third parties without the client's consent.

5. I will store all study-related data in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession.

6. All data provided or created for purposes of this agreement, including any back-up records, will be returned to the researcher or permanently deleted. When I have received confirmation that the transcription work I performed has been satisfactorily completed, any of the research data that remains with me will be returned to the researcher or destroyed, pursuant to the instructions of the researcher

7. I understand that the University of Malta has the right to take legal action against any breach of confidentiality that occurs in my handling of the research data.

Transcriber's name (printed) [redacted]

Transcriber's signature [redacted]

Date 12.12.2018

Appendix E

21/12/2018 University of Malta Mail - Research Ethics Proposal - Accepted by UREC

L-Università ta' Malta

Research Ethics Proposal Accepted by UREC

SWB FREC <researchethics.fsw@um.edu.mt>
To: hana.hamaz.16@um.edu.mt
Cc: "Dott. Roberta Attard" <roberta.attard@um.edu.mt>

Reference Number: SWB 177/2017 Dear Ms Hana Hamaz,

Hana Hamaz <hana.hamaz.16@um.edu.mt>

2 October 2017 at 15:56

Your ethics proposal with regards to your research entitled *Dancing and Mental Health: Implications for Counselling* was **discussed by UREC on Friday 15 September**.

I am pleased to inform you that **UREC has accepted your ethics proposal**. Hence, you may now **start your research**.

Once your documentation is sent back to us from UREC, we will inform you via email so that you are able to pick everything up.

Thanks and regards, Charmaine

Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC) Faculty for Social Wellbeing
Room 113
Humanities A Building (Laws & Theology) University of Malta

Msida MSD 2080

Ms Charmaine Agius Tel: (+356) 2340 2237

Ms Marica Galea
Tel: (+356) 2340 3956

Students' hours:

MondayFriday
07:3013:00 (16 June30 September)
08:0012:15 and 13:3016:45 (1 October15 June)

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Appendix F

Analysis Extracts

ANALYSIS	TRANSCRIPT	EMERGING THEMES
	Hana: What's beautiful about it... and fun about it?	
Vocabulary of moves. Like a language	**Raven:** Uh... as I mentioned it's... it's a vocabulary of moves. So uh... um... knowing that uh... that... that are certain moves that you can start and then if you change position and you change who the leader is, if you've started the movement it means whoever will be replacing you will *have* to finish it.	Dance as communication
	Hana: okay...	
Why does everyone go for certain moves? must mean something to them and say something about them Playing with one another with the body	**Raven:** So if... normally the second half of the movement would be a little bit more complicated so it's like playing tricks on someone like "I'm going to get you now, for making me, uh try to keep up with you doing a fast movement. Now it's pay back time". Um or...everyone has their favourite moves to do and... it may be that someone hasn't come to a couple of classes so they are a bit rusty and you know they normally go for that particular movement so you steal their movement and then you try to see... um... how... what they will come up with or whether they will go for the same movement again. It's... we challenge each other. Um... and we work together but there's also that... um... that that playful... that playfulness to it so... or there're people who may not be as confident being leader so putting them on the spot is fun to see what... to see what they'll come up with... whether they will panic or whether they will say "okay, screw it, I'm going to give it a try" and then be able to tell them "see, it wasn't that bad" you know?. Or... um... "you did really well. One other move that you could have done that would have gone well could be this... " and then have a conversation. It's not... like in Tribal Fusion if you're... it's... what you'll be doing is mainly drills, trying to understand um... the movements so, have it broken down and then a choreography but in a choreography you're following... you following other people's instructions. With ATS, because it's	Relationship between movement and self Movement as a way of relating Personification of movement/meaning in movement Dance as communication Dance as freedom

ANALYSIS	**TRANSCRIPT**	**EMERGING THEMES**
dance movement as a form of body language and thus is information about the person	**Charlotte:** Ehe... But you might question, listen, like, but with the hands you can easily explain because the verbals we use a lot of our hands people, even with dancing but I find it sometimes I find it a bit difficult to use the hands, because like I don't have much control, of my hands. **Hana:** You mean when you are dancing or when you explaining...? **Charlotte:** Yep. **Hana:** okay. You find it difficult to use... **Charlotte:** In both. **Hana:** Okay. **Charlotte:** I can easily relate. **Hana:** Mm.	Relationship between movement and self
Parallel between dance movements and other body movements	**Charlotte:** Because I do it with both when I am dancing and when I am talking. Explaining something sometimes I don't have really control of my hands so that it shows in my dance movements. **Hana:** Can you tell me more about that I am interested... particularly about the hands?	Dance as expression Dance as communication
Seems her anxiety is expressed through her hands... makes me think how each person expresses anxiety differently	**Charlotte:** Mela. Normally, um... when I'm, for instance, when I'm speaking or presenting something I use a lot my hands... **Hana:** Mmmm. **Charlotte:** ...and I can't really control them... That it will show that I am a bit anxious or else that I am a bit... I want to like... get over with. With dance it's the same. **Hana:** Mmmm. **Charlotte:** When I start fidgeting with my hands it's the same. It's normally when... when I am having... having a type of movement that I am not really comfortable with...	Movement as judgement Movement bringing up difficult emotions

