

**HONORING THE SPIRIT: A MODEL FOR OBSERVING, WITNESSING, AND
CELEBRATING SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGION IN DANCE/MOVEMENT
THERAPY**

Rebekah Brown

May 2023

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science in Dance/Movement Therapy
Sarah Lawrence College

Abstract

Research has shown that people of color are less likely to seek out therapy for mental health care. Instead, they, specifically members of spiritual Black communities, have relied on turning to leaders in religious communities or spiritual practices. There is a stigma around mental health care amongst Black communities. These stigmas are deeply rooted in the racial disparities in the mental health field and the historical oppression of our spiritual practices or rituals throughout the African diaspora. My intention is to help bridge the gap between religious/spiritual Black communities and mental health care by offering a model for observing, witnessing, and celebrating one's relationship to their religion and/or spirituality. Dance/movement therapy serves as the ideal modality for the integration of spirituality into the therapeutic setting. Given our unique training, dance/movement therapists are able to highlight and interact with spiritual elements on a body level as it arises in movement. In the end, the goal is to create an informed space where individuals can feel seen, on both a physical and spiritual level, while celebrating and honoring their experience.

Keywords: spirituality, religion, dance/movement therapy, healing, black communities

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, all glory be to God! May your favor forever be upon me.

I would like to thank my mother and grandmother for their unwavering and unconditional support. You both continue to instill in me the values of compassion, creativity, and faithfulness to my journey. Additional gratitude to my godmother, sister, uncle, aunt, family, and closest friends for your continued prayers and support as I embarked on this academic experience.

Thank you to my professors Susan Orkand and Elise Risher for imparting your wisdom and expertise to me. You have fostered a space that empowered me to explore and express my authentic self. Thank you to Nichole Mulet for being a mentor to me, and providing guidance and reassurance during my internship experience.

To my cohort, my class, and my new lifelong friends, Lauren, Rachel, Aaron, Iris, Ashmita, Grace, Dilara, and Johnny, there's nine of us! Wow!

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Introduction..... | 5 |
| Part I: Literature Review..... | 6 |
| Evolution of African Spiritual Movement Practices | 6 |
| Incorporating Spirituality into Dance/movement therapy..... | 9 |
| Part II: Discussion..... | 11 |
| Model for Observing Spirituality for Dance/Movement Therapist..... | 11 |
| Recognizing Spiritual Communication..... | 12 |
| Manifestation of Spiritual Connections..... | 14 |
| Reflection through Kinesthetic Awareness..... | 17 |
| Multi-realm Witnessing..... | 19 |
| Conclusion..... | 22 |
| References..... | 24 |

Introduction

Many cultures around the world engage in ritualistic processes for a wide range of circumstances. One common theme that connects rituals cross-culturally is the use of movement. In spiritual rituals, movement can take on various qualities, from the heavy stomping of the Black Baptist churches to the silent stillness of Tibetan Buddhists. Spiritual ritual practices can be communal or individual, with a general goal of some form of restoration. The restoration could be for one's spirit, health, community, connection to a higher power, or any number of things. In the literature, movement, and dance have been found to be the cornerstones of spiritual practices ((Brooke, 2006; Hazzard-Donald, 2011; Monteiro & Wall, 2011; Kraus, 2010). Dance and movement, within spiritual rituals, serve as a “holistic structure” (Monteiro & Wall, 2011, p. 235) where individuals can engage with their communities, empower themselves, have freedom of expression, and connect mind and body (Meyer, 2015). In my experiences, spirituality has developed to become a lifelong quest for an understanding of the role I have in this body and with my presence in this space.

I chose to follow a timeline of different African movement healing rituals because it provided a clear look at how some spiritual practices remained constant while other practices were forced to evolve. While some African movement healing rituals have been practiced and passed on through generations unchanged, others have had to adapt to changing environments (Glocke, 2011). Observed spiritual rituals and movement’s meanings differ vastly across the African continent. However, the African aesthetic remained consistent and distinct from other cultures around the world. This aesthetic consists of angularity, polyrhythms, character embodiment (mimicry), body isolations, and circular formations (Hazzard-Donald, 2011). These qualities of the aesthetic continue to be seen throughout the African diaspora as well.

