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Belly Dance as a Means of Dance Therapy for Survivors of Sexual Assault

Nadia De Leon
Western Kentucky University

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*Belly Dance as a Means of Dance Therapy for
Survivors of Sexual Assault*

A Senior Thesis Submitted to
the Western Kentucky University

Honors Program

by

Nadia De Leon

Spring 2006

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Abstract

This thesis is a theoretical review, as well as an empirical study, of a Belly Dance course offered to women survivors of sexual assault. Its purpose is to assess the effectiveness of Belly Dance in helping such women overcome trauma, based on the hypothesis that Belly Dance improves women's confidence and sexuality issues by promoting emotional and physical well-being, and improving body image and self-esteem. The history, practice, and philosophy of Belly Dance are presented in the background information, while invalidating stereotypes. The history, definition, and methodology of Dance Therapy are also presented, while validating movement as an expression of the self and a process for actualizing the psyche. The rationale section includes an explanation of why Belly Dance is considered a healing dance, a discussion of the physiological and psychological benefits of practicing it, and methodological propositions for utilizing Belly Dance with Survivors of Sexual Assault, based on concepts of Body Ego Technique. Descriptions of the course and lesson plans are included in the method section. The results include observations and graphics with data gathered through surveys of the students' feelings regarding themselves before, during, and after the course. The research conclusions show that Belly Dance has the power to touch women's emotional core and generate changes in their psyches, creating a healing effect that fills women with confidence. By reaffirming its beauty and sacredness, Belly Dance teaches women how to embody their sexuality, how to overcome shame, and how to love, celebrate, and be proud of their bodies, resulting in emotional healing from the trauma of sexual assault.

Background Information

An Introduction to Belly Dance

Authentic Belly Dance is not the deceptive, immoral dance of seduction that western Hollywood-influenced stereotypes would have us believe. Belly Dance has been misrepresented by cabaret dancers and incorrectly portrayed by the media. In reality, Belly Dance is a natural, earthy, beneficial, enjoyable, and completely ethical dance that honors women and femininity. The proper term for this dance is “Oriental Dance,” which can be a highly disciplined art as well as a form of casual exercise and entertainment. The first American teachers disliked the word "belly dance" because of its sexual connotation and focus on the women’s torsos and not on their dancing technique. In her article “*Roots*,” the well-known and respected teacher Morocco (Carolina Vargas), who has spent more than thirty years studying, performing, and teaching Belly Dance, states: “To use the disgusting misnomer ‘belly dance’ is not only incorrect, it is an insult equivalent to calling Flamenco ‘cockroach killing’”(n.d., ¶45). Nowadays, the term *Belly Dance* has been accepted by many teachers and reclaimed by new dancers because the body part where the movements are focused is, indeed, the belly. And this has nothing to do with a seductive goal; in fact, it has to do with fertility.



Many dance scholars support a theory that places Belly Dance as the oldest dance in the history of humanity, stating that it originated as a fertility ritual thousands of years ago. They use as evidence for their theory 17,000 years-old rock engravings found in southern Italy, Greece, and Egypt, as well as famous fertility goddesses/ women sculptures such as the Venus of Willendorf.

Figure 1 - Venus of Willendorf¹

Furthermore, some dance researchers –such as dancer, writer and editor Daniella Gioseffi in her book *Earth Dancing*– claim that Belly Dancing was originally a ritual form for the Mother Earth Goddess in primal matriarchal or polytheistic societies in which the dance honored femininity and was passed down from mothers to daughters.



**Figure 2 - Mahadeo Hills (Central India)
Cave Painting of two women dancing²**

Another important theory about the origin of Belly Dance is the one based on its childbirth facilitation and training capabilities. Several dancers, including the famed dance ethnologist La Meri, who traveled extensively throughout the Middle East for research and training purposes in the ‘20s and ‘30s, claim to have witnessed rituals in which a woman in labor was surrounded by other women who performed Belly Dancing in a sort of hypnotizing ritual for moral support (*Learning the Danse du Ventre, Dance Perspectives*, 1961 as cited in Vargas, *Roots*, ¶ 21.)

¹ Image Source: http://cv.uoc.es/~991_04_005_01_web/fitxer/willendorf.jpg

²http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00routesdata/bce_500back/cavepaintings/cavedance/cavedance.html

Belly Dancing arrived to America as an imported cabaret spectacle referred to as *Danse du ventre*, which originated in the Middle East during the colonization of Africa by European countries. Referring to this degradation process, the Armenian dancer Armen Ohanian states in her book *The Dancer of Shamahka*:

Thus in Cairo one evening I saw, with sick incredulous eyes, one of our most sacred dances degraded into a bestiality horrible and revolting. It is our poem of the mystery and pain of motherhood, which all true Asiatic men watch with reverence and humility, in the far corners of Asia where the destructive breath of the Occident has not yet penetrated. In this olden Asia, which has kept the dance in its primitive purity, it represents maternity, the mysterious conception of life, the suffering and the joy with which a new soul is brought in the world. Could any man born of woman contemplate this most holy subject, expressed in an art so pure and so ritualistic as our eastern dance, with less than profound reverence? Such is our Asiatic veneration of motherhood, that there are countries and tribes whose most sacred oath is sworn upon the stomach, because it is from this sacred cup that humanity has issued. But the spirit of the Occident had touched this holy dance, and it became the horrible 'danse du ventre' ... I heard the lean Europeans chuckling, I saw lascivious smiles upon even the lips of Asiatics, and I fled" (as cited in Vargas, n.d., *Roots*, ¶13, 14).

Even today in some Middle Eastern regions that remain unaffected by the influence of Western ways of thinking, women dance in a circle around a mother in labor to induce her to repeat the movements and to give her the psychological support shown in

the live-giving gift in every woman's destiny (Vargas, *Roots*, n.d., ¶ 80). In the informal and familial settings of some Muslim societies, women still gather by themselves in a separate location to dance to the rhythms of the drums, have fun, and interact. This traditional form of Belly Dance is called Raks-sharki. Nevertheless, in most of the Middle East the rise of Political Islam has led to more puritanical attitudes in general. Dancers who appear in public, dancing in front of men who are not family to them, contradict orthodox Islamic values. As a result, the widely held notion that professional dancers are prostitutes is being reinforced throughout the Arab countries, from Afghanistan to Morocco. In Egypt, the rise of Political Islam is creating a backlash against Belly Dance. By law, in the country that names itself as the place where Belly Dance was born, these dancers cannot dance on television, and police monitor live performances to ensure that the dancer's skirt ends below the knee and that the navel is covered, even if only with transparent material (Nieuwkerk, 1995).