ANALYSIS	**TRANSCRIPT**	**EMERGING THEMES**
	Hana: Mm. And are there some movements which you're less drawn towards, that you enjoy doing less, that... you don't like as much?	
Doesn't enjoy movements that she doesn't know how to do well	**Linda:** Only when I'm not, like, at that point (laughs) where I feel like, 'Yeah I have it, now I can um do this movement and it feels good.' Only then, and that's, for example, especially tricky with some move- some movements you do on the floor...where you have to coordinate, ahem, all your body parts. For example, like, making a turn um on your shoulder and putting up one of the legs, and you have to land with your leg on the other side. So it, um, you need to have good coordination for it, I think, so it maybe-, for me at least it takes longer. I have to practice more to get it right and so that I really feel, like, 'Okay, this feels right now' and I don't have to think too much about it. I can just do it.	Relationship between movement and self Body awareness Dance as control Dance as judgement Dance as *feeling*
Doing a move correctly is that it *feels* right (rather than it looking right, like other part, said). Is this attitude reflected in how she deals with other things in life?	**Hana:** And do you know what it is about those kinds of movements that you-, it takes you longer to, to learn or you feel are a little bit more difficult to, ahem, to do, to learn for the first time?	
Has difficulty in moves that need co-ordination - what kind of moves does she prefer?	**Linda:** Yeah it's more, um, those movements where... mm... it's harder to coordinate, it's harder to, because when you just turn, you, it's clear that you'll land again in the same place, but when you do these things in the floor sometimes you start at a certain point and then you end at a very different point.	Spatial awareness in dance
	Hana: Mm.	
	Linda: And it can be, at least for me, it can be a bit more difficult, to get that right.	Body awareness
	Hana: And when you say coordinated, is it... what are	

ANALYSIS	**TRANSCRIPT**	**EMERGING THEMES**
	Hana: Can you tell me more about that shyness, I'm curious... like what would make you shy with people that... to dance with people that you don't know	Movement as judgement
We can be judged for how we move Feels judged as a person when movements are judged	**Sarah:** People may be judging you or might be judging your movements or um... even the thought that you might not be doing it as well as you should be doing it or... mm... I am a person that looks for feedback a lot. For example, when I had the solo or even now during my Ballet lessons... um... if I don't get... if the teacher doesn't volunteer any feedback I usually ask. I ask "could I be doing this better or is there something I should be doing instead of what I am doing now?". So...	Relationship between movement and self
Looks for feedback also in other parts of her life? Need to know what others think of her/if she is 'good enough'?	**Hana:** And I'm wondering, do you know where that comes from you wanting the feedback and why it is important for you to get feedback that you would ask for?	Dance as achievement
triving for perfection or near perfection?	**Sarah:** I want to be the best that I could be so I'm not going to... if I can give a 90% product then I would rather give a 90 rather than 50. And I am always looking to improve on what I am now so even not just dance wise, academic wise, um... emotionally, you know? As in, its something in me which I always look for growth so... and improving on myself.	
Parallel between dance and other parts of her life	**Hana:** Hmm.. so it's... You kind of made the parallel between kind of how you are in dancing but also in other parts of your life. That you... that's a similarity. And I am wondering also whether you feel that um.. there are any other parallels between your dancing and your dancing life and other parts of... your life or even connections to your personality?	
Dance has taught her to take space, to be visible	**Sarah:** Umm I feel that dancing... my mum can vouch for this, because I only know this through her. But dancing has helped to bring out my character and my confidence out a bit more. When I was	Dance as empowerment

