



# Applying Critical Consciousness to Dance/Movement Therapy Pedagogy and the Politics of the Body

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## Abstract

Dance/movement therapy (DMT) is a profession and cultural community with its own habitus, assumptions, and biases. Because of the profession's progressive and unique embodied-dance approach to psychotherapy, the lack of social critique of the inherent 'whiteness' of its epistemology can be overlooked in the process of education and training of DMT professionals. The DMT norms, that are not explicitly stated, may manifest in practice as unintended oppression of trainees as well as peers. Drawing from critical race feminist theory and critical pedagogy, we offer an embodied dialectical approach to exploring the power dynamics that exist within the field of DMT education and training in the US. We raise case examples of heteropatriarchal European-American epistemology in DMT and offer counternarratives and frameworks for humanizing the admissions process, curriculum, and the facilitation of classes and/or supervision of practica and internship. We believe that a critically conscious DMT education and training opportunity leads to healing, liberation, and celebratory social action.

**Keywords** Critical pedagogy · Critical consciousness · Dance/movement therapy education · International student · Multicultural · Social justice · Embodied practice · Language privilege · Nonverbal

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It is the first year of the Dance/Movement Therapy (DMT) program. An eminent professor from the Laban program in London is visiting our movement analysis class. She gives the directive to move freely in a personal way. I still remember feeling my dance as flowing, easy, and harmonious in the modern dance style of improvisation—my favorite form of dance. The movement directives of DMT are sometimes hard for me to understand at this point in my training, but this one feels ‘good’ and right for my body. At the end of the individual movement section, the guest teacher asks for observations from us first and then makes her comments and observations. I say that “it felt good, like how I am feeling today.” She then says something to the effect that “it was monotonous, monotone, boring. It all stayed on one level—no variations in time.” I was deflated, confused, embarrassed in front of my classmates with whom my movement style had already been critiqued as too sustained in Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) terminology. That moment is still recalled so clearly and conflated with a later professor who said during an improvisation, “and I don’t want to see that static tai chi stuff.”

The American Dance Therapy Association (ADTA) has been making renewed efforts to be more diverse and inclusive as an organization (ADTA, 2017; Chang, 2017). According to the revised ADTA Standards for Education and Clinical Training (2017), core principles of DMT theories that encompass dance, human development through the lifespan, neuroscience, relationship, and assessment, should all be informed by culture. Such a concept of culture entails the “student understands that the therapist elicits and works within competencies for the identified culture(s) of the client, and brings knowledge of how personal culture(s) may bias perceptions and understanding of the client and influence core competencies” (ADTA, 2017, p. 4). Furthermore, all ADTA approved master’s programs are to “completely integrate culture, academics, and the institution’s administrative functions that serve the student and the faculty within the social context” (ADTA, 2017, p. 4). While the acknowledgment of the essentiality and existence of cultural competence and humility in every aspect of DMT education and training is much needed, systemic power dynamics—who is invited to the table, whose views are represented (beyond being decorative) in the curricula and literature, and how the dominant narrative is being reinforced in DMT—have not been made explicit.

Various incidents of discrimination in the field of DMT are not always talked about. The story we shared above is personal, but variations of such narratives are common for students who identify as African American, Caribbean-American, Latinx, Asian, Indigenous, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Two-spirited, Queer and Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, Pansexual and/or having other marginalized orientations and social identities with varying body abilities. Recognizing that all theory and practice exist within a historical, societal and political context, and that the nature of lived academic experience is a dialectic that is constantly shifting, open discourse is needed in our field to examine and decenter a DMT epistemology that revolves around heteronormative, middle-class, able-bodied white voices. If the profession were to truly serve a diverse clientele, recruit and retain diverse DMT professionals, and not participate in re-oppressing groups of people who have been marginalized, it is imperative to explicate the DMT norms that are institutionalized and reinforced.

In the first half of the article, we, as two, cis-, heterosexual, educationally privileged Asian (one biracial Chinese American, and the other multicultural Japanese immigrant DMT educators) propose a critically conscious pedagogical approach that not only celebrates multiculturalism but liberates the dance/movement therapists who undertake this work. We explore the questions: *What are we doing when we teach, and with our participants? How do we unintentionally contribute to the process of domination? How can we claim to be doing healing dance?* We draw transdisciplinarily from education and the health professions to introduce the basic tenets of critical pedagogy and dialectics. We then attempt to deconstruct the politics of the body that are resisted yet exist within the field of DMT. In the second half of the article, we present case narratives from our own teaching experiences that identify how systemic oppression and domination can manifest in DMT education and training. We offer counternarratives and propose frameworks to remediate and reevaluate the training process. We aim to empower dance/movement therapists who are underrepresented in the profession, and their allies to move forward in solidarity, for taking liberatory action and to develop a pedagogy of hope.

### **The Gap Between Multicultural Education and the Systemic Embodiment-Enactment of Power**

Well-intended multicultural education without the critical examination of what we are doing with one another creates a dissonance between the hetero-patriarchal North American theoretical notion of cultural competence and meaningful practice that is based in the lived experiences of diverse groups of people (Chen, Kakkad, & Balzano, 2008). The rootedness of white norms in multicultural education leads to a pedagogical approach that ignores race, and other structural factors, as “a central mechanism of oppression” (Abrams & Moio, 2009, p. 246). Including a multicultural element in a class can appear to address students’ cultures while obscuring systemic issues, such as the lack of funding to innovate truly inclusive programs. Evidence is scant for multicultural competence and effective practice and their application is more philosophical than practical (Chen et al. 2008; D’Andrea & Heckman, 2008; Ridley, Hill, & Wiese, 2001) unless substantive changes are made at the institutional level.