These attitudes might sound opposite to our values of freedom and free will, but they are actually understandable given Arab religious and cultural values. Strangely, here in the U.S. Belly Dancers also often suffer the weight of many prejudices. The stereotype of a Belly Dancer is often overlapped with little more than that of a stripper, as the concept of Middle Eastern Dance is all too often associated with dingy clubs. Some dance studios and gyms are embracing, and/or exploiting, the current Belly Dancing fad, while others refuse to offer Belly Dance lessons, considering them immoral or inappropriate for a respectful center. Parents hesitate about allowing their teenage daughters to join Belly Dancing Lessons. School administrators forbid the performance of Belly Dance in after-school programs because of the “depraved” exposure of a woman’s midriff, and/or the decadent seductive connotations (Shira, 2001).

Dance should be respected as a universal language that allows us to better understand the cultures of others. It is impossible to understand cultures different from ours, or widen our concepts in general, if we do not start with an open mind that does not judge dances by the amount of clothing worn by the dancers. Dance forms should be interpreted, analyzed, and understood under the light of the cultural meaning(s) attached to them. Once again, the dancer Morocco states this indignation in wonderful words in her article *Roots*:

When I first came into Oriental dance ..., I was drawn by the beauty of its music and movements and gave no thought to the possibility that it might be misinterpreted by ignorant or misinformed viewers. Innocent that I was, I assumed that the grace of a skilled dancer was sufficient to prove the beauty and legitimacy of this ancient art form. How wrong I was! I've lost count of the times that an erroneous and degrading value judgment of my morality and worthiness was made, based on ... previous performances of those who, in every profession, cater to the lowest common denominator (Vargas, *Roots*, ¶ 1).

The truth is that Belly Dance not only has many physiological benefits (such as developing proper posture, muscular strength, coordination, and cardiovascular fitness, easing menstrual pains, improving circulation and digestion, and releasing tension), it also has several psychological benefits. Most importantly, it improves self-image and confidence, which are very important benefits, especially for young women. Belly Dance lets them get in contact with their bodies and accept them as they are. Belly Dance makes any thin or overweight woman enjoy feminine dancing. This acceptance of themselves in

front of the mirror image as much as in front of other people is more easily achieved in an “only girls” atmosphere. That's why many Belly Dance teachers, including myself, don't even allow men in their studios. Second, Belly Dance also develops teamwork and a deep feeling of sisterhood among the members of a "dancing troupe." Tribal Belly Dance is danced in couples or larger groups in which dance is improvised by the "cue-er," who is the woman in the front left corner. This title is shared because of the rotation of positions, resulting in a group dynamic in which the higher level of team work is reached with the synchronicity of the dancers.

Belly Dance can be a way of life, or something women do for occasional recreation, but it is always beneficial to the women who practice it. It has a way of seducing us, women, into the quest for the light of our own feminine identity, as well as constructing a place of belonging for that identity, in history, in society, regardless of the time, place, and culture we come from. Belly Dance invokes and evokes the universal energy of womanhood from the astral collective consciousness into our striking present, into our sweat and skin, the tips of our fingers, and the rhythm of our hearts beating life.

An Introduction to Dance Therapy

Dance Therapy is a form of Creative Arts Therapy, such as Art, Psychodrama, and Music Therapy. According to the American Dance Therapy Association (A.D.T.A.), Dance/Movement Therapy is “the psychotherapeutic use of movement as a process which furthers the emotional, social, cognitive and physical integration of the individual” (A.D.T.A., 2006, ¶ 1).

Dance/Movement Therapy emerged as a distinct profession in the 1940s with the work of pioneers such as Marian Chance, Mary Whitehouse, Franziska Boas, and Liljan Espenaki. Today there are over twenty universities and institutions in the United States and abroad offering post-graduate academic programs in Dance Therapy. Presently, the A.D.T.A. is represented in forty-eight states of the U.S. and in twenty-four countries. In the academic, psychological, and medical research fields, Dance Therapy is currently accepted and valued as an effective treatment for people with developmental, medical, social, physical, and psychological impairments. Dance/Movement Therapy (D.M.T.) is practiced in educational, medical, and mental health rehabilitation settings, nursing homes, day cares, and in health-promotion programs, as well as in private D.M.T. clinics and studios, with patients ranging from normal, to neurotic, to psychotic. D.M.T. is implemented in individual, couple, family, and group therapy formats.

The practice of Dance Therapy delves into the use of somatic psychology by applying the body-mind interface to find alternative means for therapy. The body-mind interface refers to the in-depth understanding of how the body and mind interact in health

and illness, whether physiological or psychological. Dance Therapy utilizes Laban Movement Analysis as a means of patient-therapist communication, and as an assessment, treatment, and diagnostic tool. It is rooted on the premise that the body, spirit, and mind form an integral human being in contrast to the dualistic concept of body and mind as opposite and independent parts of a being. Dance Therapy is based on the fact that body movement reflects inner emotional states; likewise, alterations and adjustments in movement behavior can lead to transformation in the psyche.

The use of dance as a cathartic and therapeutic tool or medium is an ancient concept, universal to many cultures, times, and societies. So is the use of body movement as a means of expression and an instrument to communicate feelings. D.M.T. does not always exclude therapeutic techniques based on verbal communication, but adds and builds on to the meaning and usefulness of words within the realm of actions. Movement allows individuals to express, and therapists to notice, that which words sometimes cannot convey fully or vividly enough.

Dance/Movement Therapy can be used with depressed, anxious, and even schizophrenic clients or in-patients; with patients in recovery from illnesses such as cancer in hospitals; with children who are hyperactive, suffer from attention-deficit disorder, autism, or have motor development difficulties; with the mentally retarded and the physically handicapped; with individuals in the process of psychosocial rehabilitation and reintegration; with mothers who suffer from post-partum depression; with families in group therapy; with the elderly; with women who suffer from eating disorders and/or were sexually abused; with people in body-image building, substance abuse and addiction, trauma recovery, stress management, and personality-development programs,

etc. Such are some of the many current common uses of Dance and Movement Therapy and contemporary focuses of research.

The concept that movement can be an acceptable healing force, an effective way to take care of our physical and emotional well-being, and an adequate treatment for illness, might seem revolutionary in our present Western society. Nevertheless, it is both a valid and ancient concept, reflected in this chronological sampling of quotations:

- Natural forces within us are the true healers of disease. (Hippocrates)
- To watch us dance is to hear our hearts speak. (Hopi Indian Saying)
- We dance for laughter, we dance for tears, we dance for madness, we dance for fears, we dance for hopes, we dance for screams, we are the dancers, we create the dreams. (*Albert Einstein*)
- In my dance ... the profundities of consciousness are given a channel to the light of our social day. (Isadora Duncan)
- I see dance being used as communication between body and soul, to express what it's too deep to find for words. (Ruth St. Denis)
- Dance is a song of the body. Either of joy or pain. ... Movement never lies. It is a barometer telling the state of the soul's weather. (Martha Graham)

Belly Dance as a Means of Dance Therapy

The concept that Belly Dance can be healing, that it is a fine form of exercise, and that it fosters the general well being of women has been widely accepted since its origins in the Middle East all the way to contemporary dance studios in the U.S. This fact is easily confirmed through many lines in books about the history and sociology of Middle-Eastern Dance, as well as by the vast number of websites that talk about Belly Dance as a healing tool for today's women.