Spirituality and everyday life are deeply intertwined, and both are reflected in the movement and dances expressed by these communities. Wyoma (2003) articulated that integrated healing and movement look like waking up and tuning in, honoring one's body, and describing breathing as the worship of the body. She demonstrated that each breath provides life to the movement. Tapping into that energy or life source, dancers can engage in the movement for long periods of time (Sounds True, 2003).

Evolution of African Spiritual Movement Practices

Hazzard-Donald (2011) describes two main paths that developed from the older spiritual healing movement practices of the African Diaspora. These two paths can loosely be categorized as secular dance and the Black church scene. Secular dance in this context refers to movement styles that emerged within black communities that at its core have a root in spiritual expression. Outside of organized religion, secular dance highlights injustice in society and speaks to the exploration of the purpose and meaning of liberation (Corbett, 2013). Secular dance includes styles like hip-hop, which is an umbrella term used to describe a culture of fashion and music in addition to dance, and black vernacular dance.

On the shoulders of these African and Black American practices in secular dance, arose a culture of hip-hop in the African American community. The umbrella term of hip-hop encompasses a collection of music, dance, and other artistic expressions rooted in the aesthetics of African culture. Osumare (2016), has described this aesthetic as an expressivity using rhythmic timing and rhetorical strategies drawn from sociocultural context. In America, this reflection of movement practices from West and Central Africa survived through the Atlantic slave trade and influenced 21st-century hip-hop. Communities that founded and took part in hip-

hop culture were often those that experienced social injustice, intense emotions of frustration, and intergenerational trauma (Washington, 2018). One way the black communities found healing was through the art of hip-hop. Krumping is a branch of hip-hop that developed in the Black communities of Los Angeles, California. Movement qualities of Krump dance have been described as fast-paced and consist of jerk-like motions. The shaking movement has often been associated with spiritual meanings by those who are performing the movement. There is not one singular spiritual meaning to the movement, rather there are many interpretations the mover and observer can have for the same step (Seltzer-Kelly, 2010).

Character embodiment is just one of the aesthetics rooted in African dance that has been rebuilt in the context of Krump. During a movement, dancers may impulsively or intentionally embody experiences of pain, struggle, freedom, praise, or prayer, through postures and gestures. For example, moving with your arms bound behind your back may resemble oppression or incarceration (Todd, 2011). Spirituality in Krump dance is an examination and affirmation of the mover's identity.

This style of dance evokes healing that takes place by exploring controlled impulses and unpredictable gestures. Monteiro and Wall (2011) use words like destabilizing and transcendence to describe the bodily impact of this dance form. The healing sought out by Krump dancers reflects the society in which we live, with some even calling the style spiritual warfare (Fitzgerald, 2009). Black Americans in these communities are faced daily with prejudice, social injustice, and systemic racism. Krump dancing lends a space where individuals can utilize movement to work through problems and negative feelings such as stress, feelings of being

overwhelmed, and frustration. Ultimately this will reduce the chances of those individuals experiencing psychological and behavioral challenges (Monteiro & Wall, 2011).

The other path Black Americans pursued in an effort to retain and develop spiritual movement practices is through Black church communities. Just as societies and the people in them have evolved and adapted, so has the way spiritual healing practices are experienced. During the enslavement of African people, all spiritual practices had to be hidden and subverted. The adaptation from traditional spiritual practices was forced upon the enslaved to avoid being punished for displaying “primitive” or “disgusting” social behavior (Hazzard-Donald, 2011). In an effort to combat the spiritual practices of enslaved Africans, White organized religious groups relied on their church structures to impose their own boundaries and standards (Hazzard-Donald, 2011). The structure consisted of pews or rowed seating and a pulpit. The seats were typically classified by church status of affiliation. Rowed seating restricted interactions with other attendees and directed the focus to one location. Attendees may have also found that their movement was limited by the close proximity of others and the closeness of the chairs. This made spiritual expression difficult for those who were used to presenting larger movements like running, jumping, or dancing. African movement practices had to undergo reconstruction to conform to this structure (Glocke, 2011).

The purpose of examining how cultures and communities display spirituality through movement is so that as we witness another’s movements, we can recognize the qualities that speak to a deeper understanding of one’s relation to their spiritual culture.

