

Emancipatory Pedagogy?: Women's Bodies and the Creative Process in Dance

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Abstract:

Recently, I have found myself grappling with the theoretical concept of power relationships in the classroom. Coming from a Foucauldian viewpoint, and looking through a feminist lens, I have been looking for methods to deconstruct traditional ways that dance is taught in a university setting. Further, as a somatic educator, I am particularly aware of and sensitive to how dancer's bodies can be abused, manipulated, and taught to perform in ways that are destructive and harmful to student dancers. I wish to find less oppressive and more bodily conscious ways to teach dance. This is why I chose to conduct a study, which investigated the bodily perceptions of undergraduate dance students in dance, and how their previous experiences in dance education have influenced how they look at and treat their bodies.

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Emancipatory Pedagogy?: Women's Bodies and the Creative Process in Dance

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Recently, I have found myself grappling with the theoretical concept of power relationships in the classroom. Coming from a Foucauldian viewpoint, and looking through a feminist lens, I have been looking for methods to deconstruct traditional ways that dance is taught in a university setting. Further, as a somatic educator, I am particularly aware of and sensitive to how dancer's bodies can be abused, manipulated, and taught to perform in ways that are destructive and harmful to student dancers. I wish to find less oppressive and more bodily conscious ways to teach dance. This is why I chose to conduct a study, which investigated the bodily perceptions of undergraduate dance students in dance, and how their previous experiences in dance education have influenced how they look at and treat their bodies.

In a previous article, I address ways that dancer's bodies are habituated, inscribed, and influenced by dance culture through a constant effort to reach an unattainable bodily ideal (Green 1999). As a critical and postpositivist researcher, I address how university dance classes promote a training process whereby student bodies, and particularly women's bodies are constantly, in a Foucauldian sense, under "surveillance" (Foucault 1979). I record how teachers do not allow students to take ownership of their somas and weaken them in an effort to disconnect them from their bodies. I attempt to expose these destructive and oppressive ways that dance teachers sometimes inadvertently perpetuate a practice, which marginalizes young women in dance classes.

Interestingly, however, while examining findings particularly related to a final creative project, which arose from the study and the class that accompanied the investigation, I kept bumping up against how I, as a teacher, may have also colluded in the disempowerment of my students, even while I was attempting to create a liberatory research and pedagogical project.

My observations, as well as responses from students, kept pointing to the power relationships in my own class during an effort to produce a creative project. I could not get away from the power dynamic created by my own participation in the project.

Elizabeth Ellsworth (1992) addresses this problem in her article, “Why Doesn’t This Feel Empowering: Working through the Repressive Myths of Critical Pedagogy.” She raises some pedagogical concerns regarding teacher authority during her research with film students. Ellsworth discusses her own critical theory project. She suggests that critical or emancipatory teachers, who are often trying to change the ways teachers teach, often assume they have privileged knowledge, which they can help to “free” students from oppressive dominant meaning systems. In the process, however, teachers may deny the power accorded to themselves as educators, or attempt to speak for those who they believe have been oppressed. Ellsworth raises concern about any educational approach or perspective that places authority on a real truth, that is not also looked at critically or problematized. She cautions educators to be aware and reflexive about how they may attempt to “help” students and how power plays out in the classroom.

While investigating this specific classroom context, in which I was the teacher and director of the final culminating project, I also could not escape the ways my power and privilege affected the student participants. For this reason, I wish to share my personal narrative about the emergence of a creative project during this study and class. I highlight my own feelings and angst as well as the voices of the student participants. Through this juxtaposed vocality, I wish to demonstrate how theoretical and personal spheres can inform each other through a postmodern multiplicity of thought and action.

During this project, somatic practices (body-mind systems of movement) were used as tools to investigate body perceptions and experiences of undergraduate dance education majors. The five women took part in a somatics/creativity class within a university level instructional setting. This teaching and research project explored how these body perceptions have been influenced by society and the dance world. For example, the participants were asked questions about previous experiences in dance, and how they have learned to perceive their bodies in reference to a specific weight and body ideal. Class movement explorations, somatic exercises and discussion were used as tools to explore social influences on the body.