Nevertheless, the material in books is very limited. This is in part because there is not a single book completely dedicated to Belly Dance's therapeutic qualities, and in part because there are not many books generally dealing with Belly Dance at all. Second, all of the material on the Internet is anecdotal information in the form of journals or casual articles. These sources talk about personal experiences of how practicing Belly Dance brings many physiological and psychological benefits. The scope of all these sources only goes as far as Belly Dance's healing powers, but it does not address Belly Dance utilized as Dance Therapy. Although Belly Dance is used widely as a form of informal therapy, this research uncovered no material regarding its use in a strict format of physical or psychotherapy, much less material following the parameters and foundations of professional Dance/Movement Therapy. Even so, there is plenty of material available to confirm many aspects of said "healing powers" of Belly Dance.

- *Physiological Benefits*

Because Belly Dance is an aerobic exercise, practicing it regularly burns calories, helping dancers regulate body weight, as well as to improve cardiovascular fitness, which in turn prevents respiratory complications as well as heart disease. Belly Dance is a strength-and-conditioning exercise for many muscles, such as the quadriceps and hamstrings, and all the muscles of the shoulders, arms, and wrists involved in arm movements. Belly Dance especially strengthens the muscles of the torso: the abdominal, pelvic, lumbar, and gluteus muscles, which in turn improve the dancer's posture. It is well known that good posture is the first step for a chain of many physiological benefits for the human body. Because Belly dance improves both cardiovascular fitness and posture, it also develops appropriate circulation and regulates breathing, which in turn augment the oxygen levels in the blood and prevent circulation and digestion complications.

The stretching and strengthening of all the muscles involved in Belly Dance, as well as the cardiovascular work-out, help relieve muscle tension. Mastering the complex and layered isolation movements of Belly Dance constitutes an intense training of neuromuscular paths, which in turn improves the dancer's coordination. There are many testimonials that affirm that the frequent practice of Belly Dance eases and prevents menstrual pains, as well as strengthens the muscles and improves the fitness endurance of women in preparation for giving birth (Vargas, *Childbirth*, 1964 and *Giving to light*, 1996). Additionally, some women find Belly Dance to be the best therapy to help them deal with Hypothyroidism, helping them feel "fully alive and healthy" (Stricklin, *Inspire Healing*, 2002). Finally, a Belly Dancer diagnosed with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome found the dance helpful to her physical condition (Amy, *Chronic Fatigue Syndrome*, n.d.).

- Psychological Benefits

The inherent psychological benefits of Belly Dance are of utmost importance to Dance/Movement Therapy as a form of psychotherapy. Many of the psychological benefits of practicing Belly Dance often are both cause and consequence of the holistic approach of Belly Dance's philosophy, theory, and techniques. Belly Dance is an art that smudges the solid and somehow arbitrary lines that Western culture and society places between mind and body. Belly Dance helps the women who practice it to experience harmony by overcoming the polarity of thinking about themselves as fragmented pieces of spirit versus flesh, and thoughts versus emotions, by seeing themselves as "whole women." Interestingly enough, the science of Dance Therapy also shares this holistic approach, by blurring the boundaries between mind/language and body/movement, by uplifting movement as a valid form of expression, and by showing that not only neurological maturation, experiences, and learning cause change in movement behavior, but that change in movement behavior can also change the psyche. Consequently, practicing Belly Dance, and the whole of its movement vocabulary so foreign and novel for Western women, "rewires" women into a state of all-encompassing emotional well being. It connects the core of their identities in womanhood, in loving their bodies, and in being comfortable with their femininity and sensuality. And it does all this collectively, with a group of other women who shower acceptance on each other.

The first and foremost benefit of the practice of Belly Dance is that it cultivates a positive body image and boosts self-esteem (Stricklin, *Cultural Influences on Body Image*, 2005). From that fact stem many other psychological benefits. The positive body image built through Belly Dance is based on the acceptance of the image of ourselves in the mirror, on the courage to dance in front of other people, and on the milestone of

revealing our bellies. This is all possible because Belly Dance is a dance that reveres the female body in all shapes and sizes (Delilah, n.d., ¶ 18). The personal appreciation of self-identity and the enhancement of self-esteem have roots in the Dance/Movement Therapy concept that asserts that people must be comfortable in their bodies in order to move their bodies. Many Belly Dance instructors, who are not therapists, unknowingly and instinctively apply the Dance/Movement Therapy method called Body-Ego Technique, a predominantly nonverbal educational and therapeutic approach to establishing, reestablishing, and/or maintaining body image and self-identity by learning and experiencing a variety of goal-directed physical movement patterns (Salkin, 1973, p.5)

Another important psychological benefit of Belly Dance, often underappreciated, is stress relief. The benefit of practicing Belly Dance periodically may lie in the simple fact of dedicating some time to ourselves. Like meditation, yoga, and taiji, Belly Dance is an exercise and art particularly suitable for those seeking inner peace and harmony. Many women who practice Belly Dance affirm that after a class they feel completely cleansed, with renewed energy and patience, grounded, and that Belly Dance class is the one time in which they can leave all their worries outside the door and rejoice in an activity they personally enjoy. This is particularly helpful in today's Western society in which women are expected to rise to the expectations of professional success without undermining their roles as nurturers, wives, and mothers. Stress is the cause of many psychological and physiological afflictions women suffer today, and Belly Dance's value to counterbalance life's stress cannot be overestimated.

Available on the Internet are numerous articles, quotes, and anecdotes of women from the U.S. to Australia, who experienced Belly Dance as emotional healing while

recovering from breast cancer or uterine cancer. These women, who had very different personal experiences with cancer, all share something in common: they have undergone either mastectomy or hysterectomy surgeries (McAghon, n.d.). There is some information regarding dance therapy being used to enhance the recovery of cancer survivors in oncology centers and hospitals all over the world (Cohen, 1999). Nevertheless, something distinct stands out: when the type of dance being used for this healing therapy is Belly Dance, the survivors/dancers are almost always women who have gone through a surgery that makes them feel “less of a woman,” a surgery that undermines their personal feelings of femininity and their identities as women (refer to Clay, McAghon, and Shira.) No wonder these women choose Belly Dance over other dance forms to help them heal from such experiences!

Belly Dance is also used as a means of therapy for eating disorders. The reason for this is very obvious: most people suffering from eating disorders have a distorted body image with which they are not satisfied. As explained above, Belly Dance is an optimal art and exercise to help women build a positive body image and befriend their own bodies. Additionally, Belly Dance is not an art form that venerates slim bodies or demands uncommon, extraordinary abilities from the dancers’ bodies. It is a dance that not only values, but also needs and longs for curves. It is a dance built with movements that come naturally to women and that run smoothly through the human body. Information on Belly Dance utilized as the sole or main therapy form for the treatment of eating disorders is not yet readily available. Nevertheless, there is ample information about women who found Belly Dance helpful in healing from and overcoming anorexia and bulimia (Izzo, *Overcoming Bulimia*, n.d.).