Within DMT, questions arise as to who is included or excluded to become dance/movement therapist, who can provide DMT services, and who the recipients of those services are. Chang (2017) pointed out that DMT “students, faculty, and emerging professionals of color may feel and experience being ‘othered’ for maintaining cultural identities that look, sound, or dance differently, and who hold contrasting beliefs from the power structure of their institutions” (p. 270). DMT students as well as faculty who are gendered, racialized, and otherwise experience multiple forms of oppression due to the intersectionality of their socio-cultural identities weather microaggressions and other not so subtle acts of ‘othering’ on a daily basis (McGee & Stovall, 2015; Sue et al., 2007). These acts of discrimination generally manifest as “difference and inferiority” and are dependent on how far a person’s phenotypical characteristics such as the shade of one’s skin color or hair texture appear in relation

to ‘normal white bodies’ (Aujla, 2000, p. 44). Students experience an incongruence between theory and practice because applying the learned theories with non-normative bodies may not even be addressed in their training. Because the outcome based ADTA educational standards do not take into consideration the social, legal, and political forces that are beyond the therapists’ purviews (Sajani & Kaplan, 2012), the gap between cultural competencies and how these are applied falls on educators, supervisors, and clinicians. In the process, DMT trainees who possess knowledge of ‘other’ social-cultural groups may be singled out and be expected to represent their groups’ views on a regular basis. The burden of proof is placed on the student to teach others. It is one thing for a student in a subordinate position to take the lead; another to be expected by a person in a position of power to be demanded to speak about their experience. Accordingly, the practice of DMT would benefit from a nuanced critique of systemic power dynamics that can lead to imagining and doing things differently.

### Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy is a teaching philosophy that has roots in Freire’s (1968/2018) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* which was further developed within the North American context by scholars such as hooks (1994) and Giroux (1983). Critical pedagogy also built on French postmodern theorists such as Foucault (1980) who believed that power is embodied, such as in universities and theoretical frameworks, and through techniques and other tacit knowledge that are transmitted unconsciously. Foucault further believed that power was created discursively through language (Hall, 2001), and that because of its diffusiveness (rather than it being pervasive and possessed) it is simultaneously the status quo, something that can be challenged, and also be overthrown or changed. Cross-fertilization with critical race theory, which originated with legal studies (Crenshaw, 2010; Ansley, 1989), feminist pedagogy (Weiler, 1991), which offers a more inclusive and experiential vision of liberatory pedagogy, and other critical theories that were borne out of the civil rights and other social movements propelled critical pedagogy to examine the intersectionality of racial and other forms of subjugation including gender, class, religion, and sexual orientation (Abrams & Moio, 2009; Gillborn, 2005, 2008; McGee & Stovall, 2015; Parker & Stovall, 2004; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). While steeped in Western intellectual traditions, a critical pedagogical approach offers a framework to help build with rather than negate the foundations of DMT work and create change and progress from *within* a cultural community-system.

### Critical and Liberatory Consciousness

A central tenet of critical pedagogy is to encourage learners to draw upon the lived experience of their personal culture in order to develop a critical or liberatory consciousness based in understanding the underlying social dynamics that have formed their world view (Akom, 2008). The four elements for developing a liberatory consciousness involves a cyclical awareness, analysis, action, and accountability or allyship

of the oppression or internalized oppression one encounters (Love, 2000, p. 470). Deconstructing and re-centering the learning process in such way generates an embodied knowing that “invariably involves theorizing about the experiences shared in the dialogue process” (Freire, 2014, p. 17). hooks’ (1991) idea of theorizing was to understand and do things differently—as a pathway to heal and be liberated.

Essential for developing critical consciousness is one’s emotional capacity and engagement to hold the ‘in-between’ space for ambiguous thoughts and emotions to co-exist. Piaget referred to this in-between stage as cognitive disequilibrium—moving from one developmental stage to another (Kumagai & Lypson, 2009, p. 783). The person may find themselves in an unfamiliar, uncomfortable zone—what Vygotsky (1978) would refer to as the zone of proximal development (ZPD); and what Mezirow (1981) referred to as the “disorienting dilemma” (p. 7). By attempting to embody another person’s worldview and experience, and questioning one’s own previous assumptions, one may be prompted to question “how and why our habits of perception, thought and action have distorted the way we have defined the problem and ourselves in relationship to it” (Mezirow 1981, p. 7). A deep reflection on the intersectional manifestations of power dynamics is necessary. In Boler’s (2004) terms, it is a critical pedagogy of “discomfort” that emphasizes the role of emotion—“a site of women’s oppression” (Boler, 2004, pp. xix–xx)—that “invites us to examine how our modes of seeing have been specifically shaped by the dominant culture of our historical moment” (p.xx). Art therapist Gipson (2015) proposed the use of art as a way to raise critical consciousness by engaging the learner’s emotions and aesthetics “creating new tools to unmask identity, raise ethical questions, and resist domination” (p. 143). Similarly, a critical arts-based inquiry model using dance and DMT principles that is pluralistic, ethical, and transformative can be a way to bring awareness to one’s theoretical positions, and enact their social locations (Kawano, 2017). Music therapists Hadley and Norris (2019) believe that the arts therapies’ capacity to elicit, contain, and direct emotion and insight, offer pathways to address systemic and internalized oppression.

