

BODY TALK: CHOREOGRAPHIC REVELATIONS ON A DANCER'S BODY
IMAGE AND EXPERIENCE

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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The purpose of my choreographic research is to challenge traditional tendencies in Western culture that objectify the dancing body and instead suggest different ways of understanding and seeing the body. My research strategized ways in which the choreographer might create opportunities to validate body image experiences of female dancers in a collaborative choreographic endeavor rooted in feminist pedagogy practices. Qualitative methodology included improvisation, journaling, and group discussions to enable the dancers to express themselves subjectively through words and movement. Insights from choreographers and scholars of feminist pedagogy in dance informed the collaborative creative process. Participants in this study identified validation of the personal body experience as a source of knowledge and utilization of the voice in dance as significant components leading towards empowerment and subjectivity for female dancers.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Over the years as a contemporary dancer I began to notice how commonly my female dancer friends expressed dissatisfaction about their bodies. I truly felt alarmed that so many female dancers, much like myself, felt inadequate. I realized I wanted to research and address this important topic. Moreover, I felt my experience of traditional approaches to choreography and performance fostered perfectionism and self-deprecating attitudes and behaviors. For instance, the traditional choreographic process, in which dancers were the “passive” artistic tools for the sole choreographer as artist, seemed limiting to me. I realized I prefer a more collaborative process, in which dancers feel they have a voice in the creation. I also wanted the dancers to feel they could be imperfect human beings within the choreography. I hoped they could express themselves (and their body experiences) much more in a collaborative process and performance than in a traditional one, which often denies the experience of the performer and requires the dancer to perfectly fit into the choreographer’s vision.

Initially, I became fascinated with studying dancers in relation to their own body images. I researched a variety of areas: pressures from the media, self-esteem, eating disorders, different dance genres, use of studio mirrors, various kinds of dance clothes, and even the environments created in dance classrooms. Researching scientific facts and considering gathering quantitative data on female dancers’ body images seemed restricting to me and it had been widely researched. I felt it was distracting me from the

main issue: what do female dancers have to *say* about their bodies? How do they imagine themselves and how do they experience their bodies in dance and in life? How could I give them an opportunity to express their body image experiences and feelings through their craft—choreography? For this reason, this thesis does not include my review of findings on the extensive quantitative research that exists in relation to dancers’ body images. Instead, I chose to address particular female dancers’ feelings about their body images within their everyday lived body experiences. Upon searching for choreographers who specifically gave dancers an outlet to speak about their subjective body image experiences on stage, I found only a handful of choreographic projects conducted with a feminist approach that were related to the ideas I had for this project.

Obviously, the term “body image” did not encompass all of the areas I desired to study. “Body image is a multidimensional construct consisting of personal/individual perceptions, attitudes, emotions, and behaviors surrounding one’s physical appearance and its impact on one’s psychological and social functioning” (Williams 2003, 2). Yet, it does not really address the lived experience of the body in its descriptive analysis.

By contrast, the concept of the lived body attempts to describe “your own body as experienced by yourself, as yourself” (McKay 2008, under “Phenomenology”). This is an important term in phenomenology, “a method that, as its point of beginning, attempts to view any experience from the inside rather than at a distance” (Fraleigh 1987, xiv). This methodology practice often takes on a first person description, yet in terms of consciousness, it can shift between the understanding of *we* and *I*. According to dance scholar Sondra Fraleigh,

Descriptive phenomenology is primarily a tool that seeks to get at the core of things... While it utilizes self-evidence, phenomenology is not autobiographical;

rather, it is propelled by a universalizing impulse as it seeks to describe what is most basic to the phenomena being considered. (Fraleigh 1987, xiv)

In other words, when describing a phenomenon, such as body image or a dance performance, the phenomenologist seeks to see it fresh as if for the first time. The phenomenologist strives to describe the immediate contents of consciousness and thus capture the pre-reflective experience of a phenomenon without initial analysis of it (Fraleigh 1998, 138). The goal of phenomenology is a perceptual openness to the world rooted in direct experience.

For the purposes of this project, I decided to follow Fraleigh's definition of the lived body in a phenomenological context. She explains that the lived body can "describe the experience of dance as it is lived, necessarily, through the body" (Fraleigh 1987, xiv). The concept of the lived body attempts to cut beneath the well-entrenched dualisms in dance—that of the body-mind and the body-soul dualism. Emerging from existential phenomenology, this non-dualistic view of the human body explains that the body cannot be reduced to an object. As such, "A phenomenological (or lived) dualism implicates consciousness and intention and assumes an indivisible unity of body, soul, and mind" (Fraleigh 1987, 4).

My research focuses on the lived body experience and the role body image plays within that. The lived body is based on direct experience that can also be understood from the perspective of collective consciousness. As such, the body is one of action and the individual cannot separate herself from the world (Fraleigh 1987, 7-8). This indicates that neither is one's body image static or separate from one's ever changing lived experience in the world.

I was curious to learn how a choreographic process can empower dancers. Specifically, I wanted to highlight female subjectivity, share often unspoken personal narratives, and engage in a collaborative way of working that encouraged creativity and equality among female dancers. While I am most curious about the lived body experience, I do recognize the central role that body image plays in shaping one's everyday body experience. Consequently, body image as a cultural construct will also be discussed.

My research engages the phenomenology of experience, emphasizing the female lived body experience and the role body image plays within that. To focus on these areas, I discuss the theoretical underpinnings of discourse on the body, as well as the practical implications of these discourses on the field of dance. I specifically address the male gaze and objectification of women in relation to dance. Then, I highlight my interest in feminist pedagogy practices for choreography as well as some contemporary choreographers who use dance and the spoken word giving the dancers a voice. I have identified Krissy Keefer, Joe Goode, and Sean Dorsey as three choreographers who effectively expand definitions of traditional gender boundaries in their work and who have moved away from objectifying the dancer in the process and performance.

To further apply my research to my choreography, I also attended the Joe Goode Summer Workshop 2010, which focused on integrating personal text based upon life experiences with dance. I sought to understand dance theater artist Joe Goode's conceptual frameworks as well as his practical and physical strategies of working with these elements. I began to see connections with Goode's process and my interest in feminist pedagogy practices for choreography rather quickly. Both validated the

subjective nature of human experience and used the voice as a means to get there. At this point I started to devise a research design for my project. I began to understand more clearly that I wanted to utilize a process that fostered equality and subjectivity for the dancer in our creation.

Significance of Study

My research strategizes ways in which the studio choreographer can create opportunities for validating the personal body experiences and the voices of dancers in a collaborative choreographic endeavor rooted in feminist pedagogy practices. This study identifies validation of the personal experience as a source of knowledge and utilization of the voice in dance as significant components leading towards empowerment and subjectivity for the female dancer. It is beyond the scope of this study, but it is suggested that this process also furthers creativity and critical thinking of dance participants in non-hierarchical and non-traditional ways.

Problem Statement

Traditional choreographic processes and performances rooted in patriarchal systems of learning often do not tend to value the dancer as collaborator. They frequently do not place importance on the dancer's individual experience as primary source material for choreography as collaborative choreography rooted in feminist pedagogy practices does. According to our Western culture, the dancing body is traditionally objectified. What if the choreographic process and performance were different?

A driving question is how can I facilitate a collaborative choreographic process rooted in feminist pedagogy practices that encourages the dancer participants to express their body experiences through words and movement? I also sought to know what a collaborative choreographic process looks and feels like. What are the underlying values in a choreographic process rooted in feminist pedagogy principles? How do they differ from other choreographic models? How do these values influence the dancers' lives and bodies? To address these questions, I consider how I negotiated my role as choreographer, within the greater structure of a collaborative choreographic endeavor. I also researched feminist pedagogy practices for choreography.

My primary concern has been: Can the performance itself question the way female dancers are often viewed according to our Western culture, which frequently objectifies the female body? As I got further in the process, I realized this question had several sub-questions, which I outline in my choreographic intention.

Purpose: Choreographic Intention

I am intrigued with how the female body experience is talked about, dealt with, and presented in the stage space. The purpose of my choreographic research is to challenge traditional tendencies in Western culture that objectify the dancing body and instead suggest different ways of understanding and seeing. By placing her subjective female experience at the center of the choreography, I hoped to combat the rigidity of fixed ideas about the female body in dance. The intention was to devise my own collaborative process and performance grounded in feminist pedagogy practices that validate the experience of the dancer and foster equality, subjectivity, and creativity. I

made a dance about five dancers' unique body image experiences through my own collaborative process rooted in feminist pedagogy practices.

Significantly, an additional purpose of this study was to develop practical choreographic (and pedagogic) answers to three theoretical questions, which emerged from a survey of literature from the fields of dance, body image, education, and the philosophical canons of feminism and phenomenology focused on the lived body experience. The three questions are:

1. In what ways can collaborative choreography create an opportunity for dancers to express their feelings about their personal body experiences through physical action?
2. How might collaborative choreography rooted in feminist pedagogy practices challenge the traditional patriarchal notion of the body as object in dance?
3. How might collaborative choreography help empower these dancers?

Assumptions and Bias

There is an assumption that I was able to facilitate a choreographic process in a way that was considerate of the sensitive subject matter of body image and the personal needs of the individuals. As a facilitator, I looked into the experiences of others.

However, it is impossible to separate myself from my own experiences. My personal body history as a dancer influenced my interactions with the dancers. Thus, my own lived experience cannot be ignored in this process. I perceived the experiences they shared from my own perspective.

There is also an assumption that the dancers selected were mature and willing to explore their personal feelings about female body experience through discussion and choreography.

Delimitations

I delimited my study to female dancers who were willing to work collaboratively in terms of choreography. The selected female dancers were required to be open to exploring their lived body experiences and their body images for this project. It is also not within the realm of this study to investigate male, transsexual, or other gender identities of dancers' body experiences.

Limitations

The resulting choreographic and conceptual research is specific to this group of female dancers and thus will not be able to be replicated.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of literature is divided into two parts: 1) the theoretical underpinnings of body image and experience and 2) the solutions choreographers have implemented to challenge objectification of the dancer's body. The theoretical underpinnings of body image and experience include the multidimensionality of body image, the social construction of femininity, and the male gaze and objectification of women. It also covers the topics entitled: discussing subjectivity, the phenomenological perspective on body experience, and the feminist perspective on body experience. The next section on the practical solutions to objectification of the body in dance laid the groundwork for the experiential components of the research. It reviews feminist pedagogy and applies feminist pedagogy principles to the choreographic process and contemporary choreographers who give the dancer a voice. Krissy Keefer, Joe Goode (the master teacher involved at the Joe Goode Summer Workshop 2010), and Sean Dorsey were selected because they call for a renewed attention to the body.

Theoretical Underpinnings of Body Image and Experience

Multidimensionality of Body Image

In exploring how choreography can serve as a constructive means of expressing the unique body experiences of female dancers, I realized body image was a vital area to address. Every female dancer has a distinctive set of experiences, which we examined in

this choreographic process. The formation of body image is a complex process involving many factors. Body image involves the feelings and attitudes individuals have about their physical appearance, including their body perceptions and behaviors. It can also affect one's social and emotional well-being (Williams 2003, 2). Body image can be positive or negative according to Williams. We can also experience both of these extremes of ourselves simultaneously.

Body image attitudes reflect a person's evaluative beliefs, feelings, and behaviors in terms of their physical appearance (Williams 2003, 1). Individuals evaluate their bodies based upon their thoughts and beliefs of how satisfied or dissatisfied they feel in relation to it. Emotional experiences in response to subtle physical appraisals are significant to the formation of body image as well. When the perceived self differs from one's ideal body appearance, dissatisfaction occurs. Satisfaction or dissatisfaction depends on the importance placed on achieving the "ideal" body (Williams 2003, 4). Body image plays an integral role in understanding body experience. Thus, my work can provide insight into a critical and a poignant part of female body experience.

In the 2002 *Body Image: A Handbook of Theory, Research, and Clinical Practice*, editors Thomas F. Cash and Thomas Pruzinsky report that, from 1950 to 2000, the amount of research on body image had grown immensely. Yet, the editors felt that the multiple branches of work on body attitudes and feelings were strikingly disconnected. There were not a lot of cross-references by researchers (Cash and Pruzinsky 2002, 8). Thus, Cash and Pruzinsky elucidate enduring themes of body image research, thereby connecting historical and contemporary body image perspectives. Another body image researcher Seymour Fisher states, "The inexhaustible list of behaviors that has turned out

to be linked with measures in the body-experience domain documents the ubiquitous influence of body attitudes. Human identity cannot be separated from its somatic headquarters in the world” (Fisher 1990, 18). In other words, one’s body (or somatic) experiences cannot be separated from one’s identity. Body image plays a dramatic role in influencing our quality of life. It affects our emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in everyday life. Body image also affects our relationships, those with the public as well as the most intimate. It reflects the constantly changing nature of the body itself. Things like biological growth, decline, or life circumstances continuously modify it.

According to Cash and Pruzinsky, scholars agree that body image is a multidimensional phenomenon. The authors strive to clarify the variety of contexts in which body image has been explored. They insist that a deep appreciation of cultural and individual differences is crucial to a comprehensive understanding of body image (Cash and Pruzinsky 2002, 9). Thus, body image is complex and dependent on many factors that are constantly in flux (Fallon 1990, 83). In the choreographic process, it was important to examine the standards to which the dancers held their body images and to what extent they felt they matched this standard.

