Foucault and the Training of Docile Bodies in Dance Education

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Since most of you are unfamiliar with dance training and education, I will start my paper by describing a typical dance technique class (studio class) in a university setting. Of course this is a difficult task.

I do recognize the problems of describing a general dance class. There are diverse dance techniques, levels and pedagogical styles that may be included under the umbrella "higher education dance." Dance education is not a monolith at the university level. However, there are some commonalities that tend to characterize dance education in the United States.

For example, when I envision a typical dance class, I see,

a large studio space filled with mirrors. The dance teacher usually stands at the front of the studio while the students are often lined up in neat rows facing the mirror and the teacher. Students in dance classes spend much time gazing in the mirror in order to perfect the outward appearance of the body and strengthen dance technique. They commonly wear leotards and tights or variations of tightly clad clothing that allow the teacher to view the body from an outside perspective. Very often the dance teacher focuses on specific corrections, placement of the body, proper technique, and efficient performance of particular dance movements. (Green, 1999)¹

I have found that this system for training student bodies is ripe ground for a Foucauldian analysis. Foucault points out that the western prison system, has moved from an institution that punishes by inflicting pain through torture and physical abuse, to one that appears more humanely aware and sensitive but is in
fact more hidden and reaches its end through a system of surveillance, supervision, training and correction (Foucault, 1977). I contend that dance training is another example of a practice that moves from repressive control to the implementation of a system that requires subjects to be surveilled and corrected through the construction of dance technique classes. Student dance bodies are docile bodies created to produce an efficiency, not only of movement, but also, a normalization and standardization of behavior in dance classes. It may be significant to point out here that dance classes in particular areas such as modern dance and ballet are called “techniques” since Foucault used this term to identify technologies of the self as part of regimes of power that society requires of people to discipline themselves. I see these dance techniques in similar ways that Foucault described through his work.

While physical poking, prodding, and pushing were common elements of ballet and early modern dance training, we have developed new ways of ensuring particular student behaviors. Recently, as there have been a number of law suits against dance teachers who physically abuse student bodies, there has been movement to find more tacit ways of producing normalized behaviors in student dancers. This shift towards surveillance, and particularly self-surveillance, has been effective in training docile dance performers, but not so effective in producing dance artists who take ownership of their bodies and artistic processes. As Lee Quinby (1991) has suggested, perhaps the halt of creative energies that subvert the dominant paradigm is just the point. By producing docile bodies in dance classes,
there is less of a chance of ending up with political artists who question norms of ideology as well as practice.

Through this paper and Foucauldian analysis of my dance education study, I hope to look at dance education as a disciplinary power that trains students to be docile citizens in the dance world and creates standards for dance behavior and bodily being. I will explore how human beings are made subjects through this system of “dance technique,” and how the social manipulation of bodies and constant correction affect the artistic life as well as the personal and political lives of dance students.

The Study: Somatics and the Gendered Body in Dance Education

The purpose of this project was to investigate how the bodies of participant student teachers in dance are socially inscribed in relationship to gender. In this study, somatic practice was used as a tool to investigate body perceptions and experiences of undergraduate dance education majors. The five participants took part in a somatics/creativity project within a university level instructional setting at a state university in the south. This teaching and research project explored how these body perceptions have been influenced by society and the dance world. For example, the participants were asked questions about previous experiences in dance, and how they have learned to perceive their bodies in reference to a specific weight and body ideal. Class movement explorations, somatic exercises and discussion were used as tools to explore social influences on the body.

The class was designed so that during the first part of each session, participants would be exposed to various somatic practices and during the second part of each
session participants would immerse themselves in the creative process and work towards a group/production performance, which took the form of an interactive movement forum.

Entering the investigation, I sought to 1) interpret how these students perceived their bodies in relationship to society and the dance world, 2) determine if and how they found a relationship between somatic practice, their awareness of their socially inscribed bodies, and creative expression, and 3) understand how somatics may help students become aware of issues regarding gender and the social construction of bodies.

Theoretical Framework

Besides reflecting the ideas of Foucault, the study reflects a theoretical framework that builds on the ideas of a number of diverse postmodern, feminist, and somatic thinkers. As is often the case in postpositivist research the study reflects ideas that do not necessarily fit together neatly and cleanly. I, as a researcher, continue to wrestle with diverse ideas as I attempt to situate myself within sometimes complex and conflicting perspectives in a postmodern world of uncertainty and change. And as is often the case in postpositivist research, I recognize a level of subjectivity and thus attempt to be self-reflexive and look at how I am positioned in the research context.