## Counternarratives

Counternarratives and counter-storytelling are ways to reconceptualize the dominant narrative that portrays people of color and other underrepresented social identities as having ‘deficits’ (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). For example, recognizing Afro Caribbean dance’s values, beliefs, and principles as healing tools, Hérard-Marshall and Rivera (2019) developed a DMT model that transforms the imposed pathological model to a strength-based/empowerment model, working with the healthy aspect of the individual to provide treatment, particularly to communities of color. Their approach to counter the imposed ‘deficit’ narratives is a critical race methodology (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

## White Supremacy as the Ubiquitous Norm

White supremacy is the ubiquitous cultural norm that permeates various mental health service providers ranging from counseling (Shin, 2014; Speight & Vera,

2004), couples and family therapy (McDowell, Strom, & York, 2007), social work (Abrams & Moio, 2009), to arts therapies (Awais & Yali, 2013; Gipson, 2015; Hadley, 2013; Talwar 2017). In the context of education, white supremacy has less to do with neo-Nazi movements but with the unexamined, assumed and often invisible superiority of the values that are privileged, instituted, and enacted through teaching and supervising on a daily basis. It is the vantage point from where one can assume normalcy and unquestioned authenticity (Gillborn, 2005). Various health related disciplines and fields have opted for critical and liberatory pedagogical approaches that go beyond the notion of multicultural competency to investigate the systemic roots of ‘white supremacy culture’ (Abrams & Moio, 2009; Awais & Yali, 2013; Gipson, 2015; Giroux, 2004; Hadley, 2013; Hamrick & Byma, 2017; Kumagai & Lypton, 2009; McDowell et al. 2007; Scrine & McFerran, 2018; Shin, 2014; Speight & Vera, 2004; Talwar, 2015, 2017). Within creative arts therapies, music therapists have long located feminist pedagogy as emancipatory and central to their practice (Hadley, 2006; Hahna & Schwantes, 2011); defining anti-oppressive music therapy (Baines, 2013); and exploring gender and power dynamics (Scrine & McFerran, 2018). Drama therapists have proposed critical race feminism as a paradigm for engaging in anti-oppressive practice (Sajani, 2012). Specifically in group therapy contexts, drama therapist and group psychotherapist Haen and Thomas (2018) advocate acknowledging and making race visible, rather than ignoring the structural impact on racialized individuals and risk “reenacting dynamics of power, silencing, disavowal, and oppression” (p. 2). Expressive arts therapists have utilized the arts for social commentary from their inception, applying a critical lens to question authority (Estrella, 2011). More recently, art therapists have examined recruitment, retention, and training practices and called for the implementation of specific strategies on the institutional level involving infrastructures for modeling and mentoring students whose social identities are underrepresented (Awais & Yali, 2013). There is a movement and momentum for decentering the art therapy curriculum (Talwar, 2015); and with recent politically laden controversies, some art therapists have become more vocal in their charge for “white art therapists [...] to critically analyze whiteness, and to take steps to dismantle white supremacy in the study and practice of art therapy” (Hamrick & Byma, 2017, p. 106). Having a dialogue about how white educators and students make decisions and enact their dominant values (Leonardo, 2004) is central to enacting change.

## The Politics of the Body in DMT

### Embodied Dialectics

Congruent with this path to change is the dialectic method. Dialectics is a discourse approach to arriving at the truth through engaging a range of perspectives, especially those of opposing viewpoints. A known dialectic is the Socratic dialogue that is used commonly to promote logical thinking in classrooms. Dialectic thinking are pervasive in most East Asian philosophies that believe that oppositions are not contradictory but inherent in everything (Bagozzi, Wong, & Yi, 1999; Peng & Nisbett,

2000; Schimmack, Oishi, & Diener, 2002). Dance/movement therapists may benefit from engaging in *embodied dialectics* that draw from DMT's premise that the body and dance hold, and are a source for multiple truths and knowledge where meaning is co-created relationally. However, the extant knowledge-base of DMT is derived from the conviction of white female dancers and what is considered scientific and true in North American academia (e.g. cause and effect, medical model). Critical race feminists have argued the need "to understand the body as a site of political and social struggle" (Sajjani, 2012, p. 189). If DMT were to move beyond a static and easily co-opted notion of multiculturalism, it is imperative to engage in an embodied dialectic to examine how social reality works by attending to nonverbal communication, which is a major force in displaying and maintaining power structures (Henley, 1977).

Who is admitted, who can practice, how these realities are sustained by what is being taught in the curriculum, who is doing the teaching, what is the epistemology, and how these processes (e.g. credentialing) and logic can be changed are largely dependent on the nonverbal communication and power dynamics enacted in-bodies.

The power relation is the "other" dimension in the study of nonverbal communication...In front of, and defending the political-economic structure that determines our lives and defines the context of human relationships, there is the micropolitical structure that helps maintain it. This micropolitical structure is the substance of our everyday experience. (Henley, 1977, pp. 2–3)

We believe that there are two levels of body oppression that the field of DMT currently contends with. One is the marginalized positions of the professional identity of dance/movement therapists (Beaudry, 1997; Fairweather, 1997; Meekums, 2014; Vulcan, 2013); and the other is the unexamined cultural practices in the field.