Incorporating Spirituality into Dance/Movement Therapy

It is no secret that mental health problems can occur in anyone, regardless of race, gender, or religion. Yet many communities are resistant to seeking out help through therapy, particularly communities made up of religious and/or spiritual people of color (Campbell & Winchester, 2020; Codjoe et al, 2021; Knifton et al., 2010). So why do these communities avoid therapeutic help? Perhaps it is the lack of resources and opportunities, or maybe the long-standing history of discrimination and racism in the healthcare industry. To understand the stigma, first, you have to know the history between the Black community and mental health. From the time of slavery members of the Black community have had their emotions and feelings invalidated and dismissed.

Black communities have often favored turning to religion or leaning on their spiritual practices to address mental health (Codjoe et al., 2021). From my own experience, I have witnessed members of Black religious communities beginning to be advised against psychotherapy because of its lack of spiritual acknowledgment. Jones et al. (2018) suggest that incorporating African Americans' religious and spiritual values, when deemed to be appropriate, could benefit the therapeutic relationship as well as improve the outcome of the individual's treatment. Assessing spirituality and incorporating values into the treatment invites the client to show up in a way that is more relevant to them or perhaps new to them. It is also important to point out that this is not a one size fits all approach for addressing a Black person's experience with spirituality or therapy. The roles of religion and spirituality display differently in every person (Jones et al., 2018). However, to not bring spirituality up at all would be to potentially ignore the core of someone's values and purpose. Nevertheless, this is still useful in therapeutic settings because the topic of spirituality may reflect a culture within their community that was

experienced and influential to where they are now. Religion and spirituality are just one piece of the cultural competence puzzle when it comes to creating treatment approaches for Black Americans. Other components are open dialogues of racial-based experiences and creating a positive racial/ethnic identity development (Bean et al., 2002). Another reason why members of the Black community do not seek out therapy is that oftentimes they do not see themselves represented by some of the concepts and theorists of the psychology field (Jones et al., 2018). It is also worth mentioning, regardless of what the psychology field as a whole reflects, the field of dance/movement therapy has grown drastically, since its inception in the early 1940s, in the diversification of its practice (Chang, 2016; American Dance Therapy Association, n.d). Chang (2016) goes on to highlight areas such as cultural competency in education, diverse faces in higher positions, and engagement in community activism, where dance/movement therapy was developed to better represent and serve individuals of all backgrounds.

One of the reasons that increased attention is on cultural competence is because of the concern that traditional approaches were Eurocentric, containing Western values and assumptions that were not accessible to people of color (Jones et al., 2018). Research has also shown that counseling/psychology educational programs do not offer sufficient training on religious/spiritual issues that may arise in therapeutic spaces (Berkel et al., 2007; Plante, 2007).

The therapeutic relationship is also an area where people of color may feel deterred. Williams and Justice (2010) found that in a therapeutic relationship involving different races, there is a greater level of rejection, misdiagnosis, mistrust, and misunderstanding. Pedersen (1988), in his handbook for developing multicultural awareness, even stated that some minorities

feel that divulging too much information to a White therapist will result in being reported or backlash.

Model for Observing Spirituality for Dance/Movement Therapist

Dance/movement therapy offers a unique lens in the field of psychotherapy.

Dance/movement therapists, by nature, begin from a body perspective. The emphasis on a creative approach to the connection between mind and body is congruent with the aesthetics of African-inspired healing practices, making dance/movement therapy a relevant structure for members of Black communities seeking therapy (Tyson, 2006).

Dance/movement therapists often utilize movement-based observational assessments for information. However, they are not limited to those assessments. They also use more traditional psychological assessment methods when necessary or in conjunction with modality-specific practices. Yet, movement-based specific observational assessments for integrating and understanding spiritual themes as they may arise in dance/movement therapy settings are either incomplete or virtually non-existent (Brooke, 2006). This thesis proposes a movement-based model to help guide dance/movement therapists in answering the question: *What does spirituality look like on a body level?* This model, created by a dance/movement therapist for dance/movement therapists, challenges the clinicians' understanding of spirituality and surpasses the out-of-body task of answering "yes or no" questions. When it comes to exploring a client's relationship with spirituality it can be difficult to grasp the full picture of their experience through formal assessments or questioning. Anandarajah (2005) stated that the most valuable way to understand an individual's relationship with spirituality is through an informal assessment, incorporating active listening to their stories and experiences. Within the next half of

this paper, I offer an assessment model for dance/movement therapists that takes a body-level approach to consider spirituality while acknowledging cultural influences. The components of this model arose out of one-to-one movement experiences I have conducted. For that reason, while explaining the model I will also provide a parallel account of the way in which this model may be displayed during a session.