The work draws on a large and diverse body of literature that addresses somatics and the body. I use the term somatics to describe body-mind practices that tend to focus on an inner awareness and use the proprioceptive sense or an inner sensory mode. Thomas Hanna, a major somatic theorist (1988), asserts that data from a first-person perception
are quite different than data observed from a third-person view. He says that somatics is a matter of looking at oneself from the "inside out" where one is aware of feelings, movements and intention, rather than looking objectively from the outside in (p. 20).

Although he emphasizes the point that neither the first-person mode or third-person mode of observations is more factual or better, Hanna claims that there is a distinct difference between the two, as separated by soma and body. Where a body may be defined as an objective entity, studied as any material object from the outside, a soma is a "living body" that is observable from a first-person viewpoint (pp. 4-5).

Thus, according to Hanna, somatics is the study of the soma, not as an objective "body" but an embodied process of internal awareness and communication. Interestingly, while much postpositivist and feminist research recognizes the researcher as a first-person subjective participant, somatics affirms an inner perspective of the soma.

Although somatic theory and practice tend to focus on inner experience, there are some somatic theorists and educators who move into a more macro socio-political sphere and address how our bodies and somatic experiences are inscribed by the culture in which we live. I call this body of literature "social somatic theory" because it addresses socio-political issues related to somatic theory and practice. Since this project moves into a socio-political realm and begins to explore critical, postmodern and feminist issues related to the body and movement, it draws heavily on this body of literature. By no means, a monolith, these various discourses bump up against each other and may not be consistent with some components of Hanna's somatic theory in general (See Green, 1993). However, one commonality among the literatures of social somatic theory is a general shift that moves outward from micro to macro dimensions and from self to
This study particularly draws on the writing of such writers as Don Johnson (1983) and Elizabeth Behnke (1990-91) who have addressed issues of bodily authority and have demonstrated how our bodies are shaped by the cultures in which we live. According to these theorists, Western culture creates the myth of a body/mind split. This split does not simply separate our minds from our bodies and favor mind over body. Rather, there is an active obsession with the body as an objective, mechanical entity. However, according to these theorists, this split removes us from the experiences of our bodies and often results in disconnecting us from our own inner proprioceptive signals and from our somas as living processes.

Furthermore, as Johnson suggests, dominant cultures often perpetuate this body/mind split in an effort to maintain somatic weakness and confusion of oppressed groups in society and preserve and control. By disconnecting people from their sensory and sensual selves, through the imposition of external models of "ideal bodies," or standards of what the body "should be" and how it should act, the dominant culture maintains control as people in oppressed groups distrust their own sensory impulses and give up their bodily authority.

Much of Johnson's work is grounded in the discourse of Foucault, who looked at power and its relationship to knowledge (1979; 1980). Although Foucault was interested in studying power and extremes of standardizing bodily behavior that have characterized institutions in a historical context, and did not directly address the body as a source of pedagogy (and rejected power as repressive but rather explained it through discourse), his studies similarly approach the body as a site of social and political control and power.
Foucault pointed to the dangers of what he called "technologies of the self" as part of practices that society requires of people to discipline themselves. As a result, society produces what he has referred to as "docile bodies," which are bodies that are self regulated and habituated. With the body as the direct training instrument in dance, dance student bodies easily become docile bodies through dance technique and training.

I do, however, wish to trouble the uncritical resonance between Foucudian thought and somatic tehroy related to dance. There are a number of tensions that exist between these schools of thought. For example, Foucault would not be fond of the idea of bodily experience and would be suspicious of the use of working through the body. Although he viewed the body as a site of political manipulation and control and studied it as an effect of the culture in which we live, his writing suggests a suspicion of typical somatic conceptualizations such as bodily experience and practice (1979, 1980). As Arthur Frank points out, “What Foucault contributes to the study of the body--beyond his studies as a site of political violence--is an enhanced self-reflectiveness about the project of the body itself” (1990, 132).

In other words, Foucault does not claim that the body can provide us with a grounded truth or that education through the body can free people from oppressive social policies and authoritarian regimes. His writing offers an approach rooted in critique of institutions through discourses created by the dominant culture. He would be cautious about somatic practices and creative work because of his claim that experience is based on how we have been socially constructed. He would be leery of any claims to “experiential” or “somatic” authority. Many critical theorists and feminists also believe
that a focus on experience gets in way of critical social work (See Simon and Dippo 1986; McLaren 1989).

In fact, Johnson himself points to the danger of using somatic practice as a panacea to the world’s ills without framing the discourse in a larger social context (1992??). By focusing solely on individualistic bodily experience, we may be hypnotizing ourselves to the outer world and the problems Foucault addresses through his historical analyses.