The 1998 meta-analysis by Alan Feingold and Ronald Mazzella sheds light on 222 body image studies from the previous fifty years. Interestingly, this study revealed “dramatic increases in the numbers of women among individuals who have poor body image” (Feingold and Mazzella 1998, 190). These trends remained constant among multiple conceptions of body image, among them self-judgments of physical attractiveness. This study reviewed research literature on physical attractiveness, body image (especially clinical research related to eating disorders), self-esteem, and sport and

exercise psychology. The meta-analysis found that males are more satisfied with their bodies than females. Males also consider themselves better looking than females do, even when outside judges actually rated the females as more physically attractive than the males (Feingold and Mazzella 1998, 190). Perhaps this coincides with the increasing prevalence of the mass media and imagery that sets the standard of what women aspire to look like.

For this choreographic process, it was important to acknowledge also how body image played an important role in overall self-identity and self-concept, with effects on other aspects of life. For example, negative body image is associated with many other psychological and psychosocial problems, like low self-esteem, depression, social anxiety, eating pathology, and eating disorders (Williams 2003, 7). As a researcher, I had to be prepared to discuss these topics when they arose from the dancers, which, not surprisingly, they did. Body image is an important part of understanding the human experience and its intricacies.

Social Construction of Femininity

Anecdotal evidence suggests that dancers are concerned about weight gain and that negative body image among dancers abounds (Oliver 2008, 18). Women are the main recipients of societal pressures to look and act a certain way (Oliver 2008, 20). This section is devoted to showing how the notion of femininity, which has implications for a female's body image, is largely socially constructed.

Author of *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, Susan Bordo argues that it is typical for women to be concerned about fat, dieting, and

slenderness in this country because our culture surrounds women with explicit messages to be thin. Our culture encourages dieting, exercise, and bodybuilding to assist one in attaining an ideal body. She argues that the common enemy is “the soft, the loose, unsolid, excess flesh” that must be “tightly managed” (Bordo 2003, 191). Bordo argues that it is the cultural context that makes women susceptible to pressures from the beauty market. Specific positive cultural meanings are attached to slimness in women. She tells feminists to be skeptical about women’s ability to resist these pressures. Women train their bodies for docility and obedience to cultural demands of beauty while simultaneously becoming experienced at playing with the dynamics of power and control associated with “beauty” (Bordo 2003, 27). Many feminist scholars advocate a new aesthetic of the female body that is more accepting of any woman’s body shape and size. I hoped to promote this new aesthetic of the female body by addressing the personal body image experiences of the dancers on stage.

Thinness is widely viewed as an indicator of self-control of one’s body. Interestingly, a nineteenth century woman’s body that was large was not typically accused of demonstrating a lack of self-control (Ludman 1993, 20). However, by the twentieth century, being an overweight woman was considered a character flaw. Many women seemed to believe that their self-worth was wrapped up in their body weight, shape, and size. Many even believed that a spiritual and physical transformation seemed possible after weight loss.

Contemporary advertising also equates food with status, sociability and sexuality. A great paradox exists, which encourages us to fantasize about food and then maintain self-control and diet. My own anecdotal experience suggests that this may be especially

difficult for dancers who are expected to exemplify a perfectly thin and fit dancer's body and control their dance movements perfectly. Wendy Oliver, a National Dance

Association scholar writes,

Students in a dance class are constantly under surveillance by their teacher, their peers, and themselves. The most obvious contributor to self-surveillance is the mirror. The mirror provides constant feedback about the movement and shape of our bodies...unfortunately, they [the mirrors] can also become a conduit for negative self-talk. (Oliver 2008, 22)

Dance culture often seems to reinforce the self-control needed to maintain an idealized thin body. Dance class can become the site of many negative self-judgments (Oliver 2008, 22). The dance class is often a place where women strive for highly valued physical traits according to our society's standards.

Athletic thin bodies have also come to characterize the idealized trim figure of a woman, especially since the 1990s. Self-mastery was also signaled through physical virility and participation in the "health" movement, pushing women towards a fat-free body. This was partly due to the fact that women wanted to become more equal with men (Bordo 2003, 171). Stewart Ewen, author of *All Consuming Images*, describes this phenomenon that existed in the 1980s, "Mark a culture in which self-absorbed careerism, conspicuous consumption, and a conception of self as an object of competitive display have fused to become the preponderant symbols of achievement" (Ewen 1988, 194).

Evette Joy Ludman highlights in her 1993 dissertation "Psychological and Behavioral Correlates of Weight Preoccupation and Body Weight In College Students" the emerging themes of the past century that demonstrate women's vulnerability to shifting standards and dissatisfaction with their own bodies. The female body is often viewed as a commodity that increasingly alienates women from their own bodies.

In our consumer society, feminist Susie Orbach, author of *Fat Is a Feminist Issue* writes,

She [woman] is receptive to messages proclaiming her body- the crucial commodity in her life-as deficient and in need of attention. Her inner feelings of discomfort seem to be temporarily relieved by the salvational promises of the clothing, dieting and beauty industries, and she finds a certain solace in knowing that she can improve, that she can remake herself. The receptivity that women show...to the idea that their bodies are like garden-arenas for constant improvement...[and] is rooted in a recognition of their bodies as commodities. (Orbach 1982, 31-32)

Of course, the image of the body in dance can reflect this identification of the female body as a commodity. The body is seen as capable of being sculpted, trained, and toned to fit a particular dance technique, style, or desired aesthetic to best perform the dance. Combating this idea of the female body as a commodity was greatly explored in this choreographic process.

The Male Gaze and Objectification of Women

The body on display in modern dance is one that cannot escape the subjective results of cultural, historical, and social stories that it exposes. According to dance scholar Helen Thomas, “The ways we look at dance are not quite as neutral or as individual as we might think but are inscribed in a chain of cultural codes and practices in and through which our bodies, our subjectivities, are situated and implicated” (Ellis 2005, 7-8). This illustrates the implicit objectification of women in dance by the male gaze.

The heterosexual male gaze theory states that every human being will be constructed as either masculine or feminine (Mulvey 1975, 17). This theory developed from the psychoanalytic essentialist paradigm and holds that the audience watches films with an active male and passive female perspective, according to Laura Mulvey’s

influential essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (Mulvey 1975, 17). These ideas from film theory may also be applied to dance. Thus, the male gaze holds a feature of power asymmetry where the male has a dominant perspective. The audience watches from the perspective of a heterosexual man who desires the female as passive object. For example, a film may linger on the curves of a woman’s body. Mulvey argues that this male gaze takes precedence over the female gaze (Mulvey 1975, 17). According to feminist scholars, the male gaze in cinema theory can be easily connected to a male gaze in dance.

This can be seen in ballet especially. The history of classical ballet tends to reflect a patriarchal genre of dance that often elicits the male gaze and the female dancer in particular as a spectacle. Feminist dance scholar Ann Cooper Albright compares the series of looks found in classical ballet choreography to that described by Mulvey and other feminists in cinema and visual art. Cooper Albright states,

For instance, classical ballet choreography often constructs a triad of gazes remarkably similar to that of the camera, film director, and spectator. Women ballerinas are traditionally placed and displayed by a male partner, whose gaze reflects that of the (usually male) choreographer and guides that of the audience (who, whether or not they are male or female, are positioned in the role of the male spectator and/or critic). Indeed, much of the choreography and dynamic phrasing of ballet works to highlight the various signature poses of the ballerina, which become a series of mini-pictures punctuating the dancing with recognizable moments. Even in less obviously patriarchal genres of dance, it is often difficult to escape or deconstruct the implicit power dynamic of this powerful gaze. (Cooper Albright 1997, 14)

Cooper Albright clearly draws connections between ballet and the seemingly inherent male gaze. Classical ballet, which has an affinity for picture poses to direct the spectator’s eye primarily toward the female exemplifies this framing technique. It is worthy of note that the origins of modern dance were “in part a rebellion against this

male domination in dance and society” (Hanna 1988, 131). The pioneers of modern dance fought for ownership of their body and their sexuality (Hanna 1988, 132-3). While they were able to change some of the topics of exploration in dance, it seems the male gaze is still ever-present.

Dance scholar Ann Daly links the male gaze to dance more extensively in the following quote:

In fact, the male gaze theory forces the feminist dance scholar into a no-win situation that turns on an exceedingly unproductive “succeed or fail” criterion. We expect the choreographer to topple a power structure that we have theorized as monolithic. The dancer and the choreographer under consideration will always be condemned as a reinforcement of the patriarchal status quo, despite any transgressive behavior, because, by definition, whatever is communicated arises from within the fabric of culture, that is to say, within patriarchy. (Daly 2002, 307)

Daly explains how difficult it is to escape the norm of the audience viewing the “woman” on stage as a “sexual subject” within a society in which “the male gender and the sexuality of men as the dominant norm” (Geernick 1996, under “The gaze”).

Ellis refutes Daly and explains the male gaze theory may not be pertinent to dance scholars researching ways of seeing dance because it fails to account for a multiplicity of perspectives and gazes (Ellis 2005, 21-22). Dance scholar Cooper Albright agrees. She argues different kinds of performances elicit different kinds of gazes (Cooper Albright 1997, 15). Cultural critics contend that there are many kinds of visual gazes, based on not only sexual difference but also on racial, class, ethnic, and physical differences too. Who you are in relation to what you are watching will determine your perspective.

Some research questions relating to the male gaze and the objectification of the dancer emerged. How can I challenge the implicit power dynamic? How is the female body “defined” in Western culture? How does the male gaze exhibit itself in dance?

Which choreographers challenge the implicit power dynamic of the male gaze? These questions informed my choreographic research and drove my desire to place the subjective female experience at the center of my work. My artistic vision was to disrupt the cultural codes and practices that traditionally objectify the female dancing body and elucidate the male gaze. Modern dance can reposition the female body in discourse and choreography by highlighting the subjective human (body) experience of the dancer herself. To combat the dominant perspective, we made the inner lives of the female performers visible through their own words and their own accounts of their distinct experiences.

Something else that is not addressed in the notion of the male gaze is the notion of the presence of the performer. The male gaze, as a concept, tends to assume that that which is being viewed is a static image. Cooper Albright poignantly states,

The physical presence of the dancer—the aliveness of her body—radically challenges the implicit power dynamic of any gaze, for there is always the very real possibility that she will look back! Even if the dancer doesn’t literally return the gaze of the spectator, her ability to present her own experience can radically change the spectatorial dynamic of the performance. (Cooper Albright 1997, 15)

Indeed, a crucial part of dance is the concept of the performing presence, which she calls “the power of physical beingness” (Cooper Albright 1997, 17). Performing presence highlights this notion of the complex nature of the interrelationship of bodies and gazes (Cooper Albright 1997, 17). The notion of presence relates directly to body experience, which is the center of my research.

One of the ways to deflect objectification of the female dancer by the male gaze is to enhance the dancer’s subjective body experience on stage. For me, this points to the fact that, “Although it is *of* the body, dance is not just *about* the body, it is also about

subjectivity—about how that body is positioned in the world as well as the ways in which that particular body responds to the world” (Cooper Albright 1997, 4).

Discussing Subjectivity

In her thesis, “*Personals: A Choreographic Exploration of Subjectivity and Gender*,” Michele Lynn Bloom provides a definition of subjectivity that aligns with my own views:

The process of discovering subjectivity involves shedding many layers of social imposition. Instead of imposing blind social abjectness to a person, the uncovering of subjectivity allows the subjects to more clearly speak themselves. In discovering subjectivity a person must attempt to shed the idea of how that individual is supposed to be and be perceived, in order to see what is actually present in the individual. Instead of perceiving an individual as a commodity, a thing to be controlled and constructed, discovering subjectivity is the continual process of defining the self within the constructs of inescapable social imposition. (Bloom 1994, 10)

Revealing subjectivity of the dancers in my process required them to tap into their lived body experience and shed notions of a separation of mind and body. Essentially, the dancers had to shed societal implications of their own images as women to reveal how they truly felt about dance, life, and their bodies. Approaching the choreography from this angle shows how

the dancer negotiates between objectivity and subjectivity—between seeing and being seen, experiencing and being experienced, moving and being moved thus creating an interesting shift of representational codes that pushes us to rethink the experience of the body within performance. (Cooper Albright 1997, 3)

Throughout the process of performing, the dancer simultaneously shifted between object and subject. I hoped that in sharing their personal body experiences and stories that they challenged idealized images of women (of love, femininity, health, etc.) as well as traditional narratives. The intent was for the audience to notice gaps between the

stereotypes and the reality of these dancers' physical lives. This indicates the "slippage between the lived body and its cultural representation" (Cooper Albright 1997, 4). I strove to show that the embodied experience is inherently complex as it can both create and subvert cultural conventions simultaneously.

The Phenomenological Perspective on Body Experience

Sondra Fraleigh, Professor of Dance at State University of New York Brockport, explains in "Consciousness Matters" that, "Phenomenology is a method for studying experience. I employ this method in my research because it provides a first-person voice for the dancer, the choreographer, and teacher/therapist in me" (Fraleigh 2000, 54). Like Fraleigh, I chose to take a phenomenological approach to choreography by exploring the personal body experiences and stories of dancers in a collaborative manner. One of the goals of phenomenology is to build towards meaning. In our work, the dancers themselves generated this intended meaning.