The class was designed so that during the first part of each session, participants would be exposed to various somatic practices¹ and during the second part of each session participants would immerse themselves in the creative process and work towards a group/production performance, which in this case, took the form of an interactive movement forum.

I initially thought of the culminating performance project as a peripheral part of the study. I wanted to give the students an outlet for the creative energies they were developing throughout the class and project. And I was interested in using their artistic expressions as additional research data. Interestingly though, this aspect of the project became the center for struggle and anxiety during the project. I learned much from the struggle both about the creative process and teacher and student power relationships.

The creative process has been a topic of great debate for a number of years. Early theorists such as Sir Francis Galton attributed creative activity solely to inherited traits (John-Steiner 1987, 219). Such a theory of creativity focuses on the creative product as a result of a higher level of achievement, usually made or performed by a person with a gift, talent, or special

quality. Later, some psychoanalysts such as Freud, explained creativity as a neurotic or dysfunctional activity (Bloomberg 1973, 1-5; John-Steiner 1987, 219). During the late fifties, sixties, and seventies, many humanistic and environmental theorists believed that creativity was a natural human process and part of every healthy and full life. These theorists believed that everyone could be creative (Fromm 1959; Johnston 1986; Maslow 1967, 1968; May 1965, 1975; Parnes 1975; Rogers 1971; Stein 1974; Torrance 1967; Torrance, Clements, & Goff 1989; Torrance & Torrance 1973).

More recently, some researchers have examined creativity within a social framework.⁰ According to Livia Pohlman--who includes Amabile 1983; Csikszentmihalyi 1988, and Simonton 1984--in this body of work, "creativity may be considered a social process, dramatically affected by social environments and institutions, rather than simply a psychological trait inherent in individuals" (1996, 1).

In my own prior research, I have explored socio-cultural avenues and approaches to creativity. In a previous article titled, "Choreographing a Postmodern Turn: The Creative Process and Somatics," I addressed a reconceptualization of the creative process in light of an earlier investigation into the relationship between somatic practice (body-mind systems of movement) and creativity. The article explores an analysis of creativity from a posthumanistic lens; from this position, somatic and creative pedagogical work may be tools for personal change, but are also inseparable from socio-political change (Green 1996a). I found that during a particular creative project that I directed, the women, as compared to the men, tended to view the creative process through a social lens. Definitions of creativity were not limited to an individual context alone. For example, when one student entered a dance supply store, she was

told she was too large to purchase a leotard for the project; this affected her creative process. Another student, who suffered from a past rape, felt restricted during the project and indicated that the rape had affected her ability to be creative. Defining creativity within an individualistic context alone became problematic.

This broader and more global view of creativity followed me into this current investigation. However, my personal experience as a teacher and director, during this creative effort, provided a reflective mirror through which I could also see my own oppressive role.

At the start of the class, I asked the participants to keep journals and write body stories based on their previous experiences in dance, and what they were learning during the project. Basically, the body stories were excerpts from journal entries, written with the purpose of retelling specific student accounts that influenced perceptions of their bodies. Towards the end of each session we began to work toward the creative culminating project. I envisioned this as a rather open ended project; I had some ideas in mind such as using the body stories as themes and generating some sort of dance material to manipulate into some format but I was purposively unclear in order to provide opportunities to suit the preferences of the participants. As I had learned in previous teaching situations and my aforementioned study, my attempt was to be as unauthoritarian as possible. I wanted the students to explore their own somatic sensitivity and body awareness while identifying how they wanted to proceed creatively.

The students had many ideas but they never seemed to develop or congeal into a whole or complete choreographic thought. For example, Kathy³ initially began to envision the creative project as a type of women's folk dance, suggesting a community of women dancing to the music of various women's chants with sections of the dance breaking out into the body stories of

the participants. Other participants picked up on this theme and decided to have the folk dance as a group effort with individuals breaking off to tell their stories through words and movement.