Further it may be recognized that although Foucault rejected bodily practice and experience in his early career, towards the later part of his career he came to “refute the autonomy of discourse,” (McNay 1993, 27) and refer to the corporeal aspect of life. He recognized that “the discursive and material are linked together in a symbiotic relationship” (1993, 27).

Thus, I use somatics and Foucauldian thought with the recognition that they are not the same thing. However, I still feel that it is useful to see a whole system for educating dance students through a Foucauldian lens.

Methodology

I began the investigation by announcing the new experimental course, "The Gendered Body in Dance Education," to dance education students who were preparing for student teaching. This course was designed as both a pedagogical endeavor and an opportunity to collect data for the research project. I was hoping to enroll students who were interested in somatic work and the sociocultural issues tied to the body in dance. Five women joined the project through this snowball sampling process (Guba and Lincoln 1989). This small sample is
characteristic of qualitative research studies. I was not attempting to generalize findings to all dance education students. I was attempting to understand this particular research and begin to generate theory regarding dance in higher education. Thus, I was not interested in a random sampling but a purposive sampling (see Guba and Lincoln 1989; and Lincoln and Guba 1985).

Although all the students were undergraduates, ranged in age from 20-24 years old, and knew each other prior to the project, their backgrounds were diverse. Participants included one African American (who I will call Jasmine) and four Caucasian students. One participant came from Long Island, New York (Missy), two were from New Jersey (Kathy and Tess), and two were from North Carolina (Jasmine and Nancy). Two participants also identified themselves as lesbians (Kathy and Tess). The women came from diverse backgrounds; some studied in public school settings while others studied in conservatories and dance studios.

Data collection occurred throughout the duration of the two semester study. Since I was not looking at the particular efficacy of particular somatic practices, I did not include a movement analysis or quantitative assessment of results in body perception changes. I was more interested in class discussions and interviews that reflected general changes in perception through somatic practice as an investigative tool. Classes met once a week for three hours and usually included discussion, somatic and creative work, and work on the final performance/production. Each session was audiotaped and videotaped. Audiotapes of group discussions were transcribed and used as group interview data. Since I taught each class, videotapes were revisited for research purposes (i.e. data for field notes). The data collection
methods included individual interviews, group interviews, observation and documents. Individual interviews were conducted with each participant in May, at the end of the project. They addressed perceptions about socially inscribed bodies entering the project and after being exposed to somatic practices at the conclusion of the project. They also addressed the role of dance educators in relationship to the student's perceptions of the body, and future plans for action. Unstructured (Denzin 1989) and theme oriented questions (Kvale 1983) were used in order to keep an open sense of give and take between interviewer and interviewee (see Appendix for themes).

Group interviews were conducted informally. After each exercise, students discussed their experiences. These discussions provided a natural vehicle for data collection by offering information about student's lived bodily experiences. These informal group interviews were ongoing throughout the course of the project. However, once during November and once during May, after reviewing collected data, I focused specific questions around my current findings and emerging themes. These interviews also served as "member checks," a common validity criterion used in naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Guba and Lincoln 1989).

Observation provided additional data. I used videotapes of classes in order to take field notes of each class. Documents also became a primary data source. Throughout the duration of the project, participants submitted various forms of artwork from class sessions and for the production/performance. Participants also, collected ads and articles that were analyzed from a critical perspective and
submitted journals that included experiences, feelings, reactions, changes and observations during the project.

Data analysis included both an informal "analysis_in_the_field" phase, and a more formal "cut_up_and_put_in_folders approach" whereby themes were generated and categories emerged from the data analysis process (Bogdan and Biklen 1982).

Another consideration regarding methodology was validity/trustworthiness in postpositivist research. Where validity in positivism focuses on generalizing findings, and measuring and verifying existing knowledge, validity in postpositivism focuses on understanding specific contexts, and investigating and generating the application of knowledge (Kvale 1989, 89). Some common appropriate criteria used during this study included triangulation of data and sources, a systemized reflexivity, checking for discrepant cases, member checks, questioning, theorizing, peer debriefing, and catalytic validity (which requires that an investigation take action to produce desired results) (3).

participation influence the study.3

Foucault and Dance Training

Not surprisingly, initial findings suggest that these participants' previous experiences in dance did reflect an emphasis on "ideal body" myths in society and particularly in the dance world. When asked to describe and talk about their bodies, the women emphasized the influence of a dualistic perception of body as separate from mind and represented through an objectified perspective. Jasmine spoke about the size of her "butt" being too large, particularly for dance and she continually referred to her body as unacceptable according to a stereotypical model in dance. In
her journal, she offered one of many body stories that the participants were asked to recall:

I was sitting in [the ballet studio] putting on my street clothes after a typical ballet class. So that meant I felt like a total zero with two left feet. But of course I was not alone in my thoughts. Three of my friends were thinking and saying the same thing. Then walked in the stereotypical ballerinas, long legs and arms, skinny, white, hair pulled back or short, and very defined facial features. Don't forget the flexibility for days [sic]. And all we did was say, "Here come the 'real' ballerinas and of course [we] are leaving. We would not fit in with them." As I thought more about this the more I felt that I and my friends were still caught in the traditional attitude and myths [that you must look like this to be a "real" dancer]....I still fall so easily back into that stereotyped ballet body ideal. I even find myself wishing my body was like that and asking God for a body like that.

There were a number of descriptions of ideal bodies required in dance technique classes and in the dance world in general (See Green, 1996). However, what particularly stood out in my mind was how dancers were required to behave in order to achieve such ideal bodies and in order to be successful in dance. The dancers were required, not only to move in certain ways and habitually train their bodies to perform in certain ways but to train their selves to act in the world in a very specific ways. For example, they reflected on destructive perceptions of body as a result of dancing at what they called "Dolly Dinkle" dance studios (usually rural private dance studios that often required them to wear frilly outfits for dance
recitals). These studios were more often referred to as a social training ground for young girls and women than a facility to teach dance technique.

However, it may be interesting to note that the participants often claimed that with all the destructive effects of social influences such as advertising and media, the dance world itself was a more serious culprit because students were directly faced with the pressure to live up to these expectations on a daily basis. In dance classes they were, in Foucauldian terms, constantly under "surveillance."

Docile Bodies in Dance Technique

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault refers to the soldier of the early seventeenth century as a model for bodily honor and respect. He says,

> The signs for recognizing this profession are a lively, alert manner, an erect head, a taut stomach, broad shoulders, long arms, strong fingers, a small belly, thick thighs, slender legs and dry feet, because a man of such a figure could not fail to be agile and strong. (1997, p. 135)

Interestingly, one of the women in the study, Tess, refereed to a similar required habitual bodily being. Tess spoke about a perfect body as a necessity in the dance profession. In her journal she provided a list of requirements for the acceptable dance body:

[In the dance world] there is only one acceptable way to see ourselves. Example: Legs = Need to be long, slender, super flexible, usually the skinnier the better, and if you don't have thin legs it is because you are lazy and don't want to have to work at it. Legs are a definite accent point of the body. Buttocks = Small, proportional to the skinny legs, and round, it must be firm and not jiggle. Stomach = flat, no bulge, preferably no room to pinch an inch. Should be hard. Hips = No fat, As close to the bone as possible, No love handles.
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Waist = Should have a straight line. No large hour glass shapes. Shapely to attract men. Never sag.
Arms = small a small amount of muscle & no flab under the arm & no flab between shoulder and breast.
Face = Thin, fine, clear bone structure.
Lips = full, heart shaped.
Eyes = Large.
Hair = Long.
Should be light as a feather. Never eat sweets.

Both these descriptions point to a required mastery of the body in an attempt to obtain perfection and control. Foucault refers to the body as object and target of power. He says, “It is easy enough to find signs of the attention then paid to the body – to the body that is manipulated, shaped, trained, which obeys, responds, becomes skillful and increases its forces…a body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved” (p. 136). These bodies are docile bodies because they require a system of codification and methods which are under meticulous control and surveillance (p.137).

Docile bodies also require a system for hierarchical surveillance, normalizing judgement, and which requires continuous supervision (p. 192). Foucault describes such a system through his description of the panopticism or prison whereby inspection through spatial portioning provides a continuous hierarchical gaze, thus training or correcting citizens to be uncreative and self surveilling (pp. 197-203). Through this physical setting, citizens become docile and trained to behave in normalized ways.