### **Epistemological Struggle of DMT**

Historically, the DMT community has been comprised largely of an intersection of white, upper-middle class, able-bodied, cis- heterosexual women (American Dance Therapy Association Diversity Committee, 2009). The profession burgeoned during the 1940s and 1950s when the civil rights of anybody who was not a Caucasian male of a certain class were limited. The incorporation of the female identified body and dance into psychotherapeutic treatment was, and still is radical in of itself. "We are primarily a women's profession and our status in mental health and related fields reflects the status of women in our society" (White, 1994, p. 6). Furthermore, "Dance has had a bad reputation in our culture. It is still a foreign and frightening concept that our bodies are expressive and communicative. In some circles dance is still only considered a mating ritual or a form of lewd entertainment" (White, 1994, p. 6). While DMT assumes the integration of body, mind, and spirit, in practice, the socio-historical context of dance remains under the male, hetero-patriarchal gaze, and hence, dancing bodies are feminine, erotic, and require containment, which white women do, but others may not. Those who are non-white or non-gender conforming may be perceived as being 'loose' and with porous boundaries, available for

commodification; or subject to other types of punishment or subjugation. Although there is evidence that dance and spirituality evolved as one for thousands of years, various religious and social restrictions were placed upon dance, creating separation between class, religion, and gender (Adams, 2001). While women were shamed for dancing in view of the opposite sex, working class women danced in various establishments for entertainment—as commodities in the post-civil war era (Wagner, 1999). Colonial histories show the outlawing of indigenous dance forms outright (Banks, 2009; Reed, 1998; Thomas, 2005). It was not until the 20th century that praise dance reentered the church (Branigan, 2007).

Considering this history, what modern dancers brought forth was revolutionary (Albright, 2010). Dance/movement therapists were tapping into ‘dangerous’ sensorial knowledge that provided a voice and empowered women to begin to realize what they were being denied. Yet, the dilemma to commit to dance as a therapeutic approach persists (Beaudry, 1997; Meekums, 2014; Vulcan, 2013). Hanna (1979) surmised that the “social scientists’ long-standing avoidance of dance can perhaps be explained by a combination of Puritan ethics, social stratification, concepts of masculinity, and a sense of detachment from nonverbal behavior” (p. 9). Professional hierarchy and limited funding for the profession contribute to the quandary. The strive for legitimacy of the type of emotional, bodily, and artistic knowing that is the hallmark of DMT is still discussed in the context of translating and/or interpreting the work for other mainstream health professionals, or through obtaining more mainstream credentials and certifications (Vulcan, 2013). To lay claim to the intellectual right to consider epistemology is to speak for the body, for women’s and other oppressed person’s self-definition instead of accepting the silencing of the nonverbal body.

### **Dominant Narratives in DMT**

The sense of a common DMT culture as unified through the habitus (Chang, 2002) and language of dance/movement overshadows the dominant ideologies of the profession. While dance may indeed be a ‘universal’ language, dance is “a bodily practice and cultural form” (Nash, 2000, p. 660). Dance is located within a specific socio-historical–geographical context and embodies class, gender, ethnicity, and the various entanglements of cultures (Nash, 2000). The views that are represented in the DMT curriculum and literature—the historical gaze of the practitioners and the knowledge that have been and are transmitted—are rooted in European-North American modern dance and academic-institutional, patriarchal norms where *other* voices are invisible and barely recognized. Until recently, healing dance forms and worldviews that are not represented in the curricular materials tended to be perceived as ‘not dance therapy’. This can create a dynamic where trainees are subtly pressured to conform their movement and dance styles as well as their racial or gendered selves. Trainees may adopt the speech, dance style, and psychological perspectives of DMT practitioners who are represented and recognized in the DMT curriculum and field at large. Identifying with those who hold power allows those who are marginalized to survive (Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992) but can create both a personal



and internal as well as professional schism. An example of domination in the field of DMT includes how dance/movement therapists of color have been mysteriously erased from the narratives of the profession (Chang, 2017); or how white scholars have taken credit for ideas that have been previously raised by scholars who are not represented in the mainstream. Credibility and recognition are given to the white dance/movement therapist. hooks (1989) called out the ‘non-racist’ liberals who failed to recognize how their actions support the institutional structure of racism because they cannot see that they “can and/or do embody white-supremacist values and beliefs even though they may not embrace racism as prejudice or domination” (p. 113). We return to the questions: *What are we doing when we teach, and with our participants? How do we unintentionally contribute to the process of domination?*

## Applying Critical Consciousness and Decentering the DMT Curriculum

This section reflects on an amalgam of real and hypothetical case narratives that have, and can show up in education and training. These are not meant to generalize to cultural groups, but to offer accounts of the specific lived experiences of students. The perspectives are intended to “serve as critical energy to move things forward” (Love, 2000, p. 473): to raise awareness, initiate critical analysis, decide on a course of action, and to hold one another accountable in a way that liberates all of us—one being to engage in collective discourse.