Like many other enjoyable forms of exercise, Belly Dance is an exceptionally useful therapy to help treat depression (Lafata, *Healing Dance*, 2000). The release of endorphins affects the brain chemistry, improving the dancer's mood. Practicing Belly Dance also heightens creativity, lowers stress, and helps regulate metabolism and sleep patterns, all factors that affect clinical depression (Lara, *Psychological Benefits*, n.d.). Belly Dance is practiced in a comfortable, non-threatening environment. A proficient Belly Dance instructor is supportive and puts little pressure on her students. All of this results in a student's feelings of fulfillment and improvement of self-confidence.

Belly Dance is also particularly useful as a healing process for survivors of sexual abuse. Belly Dance teaches women how to embody their sexuality, how to overcome shame, and how to love, celebrate, and be proud of their bodies. Belly Dance is a reaffirmation of the beauty and sacredness of love, sex, passion, pleasure, and fertility. Additionally, Belly Dance, as any other art form, can be a way to express anger and other inner feelings (Maria, *Embodied Sexuality & Female Power*, 2002). Although it may take years for the healing process to occur, Belly Dancing has helped many women resolve their issues with sexuality and their own bodies (Lipschitz, *Recovery*, n.d.).

Belly Dance is a valid means of therapy through movement. It obviously has the power to touch women's emotional cores and generate change, evolutions, and revolutions in women's psyches by connecting them to a higher archetype of femininity. Getting in touch with this inner power through Belly Dance starts a healing domino effect that runs like the fertile overflow of a river, gently running through the dancer's body, mind, and spirit, flooding all three with well being and strength.

Women's Empowerment Belly Dance Course Description and Research Methods

A free-of-charge *Women's Empowerment Belly Dance* course was offered at East-West Kung Fu Academy in Bowling Green KY in April of 2006. Participants who were survivors of sexual assault were located by Western Kentucky University's Counseling and Testing Center and Hope Harbor, a local non-profit crisis center that provides services to victims of sexual assault. The class met for an hour twice a week for a month.

A survey was given out before starting the first class to assess the students' level of comfort with their bodies and sexualities, their self-esteem, confidence, and relationship-issues. The survey also assessed whether the students' sexual trauma affected their self-esteem, level of comfort with their bodies, their outlook on sex, and their relationships with their loved ones. The students answered the surveys by marking whether they agreed or disagreed with each one of the given statements on a scale from 1 (totally disagree) to 10 (totally agree.) The survey was repeated at the end of the fourth class. The improvement reflected on the first graph on page 31 shows the difference between the students' responses in the first and second surveys. The number provided as level improvement was calculated by subtracting the number the students marked in the first scaled answer to each question from the number they marked on the second survey for that same question. For example, if a student marked a 3 after the statement: "I am confident" in the first survey, and then marked an 8 in the second survey, the level of improvement would be 5. The survey was repeated after the last class, and the results were compared to the first survey to obtain the results shown on the second table shown in page 31.

Body Ego Technique and its Applications to Belly Dance Therapy for Survivors of Sexual Assault

Body Ego Technique is a predominantly non-verbal educational method that concentrates on one's learning and experiencing a variety of goal-directed physical movement patterns that use the elements of bodily movement (rhythm, space, and force) "to facilitate the development of self-identity, body image and ego structure, and to bring about changes of experiences that are necessary for ego growth" (Salkin, 1973, p.5). Jeri Salkin developed Body Ego Technique after becoming aware that "as she experienced changes in movements, these changes actually caused her to feel differently about herself and her environment and seemed to have an effect upon her behavior" (p. vii).

In Body Ego Technique, movement and dance are appreciated beyond their aesthetic worth to include their educational and therapeutic, as well as developmental and diagnostic, value. The elements of dance are used to build up a sense of body image and self identity, therefore helping one to develop physical and emotional confidence. This confidence is reflected in body posture, movement manner and vocabulary, as well as overall behavior. Body Ego Technique is utilized to guide children in establishing those attributes, to help adults in maintaining and properly utilizing them, and to treat individuals with psychiatric, psychological, and/or developmental afflictions in re-establishing healthier body images, self identities, and relationships with their bodies.

One of the basic assumptions behind Body Ego Technique is that body image is indeed "derived from internal sensations, postural changes, contact with outside objects

and people, emotional experiences and fantasies,” (Salkin p. ix) as defined by the *Comprehensive Dictionary of Psychological and Psychoanalytical Terms*. A person’s concept of body image can in fact be modified by stimulating diverse emotional sensations and by creating changes in posture and movement experiences.

According to Jeri Salkin, standard Dance and Movement Therapy methods tend to utilize movement expression to generate catharsis, a purging of emotions through art comparable to a toddler’s temper tantrums. Tantrums, however, release tension but do not necessarily create an experience which brings about ego growth. In contrast, in Body Ego Technique, catharsis is dealt with in a controlled way that has a beginning, middle, and end. The beginning consists of the teacher’s stimulating the student to begin to express the experience through verbal encouragement and nonverbal communication. During the middle component, the teacher redirects action into change. Towards the end, the teacher encourages the new expressive movement so that it may become the default movement pattern and bring about enduring emotional growth.

In constructing Body Ego Technique, Jeri Salkin utilized the principles of human movement and the fundamental elements of dance to create a method that uses body posture and movement changes to help develop the ego. She works with children, adults, dancers, children with developmental problems, and schizophrenic patients. The Belly Dance Lessons for Survivors of Sexual Assault, created for the purpose of this research and described below, focus on the aspects of Body Ego Technique that center upon emotional change based upon bodily experiences, rather than in upon identity development, or body-image improvement. The therapeutic focus behind the class structure and movement exercises is upon healing the students’ relationship with that part of their egos and identities called sexuality, through their relationship with their bodies.

The class also focus on emotional healing from trauma by working with the body areas and movement styles associated with sexuality and/or trauma in the student's mind, as well as with the movement patterns, body posture, and attitudes that are or could be a consequence of the sexual trauma, that have the ability to recall the mind-body pathways associated with that trauma, or that have become a two-way stimulating cycle of the body-language and emotions associated with the trauma.

Each person is the product of all his/her experiences and of the way in which he/she has coped with these experiences. Movement and posture are the externalization of that product, which we call ego, identity, self, or personality. In fact, observers tend to quickly judge people's personalities by their body language and posture, i.e. arrogant versus insecure, sexy versus shy, rebellious versus polite, etc. Additionally, posture is virtually always a response to an emotional state of being. It is often quite easy to deduce someone's mood through his/her body-language and posture. Body posture might reinforce or even trigger a particular mood, thus starting a vicious cycle. Therefore, becoming aware of, or consciously avoiding, a particular body posture might help prevent or break such a cycle.