Given the complexity of body image experience and the fact that the body is always engaged in the world, it is useful to use discourse from phenomenology, in which the body and lived experience is of the utmost importance (Weiss 1999, 39).

"Phenomenology describes how one orients to lived experience" (Van Manen 1990, 4).

Thus, when describing a phenomenon, like body image, for example, the phenomenologist seeks to see it fresh as if for the first time (despite the fact that this is not entirely possible because our attitudes color our perceptions). The phenomenologist acknowledges the challenge but keeps pursuing and strives to describe the immediate contents of consciousness and thus capture the pre-reflective experience of a

phenomenon without initial analysis of it (Fraleigh 1998, 138). Phenomenology, as a method of studying experience, provides a first person voice for the dancer and choreographer of the piece. Consequently, the performance of this piece itself was a phenomenological experience.

As Cooper Albright stresses, the very real materiality of the body must be addressed when applying cultural theory to the identity of the dancer. One cannot simply skip over the embodied experience of the performer that is ever shifting and continuously negotiated (Cooper Albright 1997, 10). The medium of the body is crucial to this analysis of the art form of dance and consequently the application of phenomenology to the subject matter is essential.

French philosopher and phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty “provides the first systematic phenomenological examination of the body as a ground for all perception...which includes actual and possible human experience” (Weiss 1999, 3). In other words, the body is a permanent condition of experience. As such, it has a perceptual openness to the world. He understands the body as the subject rather than the object of perception (Weiss 1999, xiv). Embodied experience is inclusive of movements, sensations and perceptions. Hence, the concept of body image is “neither an individual construction, nor the result of a series of conscious choices, but rather, an active agency—that has its own memory, habits, and horizons of significance” (Weiss 1999, 3). The body image seems to encapsulate human experience and interactions with the greater world. Body image is perhaps “embodied.” Therefore, a reciprocal relationship exists between body experience as shaped by body image and body image as shaped by body experience.

Gail Weiss, author of *Body Images: Embodiment as Intercorporeality*, argues for a “multiplicity of body images” (Weiss 1999, 2). While she draws on the work of Merleau-Ponty, she also provides a feminist critique. His analysis lacks any discussion of how race, sex, age, class, or moral differences are signified and registered through our body images (Weiss 1999, 3). This is a very significant oversight, which makes work like Weiss’s vital. She advocates for “a nondualistic understanding of corporeal agency which seeks to revalue women’s as well as men’s bodily capacities and possibilities” (Weiss 1999, 4).

In the essay “Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminist Body Comportment, Motility, and Spatiality,” Iris Young, former professor of Political Science at the University of Chicago, utilizes the theories of Maurice Merleau-Ponty to write about female embodiment. Young finds that existential phenomenology offers a unique approach to theorizing subjectivity, as it “aims to speak from the point of view of the constituted subject’s experience” (Young 2005, 8). While she feels that phenomenology contributes uniquely to the feminist perspective, she cautions against overlooking how the lived body experience is colored by one’s social and historical position in society. In this way, she agrees with feminist scholar, Elizabeth Grosz, who warns “against taking phenomenology to describe a foundational experience unconditioned by power and ideology” (Young 2005, 9).

In our Western culture today, “somatophobia” (the fear and loathing of the body) especially impacts women (Grosz 1994, 5). According to Young, this splitting of the subject is embodied negatively in the way that it is responsible for many women’s unwillingness to maximize their bodily potentialities. Young depicts how the female

subject is split between contradictory bodily modalities, between a confident “I can” and a diffident “perhaps I cannot” (Weiss 1999, 49). She describes this as a split between a transcendent subjectivity and an objective, immanent body.

This objectified bodily existence accounts for the self-consciousness of the feminine relation to her body and resulting distance she takes from her body. As human, she is transcendence and subjectivity and cannot live herself as mere bodily object. Thus, to the degree that she does live herself as mere body, she cannot be in unity with herself but must take a distance from and exist in discontinuity with her body. The objectifying regard that “keeps her in her place” can also account for the spatial modality of being positioned and for why women frequently tend not to move openly, keeping their limbs closed around themselves. (Young 2005, 44-45)

Exhibiting this simultaneous tension felt by many women (of “I can” and “I can’t”) was an interesting impetus for improvisation leading to choreography. It led to group discussion about what the dancers felt they were and were not capable of as dancers and as people. I felt this became a strong bonding exercise, and thus, the work evolved into a more supportive and intimate experience for the group.

“Existential phenomenology developed non-dualistic views of the human body, which provide a foundation for overcoming well-entrenched dualisms in dance” (Fraleigh 1987, 7-8). One of the many types of phenomenology, existential phenomenology is a method for studying concrete human existence (Smith 2009, under “Phenomenology”). Existential phenomenologists emphatically reject traditional dualism (mind-body separation) and the view that the body cannot be reduced to an object. “Dance is very often defined as an art that has ‘movement as its medium’ and uses the ‘body as an instrument’” (Fraleigh 1987, 9). This idea of the body as instrument implies that agency or will is considered separate from the body—as in the common phrase “mind over matter” (Fraleigh 1987, 9). But truly, as existential phenomenologists argue, “dancing

requires a concentration of the whole person as a *minded body*, not a mind in command of something separable, called a *body*” (Fraleigh 1987, 9).

The terminology that exists in our language perpetuates a problematic severing of the mind and the body. In English there is only one word for the body. Dance practices that distinguish body and mind in the teaching and learning of dance perpetuate dualism, which unfortunately seems to imply that training of dancers does not require intellect, when in fact it does.

Phenomenologists use the term lived body and lived experience to indicate “a body of feeling, an interrelated system of life” (Fraleigh 1987, 56). Lived body theory provides a path toward overcoming dualistic concepts of dance that regard the body as an objectified instrument, movement as the medium and the mind as the only motivation for the dance:

Lived body concepts hold that the body is *lived* as a body-of-action. Embodiment is a theory of action. Human movement is the actualization, the realization, of embodiment. Movement cannot be considered a medium apart from an understanding that movement *is* body, not just something that the body accomplishes instrumentally as it is moved by some distinct, inner, and separable agency. Embodiment is not passive; it is articulate. In other words, I live my body as a body-of-motion, just as I also live my self in motion. Body, movement, self, and agency (implicating human will and freedom) are ultimately not separable entities. (Fraleigh 1987, 13)

I desired to study the female body experience as a path toward unity of body, soul, and mind. During improvised moments within the dance, the dancers sensed their bodies as subjects and felt unified in action; they weren’t reflecting on themselves or their actions but living the present-centered moment. Thus, their dancing was a unity of self and body in action. This discourse highlights a pathway towards empowerment for the dancer on stage.

The Feminist Perspective on Body Experience

Due to the complexity of body image and experience for women in particular, second wave feminism in the 1960s and 1970s evolved into contemporary feminist scholarship. This scholarship remains linked to an activist agenda that strives to improve the quality of women's lives by upsetting the status quo and revealing the current systems of inequalities (Desmond 1999, 310). Since the implication is that woman is an objectified body, a central focus of this inequality is the inevitable repression of the female body. Cooper Albright discusses how much "women's bodies have been written over (and their own desires written out)" (Cooper Albright 1997, 11). Judith Butler describes how a misogynistic legacy of disembodiment defined women as "Other" (void of her identity) and men, by definition, as able to dispose of their bodies, to make themselves something other than their bodies (Cooper Albright 1997, 6-7). "The body is rendered as Other—the body repressed or denied and, then, projected—reemerges for this 'I' as the view of others as essentially body. Hence, women become the Other; they come to embody corporeality itself" (Cooper Albright 1997, 6). For this research, it meant questioning how the choreography might combat the inherent objectifying nature of dance.

Australian feminist Elizabeth Grosz points to misogynist thought which justifies women's secondary social position in society as originating from their physical bodies. In this view, women's bodies are considered "frail," "imperfect," and "unreliable" (Grosz 1994, 13). Women's sexuality and their capacity for reproduction come to be their defining cultural characteristic. Despite the power that women attain from this role in society, these functions leave women "as vulnerable, in need of protection or special

treatment, as variously prescribed by patriarchy” (Grosz 1994, 14). Linking women’s bodies to characteristic qualities of their gender as a whole inappropriately feeds the misogynist male/female oppositional stereotype, which presumes woman is body and man is intellect. It assumes a mind/body opposition exists that is mutually exclusive. It objectifies woman as body and considers man as the subject with knowledge. In such a way, each sex is attributed its own form of corporeality (meaning pertaining to the body). Grosz says,

Typically, femininity is represented (either explicitly or implicitly) in one of two ways in this cross-pairing of oppositions: either mind is rendered equivalent to the masculine and body equivalent to the feminine (thus ruling out women as a priori as possible subjects of knowledge, or philosophers) or each sex is attributed its own form of corporeality...In other words, women’s corporeal specificity is used to explain and justify the different (read: unequal) social positions and cognitive abilities of the two sexes. By implication, women’s bodies are presumed to be incapable of men’s achievements, being weaker, more prone to (hormonal) irregularities, intrusions, and unpredictabilities. (Grosz 1994, 13-14)

This viewpoint justifies women’s social and economic roles as being linked to their biology and body, while that of men is not.

In a culture rampant with mixed messages that encourage women to subscribe to the cult of thinness, how does an art form like dance, using the body as its artistic medium, confront typical Western stereotypes that identify the dancer as valid or acceptable only because of her body? What are the choreographic means for this confrontation? Many dance artists seek to overcome many of the same obstacles as the feminist movement by striving to teach women to accept their bodies as a crucial part of their selfhood. Cooper Albright states,

It isn’t enough to claim that women’s bodies are oppressed by the patriarchal order and then wax nostalgic about the possibility of an unfettered, liberated physicality that would render one “free to be me.” Rather we need to interrogate

and deconstruct ideas that situate the body as pre-cultural, as the “natural” ground onto which society builds its own image. (Cooper Albright 1997, 7)

This process of deconstructing traditional notions of the female body, especially that of the dancer, intrigued me and served to drive this research forward. I explored how dance can express individual body image stories and experiences with the physical body at the center of the discussion. A specific set of social values and ideologies are attached to the body especially for women in dance. The physical body is the site where many body image judgments and comparisons- both positive and negative- are first drawn.

Solutions to Objectification of the Body in Dance

Feminist Pedagogy

According to Carol Huncik’s 2002 thesis, “Practicing Feminist Pedagogy In the Choreographic Process,” feminist pedagogy is primarily concerned with validation of personal experience as a source of knowledge. When examining body image experience in the lives of female dancers through choreography, exploring feminist pedagogy and the choreographic process of learning through feminist pedagogical principles seemed pertinent. I was interested in the connection between feminist pedagogy and the choreographic learning process. I hoped to emphasize equality among the dancers in my rehearsal process and learning environments. I wanted to know how to incorporate values of feminist pedagogy in my rehearsals. These feminist values informed my choreography and sought to empower the dancers within this choreographic process. Exploring power dynamics when translated to the stage space was also important.

I followed Huncik’s application of feminist pedagogy to dance specifically, as a source of “personal empowerment of the learner and freedom from oppressive and

domineering teaching environments” (Huncik 2002, 5). Huncik explains that due to its complex nature it is difficult to declare a complete definition of feminist pedagogy. There are two channels of feminist pedagogy. One that emerges from the field of education pertaining to the philosophy of teaching across all academia; the other is from women’s studies concerned with gender studies and feminism. Each field has its own grounds for theory and its own prominent scholars. Feminist pedagogy as a concept has its origins in the 1970s feminist movement when there arose a need for a more sensitive approach to teaching guided by feminist values against the preexisting patriarchal dominated educational systems (Huncik 2002, 4).

At the root of feminist pedagogy, is the notion of critical pedagogy.

Critical pedagogy encourages teacher to be a partner with the student. It arose from many places; one specifically was Paulo Freire’s theory...[in which] teachers and students both engage in the process of thinking. A dialogue begins between the two, exemplifying the fact that knowledge is no longer the private property of only the teacher. (Huncik 2002, 6)

This view is very different from the traditional educational system in which a student’s role is to store the knowledge that is coming only from the teacher. In that view, students are encouraged to be passive recipients to succeed at learning from the “expert” instructor who holds the authority and the knowledge (Huncik 2002, 6). Critical pedagogy views the students as equal to the instructor. They each have their own memories, life experiences, and knowledge (Huncik 2002, 6). It encourages a dialogue rather than a monologue so that the teacher is approachable and equal (Huncik 2002, 11). By so doing, it creates a space for discovery of the inner voice. In a choreographic process, where the dancers are encouraged to develop their own voices through writing, dialogue, and,

finally, dancing on stage, the feminist pedagogy practice of discovering one's own voice is vital.