### Color Privilege

Colorism is a term used to describe ways a person is discriminated or given preferential treatment based on the skin tone and other facial features that more often resemble Europeans (Russell et al., 1992). A person’s implicit biases of skin and eye color, hair (color, length, texture), the shape of facial features (eye, nose, lips), and abilities of a body, and preference for particular aesthetics of dance styles may subtly influence the perception of a client, student, faculty, or supervisor. Studies show that colorism happens across racial categories and that “lighter skin is associated with higher educational attainment and other indicators of success among Latino/a-, Asian-, and African-descended people” (Keith & Monroe, 2016, p.8). Assumptions are made instantly. Unconsciously, supervisors may perceive someone with a darker complexion less favorably from someone who is light skinned (Burton, Bonilla-Silva, Ray, Buckelew, & Hordge Freeman, 2010; Hall, 2005). They may read into nonverbal cues differently than when reading ‘normative’ nonverbal expressions of white dance/movement therapists. For instance, a comparable expression of a darker skinned woman may be perceived as ‘angry’, while a lighter skinned woman’s as ‘neutral’. A related concern is the racializing and exotifying ways of moving that are not based in modern or contemporary European or American dance forms. The following case illustrates a student of color’s experience after interviewing at a potential internship site:

An international student of South Asian origin returned from her interview deflated. The site had appealed to the student because of the clinical population she wanted to work with, as well as the site's urban and diverse setting. At the interview her interviewer/supervisor asked whether the student was familiar with European dance forms. The student's expertise was in a classical Indian Bharatnatyam dance, but this was somehow deemed inferior to the European/American counterparts. Additionally, her body language was perceived to be 'too expressive and emotional' to handle the stressors of working in the setting.

Like the dance/movement therapist who characterized tai chi as "monotonous, monotone, boring" rather than, smooth, steady, balanced, the case brings up how the bodies that are moving in ways that are divergent from the norms of ballet or modern dance become 'problematic'. Furthermore, it would be amiss not to consider the student's darker complexion in the scenario. A similar case involves an African American student. Her movement qualities did not fit the norms of the other trainees with ballet and/or modern dance backgrounds. She was told that she should not be a dance/movement therapist by her supervisor. Some factors to consider are the rationale for needing a dance/movement therapist with a particular dance background, especially if the population at the site is diverse.

### **Language Privilege**

The initial contact and communication with any trainee happens through language, verbally (e.g. email, essays) and/or nonverbally (e.g. interviews, in the classroom). While many of the students come to the field with a wealth of dance techniques and styles, unstated expectations of dance and movement preferences and American Academic English are DMT cultural 'norms' that many students may arrive unprepared for.

### **Varieties of English Writing and Learning**

Beyond the basic ability to write and speak in English, the expectations of American Academic English are distinct. Whether the students are from the US, or other English speaking countries such as Singapore and Nigeria; or non-English speaking countries such as China and Brazil, they may, in varying degrees, be unfamiliar with the cultural norms set through American Academic English, which historically has a Eurocentric knowledge emphasis. Antioch University's Coordinator of the Writing Center, John Dunham pointed out that the discourse expectations of American Academic English are, in many ways, their own form of privilege, invisible to users and opaque to outsiders (J. Dunham, Personal Communication, February, 17, 2018). Whereas some cultures may emphasize storytelling and lived experience as their primary way of learning, such knowledge transmission could be perceived as incongruent with academic expectations of learning (McDowell et al., 2007). The following *Assimilationist-Accommodationist-Separatist* spectrum framework (see Table 1) may be useful to determine how

to navigate each case (J. Dunham, Personal Communication, February, 17, 2018). These feedback options can offer a framework to adapt feedback to the cultural match and the needs of the student. In conjunction, academic expectations that are helpful to articulate for non-American writers include: *point first*, *writer-responsible*, *tight citation*, and *sign posting* (see Online Appendix).

For example, one might use an accommodationist feedback with a student who is versed in British English. The student may be made aware of the differences between American and British English writing and be given the option, as long as they are consistent with whichever style they choose to write in. Or, a separatist feedback may be considered with a student who intends to practice only in their home country upon graduating and who may not benefit from extensive criticism about their grammar. It may suffice that the writing shows their understanding of and engagement with the content. Also, in many East Asian cultures where copying the ideas and words of the masters that came before them is a sign of respect, writing in APA style in which a clear demarcation of ideas is expected, may at first not make much sense. In high context cultures where knowledge is not necessarily explicitly expressed in the word (Hall, 1989), writers refer to the text of their predecessor to show that they are educated; not to plagiarize. Another difference is that American Academic English requires the writer to navigate and clearly state their ideas. Students from collectivistic cultures whose communication style prioritizes ambiguity for the sake of maintaining harmony may prefer that the reader draw their own conclusions. At the same token, if the student has the goal of publishing in a peer-reviewed American journal, then the expectations of the editors of such publication should be communicated to the student using an accommodationist framework.

Similarly, students may benefit from modified assignments and standards that are collaboratively articulated with the instructor or supervisor. Assignments that require transcriptions of verbal therapeutic encounters, for example, can be detrimental to the learning of a bilingual and multilingual student who may never use English back in their home country or communities within the US (Trepal, Ivers, & Lopez, 2014). In this case, a movement or arts-based transcription may be an alternative.

### Non-verbal Communication

Non-linguistic aspects of the English language are often noticed in one's mode of speech and hearing—tone, volume, enunciation, accent, and so forth. The evaluator's associations with these modes of speech may influence the perception of a trainee or faculty. For instance, a British accent is generally perceived by Americans as sounding 'intelligent' compared to other accents. With intersectional considerations, someone who appears East Asian speaking softly may be viewed as reserved or timid, where as someone who passes as white may be viewed as introspective. Another example is someone with darker skin being perceived as aggressive or angry rather than assertive.