The correct posture for effectively performing Belly Dance moves requires certain features which are also characteristic of a sexually confident body posture: tilted hips, raised chin, and open, lifted chest. The Belly Dance course for survivors of sexual assault not only emphasizes the correct posture for performing Belly Dance, but contrasts it to that of a droopy, retracted body posture with features such as an inwardly contracted chest, sagging shoulders and head, and curved back, which are characteristic of low self-esteem or over-self-protective behavior caused by trauma.

According to Body Ego Technique and Dance/Movement Therapy principles, movements that isolate body parts create awareness of the body parts worked with, as well as awareness of the memories and/or concepts that we personally associate with them. The Belly Dance movement vocabulary is heavily marked by *isolations* (movements in which the head, shoulders, torso, or hips move independently from each other.) These movements require kinesthetic coordination and proprioceptive awareness of these specific body parts, while inducing attentiveness to the qualities applied to the movements, such as whether the involved body part moves smoothly or jerkily, fluidly or awkwardly, with wide movements or few movements at all, etc. These movement qualities can be indicators and consequences of the dancer's personal relationship to the body part being moved and all that is associated, consciously or unconsciously, to that body part in the dancer's mind. Either by 1) making these associations, indications, and cause-consequence relationships conscious, or by 2) creating them from scratch, the dancer fabricates a tool for change, empowering herself to consciously change movement patterns and/or movement qualities. She deliberately aims for a consecutive emotional change. This concept is applicable to the Belly Dance movement vocabulary when one considers, for example, the *shoulder* and *hip shimmies*. Small, rigid, tight, and stiff vibrations are to be associated with nervousness and tension and therefore avoided; on the other hand, relaxed fluid vibrations are to be associated not only with proper Belly Dance technique, ease of execution, and wider range of motion, but also with tension release and enjoyment.

The sequence of guiding survivors of sexual assault through this type of contrasting movements and postures constitutes exercises in what may be termed Movement Catharsis Process. This Movement Catharsis Process reflects not the

traditional definition of *catharsis* as might be exemplified by the release of anger through feet stomping, but the Body Ego Technique definition of *catharsis* –which produces and encourages a new movement pattern or quality that reflects and fosters an enduring emotional change.

Another Body Ego Technique concept easily applicable to the *Women’s Empowerment Belly Dance for Survivors of Sexual Assault lessons* is its purposeful make-believe quality. According to Jeri Salkin, “The Body Ego Technique instructor deliberately utilizes the fantasy world and imagination to stimulate the exploration of a wide range of experiences” (p.10). Role-playing the archetype of the Belly Dancer, through the usage of costumes, and the acquisition of her movement attitude and vocabulary, allows the dancers to embody characteristic traits of the Belly Dancer archetype, such as secure femininity, awe of fertility and womanhood, acceptance and love of their bodies, and sexual confidence.

Rhythmic repetition is yet another concept of Body Ego Technique that is also characteristic of Belly Dance. According to Jeri Salkin, “rhythmic repetition is a satisfying way of learning and helps to establish a feeling of organization and accomplishment” (p. 10). Repetition helps dancers, just like children, in mastering movement. In the Belly Dance lessons, rhythmic repetition of movements derived from a Movement Catharsis Process will help the dancers not only in mastering the movement, but in gaining that same feeling of mastery over their bodies and emotions.

The teaching style for Belly Dance Therapy for Survivors of Sexual Assault adheres to concepts from the Body Ego Technique teacher training, such as Empathy not Sympathy, Movement Motivation, and Expression over imitation. Empathy not Sympathy refers to the instructor’s responsibility for accepting and understanding the

students' emotions, but maintaining herself aside so that she may help in directing the students into change. If the instructor leans towards sympathy and begins sharing the students' emotional feelings, she will no longer be able to remain objective, and will indubitably help the students in expressing their emotions, but remain incapable of guiding change. Movement Motivation refers to the teacher's ability to see movement qualities as clues to the motivations behind the movement and as tools for guiding the students through a Movement Catharsis Process. Expression over Imitation refers to the teacher's difficult responsibility in encouraging the students not to exactly imitate her movements but to aid them in the process of allowing themselves to move in manners that express their individual and unique feelings. As Jeri Salkin states: "It takes much courage and confidence to voluntarily expose one's inner thoughts and feelings by externalizing them into dance and movement" (p. 43).

Women's Empowerment Belly Dance Lesson Plans

Lesson 1

Objective: To introduce the students to the body's ability to express our emotions, moods, personality and experiences by embodying contrasting posture and movement characteristics.

Teacher Introduction

Introduction to Tribal Belly Dance

Assessment I

Posture Exercise

How does a depressed person stand? (droopy shoulders, looking at the floor, etc.)

How does an arrogant person stand? (chest lifted, chin towards the ceiling, looking at people down and over the shoulder, etc.)

How does a woman stand who feels exposed, unprotected, insecure?

How does a woman move who is not comfortable in her body?

Form couples and "sculpt" an example of these women on each other.

How does a woman stand who feels secure, safe, confident?

How does a woman move who accepts and likes her body, who feels beautiful?

Sculpt an example of these women on each other.

How did it feel to hold these sculptures' positions?

Warm-up

Belly Dance Posture instruction

Role-playing the positive characteristics of the Belly Dancer archetype by slipping into costumes

Step1: The Basic

Cool down

Lesson 2 – Belly Dance Movement Vocabulary Construction

Objective: To contrast a basic Belly Dance movement vocabulary by learning six different basic steps to work with.

Warm-up

Review

Step2: Locomotive Basic

Step3: Turning Basic

Step4: Side-alternating Locomotive Basic

Step5: Doubles

Step6: Locomotive Doubles

Step7: Turning Doubles

Cool Down

Lesson 3

Objective: To understand the concept of Collective Improvisation and acquire the skills necessary to perform it.

Warm-up

Introduction to Collective Improvisation, following and cueing

Collective Improvisation exercises

Listening to the music and counting beats

Review of arm cues for every step

Each girl leads for eight counts, full circle rotation with two choices, then three choices, then all of the 7 steps learned so far.

Step 8: Egyptian Basic

Step 9: Turning Egyptian Basic

Collective Improvisation in couples

Cool Down

Lesson 4

Objective: To allow the students to experience Movement Catharsis through qualities of movement applied to Belly Dance isolations, and encourage the generalization of the produced emotional change.

Warm-up

Isolations (head, shoulders, chest, hips) and awareness of body parts and the emotions they are associated with in our minds (students will be asked to think about this association and become aware of them so they can utilize them to bring about positive change, but not asked to share them).

Qualities of movement applied to all of the above isolations

Shoulder and Hip shimmies guided Movement Catharsis

From small, rigid, tight, and stiff vibrations to relaxed fluid vibrations, by explaining proper technique (identifying, isolating and utilizing only the absolutely necessary muscles to produce movement while relaxing the rest), while associating the change with enjoyment and tension release as contrasted to original nervousness, apprehension, and strain.

Encouragement to apply this to all other movements.