Some prominent educational themes of feminist pedagogy suggested by Huncik include cooperation, shared learning, and nurturing. Through these avenues, feminist pedagogy strives to bring equality and value to the individual students. An active and reciprocal relationship exists between teacher and student, as both are always learning and simultaneously informing the other (Huncik 2002, 7). Feminist pedagogy is concerned with the authority of the teacher and personal experience as a source of knowledge, truth and the question of difference. As facilitator, I continually encouraged the dancers to be thoughtfully critical of my role, my choices, and our explorations together. We engaged in activities designed to create equality and creativity in the rehearsals as will be described in Chapter III.

Feminist pedagogy strives to decentralize the voice of the authority and validate the experience of the individual. Enabling dancers to have a voice, restructuring the dynamic of power, and making the learning experience more democratic is crucial. Rather than assuming that students are inadequate because they don't know enough, the belief is that the students already have a wealth of knowledge and their own experience is a source of truth (Huncik 2002, 9). "To feel that one has worth regardless of one's accomplishments contradicts what has been taught for years. Feminist pedagogy values the students where they are, no matter what their personal history, empowering them through acceptance" (Huncik 2002, 9).

Professor of Dance and Education at Meredith College, Sherry B. Shapiro explains that the feminist pedagogical approach in teaching and choreography is a way

for dancers to make sense of their experience through learning. Dance students can draw upon their own experiences when striving to understand material in an educational setting. Feminist pedagogy “insists that education must start from the lived experience of our students’ lives” (Shapiro 1998, 9). It teaches us that life experience is valuable and significant. Feminist pedagogy encourages transformation of the self and the world by building confidence in students’ ability to learn and develop creative and critical thought. “It is through the critical process of reflecting upon ‘lived experience’ that students can interpret the individual and social relationships in which they interact and can begin to understand their own power and reshape and recreate those relationships, hence, their own lived world” (Shapiro 1998, 8). Shapiro explains the rationale for a feminist pedagogical approach to learning when working with students in dance and choreography in particular where nurturing imagination and critical skills is crucial (Shapiro 1998, 11).

“In academia, where women’s voices have been so often de-valued or ignored, feminist pedagogy extends a hand to the voiceless” (Huncik 2002, 11). Teaching women that they are valued and already reservoirs of knowledge completely capable of intelligent thought is more than necessary in an educational system based on out-dated and oppressive patriarchal values. This is true not only for the students, but also for the teachers in a feminist pedagogy model. Patronizing is not part of the paradigm, but rather cooperative learning is. “As Sue Middleton expresses it, a feminist pedagogy requires us as teachers to explore with our students our individual biographies, historical events, and the power relations that have shaped and constrained our lives” (Shapiro 1998, 11).

Feminist Pedagogy Principles in the Choreographic Process

I am intrigued by considerations of how the dancer is treated during the choreographic process. Respecting the dancer as a human being first, aware of the process she's involved with, is suggested by Huncik as a feminist pedagogic practice (Huncik 2002, 9). A woman's ways of learning often "are intuitive, reflective, community oriented and personal" Huncik states (Huncik 2002, 9). Feminist pedagogy principles can be applied to learning any academic subject. Since the choreographic process is a way of learning dance, exploring how feminist pedagogy can apply to the way dance is taught is important, especially when working with female dancers. Like Huncik, by learning about how feminist pedagogy principles might apply to choreography, I hoped to create a space for equality in my rehearsals. I hoped to foster positive learning environments that encourage creative thought, openness, and acceptance of difference. As a facilitator of this process, I wanted to empower the dancers through this work.

The Body as Subject Not as Object

Understanding the body as a place for critical reflection on one's life is part of our embodied knowledge (Shapiro 1998, 9). In dance, the body is often an object to be perfected both visually and technically. Shapiro links feminist pedagogy to taking issue with the objectification of one's body in traditional Western concert dance. In other words, taking a feminist viewpoint enabled Shapiro to "redefine the purpose of dance, moving from a technical language to one concerned with human liberation" (Shapiro 1998, 10-11). She began to consider how the body in dance is inscribed through power

dynamics and how the lived body is experienced in dance. Thus, she endorses subjectivity of the dancer (Shapiro 1998, 10-11). The dancer is to be viewed as a subject—a human being—not an object or something to be filled, molded, or used (Huncik 2002, 13).

A holistic view of the dancer challenges traditional notions of the body as object in dance. The body as subject, “holds the memory of one’s life, a body that defines one’s racial identity, one’s gender existence, one’s historical and cultural grounding, indeed the very materiality of one’s existence” (Shapiro 1998, 13). It also holds great knowledge. Treating the body with respect encourages creativity and choreography. The choreographer could connect movement choices with dancers’ lived experiences (Shapiro 1998, 13). The dance then becomes “a vehicle for self- and social understanding” (Shapiro 1998, 11). I worked to follow these feminist pedagogical principles, drawing upon the body image experiences of my dancers for our choreography and exploring the dual relationship between being empowered onstage, yet feeling disempowered in the larger cultural context. Examining how the dynamics of power transfer to the stage space was another area for exploration.

Freedom and Trust

The environment of the dance rehearsal creates freedom and trust by allowing for greater involvement of the dancers within the choreographic process. Huncik describes how creating unity in the collective group of dancers can facilitate trust. Another way to create trust is to decentralize the power of the choreographer by including the dancers in the creation of the work. Making them integral to all parts of the work is conducive to

giving them a sense of freedom to find their own voice in the work. Creating a safe space where the dancers feel they are valued as equals is also important (Huncik 2002, 17). The choreographers described in the next section implement these feminist pedagogical principles into their choreographic processes.

Contemporary Artists Who Give the Dancer a Voice

Krissy Keefer

As founder of the first feminist dance company in the United States in 1975, Krissy Keefer challenges the stereotypical characters, behaviors, and body types of women in her choreography. While she sometimes uses traditional archetypes, she also confronts stereotypes of women and their bodies. When asked how she portrays women, Keefer said, “Like everything, but mostly really strong. Like trying to change the world” (Bolton 2008, 48). Thus, by combating stereotypes in her dances, Keefer exposes the complexity of women’s identities that are undoubtedly included in their body image experiences.

In Sarah Kristine Bolton’s 2008 thesis “Three Lesbian Choreographers: Identity Under Construction,” she describes how some of Keefer’s work specifically destabilizes notions of a woman: “what her body looks like, with whom she dances, with whom she loves, for whom she grieves, cares for, and values, how she behaves, and how she imagines herself” (Bolton 2008, 57). Keefer values her own experiences and belief systems as a lesbian herself, thereby rejecting and subverting predominant norms of the traditional woman. She even notably advocated for acceptance of female body differences when she sued the San Francisco Ballet for not accepting her daughter into

the program due to her daughter's body type (Epstein 2000, under "Girl fights for a chance to dance/ Complaint filed over school's body-type rules").

Keefer's choreography reflects feminist pedagogical principles by striving for subjectivity of the dancer and by seeking to empower the individual. Her personal and political work is inspirational for this project because it deals with issues of the female body and with empowering women. Keefer creates a space for women onstage by allowing them to be outspoken and openly share the female experience. She rejects portrayal of women as submissive objects. Similarly, in my own choreography, I strove to create an opening for my dancers to speak against societal pressures to look, behave, and perform as "perfect" women according to Western culture.

Keefer honors the female dancer by showing her strength, her "fierce physicality in the body," and by not objectifying women in her choreographic works (Bolton 2008, 61). She has presented a new paradigm for choreographers such as myself, seeking to liberate women from being objectified and oppressively positioned in dance.

Joe Goode

As a contemporary dance-theater choreographer, Joe Goode's work inspires a conversation. I chose to research Goode because he effectively integrates spoken text and modern dance choreography onstage. Combining text, gestures, and humor with highly physical dancing, he synthesizes a thought-provoking performance genre to reach audiences. I desired my choreography to spark a conversation in itself—through the text used and through the way body experience and image were addressed.

The Joe Goode Performance Group works to fulfill Goode's artistic values. Since the founding of his dance company in 1986, the company follows Goode's vision for what dance should be,

I'm really put off by art that feels austere or grandiose or very cold to the touch or overly intellectual—because I feel it's a veil against access; that's what I'm all about. They [the audience] can relate to the story; they can relate to the movement; they can relate to the visual components; many can relate to the essential beauty of the sound and the elements because I'm really interested in having a conversation. If the conversation is limited to the select few of those who have studied dance and understand the vocabulary of the dance studio that to me is a slower way of changing the world and I really believe that art should change the world. (Spark in Educational Materials DVD, 2004)

Goode truly shares his heart and his life values in his artistic process. He feels that nothing is uncomplicated. Goode describes how life is complex and people are not simple. Above all, he feels that a verbal text often makes the characters on stage in a dance feel more real and interesting (Joe Goode, June 10, 2010, conversation with author). Providing a verbal text also gives the audience more points of entry into the artistic work.

In the 2004 film *Art for Everyone*, Goode describes how he always felt unsatisfied as a dancer being mute. "I wanted to imbue the form [dance] with what I saw as a more human fallible texture" (Spark in Educational Materials DVD, 2004). This was the spoken word. He often uses text to layer meanings and make the dance more intricate.

As indicated on the Joe Goode Performance Group's Web site, the themes of Goode's work include issues surrounding the body, homophobia, and the AIDS epidemic. In 1986 he created the Joe Goode Performance Group, a non-profit organization based in San Francisco. Goode considers himself a writer in addition to a dance choreographer. He deals with narrative, autobiographic elements, and text intersecting with dance. For these

reasons, I decided to attend his summer workshop to assist my ability to facilitate a choreographic process that reveals the personal body image stories and the unique experiences of female dancers. I give further insights into his choreographic process and my experience at his workshop in Chapter III.

Goode, like Keefer values the dancer as a human subject who is fallible and imperfect. He uses improvisation inspired by the lived experience in relation to the dancing body. In this sense, he demonstrates feminist pedagogy principles in his process and in his performances.

Sean Dorsey

As the first out transgender modern dance choreographer in the U.S., Sean Dorsey's contributions are becoming more known. *Dance Magazine* recently named him in the nation's top "25 To Watch" because his choreography artistically and skillfully deals with sensitive topics through the use of movement and text (Fresh Meat Productions 2011, under "Artistic Director: Sean Dorsey"). He strives for subjectivity of the dancer and gives the performer a voice.

In particular, his "narrative dance pieces are rooted in his own life experiences. As a transgender performer, he's bringing untold stories to the stage" (Spark in Educational Materials 2008). He brings awareness to issues of gender, sexuality, and the body in dance, especially tapping into the transgender experience. Dorsey feels that dance relies upon very separate and distinct gender categories, leaving little room for those who might fall under the category of "other" (Spark in Educational Materials 2008).

By using journal entries, memoirs, and letters to tell a story through pre-recorded voice, Dorsey creatively expresses body experience, as in his work *Lost/Found*. He uses the voice to make his struggles with gender and sexuality more understood and accessible to audiences (Spark in Educational Materials 2008). A more recent project of Dorsey's, entitled *Uncovered: The Diary Project*, utilized personal diaries as source material for the dance narrative, transporting the daily individual experience to the stage (Fresh Meat Productions 2011, under "Artistic Director: Sean Dorsey").

In Chelsea Michelle Ellis's 2005 thesis, "An Exploration of Sex, Gender, and Sexuality in Dance Finding Neutrality in a Binariated World" she describes how Dorsey closely crafts the words and movements together to be effective,

The text is threaded so beautifully with the movement that both have equal pull in the telling of this...story. Dorsey is able to walk the fine line of telling the story through movement while staying abstract and avoiding campy and literal gestures. Dorsey takes certain attributes of gender in performance...and takes it to the next level. Dorsey advances modern dance as an art form by successfully incorporating layers of gender and sexuality that continue to be defined and redefined in Western Culture. (Ellis 2005, 25)

I hoped for something similar my own choreography: to address significant issues of culture, gender, and the body experience in the field of dance by sparking a conversation within the viewer. For me, the highly gendered nature of dance has direct implications not only on one's expected sexual preference and gender, but also on the dancer's preferred body type and image. In my own choreography addressing issues of body experience and challenging objectification of the dancer, it was important to consider how this choreographer appropriately drew attention to body experiences often not directly discussed onstage. Dorsey's incorporation of journals and voice into choreography was especially interesting to me because my own creative process used

these elements as well. My dancers highlighted their own struggles with their bodies by using their live, spoken voices and movement to express their body experiences as women.

By shedding light on these areas, choreography can lead to transformation and empowerment for the dancer. When interviewed, Dorsey's romantic partner stated, "what he taps into is the fact that everybody has struggles around their gender and I think Sean's work opens everyone up to think about their own experience; their own struggles" (Spark in Educational Materials 2008). In relation to my research, Dorsey's choreographic process encompasses feminist pedagogy practices by striving for equality, freedom, and subjectivity of the dancer.

Reflections on the Literature Review

In reflecting on practical solutions to deflect objectification of the dancing body, I identified the emergent themes of illustrating subjective experience and giving the dancer a voice. With my own theoretical questions in mind, I considered how these two themes might complement choreography, as well as dance pedagogy and body image experiences among dancers.

This review of literature demonstrates how frequently female dancers compare themselves to impossible standards of the idealized female body. Existing in a greater society that values woman as body and is built upon traditional patriarchal values, these findings are not surprising. Traditional dance training and choreographing seem to foster this perfectionism that demands that females dance perfectly and have the perfect body. It is imperative that research such as this continues the dialogue that addresses body image

and consequently self-worth concerns among female dancers in dance education and choreography. This review synthesizes many ideas about ways to discuss body image experiences through a choreographic process and performance designed for female dancers.