Dance training provides a similar system for maintaining proper behavior. In the dance classroom, this takes the form of a studio with mirrors to monitor student behavior and self surveillance. For example, the participants in the study continuously referred to the traditional Western dance setting, with particular relevance to the existence of mirrors, as an ominous and powerful presence that
contributed to physical self-evaluation, behavior regulation, body objectification, and competition. As Tess explained,

We as dancers spend so much time in front of the mirror. And I sit there and pick my body apart the whole time. And many of my classmates claim that they are overweight and need to lose but they have bodies that are fine and outside the dance world these women are considered small, skinny, tiny. But here they are considered chunky, flabby, not professional material. They tell me how bad their eating habits are for them, then they won't even finish their salad. When I enter class, I look around to see who is smaller than me and think about how big I am. If I concentrate in class half as hard as I do on the shape of my body I would be an incredible dancer. I want to know how to change this attitude because I don't want to pass it on to my students...Cause you can do a lot of damage when you take all that we've been programmed with and then you sit in front of a mirror over and over and over and [you are] encouraged to correct, correct, correct, pull up, pull in, suck, tuck. You're getting all that all day. So, [the mirror] it's kind of a reinforcer....Everything that we do reflects how we are perceived.

Along with this significance placed on perception, the analysis pointed to a parallel emphasis on the attitudes of dance teachers and the assumptions communicated about how students should look. As Kathy communicated in her journal, "...it is sometimes more important that the dancer look a certain way than it is that the dancer have something to communicate." Interestingly, as Susan Bordo (1993) points out and even according to an article in Newsweek (Brant 1995), the
ideal body has changed within the last decade. The new aesthetic also includes a toned and muscular ideal. However, this new model does not replace the societal expectation of achieving a small, emaciated body, with an empowering model of strength, vitality, health and power. To the contrary, bodies, particularly women's bodies are still required to be conditioned and manipulated into "shape." Women are required to spend large amounts of time primping and training the body. Bodies must remain thin and smaller; but now women have the additional demand of appearing strong and muscular too. According to Thomas F. Cash, professor of psychology at Old Dominion University, "It's [the fitness ethos] just added another master to be served.... Women say want to look healthier, not be healthier." (cited in Brant 1995, 88). With an exaggeration of this attitude in the dance world, the participants often felt added pressure to meet this cumulative ideal.

The participants provided many examples of teacher directions which required self training and regulation in order to achieve an external standard. Comments included instructions and corrections such as, "Don't let your butt does stick out," "Lock your knees," "Make sure your back is flat," "Squeeze your butt." Teachers were also accused of stopping class to point out student weaknesses in these areas. According to the participants, pressure to meet these standards led to dysfunctional habits and strategies such as tucking under, hyperextended knees, forced turnout and a number of other physical ailments, injury, lack of feelings of connectedness and well-being, physical and emotional distress and pain.

With the training of docile dance bodies so prevalent in the minds of these participants, authority and power relationships became overriding subthemes in the
The participants often discussed feelings of oppression and dominance by powerful instructors. Some students indicated they felt intimidated by various teachers and some outwardly described specific teachers as authoritarian. During class discussions Kathy referred to "the whole authoritarian structure" of dance classes. And Tess referred to a silent code when she said, "If you break that code of what you're supposed to do, you are just upsetting the whole hierarchy." In her journal, Jasmine literally and metaphorically remembered, "I remember beginning a jazz class...and I got scolded for being out of line."

Many times, participants discussed particular authoritarian practices and required standardized behaviors that were required within the broader educational dance setting. Often control was established through institutionalized codes of dress and behavior particularly in classes at dance conservatories, where students in different levels were required to wear different colored leotards. At some schools, eating was monitored by teachers. And often students were required to participate in "weigh_ins."

Competition, cliques, and rivalry for teacher attention were other tensions discussed. These conditions often further exacerbated inequities in power while disconnecting students from a sense of somatic awareness and authority. They also led to feelings of intimidation, student frustration, isolation and lack of confidence.

The participants often talked about this abuse of power as a violation and assault that resulted in a disconnection from their bodies. Somatic awareness sessions and practice tended to provide students with a place where they could reconnect to inner senses and somatic impulses while releasing some of the habitual
physical strain required from keeping constant vigilance and surveillance over their bodies.

However, it may be significant to point out that although somatic practice was used as a vehicle for body awareness and release of habitual tension patterns, I caution educators not to use somatic practice as separate from a social analysis and critical thought. It may be just as dangerous to view somatics as a panacea for dealing with the effects of power and the training of docile bodies. In past research, I have pointed out the danger of solely employing somatic practice outside the recognition of a sociocultural_political context and within an individualistic and micro context alone (1993). Without a broader social lens used to examine how bodies are habituated and regulated through technologies of normalization, we are not likely to change pressure to conform to a dominant ideal body model or break down strategies for training docile bodies.