Collective Improvisation

Assessment II

Cool Down

Lesson 5

Objective: To further build Belly Dance movement vocabulary, and improve arm cueing for Collective Improvisation.

Warm-up

Fine-tuning: Arms (cueing positions, arms as frame, snake arms, arm circles)

Hip drops

Hip lifts

Turning hip lifts
Hip twists
Turning hip twists
Collective Improvisation
Cool Down

Lesson 6

Objective: To acquire further Belly Dance movement vocabulary and improve the dynamics of Collective Improvisation.

Warm-up
Floreo
Hip circles
Egyptian quick-step
Collective Improvisation
Cool Down

Lesson 7

Objective: To allow free locomotion while dancing, and more spontaneous and fluid hip movements.

Warm-up
Walking and weight distribution
Walking shimmies
Collective Improvisation
Cool Down

Lesson 8

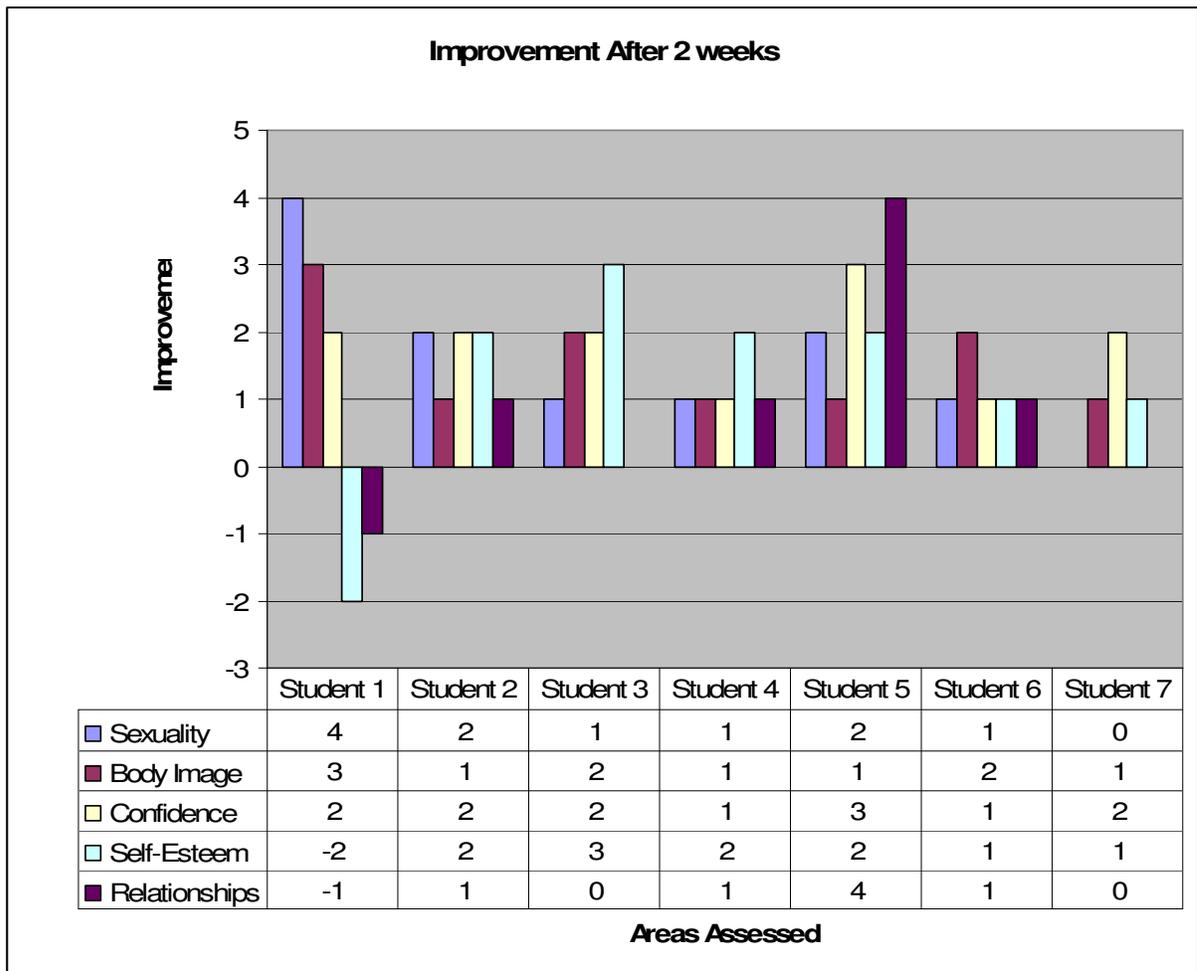
Objective: TBA. Left open to allow for changes, possible difficulties, unexpected problems, and to allow for some plasticity in the program.

Warm-up
Collective Improvisation
Assessment III
Cool Down

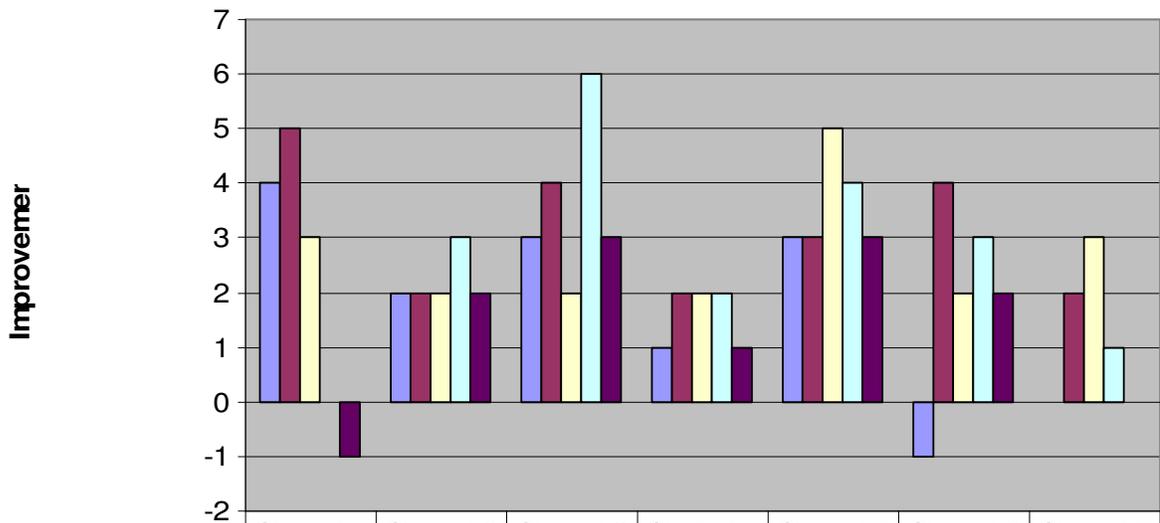
Results

The surveys showed that most of the participants had considerable self-esteem, confidence, sexuality, and relationship issues. Most participants showed significant improvement in all the previously mentioned areas, except relationship issues. Improvement was significantly greater after four weeks of class than after the end of the second week. All participants marked that their sexual trauma affected their relationships with their loved ones. As the participants' level of confidence, their self-esteem, ease with their sexuality, and body image improved, it was expected that the level at which their sexual trauma affected their relationships would decrease. There was no clear trend of this happening, or of relationship issues in general decreasing. On the other hand, all participants reported a decrease in the level in which the participants' sexual traumas affected their self-esteem, body image, confidence, and outlook on sex.