CHAPTER III

BODY TALK: CHOREOGRAPHIC REVELATIONS ON A DANCER'S BODY

IMAGE AND EXPERIENCE

The methodology is divided into phases reflecting the complete research design of this endeavor. Every component of my research built on the previous element. They encompass an overview of the research design, the Joe Goode Summer Workshop 2010, the collaborative choreographic process, and the performance. The purpose was to explore how choreography can serve as a constructive means of expressing the personal body image stories and unique experiences of five dancers. Seeking to challenge objectification of the female body by presenting the unexpected in the traditional manner of a dance theater performance, I strove to show the female dancer's capacity for subjectivity and empowerment.

Phase I: Research Design

The research design for this project emerged from my preliminary studies in phenomenology, feminist thought, feminist pedagogy, oppression and empowerment, and discourse on the body. I examined choreographers who I felt gave practical solutions to deflecting objectification of the dancing body by addressing lived body experience on stage using voice and movement. From the intersection of these ideas, both theoretical and practical, I formulated my qualitative experiential-based methodology and identified three primary research questions based upon emergent themes.

Phase II: Joe Goode Summer Workshop 2010

I attended a five-day choreography workshop led by the Joe Goode Performance Group at the Margaret Jenkins Dance Studio in San Francisco on June 7-11, 2010, where I engaged in observations and document analysis. In addition to participating in the training, I read articles and watched videos on Joe Goode.

Most importantly, I was there to learn about art making through the intersection of dance, voice, and movement. Before arriving I familiarized myself with the information given about the workshop describing its daily activities and goals. In an email to the Joe Goode Summer 2010 Workshop participants mailing list on April 7, 2010 Joe Goode described what the workshop entailed:

Body Practice—zeroing out the body to bring it into receptivity
Writing—integrating text into movement
Improvisation—honing skills of listening, responding, adding value
Generating Material—taking simple steps toward authentic, original material
Performance Projects—treating the performative moment as one of inquiry

Ultimately it's the legacy of passionate, crazy art making that I'm passing along.
For some it may appear too risky, but for many it will feel like coming home.
- Joe Goode

A ride rich with surprises and nurturing, deeply physical interaction.
- 2009 workshop participant

Every day of the workshop began with a technique class involving some sort of meditative practice. The afternoons involved lessons from Goode, sharing his insight into the creative process. These lessons required active participation from us, as dancers and creators. Under his guidance, we began learning how to connect our creative descriptive writing, based upon our own life experiences, with our movement. Playful trust, vocal, and singing exercises facilitated our comfort level sharing intimate stories with one another. Then, working in small partnerships we crafted short collaborative dance

narratives. Goode shared many techniques for layering dance movement and words, such as overlapping text, eliminating words in a sentence, or using repetition to reinforce a specific idea. He also explained that silences are important, and gestures can be very powerful.

With so much to consider, finally, Goode asked us to share our work with the group. We collectively assisted the creators in making their choreographic ideas more coherent in order to effectively communicate the intended message. After taking time for reflection, improvisation, and revision, we showed the pieces again. This second round of feedback helped us craft our pieces. We honed our ability to integrate spoken word and dance by listening, witnessing, and collaboratively responding to each other through group discussions about the art. We began working in larger groups with larger amounts of text and our work continued to grow and evolve. By the end of the week, we discovered our own ability to quickly create dance narratives within this supportive group.

My involvement in these workshop activities assisted me in devising choreographic structures for my own collaborative choreographic endeavor. My appreciation for Goode's humanitarian approach, led me to realize that a somewhat similar way of choreographing, involving journaling, improvising, and group discussion, would be crucial for the success of my own process. This workshop taught me how to facilitate a choreographic process that allowed the dancers to share their voices and be heard.

Phase III: The Collaborative Choreographic Process

The third phase of my research design was engaging in a collaborative choreographic endeavor with five female dancers from the University of Oregon Department of Dance. Realizing I wanted five female dancers, I specifically recruited individuals by their interest, availability, and willingness to dialogue about their own unique experiences and perceptions of body image. I felt these dancers would be able to work well in a group, offer their own opinions, and be willing to play an integral part in creating the work itself.

Beginning in early August 2010, five female dancers rehearsed with me for about four hours a week for approximately seven months until the show on February 26th, 2011. The rehearsals were primarily held at Gerlinger Annex in the Department of Dance at the University of Oregon.

The three primary tenets of inquiry: improvisation, journaling, and group discussion were key to how I wanted to work. Improvisation was a means to allow the dancers to express themselves as subjects according to how one negotiated impulses in relationship to others in time and space. It involved decision-making, expressing volition, enactment of will, and subjectivity of the dancer. Objectifying the dancer's body was not the primary goal. Journaling was a way for the dancers to express themselves subjectively through words. Their body perceptions, our objectifying culture, and women's issues were central areas for written exploration. An aim of the process was to prepare the dancers first through personal reflection before group discussions. Personal journaling made the group discussions that followed richer. Group discussions allowed for one's

subjective body experience to be expressed in an interactive setting where individuals could listen and support one another.

For us to be able to truly share and collaborate, I needed to make the rehearsal space a place for us to come together as women in a circle of equals who felt safe enough to share with each other. In a ritualistic fashion, I began rehearsals typically in a circle. Inviting forth discussion, journaling, or movement, we contributed in a non-hierarchical manner seeking for each individual's contribution to be equally received. I strove to emulate Carol Huncik's way of working in rehearsals. My process was largely modeled off of this description in "Practicing Feminist Pedagogy in the Choreographic Process,"

I wanted this experience to be different than the average rehearsal; one where the dancer could come and be more than a physical medium for the artist, the choreographer. I wanted a circle to be formed, words spoken, discussions, growth, a union. The starting point for this dance piece and process began with giving the dancers writing assignments. The women became witnesses, listeners, reflectors and friends for each other. The quality of sharing was always respectful and supportive. (Huncik 2002, 48)

This description of Huncik's rehearsals is similar to the atmosphere I fostered with my dancers. I watched them and myself grow throughout the process. Our work dealt with the intimate issues surrounding women's bodies and how they are treated specifically in our dance culture. Once we had created this safe space and began to disclose our stories, our friendships deepened and working together collaboratively quickly became comfortable.

A large portion of creating a comfortable environment dealt with getting in touch with oneself individually before connecting with others. Improvising was a physical means of getting at this goal, while journaling was a conceptual way. At our first meeting together, I gave each dancer a blank journal and a pencil to devote to our rehearsals

together. While sitting in a circle, I explained my ideas for the choreography and asked the dancers to share any thoughts, questions, or comments they had about the topic at hand. I made it very clear that we would be working collaboratively, following some of the practices I learned at the Joe Goode workshop, and that I sought empowerment of the individual and self-expression of the dancer. I explained I was not after perfection, nor the perfect dancer body. I stated that

I strive to make this a positive experience so if anything ever makes you feel uncomfortable or you want to discuss something privately feel free to do so. I hope, however, that we are able to collectively explore this topic, go beyond our comfort zones in a safe way, and share some of our experiences through our art.

I wanted all of the dancers to know that their emotional and physical safety was of utmost importance to me in dealing with this sensitive issue. I wanted to develop their trust right from the beginning.

Since our rehearsal process spanned nearly seven months, I gave them a variety of journal assignments throughout our time together. An example was: How does your body feel today? After journaling, I asked them to select two descriptive words and physically improvise to these words. I was beginning to prime the dancers to connect the conceptual connotation of the words with physical sensation and expression of the body. Once they got comfortable with this I asked them to select partners and simply witness one another's improvised dance to the words while traveling across the length of the room. After watching their respective partners, I asked them to have "a movement conversation" by both moving simultaneously and by becoming aware of the other person as they moved across the space. Initially, I had them explore a variety of exercises like this to encourage their comfort level with each other while just dancing. Later on, they made movement phrases based upon a string of collectively chosen words.

Throughout the process, I utilized improvisation exercises from Ruth Zaporah's book *Action Theater: The Improvisation of Presence* designed to hone awareness and performance skills. These explorations utilized the breath and the voice to compose stories and work with tone of voice. Physical exercises worked towards improving partnering skills and quality of movement. They focused attention on the present moment. This cultivated creativity, spontaneity, and served to move the dancers through fear and self-limiting ideas when it came to improvising.

Next, I introduced some of the fundamental concepts from the Joe Goode summer workshop. In a conversation with workshop participants on June 7, 2010, Joe Goode stated his three phases of creating and shaping movement material:

1. Generating Felt Material—
 - a. Feeling the emotional repercussions of your work
 - b. Owning it, believing it, and making it truthful
 - c. Making it fun for you to dance/express:
"If you're not having fun, then those around you likely aren't having fun either. If you care about your material, then those around you will care about it too."
2. Create a Collision of Felt Material—
"Emotion and states of being are always complicated. That's where I hope the humanity comes in. It's embracing the complexity and the humanity—is when it starts to look like something real versus something preplanned that is like canned goods. I find it to be a very rewarding experience."
3. Arcing—
 - a. Ride this material.
 - b. Create an obstacle course.
 - c. Create a beginning, middle, and end.

Goode also gave us permission to "do it" and to "let it happen." He suggested considering what exactly you want to take home that you learned. In a conversation with workshop participants on June 7, 2010 Goode reminded us to ask ourselves, "How can I have a new perspective or sensation? How can I have a *complete* experience that teaches me

something—that makes my life better? That is fantastically rich. It’s about being a little bit selfish.”

I wanted to get my dancers in the habit of composing movement and making artistic decisions from the material they improvised and then began to set. At various points, they showed their work to partners and offered feedback. We worked collectively at times to shape material too. The purpose was to give them structures to begin creating and setting material with one another.

As facilitator, I felt it was important to ease the dancers into the process of connecting spoken words with movements. It took a few rehearsals before I began to ask them to select their own words to speak while dancing. Once we began however, I based how I facilitated my assignments on Joe Goode’s exercises. My questions for journaling were specifically tailored to the topic of body image and lived body experience. Below are some of the journal entry questions that yielded material for the piece:

- Write about your idea of the ideal dancer’s body. How do you feel you measure up?
How might we use this as fodder for the dance? Where would dance be without these judgments? Is dance about judgment of the body?
- How has dance shaped how you feel about your body? Write about an experience that details this.

I used a variety of tactics to effectively integrate text and dance as well as utilize the stage space. Overlapping text, editing text, overlaying stories, and foregrounding text were simply a few techniques.

Music, interestingly, was an area we did not discuss in the workshop. Goode often works with his dancers to create their own melodies and songs. A composer then creates

an original musical score based upon the arrangement of individual or collective dancers' songs. For my own piece, however, I was unable to do this. It was suggested I add music later after the text and choreography were created, which is what I did once the majority of the dance was complete. I worked with the University of Oregon's musical director Christian Cherry for musical and technical assistance. The result was pre-recorded melodic music that overlaid the dance and text in a supportive way not detracting from the dancers' testimonials, rather adding to the emotional intensity of their words. The musical artists are listed in the Appendix.

While the large portion of the choreography involved translations of the dancers' narratives into movement, several of the large group unison sections were created by myself and edited by the group. I felt that creating some unison sections with motifs would anchor the series of personal vignettes the dancers had created. I was careful to seek the group's guidance. We occasionally created group unison movement sections collaboratively, in which we each contributed a movement idea. While the work was wholeheartedly in the spirit of collaboration, I learned that at times giving the dancers a break from constantly creating was also productive for the dancers. As a choreographer, I couldn't help but create alongside the dancers. Again, I strove to make movement phrases that would complement the preexisting choreography the dancers had uniquely crafted.

By this time, the work required editing and distilling the pieces of the choreographic puzzle. Group discussions were key to facilitating this process and to furthering the artistic vision. I felt like I was part of a family of artists, who had grown completely comfortable with one another, unified by a common goal: their stories and the dance.

Videotaping rehearsals was helpful to study the piece in between sessions. I continually questioned if the overall intention of the choreography was being met: to challenge the audience to see the dancers subjectively and to reveal their body image stories through a collaborative endeavor. Frequently, I asked the dancers for their responses and I often analyzed my role as primary choreographer and facilitator of the collective effort. Again, authenticity of the stories and the movement was essential. My hope was to create a sense of agency, self-awareness, connection between mind and body and a transformation of abstract thought into physical action for the dancers.

Phase IV: The Performance

After the collective choreographic process in the late summer, fall of 2010 and winter of 2011, the resulting choreography was shown in Dougherty Dance Theatre. The show was held on Saturday, February 26th, 2010 at 8pm. It was a thirty-minute work entitled *Body Talk: Choreographic Revelations on a Dancer's Body Image and Experience*. A program of the concert is in Appendix A and a DVD of the performance is on file at the Department of Dance. A DVD of the actual performance, edited by Vanguard Media, is also included with this written thesis.

The performance was designed to unfold in a way that honored the experiences of the individuals and our collective movement explorations. *Body Talk* had two main sections, a somewhat serious, somber section that evolved into a more light-hearted, playful, and celebratory section.