Nevertheless, the myth of the ideal body is pervasive in the dance world and dance students, who are mostly young women, are particularly vulnerable to the current spread of diet regimes and other technologies aimed at bodily "correction" (Bordo, 1993, 104). While "control" and "mastery" are concepts being used in media and advertisements, to dictate acceptable behavior regarding weight management and body regulation in the larger society, "prohibitions against female indulgence" are even more severe for dancers in the studio and the micro dance culture. Lack of control of the body is often not tolerated. Dancers cannot succeed in the dance world if they are perceived as slovenly, lazy, or fat.
Furthermore, interestingly, Bruch notes that a typical symptom of an eating disorder is the feeling of "not owning the body and its sensations." (cited in Bordo 1993, 147). Dance students are faced with the double whammy of daily training that teaches them to disconnect from their bodies and the threat of disorders that further weaken and disembodied them. Often, in an attempt to "not take up too much space," (160) female dancers run the risk of literally vanishing from the dance world.

Technologies of the Self

There was one discrepancy regarding the data in relationship to strength and control. As a feminist and somatic educator, I began to feel quite uncomfortable with a number of responses that described feelings of power and control experienced by some of the participants while they were practicing weight and strength training at the gym. I could not ascertain why students expressed such feelings of power associated with current techniques that require body modification and regulation. To me, the new fitness craze was not empowering for women. While women could learn to build muscle and look more like men, I believed strength training, like traditional dance pedagogy, required women to spend more time training an ideal body, thin, yet now muscular, whose purpose was an objectified representation designed for the male gaze. Yet it seemed to me that the participants were not ready to release an aesthetic ideal and conclude that reaching this ideal had empowered them. Missy for example, talked about her recovery from an eating disorder which included taking a job at a gym:
When I looked at different people in the gym there are so many different body types in the gym. I realized aesthetically to me someone who was muscular and had__as a male or female__I found was a lot more attractive than a skinny person with no shape, no muscle tone. Finally I was like__I always looked like I worked out even when I didn’t. I was like....it is not in my genes to look like a bean pole. Apparently I said there is something in my genes that tends toward the muscular. That’s what I’m going to do. I got to eating right to help me build my muscle definition. I looked at this as a health conscious choice of proper eating but I said that gave me a goal to eat something right. Because this was something that I wanted. It was still an aesthetic body because I was going toward the aesthetic. I couldn’t get it without eating.

As a teacher, I became very concerned about Missy. She came to me two years ago because she had not eaten in two weeks. I was the one who drove her to the hospital and listened to her story about her inability to keep food down. Here she was telling me she was eating, and taking care of her body yet she seemed to still compulsively work to mold her body into a more familiar and contemporary shape, but nevertheless an imposed body ideal.

Interestingly, Missy communicated a sense of control and power when she refused to eat and became focused on molding her body. But Bordo explains this feeling of strength, control and power as deceptive. She describes it as a modification practice that leads women to collude with a dominant culture. The self_control necessary to diet or shape the body may afford dancers a sense of
mastery over their bodies, qualities valued in a male-dominated society. However, as Bordo suggests,

To reshape one's body into a male body is not to put on male power and privilege. To feel autonomous and free while harnessing body and soul to an obsessive body_practice is to serve, not transform, a social order that limits female possibilities. (1993, 179)

Thus, self_management of bodies is a "continual and virtually impossible task in our culture" (187) and particularly in the dance world. The ideal body is impossible to achieve because it requires vast energy which often saps the body of usable strength and decreases agency in women by disconnecting them from their bodies as they fight to adapt to cumulatively impossible standards that are designed to control women's bodies and desires. However, interestingly, Kathy often did talk about strength in relationship to an inner feeling of connectedness. By not allowing herself to be disconnected from her own embodiment and focusing more on somatic sensitivity than outer standardized ideals, she may be more likely to connect to the larger global world and use her sense of physical strength along with social agency.

Technologies of the Self

There were also other cases; some men were awarded some positive qualities (i.e. using somatic practices and approaches) but women were reserved for particular acclaim regarding this consideration. However, Missy stood out as a student who seemed to defy this categorization; she often had problems in more supportive and somatic classes. And she often expressed success with teachers like
Jeff who intimidated other students while she sometimes explained that she likes to be pushed and physically challenged. She said that she hurts in Jeff’s classes but she liked it. Listening to her, I could not help feel that Missy’s responses were connected to her training, that she might have felt more comfortable with this approach because it was familiar. She felt like she was working "hard" and achieving success in control of her body through self-discipline and restraint. In Bordo’s words, she may have experienced some sense of "mastery" over her body, with pain as an unfortunate result. Her words often haunted me because I could not help but think this was a case of physical denial and an effort to numb the body. Interestingly, she also experienced some problems with the somatic work (mostly the body awareness exercises) because it did not always help her to feel better but sometimes made her aware of her physical discomfort and brought on negative feelings about her body size. She explained feeling her body take up space:

Sometimes the somatic work can work for me as in like, releasing tension and stuff like that. Then other times it doesn’t work because I start thinking about my body and the shape of my body....Sometimes I can just let everything go, but other times, when you’re concentrating on yourself... you go down to your back, or go down to this part of your body, then you’re like, OK this part of my body is wide.