Later, the participants worked as a group with themes from their journals, such as oppression, media, and sexuality, to develop material. They began to select themes, develop movement phrases and work with each other to vary the material choreographically. However, throughout these choreographic sessions, the participants seemed to struggle with the idea of creating what they perceived as a choreographic project. For example, I asked them to think about their body stories from their journals and how they could communicate some of the ideas we were addressing in class. During the following class, I asked for their suggestions for a final project or performance. They began to think about some interesting conceptual ideas, but these ideas seemed to collapse into set movements that obscured the themes.

Kathy

I started thinking about my body story and how I could incorporate the ideas that I was thinking about [with] the images coming from TV and magazines, and inactivity [that we were talking about]. As far as feeling good about yourself. And also gender definitions. We keep talking about how neat it would be to show one of those gender differentiation stories.... Before I had written, "How is it that we are taught to hate ourselves?" I thought about spraying one of those aerosol sprays [feminine deodorant]. I listed some things that were typical of men and some things that were typical of women.... I had the idea of jumping from one side [of the list] to the other.

Kathy discussed feminist content, but I noticed that she slowly began to directly describe movements and choreograph steps. The other students followed and worked on rather specific

dances, while moving away from ideas that we had specifically discussed in class. I suggested that they did not have to perform a formal dance for an audience and we could see where the process took us, that we were looking for a way to express what the project had meant to them and that the project would involve a creative interpretation and representation of the issues.

Me

At first, I felt that the students were working towards some project that they found interesting. However, the students seem to prefer to spend time practicing somatic work and discussing the issues of gendered bodies in dance education than working on the creative project. The project always seems to be a chore.

Tess

I don't know why I'm having such a block.

Another student Nancy, did not even want to write down a body story much less communicate her ideas through movement. She perceived herself as a healthy dancer with a good attitude and asserted that she was having trouble getting an idea of something to even write down. Nancy

Cause if I write down something bad, I'm just complaining about it. Cause there's nothing really that awful that's happened. It's only nit-picky things, that didn't really have an impact on my life.

And although Nancy later came to embrace some of these women's issues, her resistance to the issues did influence the direction of her choreography and creative process. She too, began to rely more on movement and steps than the communication or expression of ideas. I began to feel

that this was a way to hide from these issues rather than think about them.

I did not give up, partially because instinct told me to keep going, that something would emerge and that it was not really important how “good” the creative project would be but that the students expressed what was happening in some form. Further, I did not want to impose my ideas about a creative project, stop the project, infer that it was not working, or bring more emphasis to this part of the project. I wanted to bring authority to the process itself. So, I did not stop it.

But by not wanting to be authoritative, was I denying my authority given me in this context, while making myself unclear about my own agenda? Had I wanted to shake up the very process by which these students had learned to choreograph (by not emphasizing movements, steps and a particular use of design that they were familiar with)? By attempting to move them away from their habitual choreographic process, was I not imposing another model on them?

A breakthrough occurred during one point in the study, when I attempted a different approach. Rather than ask the students to choreographic phrases based on their body stories, I directly used an exercise from Kinetic Awareness™ (KA), a somatic practice, to attempt to get the student participants in touch with their bodies during the choreographic process. What I felt had been missing was the direct engagement with the body stories and an ownership of the creative process. I believed that they were depending on specific movements and steps to represent their stories instead of making the material immediately meaningful for them. Rather than connect to their bodies they seemed to be disconnecting from the content of the body itself. We were discussing the issues, yet they chose to not listen to their bodies while attempting to engage in the creative process. I wanted to help them find what Don Johnson calls their

experiential authority (1992) or inner somatic power. I took them through an exercise where I asked them to sense their bodies and then begin to move and stretch by listening to how their bodies needed to move and how they could take their somatic sensitivity into performance. I then asked them to begin talking while they were moving, bringing in journal entries and their body issues and then beginning a discussion regarding the issues. This stopped them from planning their movement. Their movement appeared much more clearly focused to me; I videotaped a second attempt to move with awareness and with attention to the body and the issues raised in class. When they viewed the tape they were quite impressed by the improvisational responses and continued to talk about this in class.