Data Graphics

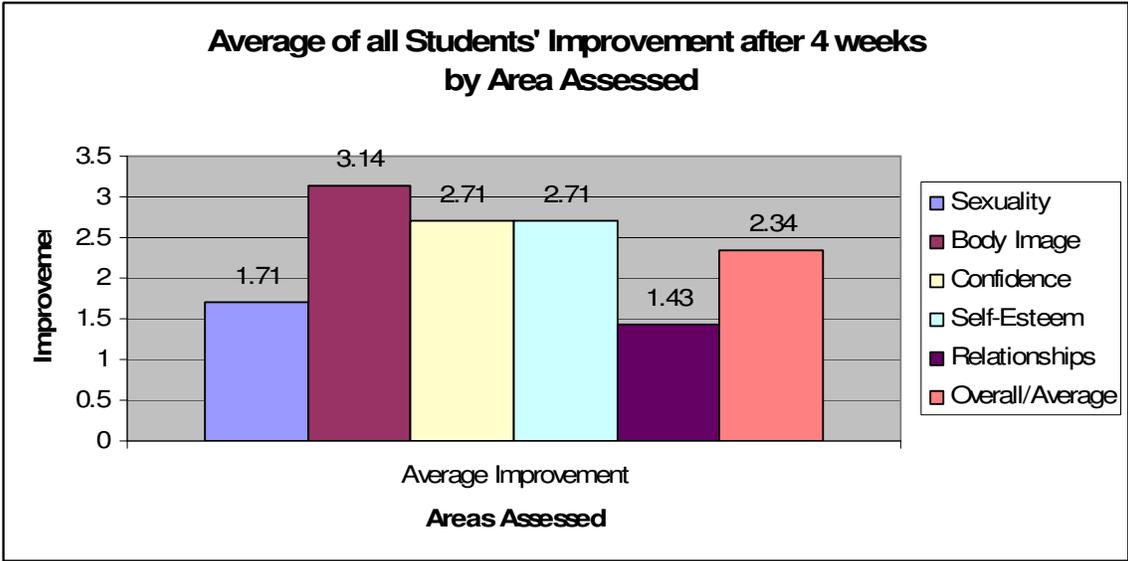
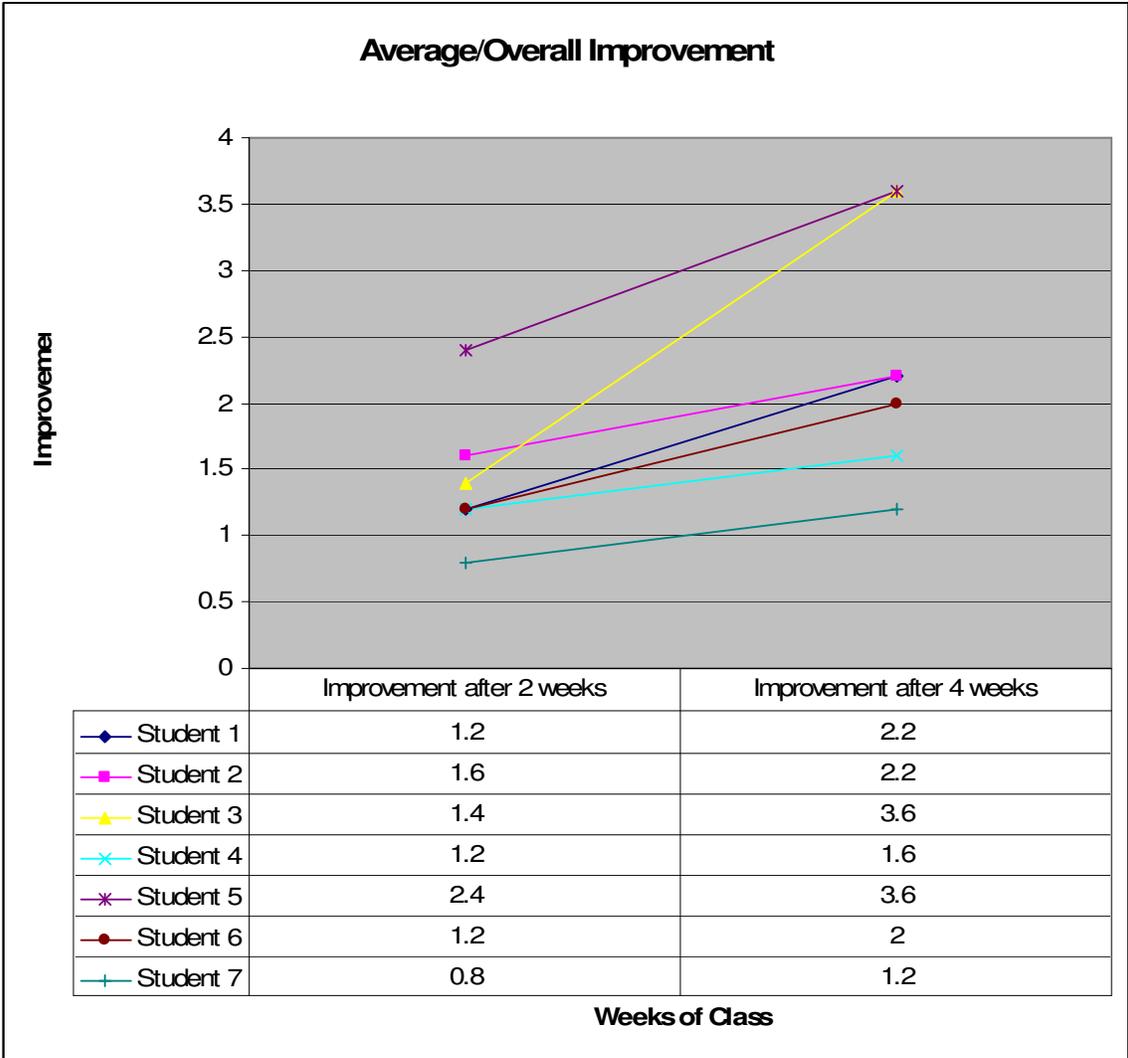


Improvement After 4 weeks



| | Student 1 | Student 2 | Student 3 | Student 4 | Student 5 | Student 6 | Student 7 |
|---------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Sexuality | 4 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 3 | -1 | 0 |
| Body Image | 5 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 2 |
| Confidence | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 5 | 2 | 3 |
| Self-Esteem | 0 | 3 | 6 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 1 |
| Relationships | -1 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 0 |

Areas Assessed



Observations

After the last survey, students were also asked to answer whether the class had been beneficial to them, and if so, to describe in which specific ways it had helped them and what they were taking away from the class. All the answers were positive. Among several statements of having had fun during the class, having relieved stress, and having felt comfortable dancing in front of other people, some of the answers included the following:

- “I don’t feel this class has affected my outlook on sex, but I have noticed a difference in confidence.”
- “More confidence.”
- “A more positive outlook.”
- “It has improved my posture and my self esteem.”
- “I loved the way dance helps strengthen my body and mind!”
- “How to get away from all of my worries for at least 60 minutes!”
- “It made me very aware of how I move and how my body feels.”
- “I have learnt a fun, relaxing way to relieve stress and make myself feel sexy.”