**Table 1** Assimilationist-accommodationist-separatist spectrum framework

Framework	Assumptions	Practical application
Assimilationist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Differences = deficiencies</li> <li>– “errors to be corrected” (Matsuda &amp; Cox, 2009, p. 45)</li> <li>– Americanized academic writing is the highest standard</li> <li>– Cultural variety in organization of ideas, structure, and phrasing are seen as prohibitive (J. Dunham, Personal Communication, April 17, 2017)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Enforce American academic writing standards rigorously</li> <li>– Encouraging the adaption of the dominant standards can improve the writer’s economic and social standing</li> </ul>
Accommodationist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Differences = having value</li> <li>– Aims “to help the writer learn new discourse patterns without completely losing the old” (Matsuda &amp; Cox, 2009, p. 45)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Points out where an American scholar would have made a different choice, explains why, and offers potential changes</li> <li>– Help the writer learn the expectations of a different audience</li> </ul>
Separatist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– “Preserve difference” (Matsuda &amp; Cox, 2011, p. 45).</li> <li>– Appreciates the approaches of writers with different backgrounds</li> <li>– Emphasis is placed on meaning rather than correctness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Help the writer develop and communicate ideas, regardless of whether they do so according to APA standards (J. Dunham, Personal Communication, April 17, 2017)</li> </ul>

## International Students

There is some hesitation to label international students as a category of identity, but several anecdotal experiences of students pointed to the problem of exactly that—of being labeled as separate and different. Instead of acknowledging and accounting for their different needs, educators and supervisors may hold international students to standards that may not be congruent with the students' professional goals. To be inclusive, one consideration may be given to the acculturation process. Expectations regarding class participation can be quite different. Some international students may arrive confused that the readings need to be done prior to class because in their home countries, they were never expected to have an opinion or question about the content before learning from the professor. This is in contrast to some cultures where the students are expected to be able to regurgitate the content before having any opinion about it. Rules of engagement with professors and peers may also be new: instead of discussing the material with peers, international students may believe it more appropriate to ask questions or speak directly to the professor out of respect for authority. Also, international students may have urgent needs related to their immigration status; in such situations the process of orienting to becoming a professional is markedly different from that of someone who has assumed citizenship status. With the political climate, not knowing how to plan for the future can be a huge stressor, which can add to the ethno- and religious racism and microaggressions that the students may already be encountering.

Let us consider the following case with regard to how the admissions standards may be applied to an international student:

An East Asian applicant with an advanced degree in traditional healing arts and dance form whose native tongue was not English was almost denied admission. The applicant was not familiar with psychological jargon and had some difficulty answering the way a native English speaker might answer an interview question about her helping style. Perhaps because this concept of a 'helping style' was foreign, the applicant appeared confused, but still managed to give a response that made grammatical sense. The interviewer, however, interpreted her as not having insight—which is itself a Western European psychology convention.

Sometimes, there is a lack of understanding that language and culture do not exist in a vacuum. Language is a symbolic cultural representation that is utilized and expressed in a given social context. Even in American English, the language used in the DMT profession is particular and understood amongst those who are a part of the cultural community. Some educators expressed having reservations about admitting international students because they believed that they will hold back the other students' learning. As when stereotyping, a single experience may color other experiences with international students. The geopolitical climate may also have an undue influence. Relatedly, international students often come to the US without knowing about the socio-political dynamics, particularly around race and gender. This lack of understanding can lead to unintentionally using what may be considered politically incorrect terms. A critical reflexive and embodied dialectic may allow the

educator to be patient and understand where theirs and their students' thinking is coming from, and what truths such beliefs may hold.

### **DMT Curriculum**

The ambivalence and stereotyping of 'other' races and cultures are reflected in the history, dance forms, and the bodies that are included or excluded in the curriculum. The following are some ideas to consider for a critical approach to DMT education and training. This is by no means an exhaustive list and offers one perspective to begin addressing different areas of core teachings.

### **DMT Theories and Foundations**

In the new ADTA Standards of Education and Training (2017), teaching the historical and contemporary contributions of the major founders includes item "1.3: Identify and articulate the historical, cultural, racial, and societal context on the development of dance/movement therapy" (p. 17). This new standard tasks educators and supervisors to engage students to dialogue about whose views are included in the formation of the profession known as DMT. For instance, in learning about the history of the DMT 'pioneers' and their theories, the trail-blazing and stereotype-breaking theories established by these dancers are highlighted, but the historical context of who a pioneer is has not been deconstructed. *In US history, what image does the word pioneer conjure? What color are their bodies and how do they move? What did pioneers do in the US? How does the word translate into non-American languages?* For many in the US, the word pioneer resurrects scenes such as Oklahoma 'pioneer days', of grabbing land without asking whose land it was originally. The effect of colonizing a race was to appropriate aspects of a people's culture, making them decorative and/or fetishizing the divergent. In current times, we must consider how we can abrogate this power of dance and bring such ground-breaking initiative into inspiring daily life rather than locating innovation in our history.