Recognizing Spiritual Communication

The first component of this model is recognizing spiritual presence through the non-vocalized communication/gestures that are present within the movement. Communication is an essential component of religious and spiritual practices. The acts of prayer, communion, ritual, or meditation all require a level of communication that may look different in form and action. Sometimes, our auditory processing first picks up the vocalized accompaniments of spiritual communication, such as singing, chanting, or non-vocal body percussions. Simultaneously, on a body level, there is communication that is also emerging with its own purpose and meaning. Observations can be made about an individual's meaning of movement; however, we must remember that what is observed gets filtered through our perception, which is curated from our lived experiences (Knapp et al., 2014). Thus, in a dance/movement therapy space, there is more opportunity for observational exchange between the witnessed movement and embodied/lived experiences of both the individual and therapist. Even though movement is often thought of as a universal language, there are some movements unique to spiritual practices and religious practices, based on culture and/or region (Moore & Yamamoto, 2012). For example, spiritual movement practices like American Christian praise dance and Umoya, a South African dance both use similar gestures of pulling extended arms inward into one's torso or spirit. Wyoma

(2003) interprets this movement as pulling peace, energy, or God's presence into your own spirit. Depending on the mover, the pulling motion in the arm may possess different movement qualities, each entailing its own emotional meaning. A quick, direct pull could insinuate urgency or emphasis on the self. Whereas a sustained, direct pull can imply the tenderness of peace and the desire to maintain its soothing energy (Sounds True, 2003).

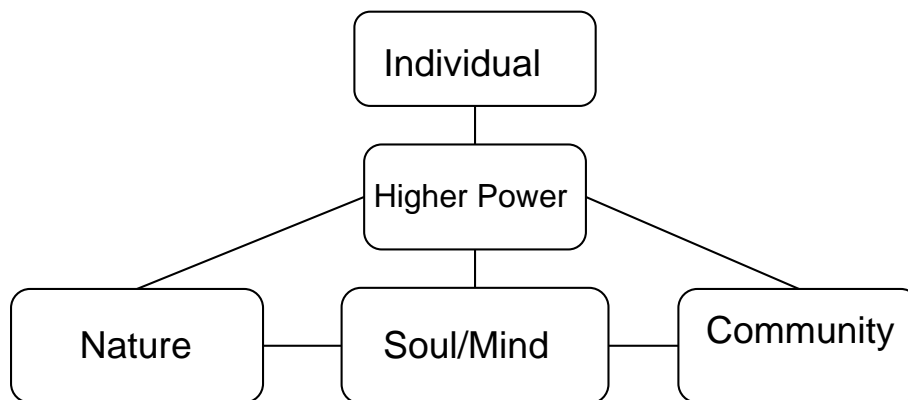
As mentioned previously, alongside this model I will be recounting ways in which spirituality can hold a heavy presence in the dance/movement therapy space. During a one-to-one movement visit, I make my way to a client's space where they are in their bed looking out the window. My movement history with clients often lend themselves to a spiritual theme arising in our conversations. I am welcomed in, with eagerness to share a song list made for me to play during our movement time. These music requests in the context of one-to-one movement sessions are not uncharacteristic. I express curiosity about song choices and what the message of a song may mean to a client. I play the songs requested in the order given to me. I want to know more about any associations there may be with these songs and what they represent for the client. As the first song comes to an end, I ask about the significance of these specific songs. I am told that these songs are songs of healing that are sung and moved to when healing is needed. The movement captures my attention. Often, there is an expression of release that I feel while witnessing clients' movements. They turn their gaze away from me while they close their eyes and sing along to the music. Their head releases back to the pillow while their upper body sways right to left to the rhythm of the music. Together we explore the movements and gestures used to express healing. One movement that is shared is a shaking gesture. With elbows held close to the sides and freely flicking forearms and wrists up and down in a quick effort motion, fingers curled into loose fists, we keep a steady sway to the music. The meaning placed to this movement is

“shaking off the sickness”. Together, we stay in this shaking gesture for a few songs. I begin to feel a sense of persistence similar to a trance. They slowly close their eyes, staying in that gesture and turning their focus internally. At this moment, I stop mirroring and become a witness to the non-verbal conversation taking place.