Other than including this particular exercise, we continued to work on the creative project as usual except that after this exercise one student, Missy, suggested we begin to work on a structured improvisation in order to relieve the pressure to create a dance, which was mounting at this point. Then, one day when left alone, the students apparently discussed the final project without me. They came to me appearing afraid to tell me that they wished to change the format of the creative project; they felt that a formal choreographic project was not consistent with what they were learning in class. They were learning to recognize how their bodies were products of social patterns and had been habitually manipulated and abused during prior dance classes. They wanted to express how they needed to take ownership of their bodies and include discussion about the issues they were addressing in the study. They said that they wanted to have a looser and more open format for addressing the significance of their somatic experiences and awareness of their bodies as a social construct.

Me

I now wonder if I had not inadvertently led them to this awareness in an effort to deconstruct their typical creative process as well as their perceptions of their bodies. I was pleased that they discovered the initial process was not working; I wanted them to take ownership of their bodies from the start and be involved with the process of expressing this significance for them. Although, I had no preconceived idea of a creative process or product, I did want them to find a mode that reflected what I would describe as an “ownership” of their bodies. However, I needed to recognize my own agenda and that I wanted them to become aware of the constraints of the ways traditional choreography may be a limitation here. In fact, they were so familiar with typical dance and choreographic classes which are framed around structure, design and a particular craft, they seemed to apologize for wanting to deviate from this pattern, even though they may have sensed that I wanted them to deviate all along. However, I played an active role in their detour and I need to acknowledge this. And perhaps the way that eventually worked for them, was actually due to a concerted effort by me, but designed to appear as if they came to their own conclusion. In other words, I may have manipulated the situation in order to achieve a desired result. In a sense, most critical projects do this to some extent. But whether or not this is conscious and up front may be significant here.

After discussing creative possibilities, the participants came up with the idea of an interactive movement forum whereby students would dance and discuss the issues, while allowing the audience to be involved in the movement and discussion. They came up with a list of issues to address, decided to start with the K A improvisation, gradually including words, phrases and discussion which would eventually involve the audience, and end with audience

participation of the movement. They wanted a small audience, and decided to invite particular people who might be receptive to the idea and support their efforts without judging the work by formal choreographic standards. They were clear that this project was not about choreography per se but an attempt to express themselves through movement and discussion. For this reason, the only publicity involved included a small flyer announcing the event. The title, “Body Herstory: An Interactive Movement Forum,” was unanimously selected because it addressed both the content and method of the project. Media clippings and pictures from Dance Magazine and other dance materials, which were collected during the project, were taped onto a mirror and made into a collage. The mirror became a powerful theme for the external image of dancer bodies recognized during the study. It became an appropriate metaphor for the outside gaze. This collage provided another representation of the multifaceted perspectives and juxtaposed images invoked during the project. The video of the final forum opened with a shot of the mirror.

Describing their experiences with the creative process, the students expressed the problematic nature of attempting to impose a rigid structure around their experiences. They claimed that their original choreographic themes were too “dancey” to fit this project, that through the discussion and somatic work they were making meaning of their experiences in a non-linear way.

Tess

When we started the semester we didn't know that it was going to be performance oriented and that it now felt like we were working for a finished product instead of through a process. We wanted to work through more issues; we weren't really in the mindset of a performance.... It didn't feel natural because we kept repeating the same

issues over and over and it wasn't authentic anymore; it became rehearsed. Missy said, "What about a lecture/demo." And that we would call it that: a lecture demonstration on somatics. But we decided that maybe having the beginning like we had it with that sort of slow stretching and then having it turn into a conversation amongst us about the issues, making that more improv in terms of what would come up [would work]. And then we would come around and start asking questions of the audience...and then have it turn into audience participation.... [Before this point] it was so manufactured, so false.... I think the main point for me is I don't want to fall into a set [dance] where things feel like they're not real. [After all] We're teaching ourselves how to be true to our bodies.