The curtain opened in silence and the dance began with an opening solo of a dancer moving in a circle of light with an internal focus. After dancing for a few

moments, the dancer verbally recounted a memory from her dance studio to the audience. She explained that as a teenager, a fellow dancer told her that her costume was clearly too small for you, “if I had boobs like you, I’d quit ballet.” Beginning to shrink backwards from the audience, she then described how that comment affected her dancing. It led to her “counting calories, staying up all night to workout, [and] seeking out private bathrooms. These were the main activities for years to come.” At these last words, she disappeared into a group of dancers who had gradually grouped upstage right. The other dancers had one by one walked to upstage right placing their hands in the air creating a barrier between themselves and the audience, while simultaneously acting as witnesses to the story of the solo dancer. Once the soloist joined them, all together the dancers’ hands in the air began to undulate and low somber monotonous tones of Kevin Volans’s *String Quartet # 6* began. One at a time they fell away dancing a phrase they had each uniquely created. Again they returned to the pose frozen with their hands in the air separating themselves from the audience.

In stillness, for a moment, with all hands in the air, a different soloist emerged from the group while her hands slowly lowered. She began repeatedly throwing herself to the floor. The other dancers behind her followed, repeatedly falling to the ground. As the soloist did this, she described a dancing scenario in which she repeatedly and violently “threw herself to the floor, trying to master the fall.” She continued, “Hitting my chin on the floor, in a clumsy finish I cried. I thought I am not strong enough, I am bigger than everyone else, I am inadequate.” In response to the following writing: “How has dance shaped how you feel about your body? Write about a specific experience that details

this,” she stood up from the floor and walked through the other dancers whose legs were bizarrely floating in the air; she revealed,

I am still astonished that I am no longer that awkward thirteen-year-old girl. I am no longer that lumbering bear. But sometimes dance makes me feel bigger than I really am. I know I am a smaller person, but sometimes the big energy elongates the body in my mind and creates an aura of power, but other times, that big lumbering bear returns—that big lumbering, chin-hitting, inadequate bear. At times like this, the big turn to weak and the mirror reflects an image that is no longer me. At times like this, the big turn to weak and the mirror reflects an image that is no longer me.

The dancers all gradually stood up placing their hands in the air again creating a barrier or perhaps a mirror between themselves and the audience. Then their arms opened wide apart as they leaned and grabbed at the air in slow unison, only to disperse, leaving two dancers remaining in the space.

Anticipation built as the two dancers on stage grasped at the air, ran, jumped and fell to the ground at separate times. As they met and swirled around each other, the music, *After Dust* by Mary Ellen Childs, began to creep in. The dancers revealed their stories while dancing “circular phrases” individually created, which gave the sense their situations were never ending. One dancer described being ostracized in third grade, teased about her weight, and consequently changing elementary schools. The other mentioned an embarrassing adolescent moment when every flaw, every pimple made her feel estranged while posing for a family photo.

Another dancer ran on from upstage right, squirming and falling down and up, spinning around, tossing and turning. The two dancers who were already on stage began to walk then run backwards around the tormented dancer who entered their space. The tormented dancer folded her body forward with hands on thighs as if she’d had enough spinning and was disturbed. But before long, the two running around toppled her to the

ground, almost fighting with her, manipulating her body. Surprisingly, the three of them wound up panting and hugging each other, perhaps signaling a realization that they were all struggling with similar issues. At this point the music swelled and the sound of strings and violins was prevalent.

Then a fourth dancer entered the space whipping her head and spine around in circles. The previously tormented dancer left the trio and began to control the movements of the fourth dancer. The next part of the dance was created in response to the following journal entry: “Write about the ideal dancer’s body. How do you feel you measure up? How might we use this as fodder for the dance?” The fourth dancer described the dimensions of the ideal female dancers’ body as “85-115 pounds, narrow hips, [and] small posterior. Don’t think!” In between her descriptors of the “ideal body” she was manipulated and thrown around by the previously tormented dancer.

Then a fifth dancer entered the space. All of the dancers stood up tall. One of the dancers called out “Ready!” Another dancer responded, “Go!” Pacing back and forth like soldiers, the dancers walks got faster and faster until some of them were actually jumping in the air and lifting each other. All of the dancers cleared the space except for two who remained on, running after each other, encircling the stage space. Then one of the dancers reached for the other, momentum carrying her into a roll over the back of the other dancer and into a cartwheel. They fell into an embrace panting.

Low somber monotonous tones of Kevin Volans’s *String Quartet # 6* began again. After a series of gentle embraces they began to speak while taking turns lifting each other, holding hands, and exchanging weight. At first their movements together were heavy and slow while one of the dancers stated: “With this I, helpless, don’t appear

smart, helpless, how could I, helpless, without.” The following section was created in response to a Joe Goode exercise, where I asked them to energetically connect two distinct points on their bodies, five times. The words were created in response to the journal entry: “Write about something that gets in your way—a pattern, a tendency—a psychological condition. Write about that thing you encounter and say, ‘If only I didn’t have that trait, I’d be better off.’” The two dancers performed jagged, tension-filled, and constrained movements together. While doing these jagged moves the other dancer responded, “Something that gets in my way is having a negative attitude.” Her voice got louder as she said “way” and her tone was on the verge of anger. Then, their once slow and heavy series of partnering movements became faster, amplified, angry, and edgy. At this point the other dancer stated, “I might think, defeated, they are better, defeated, than I am, defeated.” The two finished this duet pulling away from each other holding hands, each deeply squatting. As they slowly stood up, hands dropping, then the other dancers ran onstage as well.

At this point, ethereal stringed music, Childs’s *Very High*, played in the background of all the dancers who were now frozen in separate grotesque poses on stage. The way the following phrases were created and manipulated was inspired by my work at the Joe Goode Summer Workshop 2010. One at a time, they verbally and physically shared short snippets of the difficult and lengthy body image stories revealed earlier. Every dancer’s individual movement motif seen earlier was again revealed. Beginning with the soloist at the opening of *Body Talk* they overlapped their stories and unique movement phrases, individually created for this work, in a canon. The theater became a chaotic blur of words, sounds, and movement textures all overlaid. When the last of the

five dancers finished, the dancers repeated their individual phrases all together without the words and sounds. The movements and gestures suddenly had new meaning.

Then the dancers all gathered towards each other with palms facing upwards, as if to say, “We surrender.” In unison they performed a series of simple beautifully grotesque arm and primarily upper body gestures taken from each of their distinct movement motifs. Collaboratively, we had strung together each one of their movements to make a collective “negative dance phrase.” After this, they flailed their heads around in circles, very out of control. Then they performed bigger unison group choreography, which I had created for them. It involved hugging one’s self while tossing the head in circles, then embracing the air as if hugging another person and then tossing it away, and falling to the ground and then getting back up again. At another point they stopped all of their movement completely. They simply stood, looking square at the audience, letting their hands slowly drop. While this was a vulnerable position for the dancers, it was also empowering. It revealed their ability to return the gaze of the viewer, thereby resisting objectification. Eventually the dancers dramatically shook their hands in front of their bodies, moving into a larger phrase with a partner, which was very athletic, involving cartwheels, desperate reaches in the air, and falls to the ground. Their momentum finally took them to an ending, spinning upstage left; again their hands were suspended in the air. The ethereal music slowly faded at this point, the dancers clinging to each other, arms intertwined, breathing and panting.

Two dancers emerged from the connected line-up and moved to center floor. They performed a vignette of spoken words and movements. Together, they detailed a time that one of them witnessed the other dancer in a dance class. The witnessing dancer

described being injured and having to sit out, but still deriving pleasure from her friend dancing, moving and having “so much fun.” The teacher leading the dance class was described as “up-beat...so encouraging and positive.” At this point in the dance, the “injured” witnessing dancer sat on the ground, while the dancer in the class leapt through the air, flying, and yelled, “Look at me Mom!” The witnessing dancer stood up and joined the other dancer leaping and said “I didn’t care that my body could limit me, I knew that other dancers, like Haley, could always give it [the gift of dancing joy] to me.” Together they leapt to the floor embracing on the ground.

Then, the remaining three dancers still upstage came to center floor. A soloist emerged recounting a time she “loved the skin she was in.” The other two dancers played a supporting role, improvising movements and echoing words of the soloist, such as “experiencing” or “reflection.” Her words were:

Walking. Summer heat hitting my arms, my legs, my feet, weight shifting from side to side, my eyes open wide, experiencing. I feel the most accepting and full of love for myself, my body, during these walks I take alone. My body feels light, free from worry. My mind wanders from my hands, to my face, to my legs. What are they feeling? Passing by a window I catch my reflection smiling. My hair is big today and that’s okay. I see myself in there, in the glass, content. Walking with a spring in my step, this is a good day. When I want to stop walking, I stop walking. I just lie there, eyes closed, thinking about the grass touching my skin, hugging me, begging me to cartwheel.

Together they then encircled the space and comfortably laid on the ground and on each other’s bodies. One of the dancers, the original soloist from the very opening of *Body Talk* circled the space and walked upstage, as gentle plucking noises from Foday Musa Suso’s *Tilliboyo (Sunset)* began. The soloist described a time that she performed naked, only in body paint for an audience. (As she told her story she walked closer and closer to the audience, enticing them with her undulating and fluid torso and body

movements). She explained that you think it would make her nervous, “but in fact, it was the opposite, it was empowering [her voice got louder and she made eye contact with the audience and spiraled her body]. I was so honestly on display. Eyes falling on my bare-skin, [she said as she released her body to the earth below and sighed before standing again], the audience was within inches, and they came to share in my body dancing, honestly, our bodies.” As she finished her last line she motioned towards the other four dancers comfortably lounging on each other, their female forms looking natural and relaxed. Then one at a time, she lifted them up from the ground, their arms opening wide, tossing them spiraling out to upstage, where they returned to the gesture of arms in the air, from the beginning of the piece, but this time facing away from the audience.

Then a small duo and trio emerged looking like ocean waves of movement, ebbing and flowing together as they performed a series of fluid, arching, and lifting phrases I had created. The music continued to swell as the strings played. The dancers gathered upstage all with hands in the air but this time they were literally on top of each other, fluidly morphing around each other in a large blob. Two of the dancers left the group as the other three continued moving and improvising together.

The two came to separate sides of the stage describing times that they “loved the skin they were in.” As they told their stories they got closer and closer to each other and they wound up smoothly embracing. The stories they told were of skinny-dipping in the dark with three English teaching gray-haired aunts and feeling at home and knowing oneself among the trees. Some key lines from their experiences were: “I’ve always felt at home in the woods, it’s where I belong... My body felt both unimportant and powerful, part of the water and part of my family...I felt safe and comfortable. I know who I am

and am able to embrace myself.” At this point the dancers replayed different partnering and embracing actions in a duo and trio onstage. The music slowly faded.

One of the dancers who just spoke came to front and center with arms in the air facing the audience and said, “I value beauty that can communicate.” One at a time they came to the front, placed arms in the air, and stated something they were grateful for:

I love my body in the mirror, focused, sweaty, and wild.
My emotional core feeds upon the movements of my body.
I value the feeling of being embodied, in my skin.
The sensations of my life come alive in the movement that is me.

Music by Mark O’Connor’s *Appalachia Waltz (Solo Cello Version)* began playing. Then the dancers posed together to represent caring, community, and empowerment. Their final pose was a reach up to the sky. Then their duo and trio of flowing, curving ocean-like moves was repeated, but this time facing the audience. All gathered at upstage right, they individually leapt up reaching to the sky and fell into an almost backwards roll, all at varying times. They did this again and again; very vigorously until, finally, reaching above themselves, they formed a clenched fist that was pulled inwards toward the body. Their fists slowly opened and the dancers easefully came to the ground. It was as if they were claiming their power in that moment. Then once on the ground their fingers grazed the earth, giving thanks. Then their chests and arms turned upward.

Evoking the feminine with curved movements, the dancers spiraled in towards each other. They continued to swirl as they gently lifted each other moving around in a circle. Then all palms connected as the dancers leaned in towards each other. As if gathering strength from the group, their palms pressed away from each other at last. They performed personalized motifs and jumps separately in the stage space as the lights and music slowly faded.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses practical choreographic answers to my initial theoretical questions. My reflections combined with that of the dancers are discussed. I strove to answer three primary questions: 1) In what ways did this collaborative choreography create an opportunity for these dancers to express their feelings about their personal body images and experiences through physical action? 2) How did this choreography challenge the traditional patriarchal notion of the body as object in dance? 3) How did this collaborative choreography help empower these dancers? As I began to reflect further, two very integral themes emerged—validating the personal lived body experience as a source of knowledge and utilizing the dancer’s voice in the process as a means toward empowerment. Insights from the dancers themselves, experts in feminist pedagogy and dance education, are interwoven in these thoughts on the process, the culminating performance, and the post-performance question and answer session.

In What Ways Did This Collaborative Choreography Create an Opportunity for These Dancers to Express Their Feelings about Their Personal Body Images and Experiences Through Physical Action?