Missy may have experienced discomfort because she had been previously attempting to tune out inner messages of her body in an attempt to work towards a body ideal. This may indicate a feeling of personal responsibility to train a docile body rather than an awareness of impossible larger social standards. In other
words, while listening to her body she experienced unsuccessful feelings and frustration in not meeting an objectified body ideal. [CREATING A SELF]

Nancy also often provided a sense of tension and contradiction when communicating perceptions about her body and past experiences in dance. She often said that she did not feel badly about her body and often discussed the positive dance education she received from a former teacher at a private studio. Although she often addressed many body problems after arriving at the university, she claimed that she was very happy in dance prior to her move to this university. She attributed this attitude to her cheerful disposition, inability to feel depressed and the nurturing care of her family and former teacher. She seemed to not want to deal with critical analysis or own any contradictory feelings regarding her body. She claimed she did not have a dark side and resisted working on dances that did not express happiness and lightness. She perceived herself as strong and attributed her strength to her positive self-image. I, as researcher and teacher, observed that there appeared to be a lack of strength in Nancy’s body and movement. However, Nancy may have associated strength with the projection of a constantly happy “appearance.”

Perhaps, Nancy did feel good because she was supported and valued at home and in her prior dance classes. She recalled her teacher affirming all body types and appreciating the value of each student. However, I sensed that Nancy’s stories seemed “too good” and that she was demonstrating “good girl” qualities. My ongoing personal frustration with Nancy’s resistance to “think critically” and address issues related to the body in a reflexive and thoughtful manner created a certain
postmodern tension (5). I found myself attributing this denial to what many critical theorists refer to as a "false consciousness" (see Lather 1991) and resistance to think critically. Some participants who expressed confirmed my observations concern regarding what Jasmine referred to as Nancy's "ignorance" and "negativity" regarding other participants feelings of marginalization.

Nancy also did confirm her behavior as disciplined at times. For example, she attributed her resistance to delve into serious issues and her dislike of "heavy" dance to her prior education where she got more rewards for smiling on stage. She did complain about teacher attitudes regarding perceived body problems. And she addressed expectations from teachers who characterized her "perfect body," while expressing concern that she was not perfect at all. Furthermore, her connection to a body ideal may not have been conscious but nevertheless apparent at times. When discussing a particular student's problem with weight control, she inadvertently said, "I would have killed to have her body." And although she said that pressure to achieve an ideal body did not bother her, she did recognize and affirm that body ideals were socially influenced and destructive to other students; she expressed concern about health considerations and expressed a desire to affirm body difference and diversity in her future classes.

It may be significant to be aware however, that although I may find evidence to support my findings regarding some participant behavior and attitudes, the point may be that I had a sense that they were attempting to tell me more than I thought I knew. Kathy and Missy's feelings of strength from weight training could not be denied. (In fact, I have considered going to a gym in order to attempt to see if I
would experience a similar result.) Further, I could not argue with Nancy's strong denial of marginalization during her dance training.

I continued to wrestle with these complex questions and issues. And while I continue to find evidence to support the need to look at how we educate dancer's bodies, I also strive to be open to the complexity of the issue.

Implications for Dance Education

Very often agency is valued as a validity criteria in postpositivist research (Lather 1986, 1991, 1993). Particularly for emancipatory pedagogy, educators and researchers attempt to work toward change and action in both the teaching and research processes. This is why teaching and research often overlap.

For this reason, throughout the class and project I asked the participants about the relevance of the issues in relationship to their goals and objectives as dance teachers. Many ideas, strategies and plans for action were generated. For one thing, these participants discussed the need for awareness of these issues. As Jasmine suggested, "It's important just to be aware that we can address those [issues]."

The participants also refereed to the need to teach multiculturally, in other words, to be aware of who is marginalized in the dance class and to be aware of judging students based on body types. Interestingly, Missy, although striving at times to achieve a muscular look, indicated that there is nobody who can meet these impossible standards and said she would strive to bring this awareness into her future classes.