Kathy

If you decide to do things in an authoritative, linear way you're going to run into problems.... People are going to be less giving of themselves and they're not going to contribute ideas when you might need them to contribute ideas.

Jasmine

I enjoyed [working on the dance choreographically] but I also think it took away from the project. We weren't going towards helping us or helping our students in the future deal with these different [body] problems. We were going towards what will the audience want to hear? What would the audience like to see...It came to be a creative product... which was really hard because we had to get into that product mode.... We said, "Let's work toward a performance. [But] we should not say performance [but] some type of interactive forum...We turned the process all of a sudden into a product.... a lot of people had a lot of different outside things to do; it got more stressful. And I think we should

have used more somatic work to help us deal with it. To help us bring into that mindset of process. You know some of that relaxation stuff that you have tons and tons of. I wanted more of it.

Me

Had I not contributed to the stress by insisting on a culminating project (for, dare I say, research data)? Perhaps I might have let them continue to do what they wished, provide somatic experiences and critically discuss the issues. I wanted them to continue to connect to their bodies through the creative process too but they may not have desired to do this in this way.

Johnson asserts that society teaches us to detach from the inner messages of the body in order to manipulate us and habituate us to socialized norms. This disempowers us to act in the world. With somatic work and an awareness of what our bodies are telling us, he claims that we take more ownership of our bodies and are able to “stand up” to authority figures (1992). A number of the participants also referred to the body as a source for creative contact and somatic authority. For example, Tess spoke about the K A stretch exercise we often did, when the participants were asked to listen to their bodies and allow the body to tell them when to move, stretch, and dance.

Tess

One thing that I always feel whenever we do this, is I feel like, a number of feelings come up. First of all, I feel almost like I shouldn't be allowed to move this way. That it

feels very sensual and sometimes that gets mixed up with sexual and sometimes that brings up feelings for me. To allow the body to move like that. Indulging in your movement. Sometimes it's really hard.

Jasmine addressed body practice as a better way of getting at what we needed to for this creative endeavor.

Jasmine

[The formal choreographic work] was being more phony and getting into that performance mode with like what the choreographer wants from you. [We're trained] that way. And this class trained me in another way--in using somatics to get to the creative process in choreographing stuff.

Kathy addressed body experience as well as the body as the content of the creative project.

Kathy

Ideas that come up with the somatic movement can easily be transferred into the creative process. I mean, the one movement phrase that we each made, I guess it was about our body stories. I did something about high heels and arched backs, which was something that we talked about as far as blocking energy in your body or alignment in your body. I think also the hands-on somatic work, like when we were hands-on with one another, that's something that's really important in both performance and teaching and the creative process is really easily transferred into contact improvisation,⁰ you know, just having that contact with people. Sometimes people are really intimidated about that.

These responses again tie creativity to socio-political issues, particularly in reference to the idea of creativity as a type of subversive bodily force, which may bring up feelings deemed

taboo. They resonate with Lee Quinby's posthumanistic definition of creativity as "a changing artistic activity of self and society, an activity made up of disruptive energies." (1991, 12). It was no wonder that the KA exercise became a major part of the final performance since it allowed the issues we were discussing to emerge as the participants worked on the interactive movement forum. For example, Jasmine said that the creative process, as done in this way, made her freer to explore what is important to her and helped her to be less dependent on a choreographer.

Jasmine

[The process] made me more aware of problems that society told me I'd have to deal with...And I've gotten so accustomed to living with so much stuff. And I'll just take what they say; that's fine; they're the boss. But now I'm realizing that some of the things, some issues inside me that I have kept contained have come out.... Personally, I feel that as a female and also, in society we're told to be dependent [and not listen to the inner messages of the body].

So maybe by insisting on a defined choreographic form at the beginning of the project, I interfered with their creativity, even though I was attempting to channel their energies towards a subversive choreographic stance. I may have fallen into the unconscious trap of depending on a conclusive end product to define what I hoped the participants would learn and communicate. I realized that I wasn't doing with creative project what I was trying to do with somatics as I slipped back into a traditional, rote, and linear way of creating dance; at the same time I was hoping they would find a more liberatory means of expressing themselves.