ANALYSIS	**TRANSCRIPT**	**EMERGING THEMES**
Wants to get it right. When learning she's not 'letting go' like she said she does when dancing	**Hana:** So you don't mean rigid, as in physically, but as in your mind you want to do it correctly?	Dance as control Dance as purpose Dance as achievement Dance as restriction of freedom
	Miriam: no, rigid, rigid, doing in correctly, yes. Rigid in doing it correctly. So, I find that between me and my husband, there are times when we start learning new pieces when, I'm going one way in my mind and feet, and he's going in another way, and that is when we quarrel...	
	Hana: mm	
I see a power struggle	**Miriam:** ... that is when I say "that's not it!". And he says "I'm leading!". And I say "but we're learning!". And he says "but you do where I push you!", sort of, "where I... you got where I take you". And I say "No, we haven't learnt it yet! Let's learn it first so that then I can take your cues".... You know, so you're learning one, two, three, and that's the way the sequence, we've learnt, I mean. *I* expect us to do them like that until our feet can run it on their own. Can do it on their own. But while I'm still counting, while I'm still thinking what happens next? Where do we go now? I'm not thinking about his cues, about where he's pushing me or where he's taking me, you know? I'm thinking about what I'm doing and that is, that is the bad moment between us, eh, because he wants to lead but now *hopefully* after two and a half years I think he's got it (inaudible).... or I got my message across. Let's do it the way its (inaudible), because even the instructor told him that. He said "what were you doing there?" and he said "I was changing" and he said "you do change when you've learnt it properly first. Because she's not with you". So, hopefully...	Dance as disconnection from others
I wonder how this dynamic parallels to their relationship outside of the dance class		The meaning in movement
Common metaphor - "relationships are like a dance" Dynamics in dance and in life		The relationship in dance/dance as connection to others
	Hana: So it's something about...he does it in a... in his own way, or...	
	Miriam: He wants to express - yes - he wants to do it in a free, free, free, express it freely but I'm doing it in the	Dance as expression Dance as freedom

ANALYSIS	**TRANSCRIPT**	**EMERGING THEMES**
dance seems to a space in which she is in control, to do whatever she wishes Praise from others - increased her self-esteem? Release her emotions through dance Need/desire to be seen? Joy from dance can be experienced anywhere Expressing oneself even within strict and rigid dance Beauty in movement	**Zara:** [...] Um, the thing with dancing is that I always felt it... with a piece of music you can kind… you can do whatever you want with it and... it's... it's up to you... and you know, if it has lyrics especially, you… you listen to it and you interpret them however you want, you can even apply them to how you're feeling at the moment, or in another moment. Um... so... I always felt that, kind of, it kind of set me free, kind of, it gave me a bit of... um freedom, especially since I was good at it, so whenever I did something I would get commended for it, um... because... at the same time, um, during my secondary school experiences um... I was bullied severely and um... the bullying... literally, the only reason I kept going to school was because I knew I had I had dance lessons to... kind of vent out in. Which, ultimately, did end up even making things a bit worse because... um.. every time I'd get commended in front of the students who used to bully me it would make the bullying worse, but whatever. Um... and eh, then after Form 5 and obviously after I got rid of the bullies that came along with it.. um... I kind of wanted to keep pushing through because it was still a place where I could be myself, I mean... **Hana:** When you say 'yourself' can you say more about... about how it... **Zara:** Okay so...for example in the year that I spent not dancing ballet, I... I would go shopping and I wouldn't just walk around with the trolley, I'd...I don't know, pirouette (laughs) to pick stuff up and... I literally danced through the supermarket, even if there was no music. And um and at home I used to come up with choreographies by myself. Dance makes me feel like... I have a very strong emotion inside me and... I'm able to let it out... um... and some people tell me 'but ballet is so strict and rigid and like how can you kind of express yourself?'... because through the strictness and rigidity of the ballet and you know that you have to	Dance as freedom Mastership Dance as self-expression Creativity Achievement Dance as self expression Dance as connection to self Dance as being seen Dance as self-expression Dance as release/freedom Creativity

ANALYSIS	TRANSCRIPT	EMERGING THEMES
	Hana: When you are not... when you're doing your dancing and you don't do something in the way that you would want to...	
	Cristina: Aha.	
	Hana: how do you feel then?	
Felt judged? She learned about the stronger and weaker parts of her body Became more confident when her body 'failed' her?	**Cristina:** Hm (long pause) I think I... on the- I mean, when I was younger I would if I for example fell down I would feel a bit embarrassed because everyone um you know there is everyone around. As I got old but I started to, one get used to-, when I did big turns my ankles were always a bit weak, as well, that's another part of my body which was a bit weaker, um... so it it used to happen that I would, when I am practicing when I am training that I would fall down. The fact that I got used, you know used to the people around me I felt more comfortable to be able to fall down and get back up. I got into the routine but that if I am not doing something right to keep trying it over and over again. That's something which I started when I was sixteen.	Rel. between movement and self Movement as judgement Body awareness Dance as empowerment Dance as failure Achievement
	Hana: Mm.	
Confidence built when she saw if she worked hard she could achieve. Does better when she stressed less	**Cristina:** Before I didn't used to, you know, if I can't do it I can't do it. But at that age then I started to say, 'okay let me just go into a corner, try it, try it, try it... **Hana:** Mm. **Cristina:** ... and eventually em... I started to realise I... I... I can do it better. At some point either because I am practicing it often or because I'm removing you know the stress about it and it comes out much better.	Empowerment Achievement
She learned perseverance	**Hana:** Mm. **Cristina:** Or because someone tells you, 'okay you need to put your leg in this way for it to come out better'. So with time then em... sorry I lost where I was going. Em how it made me feel. So in time I got used to the fact the I am not going to get it right	

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