Furthermore, participants addressed the need to honor all body types and teach to all students both in the studio, by emphasizing that dancers come in all shapes
and sizes, and outside it by choreographing works that use dancers of different sizes, and alternative body types. They also suggested showing videos of ethnically diverse dance companies and dancers who use different body types. I was quite surprised that by the end of the project, the participants were also thinking about directly addressing critical issues in class. As Kathy suggested, "As dance educators, we can integrate ways of broadening the definition of who is a dancer and what a woman is, and recognizing how media and society confines the definition of what a woman is and how they should be and act and look." They spoke about including classes modeled on the one we used for the project and by brainstorming and having discussion, which directly raise the issue of body ideals. Kathy also suggested teaching dance history critically and including the body as topic. Some specific ideas included using videos of traditional dancing critically by to raising questions regarding the lack of color and diverse body types and problematizing ads, texts and other materials and sources that teach and perpetuate reliance on achieving a body ideal, and to recognize and challenge bias and prejudice in the classroom.

The participants were also interested in challenging the societal construct that female dancers must be skinny by discussing the detrimental effects of the pressure to attain this ideal including particular ways this may lead to bodily disconnection, i.e. retraction of the pelvis to fit the body of an ideal women can lead to alignment problems and injury while the additional compensation of tucking, can create another set of problems.

Finally, the participants also discussed plans to incorporate somatic and body awareness practices into their classes and curriculums and, as Tess suggested, also
to make it available to men because they are not often taught to get in touch with their bodies. Kathy spoke to the need for somatic work when she said, "Somatic experience, you know, connecting the mind and the body, would seem to me another feminist pedagogical tool because a lot of dance doesn't necessarily do that."

Many of the participants spoke about helping students reclaim ownership of their bodies and associated somatic authority to an inner strength. Kathy expressed her plans to continue using somatic practice [body awareness] in the fitness world by emphasizing an inner bodily focus. She articulated that by reconnecting inwardly even fitness teachers might incorporate a somatic approach to an activity that generally brings authority to objectified bodies. For the most part the participants were interested in using strategies that disconnect from an external standard and reconnect to their embodied selves.

I’d like to close with an excerpt of a journal entry form Kathy who effectively summed up the heart of this topic:

In talking with my fellow field experience students, it seems that many have trouble teaching technical classes from a non-objectified approach. Showing movement to be copied is certainly the more traditional/accepted way of teaching, but an investment of less common pedagogical practices would be worth it in the long run. By teaching movement concepts from the inside out to arrive at a technical aspect shows a student that they have something to give from the inside rather than someone who has movement put upon them. The inner approach gives the student a sense of ownership of themselves and their contribution to dance. The outward
approach makes the student feel like they are something to be molded or that they need to fit into a mold and if they don't they cannot contribute. It is important to change the way we teach dance in order to change what is valued in dance.

Endnotes

1. See Stinson (1993) for a broader discussion of traditional dance pedagogy and underlying philosophical assumptions.

2. Postpositivist inquiry includes a number of research paradigms existing at the same time. In a potsmodern world of conflicting positionalities, multiple and competing perspectives and fuzzy boundaries, these categorizations are not often so clearly defined. See Green (1996_a, 1996_b), and Lather (1991) for fuller discussions about postpositivist research.

3. Due to lack of time and space I have not addressed issues such as ethical concerns
and the complexity of the methodology. For a fuller discussion about methodology please see Green, 1999.

4. See Green (1996_c) for a discussion about the problems of working form a gender perspective that does not include issues of race and class. The one African American student in the study did provide some data that reflected a different perspective regarding ideal representation in her African American community. However, working daily with dancers, she felt that she was open to the messages prevalent in the dance world and she felt pressured to achieve and external ideal body.

5. Erica McWilliam (1993, 1994) describes postmodern tension as a physical [or somatic] response to the uncertainty of knowledge and "truth" in a postmodern world. Postpositivist researchers often struggle with the multiple perspectives of participants, researcher, and theories while attempting to make meaning of a research context. See also Green (1993, 1996_a, 1996_b) for a description of this condition and a discussion about how somatic sensitivity may be used as a research tool.
APPENDIX

Themes for Individual Interviews

1. Meaning and influence of the project as women, dancer, and educator.

2. Meaning of "the gendered body in dance education."

3. Value of the course (somatic work, class activities, discussion of issues, creative process and creative project); what worked? What did not work?

4. Learning regarding diversity and other issues rose.

5. Social and Pedagogical Influences on Ideal Bodies and Body Perceptions.

6. Implications for Dance Education and Strategies for Future Teaching.
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