To most of the women, the improvisational method of working was feminist and subversive. However, the participants did not always talk about this way of working as a panacea for the world's problems. They often discussed some difficulties. For example, Kathy struggled with her former training.

Kathy

It's easier to fall back on things that we already know. When you have a whole world that's supporting a linear, patriarchal mode of doing things and you're trying to start up this other way, which is hard, I mean, it takes effort; it takes cooperation. It's very strenuous.

But she also added how valuable it is:

I think it was valuable because some people had different ideas about stuff, to hear. You know sometimes you get stuck in your own mind set, even though you're thinking diversity...You come from a perspective that's more diverse than someone else's, so you feel good about that, but then you hear where other people are and you respect their ideas. That was very valuable to me.

Discussion

The participants were using the creative body to connect to the issues they were discussing and somatically exploring as part of the project, and they found that this was a different way for them to work. They were taking ownership of the creative project as they were claiming ownership of their bodies. Many feminist and postmodern theorists have called for such a bodily approach (Haug et al. 1987; Gallop 1988; hooks 1994; Green 1999; Johnson 1992; Stinson 1995; Wilshire 1989).

However, as in much postpositivist⁰ work, I feel a need to also problematize these findings and point out some tensions apparent with any claim that this way of working will further social change and action. For example, many postmodernists and feminists are suspicious of the use of working through the body as a “critical project.” Foucault was not fond of the idea of body experience. Although he viewed the body as a site of political manipulation and control and studied it as an effect of the culture in which we live, his writing suggests a suspicion of typical somatic conceptualizations such as bodily experience and practice (1979, 1980). As Arthur Frank points out, “What Foucault contributes to the study of the body--beyond his studies as a site of political violence--is an enhanced self-reflectiveness about the project of the body itself” (1990, 132).

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

However, a number of writers are not willing to throw out the or deny the existence of bodily experience but at the same time caution us not to use bodywork as an isolated panacea. They look at the socio-political factors that help inscribe bodies, while embracing the value of referring to bodily experience as a socially subversive act. For example, in *Volatile Bodies*:

Toward a Corporeal Feminism (1994), Elizabeth Grosz refers to the need for both a socio-political lens and attention to the body in its creative fluidity. Although she does not directly address creativity, she speaks about postmodern approaches to the body as a type of unimpeded flow and discusses postmodern opposition to the traditional idea of the structure or organization of bodies, the body as stratified, regulated, ordered, and functional. Interestingly, the participants in this project also spoke about the way they learned to work on the creative project as less regulated and structured. Grosz examines body process as valuable while acknowledging the claim that the body “can be regarded as a cultural and historic product (1994, 187).

In *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, bell hooks also addresses the importance of the body in actualizing social action through pedagogy and the creative process. She refers to the type of pedagogical creative process I have addressed when she discusses the value of student engagement and educational subversion. For example, she encourages educators to return to the body as a source of information necessary for social change:

The arrangement of the body we are talking about de-emphasizes the reality that professors are in the classroom to offer something of our selves to the students. The erasure of the body encourages us to think that we are listening to neutral, objective facts, facts that are not particular to who is sharing the information. We are invited to teach information as though it does not emerge from bodies. Significantly, those of us who are trying to critique biases in the classroom have been compelled to return to the body to speak about ourselves as subjects in history. We must return to ourselves to a state of embodiment in order to deconstruct the way power has been traditionally orchestrated in

the classroom, denying subjectivity to some groups and according it to others. By recognizing subjectivity and the limits of identity, we disrupt the objectification that is so necessary in a culture of domination. (1994, 139)