Manifestation of Spiritual Connections

Awe, simplicity, living in the moment, and community are some of the characteristics of indigenous spirituality that we need to pay more attention to today. (Collister, 2006)

This figure illustrates the pathways that a spiritual connection could occur from or within an individual. In some cases, there could be more than one connection made at a time. The connection between an individual and a higher power can be found within the other three connections as well.



Connection to Inner Awareness (Soul/Mind)

The connection to oneself is often a connection that is overlooked or undervalued in Western society. A large part of this disconnect is in response to the structure of society. To be connected to yourself means that you have some level of bodily awareness and attunement to

your internal experience and your external response. The connection between oneself and their soul/mind or the body-mind connection is fostered in the field of dance/movement therapy. This connection or integration suggests that the systems of the body and signals of the mind do not exist separately from each other (Chaiklin & Wengrower, 2009; Siegel, 2012).

Nature

Connecting ourselves to nature can provide numerous benefits to our biological bodies as well as our psyche (Saumaa, 2020). It has even been studied that children can form attachments to nature, where nature takes on a resembled expression of spirituality (Louv, 2012; Miller, 2015; Schein, 2018). This connection between a person and nature is unveiled in a desire for wonder, a sense of awe, and excitement for what nature holds (Christian, 2020). Through nature, we can exercise all of our senses to react and interact with the environment around us to inspire a deeper connection to spirituality. Spirituality, as presented by Christian (2020), is a source of a higher power that provides guidance, purpose, and inner comfort. Nature does play a large role in our spirituality and healing. Nature has always been present in spiritual rituals, especially when looking at spiritual healing practices for mental and physical ailments. Calvert (2021) discusses the healing benefits nature provides for individuals with trauma. Nature can support the healing of trauma by providing a grounding environment where an individual can connect with their breath, “the power of the spirit” (pg. 21). Having breath awareness allows for attunement to the experiences and sensations offered by nature. Hackney (1998) expressed that having breath awareness lends itself to a greater spiritual connection to the universe.

Community

Having a connection to a community that shares similar spiritual or religious beliefs and values serves as a support system for many individuals. Examples of these religious and spiritual communities can look like large/small-scale gatherings for prayer or worship, yoga groups, or spiritual-based group counseling. Studies have shown that being a part of religious and/or spiritual communities has led to increased higher social support and better coping skills; resulting in decreased rates of depression, suicide, and substance misuse (VanderWeele, 2017; Wilcox & Wolfinger, 2016; Strawbridge et al., 1997; Wu et al., 2021). A study conducted by Wu et.al (2021) found that the ability and freedom to take part in spiritual/religious practices within one's own community is more relevant to well-being than the act of attending religious services. This study looked specifically at refugees living in New York and the importance of inclusivity in communities.

The association between religious inclusion and well-being, even among those who do not actively practice religion, suggests that this variable may measure a more fundamental concern for refugees. Trauma, insecurity, and risk are hallmarks of the refugee experience, and some of Utica's refugees come from countries that suppressed or limited the exercise of religion...we find that one's perceived ability to practice religion in their community is more closely tied to their sense of well-being than an individual's religiosity or one's attendance of religious services. This result is robust and holds across different religious affiliations, different refugee groups, and for both recent arrivals and refugees who have lived in the United States for a long period of time. (p.305)

Understanding the value of spiritually aligned communities can provide insight as to how a client may show up in a group therapy space where spiritual values may not be aligned with the group community. By ignoring an individual's value of spirituality or religion, a therapist may be diminishing the effects of the therapeutic work. Ultimately, depending on the individual or group, this perceived isolation from the community can lead to retraumatization, insecurity, and decreased levels of well-being (Wu et al., 2021).

Though the session begins as a connection between therapist and client, it does not always stay in that dynamic. As attention is brought to an internal focus, the therapeutic connection becomes only one of the dynamics in the space. In the role of an observer, my attention is drawn to perceived connections created by the client's movements. I feel as though the gestures being performed represent a call. This is a call for connection with God and connection with the soul/mind. My response to witnessing this experience is that perhaps the feeling of persistence is a feeling of waiting on the call to be answered. An additional realm has been introduced into the therapeutic relationship. I, as a therapist, have to understand that in this therapeutic space, I am not the only influential factor accounted for. Through movement, clients are able to bring in their spirituality to aid the therapeutic process. Being able to welcome and incorporate one's full identity into the therapeutic space is intrinsic to the work we do as therapists, as this allows for interventions to be more relevant for our clients and shows them that we recognize them for who they are.