It is also curious to think how Mary Starks Whitehouse, known for developing a DMT approach known as authentic movement, whose multiple sclerosis worsened with age was not the body we associate her with. Perhaps this was a reflection of the cultural perception of how a woman's dancing body should appear. Perhaps it speaks to a difficulty in acknowledging the ableist foundations of a dance therapy. The assumption that a dance/movement therapist's body is "pain-free, which is intertwined with range of movement, and always open and able to hold space to maintain presence and be 'on'" (M. LaVelle, Personal Communication, December 18, 2018) is also linked to prioritizing macro- rather than micro-movements that maybe requires a different type of attention to sense.

### **Assessment**

A crucial skill that is cultivated in DMT education is the 'listening' through observation and assessment of body and movement. Assessments begin in the admissions

process, continuing on in academic and clinical evaluations, and into the future in professional networking and employment opportunities. Movement observation and analysis, and other types of assessment courses that include standardized assessments have historically been tested and normed predominantly with white populations (Hunter & Nettles, 1999). When teaching about movement analysis frameworks such as LMA, Bartenieff Fundamentals, and the Kestenberg Movement Profile (KMP), their historical developmental context should be articulated and their current use should be examined. Thus, acknowledging the limitations of movement analysis frameworks and potential harm in using them with culturally, racially, and gender diverse populations is necessary, particularly when the assessor is unfamiliar with the population they are assessing.

### Ethics and Cross-Cultural Communication

Furthermore, utilizing movement assessment techniques requires considering how the interpretation of nonverbal cues and how the body moves (e.g. ‘too’ rhythmic) are dependent on an assessor’s critical understanding of the politics of the body. Some questions for reflection include: *How aware are we of the ways in which we verbally and nonverbally embody and enact our privilege in the role of the supervisor or educator? What characteristics of the person do we notice first? Where does our attention initially go in relation to the use of space, facial expression, eye contact, gestures, touch, and use of time with the other person? How do we interpret these cues? Is the client or student being disrespectful when they avert eye contact, or arrive late? Or is there a cultural misunderstanding about kinesics—gestures and facial expressions; or chronemics—the use of time? Is the student on the spectrum because their affect is flat? Or are they able to contain their emotions in public as they were culturally raised to do so?* The goal is to challenge norms of body movement, preferences, dance forms, relational styles, and whether any of the assumptions and practices of DMT are colonizing or oppressive towards a group of people.

### Supervision

For students and faculty in marginalized groups, the often unspoken white inspecting gaze of non-white bodies become sources for reflection—*How are we seen? How do we present ourselves in movement? What if we don’t do our ‘traditional’ dances? And how do these impact the therapeutic relationship?* These feelings are often not addressed until the students and faculty start to work in the community. Or if they do receive attention, it is in the form of needing to speak for the entire culture they are perceived to represent. For bi/multicultural and/or international students, the supervision provided at practicum and internship sites may not necessarily fit with the vision of where the student may find themselves working in. Much of this has to do with the ontology and realities of where and whom the students envision working with. When I first started working at a community-based site for teenage Latinas, I was made aware of how my predominantly modern dance background and the DMT training I received did not prepare me to work effectively. Worse, there was no supervisor I could turn to for guidance. Even if there was somebody across

the country, internet conferencing was not an option at the time. I learned how to dance bachata from the girls and proceeded naively from there. *What was I doing? Who was I helping?* I needed help to conceptualize a more collectivistic paradigm that integrated the arts. Guidance on cross-cultural and racial relations would have also been useful. The embodied psychotherapy of Rivera (2018) focuses on distinct ‘powers’ within Afro-Caribbean dance traditions. It is a call to action for the DMT community to incorporate a therapeutic paradigm that is culturally, socially, and politically sensitive, to stay open to culturally distinct ways of conceptualizing health and healing.

## Research

Courses in research and thesis confront dance/movement therapists to consider which type of knowledge is privileged in academia and society at large. Locating DMT in relation to other health professions propels the field to theorize about whose and what type of knowledge is valued in society. While there is legitimate pressure to produce more randomized control trials for the survival of the profession, it is just as important to highlight DMT’s unique paradigm (Meekums, 2010). Exploring the epistemology, ontology, and paradigms of the students’ respective cultures allows for critical reflection of their belief system and assumptions, which gives way for questioning the foundations of the field. For instance, the following excerpt by Deloria Jr (1986) outlines the correlation principle of “Indian information gathering” (para. 15):

Being interested in the psychological behavior of things in the world and attributing personality to all things, Indians began to observe and remember how and when things happened together. The result was that they made connections between things that had no sequential relationships. [...] Many ceremonies that are used to find things, heal, or predict the future rely upon this kind of correlation between and among entities in the world. The so called medicine powers and medicine bundles represented this kind of correlative understanding of how different things were related to each other. Correlation is responsible, for example, for designating the bear as a medicine animal, owls as forecasting death or illness and snakes as anticipating thunderstorms.

Many indigenous methodologies value oral dissemination, and personal, experiential, and holistic knowledge (Kovach, 2019) that are grounded in tribal and environmental beliefs (Deloria Jr, 1986). Expanding ways of knowing can in turn, help students to discern what healing means to different people, and discover expanded possibilities for who is doing the work and for whom.