Hooks refers to creativity when she discusses the problems of the censoring process in education and the need for a subversive passion to flow in the classroom. As the participants in this somatic/creativity project sometimes felt that what they were engaging in was subversive, hooks affirms the need to include bodily experience as a teaching strategy. She recalls that she learned that

there was a place for passion in the curriculum that Eros and the erotic did not need to be denied for learning to take place. One of the tenets of feminist critical pedagogy has been the insistence on not engaging the mind/body split. This is one of the underlying beliefs that has made Women's Studies a subversive location in the academy. While women's studies over the years has had to fight to be taken seriously by academics in traditional disciplines, those of us who have been intimately engaged as students or teachers with feminist thinking have always recognized the legitimacy of a pedagogy that dares to subvert the mind/body split and allow us to be whole in the classroom, and as a consequence, wholehearted. (1994, 193)

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

The issue is complicated and complex. Perhaps we need to recognize bodily impulses and somatic authority during the creative process without according them “truth” and without separating them from social concerns. This may occur by facilitating a process by which creativity may help produce the subversive energies necessary to propel social change.

Lastly, besides reflecting on the use of somatic practice and improvisational authority during the creative process, I also had struggles with the issue of authority itself and with questions about my role/influence in the findings. I began to ask myself a number of questions. Was I not attempting to free these students of oppressive myths about the body by offering them another authoritative truth in somatics and improvisational choreography? Were they not feeling empowered because I was projecting myself as an “expert” in the field, offering them a way out of traditional practices and models? And how radical were my methods, when I was asking them to construct a dance in the first place? (knowing that we all were basing the definition of “dance” on traditional western choreographic concepts).

On the other hand, I am not sure that we can simply forfeit our roles as powerful experts and authority figures. Teachers cannot simply avoid being in an authority role. But we can see how it plays out in practical situations. As Patti Lather points out, “To deconstruct authority is not to do away with it but to learn to trace its effects, to see how authority is constituted and constituting (1991, 144). This may be why reflexivity is so important in feminist and postpositivist work.

In an article, “On Creativity and Social Change,” Mary Clare Powell describes a creative project conducted with Chicopee women in housing projects. She points out that we erroneously tend to view creativity from the viewpoint of the dominant culture and assign “mono-cultural

definitions of creativity” (1994, 30). By presenting her research as a cultural narrative she redefines creativity within a multicultural perspective. She asserts that,

this whole process of re-defining both creativity and the arts results not only in individuals’ discovering and using their creativity, but actually helps create a positive multicultural society, one in which diversity is prized and sought, not just tolerated.

How? In the Chicopee [writing] workshop, we see a group of people from whom nothing was expected, who had never been visible except as part of a faceless group, a social problem. Suddenly they are talking about themselves as if someone else wants to hear, and we find that we do, that we are moved by their accounts. When invisible groups of people become visible, our sense of our common life is broadened. (1994, 30)

Although the participants in the somatics/creativity project were not disenfranchised and invisible in the same sense that the women in the Chicopee writing workshop were, a similar point may be made. These students started to expand definitions of choreography into a social context. They were using their “voices” and “bodily voices” to tell their accounts and raise significant feminist issues.⁰ They rejected the formalized traditional structure of dance choreography to tell their stories; they made their choices visible while they advocated agency and change. In this sense, this research project substantiated a move away from individualistic frameworks for creative work and opened a window to a more global and macro level for addressing the topic of creativity. By finally seeing what this meant regarding the creative/research process itself, I hope that I began to finally allow them to do this by letting them find their own bodily voices and define their own methods for subversive creativity.

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Notes

1. I refer to somatic practices as body awareness approaches and modalities that I used as strategies to help students become aware of inner bodily perceptions. Some of the somatic awareness practices offered during the course included Kinetic Awareness,TM Feldenkrais Awareness Through Movement, progressive relaxation, visualization and imagery, Ideokinesis, breathing techniques, and other body approaches. I use upper case titles to generally identify approaches that have been developed and registered or trademarked as separate systems while lower case titles are used more broadly as general techniques or approaches. My intention is not to apply a specific approach or practice, but to find ways to help students identify the inner messages of the body.

0.2. (Green 1996a; Pohlman 1996; Powell 1994; Wesenberg 1994)

3. Pseudonyms were used in this study.

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

0.6. See Green (1999) for a discussion about the specific bodily issues that emerged from this project.