Reflection through Kinesthetic Awareness

This step of the model can transpire in two ways: from the perspective of the mover or the reflection that takes place in the witness. For the therapist to inquire deeper into a client's

experience there must be a self-reflection internally first. Tufekcioglu and Muran (2015) stated that a therapist engaging in a therapeutic process has to “courageously confront themselves and expand their awareness of themselves in relation to yet another individual” (p. 472). This examination of oneself speaks to the understanding that nothing is without reference, meaning that every word, emotion, and experience that a therapist witnesses is filtered through our schema. This filter is shaped by our relationships, upbringing, and cultural identities. Pausing for self-reflection grants us the opportunity to peel apart what the individual is really expressing and what the therapist is interpreting based on their experience. The added term, reflection, implies that there is an additional action taking place alongside having awareness. Kinesthetic reflection asks the question: what is my bodily reaction responding to? Have I felt this way before, and what is it attributed to? Fogel (2009) further detailed “the more we actively practice creating opportunities for embodied self-awareness to emerge...the more we have the ability to stay longer in the subjective emotional present and the ability to choose to tune into particular sensations in particular parts of the body” (p. 61). The whole-body reflection or kinesthetic awareness stage of the model can be used as a check-in point for the mover to bring awareness to where they are in the present moment. However, this can simultaneously provide the witness an opportunity to check in and take care of themselves. During an experience with a client, as they turned their focus internally, I also check in with myself, bringing awareness to my own embodied response. In reflecting, I notice that the energy I feel in my spirit is oscillating between observing objectively and witnessing subjectively. Objectively, I am able to connect how the client names their experience to what I am seeing. Yet subjectively I have my own understanding of religious music and spiritual movement as it relates to my cultural identity. There is a feeling of familiarity in my response to witnessing both auditory and visual. The songs chosen are songs

that are also familiar to me through church or hearing them around the house. Rather than dismissing my own associations with the movement and song, I use it as insight to feed my curiosity as to how a client may be processing the experience. For example, while observing gestures they provide, I reflect on the times I have witnessed the same movements in Black church settings. This may prompt conversations about what a spiritual healing movement looks like for them, which can lead to them discussing their experience growing up in church.

Multi-realm Witnessing

Mason (2009) acknowledges the examination of other realms through the process of Authentic Movement. The concept of Authentic Movement was structured by dance/ movement therapist Mary Whitehouse, and influenced by Carl Jung's theories. In Authentic Movement the intention is to give way to impulse and instinctual movement that is activated within our body (Wyman-McGinty,1998). Authentic Movement is a practice that has evolved into a therapeutic tool used by many dance/movement therapists today, due to the additional development of therapists like Janet Adler who continued the work. Adler was the first to attach the titled roles of mover and witness when discussing Authentic Movement (Haze, 1999). Understanding the subtle differences between the roles of witnessing and observing is important to this model. Each of these roles has a specific intention within the steps. Unlike the first two components of this model, where observations are formulated and assessed to uncover potential meanings of gestures and movements, multi-realm witnessing requires a different form of attunement. According to Janet Adler's essay in Authentic Movement (1999), a witness "is not 'looking at' the person moving, she is witnessing, listening, and bringing a specific quality of attention or presence to the experience of the mover" (p.114). The witness is given permission to set aside

the theory and analytic mindset and just be with the individual. Witnessing allows the therapist to draw a deeper empathetic connection to the individual vicariously through their movement and emotion. The Cambridge Dictionary defines an observer as a person who watches what happens but has no active participation (Cambridge University Press, n.d.). An observer is typically seen as standing apart or independent of who they are observing. The main takeaway from Authentic Movement that applies to multi-realm witnessing is the concept of witnessing. As dance/movement therapists who work with individuals who recognize the existence of additional realms, we are not only witnessing the mover but we may also be a witness to communication transpiring across connections.

However, there are beliefs and practices that recognize that there are additional realms occupying the witness space as well. Have you ever heard that experiencing a shivering cold chill was thought to be a ghost or an ancestor passing through you to lend you wisdom? Or maybe you believe God or a deity is always watching over you, interacting and intervening for you. Some individuals personify the presence of nature, by acknowledging it as a witness to our daily routines. All of these examples are evidence of multi-realm witnessing (Eshleman, 2016; Guoqing, 2004).