A primary way this choreography allowed the dancers to express their feelings about their body images and experiences was through descriptive language. On the night of our performance one of the dancers wrote to me,

I am grateful for this ability [to dance]—this means of expression...I love my body for what it allows me to experience each and every day. Through every tactile sensation I am reminded of my journey through life, and through every dance move I make I am reminded of that part of me that I hold so dear. That emotional core that feeds upon the movements of my body...As I dance, I feel my body emoting what I feel inside of me, and I am so eternally grateful that it allows me this avenue in which to find myself.

The dancer's description entitled "What I'm Grateful For" is an example of descriptive lived experiential writing. Her writing is rich and detailed, describing how her body senses color her life and her dance. Our choreography enabled this dancer to express her feelings and her lived body experiences through not only descriptive language, such as this, but also through the physical action of dancing. Several of the dancers told me that the words would not have made sense without the dance and that the dance would not have made sense without the words. The two were interwoven and integral to conveying the artistic message of each dancer's body story within the work.

Inspired by the Joe Goode workshop, my movement prompts guided the dancers to link their individual journal entries about their body experiences and images with their own personalized movement motifs. These motifs were created from gestures selected by the dancers, which evoked a state of being that reflected their emotions. This emphasized each dancer's feelings about her body experience.

We also found that improvising facilitated development of an individual's awareness of her body experience and feelings. Some dancers felt it was easier to improvise about the underlying somatic feeling of a body experience than it was to write about in words. As facilitator, I encouraged reflexive thought, which fostered authority of the dancer through improvised movement exploration.

In a conversation with one of my dancers, she described how important it was for her to have a chance to explore how she felt about her body through the creative means of journaling, improvising, and creating movement. She also enjoyed discussing our individual stories in a supportive group. She felt that women in our culture tend to repress their feelings about their bodies, do not feel validated, and have trouble even talking about this issue. Instead of being criticized, our nurturing process made it easy to discuss. This dancer was able to express her body experiences in a shared discussion where she realized she was not so different from the others. This ultimately led to creative dialogue and group improvisations, which established more shared movement and interrelationships based on their stories.

Describing individual body stories through sensory descriptive language within a safe space not only validated personal voice, but also caused the irreducible elements of subjectivity to emerge—the connections that we have with each other and the world (Fraleigh 2000, 60). The openness and unity of the group facilitated trust and freedom, which helped the dancers to find their own voices. It decentralized power from the choreographer to the group. This enhanced collective growth as well as our relationships with each other and enabled the dancers to express their stories more fully. Finally, the physical actions of our collective work created connections with an even larger group—the audience.

How Did This Choreography Challenge the Traditional Patriarchal Notion of the Body as Object in Dance?

Instead of treating the dancer as object or tool to serve the power and decisions of the sole choreographer, our collaborative choreography strove for subjectivity of the dancer by focusing on real life body experiences as being important and valuable to the process and the art. I found what feminist dance educator Sherry Shapiro suggests to be true; the body can resist objectification by being understood as a site for personal reflection. Like Shapiro, my “intention was to relate movement vocabulary to the students’ experiences” (Shapiro 1998, 11). Dance that opens itself to the uniqueness and subjective nature of the individual performer can be then viewed as following feminist pedagogy principles (Huncik 2002, 14). In such a way, the dancers and I worked democratically to value their voices and personal body experiences holistically. Instead of denying them in the process and performance, we incorporated them in every way.

Our feminist pedagogy model of choreographing strove to address some of the issues related to the dancer’s body. The goal was empowerment for the dancer and her body. Consequently, reaching for empowerment meant connecting with and becoming aware of the many layers of emotion and feeling associated with one’s body. Openness, sensitivity, and trust were required to deal with these potentially hidden subjective body truths. To finally reveal them publicly through our intimate dance work called for courage and maturity. Our process was quite different from a traditional means of choreographing. The dancer was not forced to perfectly fit the choreographer’s vision.

One of the dancers summed up how our process differed from traditional choreographic processes she had been a part of:

I think we are all used to being asked, as dancers who have performed in many works for many choreographers, to contribute movement and/or choreographic suggestions in rehearsals, but the way you directed this process made it feel much more personal. Not only because we were asked to share personal stories and incorporate our own words, but [also] because we've developed a very intimate and comfortable group. Having to get over the initial discomfort of sharing these emotional stories with each other (and also having you be a part of this sharing, offering your own stories) prepared us for having no misgivings about offering choreographic feedback and creating movement – we've achieved a level of trust, I think, that allows us to not take feedback and critique personally, and not to be self-conscious about our ideas.

I believe this suggests that she also felt less self-conscious about her body and being herself in this process and performance. This dancer seemed to enjoy this way of working which applied feminist pedagogy principles of treating the dancer as subject and establishing freedom and trust to find one's own voice. As a woman and a dancer myself, I felt this approach to dance making encouraged the dancers to express very personal feelings through words and movement in a way that was respectful of them as women. As this dancer indicated, our collaborative work seemed to support these women's ways of knowing and expressing themselves.

In their landmark work, *Women's Ways of Knowing* (1986), Mary Belenky and her colleagues point out that adult women are silenced much more often than men. In their analysis, "finding one's voice" is a metaphor that appears frequently when women describe their own journeys from silence to critical thinking; for women, learning to think means learning to speak with their own voices. Traditional dance pedagogy, with its emphasis on silent conformity, does not facilitate such a journey. Dancers typically learn to reproduce what they receive, not to critique or create (Stinson 1994, 133-134).

Our process and performance rooted in feminist pedagogy helped to identify these women and their bodies as part of a group affected by patriarchal values, which gave them mixed messages about their bodies as dancers. The use of feminist pedagogy helped empower them to actively create this choreography together. Instead of reinforcing the silent passive woman who obsessively conforms to cultural expectations in relation to the

female body image in dance, we valued the dancers as subjects, who formed their own opinions. By valuing community and caring, rather than separation and competition, our project called for fundamental changes in how to value individuals and their bodies in dance.

Stinson feels that one of the invaluable gifts of implementing feminist pedagogy in the creative process is that it encourages reflexive thought on the part of every individual involved (Stinson 1994, 142). She encourages students to listen to their bodies and to notice when the movement feels most fulfilled (Stinson 1994, 139). The emphasis is placed on how the body internally feels, rather than judging how it looks externally. Developing internal awareness, and reflective, critical thinking, evoked curiosity, cooperative learning, and creativity. This method served as a counterpoint to a more traditional patriarchal model that tends to overly objectify the dancer. Our process was designed to facilitate subjective awareness of the dancer's own body.

One of the dancers stated how this process and performance affected her feelings about her own body:

I feel very confident with my body now and when I was in the [rehearsal and performance] process. I used to really be self-conscious about it. I had an eating disorder. In the past, I would compare myself to the bodies of other women in the cast. If I had a duet with a dancer who was smaller than me, it was upsetting. But through the process of sharing our body stories, I saw the other women in this project as being much like myself. It made me think. Dancers, who I might have felt insecure around because of their "perfect bodies," have become my dearest friends.

This project seemed to have aided this dancer in moving past body differences with others in the work. It actually enabled her to see a similarity with someone she originally would have felt separate from because of her body. The fact that she formed a bond with an individual whom she perceived as having a perfect body, indicated how positive our

approach to working with feminist pedagogy principles was given our topic of dealing with women's bodies in dance.

In the work, a repeated image that resisted the objectifying gaze was when the dancers glanced back at the audience between their arms, as if they were taking a moment to judge the audience. The use of voice and speaking directly to the audience at times also resisted an objectifying gaze because the viewer had to contend with factual information about the dancers' own lives.

How Did This Collaborative Choreography Help Empower These Dancers?

According to Elizabeth Ellsworth, the vision of empowerment is “for ‘human betterment,’ for expanding ‘the range of possible social identities people may become’ and ‘making one’s self present as part of a moral and political project that links production of meaning to the possibility for human agency, democratic community, and transformative social action’” (Ellsworth 1992, 99). This quote illustrates the poignancy of sharing human experience as a source of meaning. When reflected upon, individuals have the capacity to transform themselves and their world through their understanding and knowledge of their subjective lived experience. To do this all through the art form of dance is truly remarkable.

By placing the subjective female body experience at the center of the choreography we hoped that it suggested new ways of understanding and seeing the female body, thus creating change and further empowering these individual dancers in the process and in the sharing of our culminating product. I suspect that some almost universal truths for women, especially dancers emerged.

After the performance one of the dancers described how connecting to her own lived experience in this process enabled her to find her voice, even as a quiet person. She felt empowered as a result of speaking and dancing her truth,

I've never spoken my own words in a performance before. I had a lot of nervous energy at first, but with this [process], I learned not to be so afraid. It was interesting how the words became so integral to the dance. It [the dance] wouldn't be clear without the words. It wouldn't have affected people in the same way. Also, being true to myself became really important. For instance, the part where I talk about having "big hair" on stage, [the audience] people could identify with that line and they laughed. Our [choreographic] process really made me tap into when my movement and my words were authentic.

This dancer also talked about how at first sharing personal experiences in the rehearsals made her nervous and she felt self-judgments and comparisons with others creep in. But again she explained that as the process unfolded and she heard the stories of others it helped her realize her original "black and white thinking" and feelings of "I can't." She described how she began to see her best friend (who was also engaged in the process) in a new, more subjective light, based on some of the struggles her friend had confided to the group about. She ended our chat by saying how "the personal is beautiful."

Another dancer wrote,

At first I was uncomfortable with this project because I have no experience with theater and speaking explicitly and loudly isn't really my "style," but our work has grown in such a way that our individual "voices," our individual ways of communicating, have become fully realized. You have made this work not just about what you envisioned, or about what any of us wanted, but about who we actually are and what we actually have to say about it.

I think this dancer's quote reveals the democratic nature of this work, especially in the way that it valued the dancer's personal lived experience. Our approach accepted who the dancers were as individuals, all contributing their own knowledge to the group.

Knowledge links with power and having a voice that an individual feels is heard and

respected is important, especially for women. Interestingly, this dancer later described how in the piece she speaks less than others and that this accurately reflected how she actually communicates.

Another one of the dancers discussed how language has always been her fear, but with this project she felt that her own voice was accommodated,

I feel like I have found my voice—and my language—since this project. Language has always been my fear. Like the part in the dance, where I talk about “How could I appear smart without this?” “This” being language. Words have so much power. For years I’ve struggled with my writing, words, and even speaking... But in the safe environment of our project, I learned to not feel so petrified with my writing skills, or reading and sharing aloud. I became comfortable speaking on stage and projecting. I actually enjoyed it. Now I’m choreographing my own piece involving speaking on stage for the first time.

This choreography allowed her to access her own descriptive language of her own experiences, even in this initially intimidating approach.

She later described how each dancer was given the space to develop her own choreographic motifs and artistry. In such a way, she felt free to dance in her own skin:

I never *tried* to dance like anyone else in the process—like you or the others. This happens in dance class typically, like last week, when I tried to dance like the teacher and match my body to *look exactly* like hers. But here, I made choices for me, and the other dancers made choices for themselves. I felt empowered. In this context, my own dance abilities felt validated, as did the collective sharing of movement, when we would combine our ideas to create something for the group. This not only helped me with my body image in dance, but also made me more confident in the act of choreographing. I felt and still feel more willing to try things choreographically. I feel there are more possibilities than I ever allowed myself.

This dancer described feeling empowered and validated in our collaborative work informed by feminist pedagogy.

This process enabled the dancers and I to witness, listen, and respond to one another for the purposes of personal and collective expression and innovation. Huncik

states, “Feminist pedagogy is concerned with transformation of the self and world... Teaching is not simply to transmit knowledge and information but to transform the learner and through the learner transform society. The goal of teaching is to help build confidence in students as thinkers, inventors of thought and inventors of change” (Huncik 2002, 10). It is through the process of reflecting on the lived and embodied experience that dancers begin to understand themselves and the world and thereby transform these areas, as they did in our collaborative choreography. I suspect our work together was transformative for them in other aspects of their lives as well, perhaps even more than they realize yet. I know it was transformative for me. I still feel deeply touched by how willing these women were to engage in this truth-seeking project with me.

One of the dancers described how *Body Talk* enabled her to become more fully who she already is:

I underwent a transformation from the start of the project to now. I was so fearful of my own words at the beginning. Something that helped me was when I learned that voice is vibration and movement. As a dancer, I understood how I could access and open the door to my voice through *movement*. Embracing and feeling each other’s bodies vibrating from sound made me realize this. This was such a revelation to me! Since our rehearsals, my throat feels more open; I even find that I sing for fun—something that used to be horrifying to me! I definitely got more and more confident in the process. I really got invested and wanted it to be good. It reminded me of how good it is to be in rehearsal—they [the rehearsals] are a privilege.

It certainly sounded as if this dancer was able to become more of who she wanted to be through our work together. Yet another dancer wrote to me,

Thank you so much for allowing me to be a part of this incredible process. This piece has been an amazingly fulfilling and rewarding experience. I have been blessed to get to go on this journey with you and all of these wonderful women.

Each of the dancers gave extremely positive feedback to me about our collaborative process together, suggesting that they felt empowered through this project. Their

testimonies state that they came to a deeper understanding of their own body images and lived body experiences through this endeavor. The dancers' own voices and stories changed their experience of dancing and performing. The power of their own experiences became even more meaningful when shared with an audience. Even the audience seemed to suggest that the dancers were empowered. I received a few comments by viewers who remarked that simply hearing the dancers speak on stage was a very powerful experience for them.