When exploring topics, listening to where the students’ interests lie, what their ontology is, and who they want to work with are key points to consider to support them in their capstone or research project. Needless to say, the history of biomedical research being done unethically with persons of color, and with primarily white college students of a certain economic status should be considered. An essential part of this learning process is to help students explore methodological choices that factor into knowledge creation and dissemination. Beaudry (1997) laid out a DMT identity



model where the arts are used “to promote social and political change, emphasizing individuals’ cultural heritage to develop group cohesiveness and a sense of common purpose” (p. 55). Recognizing that the arts, and particularly dance, can be a driver for raising awareness of social justice issues, dance can serve not only as a form of communication but a source of knowledge and a conduit for lifting the voices of marginalized persons and groups, and for creating a vision of what DMT’s future can hold. Furthermore, introducing decolonizing and indigenous methodologies where appropriate can allow for articulating who the research is for, and from what perspective the research is being designed. Reaching out and entering into various communities and attempting to make connections may also be a way of working with a research paradigm such as participatory action research (Chavez et al., 2008; Ponterotto, 2010) that prioritizes relationships. Asking for what is needed in a given community is another important stance for doing respectful, responsible, relevant, and reconciliatory research, as long as cultural protocols are followed and the researcher is willing to commit to a reciprocal relationship with the people.

## Discussion

Dance/movement therapists arrive to the work with a diversity of bodily lived experiences. The lived experiences of DMT students and faculty can be highlighted by bringing an embodied critical pedagogical approach. Particularly with the renewed diversity and inclusion efforts of the ADTA, we are hopeful that these narratives from the educational front can offer ideas for reflection and mobilize dance/movement therapists to engage in constructive conversations. There are many creative embodied and enactive approaches that dance/movement therapists can incorporate to do just that. It is important to note that political correctness—of using correct terminology to talk about sensitive topics—or focusing on identity politics is not the point. The spirit of embodied dialectics is to be radically truthful and face one’s and others’ vulnerable emotions and create new understanding and relationships. At the same time, educators need to be aware of airing out grievances of their gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic, and other marginalized identities. Examining how powers are negotiated may be more developmental.

At this stage, there is a way in which the field of DMT unintentionally contributes to the process of domination and colonization. DMT professionals cannot claim to be doing healing dance unless the profession recognizes what healing means and looks like for different groups of people. Serving a diverse clientele requires that the dance/movement therapists themselves are knowledgeable about and responsive to diversity in their ability, appearance, and expertise. To expand the body of the profession, we need to be able to provide options for the clients to engage with a practitioner who may have a better understanding of their struggles and/or embodies and enacts their world views. Perhaps a dance/movement therapist who knows what it is like to live in a brown body can come to their clients of color with more of a shared sociocultural context. Or, a person living with, or has knowledge of living with pain can contribute to the field by developing interventions that consider the body realities for those who struggle with chronic pain. Or a dance/movement therapist who

is a part of the deaf community can teach us how we can be more sensitive about responding to clients with varied communication abilities. Alternately, informed dance/movement therapists may be able to provide a mutually respectful and collaborative form of psychotherapy that is congruent with a range of cultural perspectives so that a cultural congruence can develop between themselves and their clients from different racial, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds (Acharyya, 1992; Gilroy, 1998). How to enter into respectful relationships and building with difference is key.

While developments have been made in the admissions standards, such as opening up the possibilities for applicants who are not ‘classically trained’ to enter the profession, creating policies is not enough unless they are enacted upon. Those who can ‘pass’ may be admitted to a program or accepted to a practicum site because they blend in with the existing personnel and their values. However, the commodification of diversity only adds to the tokenization of ‘diverse’ individuals. The real work is to create an inclusive environment where the educational program, institution, or sites are willing to be challenged and respond to uncomfortable questions. To remain un-conscious risks the perpetuation of racial, gender, and other forms of re-traumatization of trainees and clients.

Recruiting and retaining diverse DMT professionals does not mean that the standards are being lowered, as has been feared by some educators. Instead, new ways of knowing, of broadening the criteria for what a dance/movement therapist looks like, how they dance themselves into being, and how they can best serve their client are being creatively expanded. It means that the field is meeting those who wish to do the work, where they are. Instead of participating in re-oppressing groups of people who have been marginalized, dance/movement therapists stay open, listening to and engaging with those who do not have the opportunity to voice the extra time they need to get to a classroom because they are in a wheelchair, or who fall through the wayside because they needed childcare and could not make it to class because accommodations could not be made for the student to video-conference into the classroom just once. It means that the dance/movement therapists engage in an embodied dialectic on the power structures: the racism, colorism, ableism, and the Eurocentric perspective of multiculturalism that are deeply ingrained within the views and assumptions of DMT. Creating agreements and protocols to hold the community of dance/movement therapists accountable for ethical, reciprocal conduct are certainly a part of the development of liberatory consciousness.

The narrative we began this paper with is personal, but such stories are pervasive. As Asian women, our inclination is to remain silent. Being political goes against our cultural inclination to maintain harmony. However, not speaking out would be unethical and contradictory to the spirit that birthed and has brought forward motion to the growth of our field. Instead of holding the existing curricular knowledge as the ultimate truth, expanding the epistemology of how one knows with and through the body and dance can develop and amplify the profession. The biggest question we are interested in is how to enter into building respectful relationships. In the long run, embodied dialectics need to involve, not only other DMT practitioners and trainees, but administrators, educators from other academic departments, support resources such as the writing center and disabilities services, as well as outside allies. Creating harmony is a process and may involve a little dissonance and a lot of listening along the way.

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## Compliance with Ethical Standards

**Conflict of interest** The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

**Ethical Approval** All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. Informed consent was obtained from all individuals who offered to have their narratives included in the paper.

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