Although multi-realm witnessing may seem like an abstract concept, within the context of spirituality and religion, the recognition of other realms often occurs in practices of many cultures. The natural, supernatural, and ancestral are some of the more common realms that are observed by different cultural groups (Eshleman, 2016; Guoqing, 2004; Washington, 2005). Enslaved African Americans formed a spiritual movement practice that involved worshipers moving in a rhythmic foot shuffle, while synchronously clapping, praising (singing/vocal), and

moving in circular patterns. This religious dance, originally called ring shout, is still practiced today in churches, particularly in the South under the short name of shout or praise break (Elliott, 2019). Ring shout depicted an embodied prayer that, depending on the intention or context, could represent communication between spiritual realms. When danced, Ring Shout was a way to call on ancestors and the spiritual realm. Nowadays, shouting is more often used in churches to communicate and connect with the Holy Ghost or Holy Spirit; the movement opens the space for interaction and conversation with the heavenly and spiritual realm (Washington, 2005).

Ashe is a Yoruba phrase that represents a universal spiritual energy. Yoruba is a belief system used by a large number of West African cultures. Coleman (2002) wrote about the Yoruba belief in the importance of acknowledging the presence of those who came before us who are no longer in our physical realm. Whether we are conscious of it or not, our presentation and actions can be in response to how we interact with our ancestral realm. The idea of multi-realm witnessing is that in a therapeutic relationship, there may be more than the therapist and the individual/group present. In multi-realm witnessing there is an understanding that the therapist's influence is not the only one present in the therapeutic space. In dance/movement therapy, as a clinician/observers/witnesses, our role is to do our due diligence in understanding some foundation of our client's relationship to spirituality. Making an effort to acknowledge the different realms individuals may bring into the therapeutic space is important for the therapist. Some therapists may operate believing they are the sole facilitator of the therapeutic space, assuming that a client's behavior is always in response to therapeutic intervention. We cannot always assume the individuals we work with see it the same way. From my experiences with clients, I have witnessed a connection that is a fundamental value to who they are. Allowing space for their spiritual identity to take presence and hold weight in the room, I have felt opened

a deeper level of trust in our therapeutic relationship. By attuning to the client's cultural framework, I am able to hold the therapeutic space with an understanding that they are having a spiritual experience that may be vulnerable for them. I also have the information to better understand how they define their spiritual healing.

Conclusion

Though this literature focused on the cultural lens of Black Americans, it is still applicable to people representing all walks of life. For some individuals, therapy can be inaccessible due to economic, time, and resource barriers. When individuals are able to overcome those barriers, they should not be met with assessments, interventions, and frameworks that are not accessible to them as well. Before dance/movement therapy was packaged into the expressive-based psychotherapeutic modality it is today, it was a healing arts tool used by many cultures. Each culture exemplifies its own aesthetics, qualities, and meanings. Working with a therapist who possesses the tools and ability to observe and witness the spirituality within movement by embracing one's history of spiritual healing practices is not always a given.

There are two main takeaways from this paper that I hope continue to inspire not only myself but other dance/movement therapists and psychologists alike. The first is that therapy and spirituality/religion can exist in the same space. Even though the research on how this integration is demonstrated in therapeutic spaces is limited, there is ample evidence that when incorporated, the therapeutic effectiveness only increases. Deconstructing the stigmas of mental health care in Black spiritual/religious communities requires a conscious change of efforts from both parties. It requires the willingness of Black spiritual/religious communities and a systematic reconstruction

of how we observe and witness in the mental health field. As dance/movement therapists we can start bridging this divide by honoring the spiritual essence of the individual with whom we work, as appropriate, attuning to their ever-developing spiritual journey and acknowledging their lived experiences. This can be implemented regardless of whether or not you are a clinician who is religious, spiritual, or still exploring what spirituality means to you. Secondly, celebrate your identity through your theoretical framework. Our personal experiences are just that! They are unique and they are our own. What you value and what you believe requires no one else's approval. The therapeutic space is intended to be a place of self-discovery, healing, and celebration of who you are. To the reader, I leave you with this poem of prayer.

*Let this be the generation that breaks the silence of age-old trials
Bring forth our heavy tribulations, and lay them at the feet of our Father
Let us revive our earthly bodies in the works of therapy, shedding stigma
and preparing both the flesh and the spirit, for greater things are yet to come.*

Ashe (may it be so) ~Rebekah Brown

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