The Post-Performance Question and Answer Session

This section illustrates the audience's response during the question and answer session directly following the performance. The audience gave a standing ovation. The twenty-minute discussion was overwhelmingly positive. There was a great deal of feedback that unfortunately was not videotaped. Some of the comments and questions are listed below:

- You are breaking a taboo in dance by using the voice.
- How do you think your sensitivity towards women's bodies and their images affects the teaching of dance—or how could or should it rather?
- Have you thought about performing this for younger dancers or at bigger venues like the Hult Center?
- What about men dancers, what would this process look like for them?
Would this process be more revealing for them? Would it be a similar process to get there even? How would that be different?
- Do you think that body image is fluid?

- How was the text created exactly?
- Which came first, the words or the movement?
- What was the process like for the dancers, using the voice and their own words?
- How do you all feel that you will carry this experience forward in your own lives or dancing endeavors?
- This gave my husband and me who are not dancers a new way of looking at bodies and dancing, the voice enabled us to understand it. It was accessible to us!
- Simply hearing the live voices of the women performers was really powerful on stage.
- The sheer physicality and athleticism of the dancers was impressive; especially the strong lifting of each other as well as the touching and supporting roles showed both their strong/aggressive and caring qualities.
- How was it collaborating together? How did you negotiate your role as primary choreographer, yet still collaborate?
- How did the process influence your relationships with each other? It seems like you've all really bonded!
- How was your music selected? When was the music incorporated with the dance?
- For the first time ever, my husband felt that he could understand more of a woman's body concerns.

- I used to be a dancer; I really identified with this show. It made me cry; I was moved.

Overall, I felt very touched by the comments and questions of the audience. The questions were thoughtful and reflect invested interest. Many of their questions have been answered throughout this thesis. Unanswered questions invite further inquiry.

Insights into Application of the Feminist Pedagogy Principles to the Collaborative Choreographic Process

This project encouraged me to have a new definition of what choreography is and can be. Our work together broadened our horizons. The dancers connected with their inner authority and listened to their inner messages of the body to respond authentically in the present moment. Dance scholar Jill Green describes a similar experience that occurred in her own facilitation of a similar creative process. Green was engaged in emancipatory pedagogy practices too, but involving somatic work and improvisation. I feel her words are pertinent to our process,

They [the students] were using their “voices” and “bodily voices” to tell their accounts and raise significant feminist issues. They rejected formalized traditional structure of dance choreography to tell their stories; they made their choices visible while they advocated agency and change. In this sense, the research project substantiated a move away from individualistic frameworks for creative work and opened up a window to a more global approach for addressing the topic of creativity. They found their own bodily voices and defined their own methods for subversive creativity by confronting authority themselves. (Green 2000, 137)

I felt that my dancers were also able to work together for agency by recognizing the importance of their own body experiences as women.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Body Talk reflected the complexity of subjectivity. In dance there is some element of objectification of the body that is ever-present and inescapable. As much as my dancers and I tried to disregard judgment based on body appearance, truthfully, it was difficult for most of us to completely ignore pressures exerted by the media to look like women who have perfect bodies. This project showed that an effective solution to the problem of objectification involves allowing space for self-expression of body experience. If possible, maintaining power that is shared and forming connections within a supportive group is also recommended for creative endeavors in dance. Furthermore, a dance performance itself can question traditional ways of objectifying the dancer by showing “the body as a site for critical reflection on one’s life” (Shapiro 1998, 11).

In “Art and the Community: Breaking the Aesthetic of Disempowerment”

Christine M. Lomas describes what I envision for women in dance,

I believe it is possible to redress the negative experiences for the individual in a rapidly changing world and to respond proactively to disempowerment and disenfranchisement by using dance as a mediator in relation to nature and culture. Dance, like all art activities, offers the individual the opportunity to organize experience, make sense of self, problem-solve, and represent self-expression and metaphor. It can afford self-directed and increasingly self-mastering experiences. In dance one is in the world of the nonlinear, the felt rather than the thought experience, the soul and spirit; individuals in this world are informed by their authentic self instead of their wholly adapted self... This revelation occurs through an encoding wherein the body does the knowing, creates, communicates, and learns through dance. A process of reclamation can occur where our adaptive self, which we build in order to be acceptable to our perceived world, is challenged and reshaped; and understandings occur that are more acceptable to our inner, deeply intuitive self. Seen in this way, dance can be said to be therapeutic. I

propose here that all dance has the potential to be a combination of artistic activity and therapeutic activity, to offer individuals the opportunity to self-discover and to share with others. (Lomas 1992, 153)

Addressing the choreographic subject of a female dancer's body experience led me to discover a feminist pedagogical process. Facilitating my own collaborative process informed by not only feminist pedagogy but also by Goode's workshop and the voices of the dancers themselves, guided these women towards reflection, dialogue, and transformation. The goal was empowerment for the dancer and her body. Unlike other models of choreographing, the dancer was not forced to perfectly fit the choreographer's vision. Rather, she had an active role in the creation among a supported group of equals. This approach supported the dancer's ability as a woman to express and communicate personal body experiences through words and movement.

The positive feedback related to this work indicated that collaborative choreography informed by feminist pedagogy is a model that yields great benefits. I witnessed a transformation in the dancers' confidence level, ability to fully embody the movement/words, and a definite increase in their ability to work creatively with each other. Interestingly, even after this project disbanded, several of the dancers chose to continue working creatively with one another in their own choreographic projects, which sometimes incorporated the voice. This democratic method of choreographing has inspired these dancers to approach dance in new ways.

My choreographic process that used personal body narratives told through spoken word and movement, within a feminist pedagogical structure, can also be used with other populations as well. This research has a much broader application to younger female dancers, to male dancers, to transgender dancers, to disabled dancers, and as well as other

groups. Using a model that encourages caring, equality, and subjectivity in relation to the body is valuable to a variety of dancers, choreographers, and teachers, primarily because it allows for expression of the individual and acceptance of individual differences. This, in turn, leads to empowerment.

Using the model of feminist pedagogy in choreography to challenge objectification of the body in dance created an opportunity to express and transform the human experience through dance and voice. In my opinion, the benefits of this approach for the choreographer or the teacher have yet to be fully explored in dance education. It is my hope that other dance scholars will continue researching feminist pedagogy and the body in dance. In “Journey Toward A Feminist Pedagogy For Dance,” dance educator Susan Stinson explains that we do not really know what changes a feminist pedagogy will bring to the art form of dance itself, but she postulates,

I can imagine that there might be more diversity and more room in the field for individual visions. I can also imagine less technical virtuosity, more variety in shapes and sizes of dancers, and probably more “bad dance” (self-indulgent, poorly crafted, and all of the other negatives pointed out by critics) as well as more “good dance.” Perhaps we would have less interest in judging dance as good or bad, and might see it less as an object and more as a shared experience. (Stinson 1994, 142)

After completing this collaborative choreography, I advocate for approaching dance as a shared experience too. Our unique collaborative choreography provided powerful new ways of seeing, experiencing, and understanding the dancing body.

By linking critical questioning of one’s own experiences to creative empowerment, a feminist pedagogy for dance offers reflections on what dance should be. Feminist pedagogy questions traditional approaches to dance. Feminist dance educator Shapiro makes

connections between how we structure what the dance experience is to be and what students learn. We must give greater attention to the underlying vision or philosophy that shapes dance education. In particular, we must look more carefully at how we think of and value “the body” in dance. Do we see it as merely an object for perfection? Perhaps we’ve come to a necessary juncture in dance where we must engage our own re-search to discover the true nature of dance and its role in the wider culture. We must question our values and how our belief systems are transmitted to our students. Are students simply learning to regurgitate what the teacher knows or teaches? What is the role of dance in society? Does dance, as an institution, have any responsibility to the dancers or the dance? (Shapiro 1998, 19)

My research suggests that it does. Dance does have a responsibility to its practitioners. Dance making and learning can promote teamwork, trust, subjectivity of the body, and further understanding of the self and others through a supportive and safe environment. Or, on the contrary, it can promote intimidation, separation, and objectification of the body as well as degradation of the dancer through perfectionist aims. As demonstrated in *Body Talk*, sharing individual understanding and knowledge of one’s subjective, lived body experience is invaluable and transformative. If some of the goals of dance are both community building and discovery of the self, then collaborative choreography grounded in feminist pedagogy is poised to lead the way.

APPENDIX
PROGRAM



Department of Dance Calendar of Events

Grad Loft 2011

Friday, March 11 at 8pm, Dougherty Dance Theatre
\$3 Student/Senior, \$5 General Admission

UO Repertory Dance Company At Home Concert

April 15 & 16 at 8pm, Dougherty Dance Theatre
\$5 Student/Senior, \$10 General Admission

Spring Student Dance Concert

May 12-14 at 8pm, Dougherty Dance Theatre
\$5 Student/Senior, \$10 General Admission

Spring Loft 2011

Friday, June 3 at 8pm, Dougherty Dance Theatre
\$3 Student/Senior, \$5 General Admission

Department of Dance

Faculty: Steven Chatfield, Christian Cherry, Jenifer Craig, Brad Garner,
Rita Honka, Walter Kennedy, Shannon Mockli

Adjunct Faculty: Sarah Ebert, Cynthia Gutierrez-Garner,
Florabelle Moses, Jeanine VanSise, Susan Zadoff

Musicians: Glenn Bonney, John Polese,
Matt Svoboda, Brian West, Eric Valentine

Office Coordinator: Marian Moser

Emeritus Faculty: Bruno Madrid, Susan Zadoff

Graduate Teaching Fellows: Laura Black, Liana Conyers,
Wen Wen Dong, Erinn Ernst, Ayumi Hori, Laura Katzman,
Melanie Meenan, Jean Nelson, Devon Ryan Polynone,
Dawn Urista, Amy Ward

O UNIVERSITY OF OREGON



The University of Oregon Department of Dance Presents

A Master of Fine Arts Choreographic Thesis Project by Laura Katzman

Body Talk:

*Choreographic Revelations on
a Dancer's Body Image
and Experience*

Saturday, February 26th, 2011 at 8pm
Dougherty Dance Theatre
3rd Floor Gerlinger Annex

Welcome to Body Talk

Empowering the dancing body through personal exploration and performance was the initial impetus for this work. Specifically, we hope this performance brings insight into the body experiences of female dancers. This piece explores the personal experiences of five dancers who generously share their stories. The original narratives reveal the unique joys and struggles faced by women in the field of dance.

As director, I am continually impressed with the tenacity, honesty and strength of this group of women. I have watched them grow throughout the process. It has truly been a privilege to witness and be a part of this collaborative endeavor. I invite you to watch their experiences and perhaps empathize with their stories.

Appreciation

Special thanks to the University of Oregon Department of Dance and my committee Shannon Mockli (Chair), Jenifer Craig, Rita Honka, Christian Cherry (my honorary committee member) and Office Coordinator Marian Moser for their generous and ongoing support. Shannon Mockli especially has spent many tireless hours supporting this endeavor.

I am also unbelievably grateful to my five dancers. They exhibited openness, maturity, grace and an abundance of creativity. This project required emotional and physical challenges, which they approached without question. They are a remarkably strong group of women and have become my dear friends. Each of their voices has been a vital part of this project. I know for a fact this work would not be the same without their contributions. Their actions both on stage and off have been beyond admirable. I thank them again for sharing their stories and just for being who they are.

My photographer, Shannon Knight, is to be commended for her work. Her photographs have documented my choreographic process throughout these months of rehearsals. She is very perceptive and has an eye for capturing dancers' movement. The audience is invited to observe her work featured outside the performance space. She also helped design both the poster and the program. Enjoy her images.

Christian Cherry is also deserving of special thanks for his musical guidance, helpful suggestions and assistance with the sound system.

I also want to thank the grads (both past and present) in the MFA program. They provide so much support so much of the time. I owe a special thank you to Erinn Ernst for helping to create the poster and program using input and images from Shannon Knight.

Finally, I thank my family and friends for all of the love and support I received on a frequent and continual basis throughout the creative process.

Body Talk: Choreographic Revelations on a Dancer's Body Image and Experience

Choreography Conception and Direction:
Laura Katzman

Collaborating Dancers:
Liz Corwin, Ivy Farrell, Hannalisa Johnson,
Haley Friend Wilson, Julia Vickers

Music:
Excerpts from Kevin Volans: String Quartet #6,
Excerpts from Mary Ellen Childs: After Dust and Very High,
Foday Musa Suso: Tilliboyo (Sunset)
Excerpts from Mark O'Connor: Appalachia Waltz
(Solo Cello Version)

Costumes:
Haley Friend Wilson
Courtesy of Xylem Clothing
www.xylemclothing.com

Production Crew

Theatre Director: Jenifer Craig
Publicity Coordinator: Walter Kennedy
Music Director: Christian Cherry
Photographer: Shannon Knight
Videography: Vanguard Media
Stage Manager: Lou Moulder
House Manager: Katy Ansbaugh
Lighting Design: Liana Conyers
Soundboard Operator: Laura Katzman
Stage Work: Siobhan 'Ruby' McConnell
Poster and Program Design: Erinn Ernst,
Laura Katzman, Shannon Knight

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