Conclusion

Due to the limited duration of this research and the extremely small number of participants, none of the findings could be considered definitive. Nevertheless, the process and results of this research demonstrate Belly Dance's potential in helping women develop confidence, which might in turn improve their self-esteem, body image, and sexual relationships. Women who are survivors of sexual assault often suffer from difficulties in the above-mentioned areas as a consequence of sexual trauma. Belly Dance is an ideal art and exercise form for these women to practice, giving them the opportunity to have the benefit of improvement in their overall emotional well being.

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Appendixes

Web-Articles Summaries

Abdo O'Dell, Margo. *Improving Teaching Skills*. <http://www.margoabdo-odell.com>, as of November, 2005.

This detailed article presents the dance teacher as skilled in four roles: educator (as a knowledgeable, proficient, safe, and flexible skill modeler and shaper), empowerer (motivator of student involvement and creativity, personable, practical positive encouraging professional), manager (in charge of class administration, class scheduling, class planning, music, announcements, handouts, attendance, etc.), and performer.

Abdo O'Dell, Margo. *Middle Eastern Dance Class: Warm-up and Cool-Down*. <http://www.margoabdo-odell.com>, as of November, 2005.

The author conveys the importance of effective and purposeful warm-up movements, as well as flexibility-enhancing, injury-preventing, relaxing cool-down exercises. She also presents specific examples.

Abdo O'Dell, Margo. *Providing Student Feedback*. <http://www.margoabdo-odell.com>, as of November, 2005.

Abdo O'Dell explains the prime relevance of feedback, constructive criticism, and coaching in Belly Dance to improve students' abilities, when to give such feedback, balanced feedback, positive phrasing and different types of feed back (such as group, non-verbal, hands on, and after class).

Abdo O'Dell, Margo. *The history of Middle Eastern Dance*. <http://www.margoabdo-odell.com>, as of November, 2005.

This article traces the roots and names of this dance as an ethnic, culturally expressive dance of different areas of the Middle East. It offers comparisons in regard to movements, names, music and styles.

Amy. *Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Belly Dance*. <http://www.dreamingofjeannie.com.au/chronic%20fatigue%20syndrome.html>, as of November, 2005.

Here a student relates a personal description of her experience with Belly Dance and how she found it to be an ideal exercise to deal with her chronic illness.

Clay, Jean. "*Danse Orientale aided my recovery and renewed my joy for the gift of life*". Healing Dance Testimonials, <http://www.tahya.com/danceheals.html>, as of October, 2005.

A survivor of breast cancer, surgery, and therapy explains how Arabic Dance healed her emotionally by helping her overcome fatigue and depression after surgery had healed her physically. She writes about how Arabic dancing gave her a way to express her emotions and be able to approach each day with a renewed joy for the gift of life.

Danelle (Psychiatric Nurse), *Mental Health and Belly Dancing*, <http://www.dreamingofjeannie.com/mental20%health20%and20%bellydancing.html>, as of November, 2005.

Comprehensive descriptions of the ways in which exercise in general positively affects mental health including the assistance of metabolism, sleeping patterns, fitness, lymphatic toxins draining, and many others, are included in this articles. It then describes the way in which Belly Dancing specifically and positively affects mental health, including the promotion of positive self-image, increase of self confidence, comfort and relaxation In a non-threatening environment with women of all shapes and sizes.

Delilah. *Reviving Ophelia Through Belly Dancing – Can belly dance offer young women a more positive self image?* <http://visionarydance.com/ophelia.html>, as of November, 2005.

Delilah refocuses the concepts in Dr. Mary Pipher’s book *Reviving Ophelia*, which deals with the current crisis of personal growth, self identity, body-image and sexuality affecting adolescent girls in America today, where young girls suffer from more depression, eating disorders, addictions, self-mutilations and suicide than ever. It describes in detail all this problematic issues, the influence of the media, as well as their causes and consequences. Finally it presents Belly Dance as a self-empowerment tool to improve the situation.

Despina, *Teaching Beginners Courses in Belly Dance*, <http://www.dreamingofjeannie.com.au/teaching.html>, as of November, 2005.

This extensive article gives advice to new teachers regarding issues such as drop outs, class difficulty, time investments and practice requirements versus student’s expectations, student’s interest, teaching styles, and behavior problems.

Despina, *Zill Master*, November 2004, <http://www.dreamingofjeannie.com.au/zill20%master.html>, as of November, 2005.

Playing zills while dancing can be challenging. This article gives insight into a very effective way for keeping rhythm and cueing students, as well as advice on wearing them, playing them, usage, music and styles.

Despina. *Belyssa’s Teacher Traininng – Teaching vs. Performing*. November 2004, <http://www.dreamingofjeannie.com.au/belyssa’s%20teacher%20training.html>, as of November, 2005.

Despina discusses the differences between performing and teaching, such as attention catching techniques, clothing, and attitude.

Despina. *Belyssa’s Teacher Training- Study Topics*, November 2004, <http://www.dreamingofjeannie.com.au/belyssa’s%20teacher%trainingtopics.html>, as of November, 2005.

Included here is a description of the topics in a Belly Dance teacher-training course, including characteristics of a good teacher, warm-up approaches, technology, methodology, innovation, previous training, technique (musicality, styles, energies, levels), administration and communications (studio, marketing, networking, location,

ethics, insurance), assessments, program/class structure, troupe quality, feedback, safety, choreography and improvisation.

Despina. *Belyssa's Teacher Training – What makes a good teacher*, November, 2004, <http://www.dreamingofjeannie.com.au/belyssa's%20teacher%training%20good%20teacher.html>, as of November, 2005.

This article describes characteristics of a good belly dance teacher, placing emphasis on asking for feedback and leading a fun, relaxing and accepting atmosphere.

Hatoum, Miriam. “*Belly Dancing as Storytelling Art*” Column #2, *Belly Dancing as Healing Dance*, July 2001, <http://www.visionarydance.com>, as of October, 2005.

The famous Belly Dance teacher known in the Orientale Danse world as Amira Jamal, tells us about her re-entering into the dance world after being a satisfied house wife and mother to her then just-gone-to-college children. She weaves into the story her spiritual path and findings regarding women's spirituality and the experience and appreciation of menopause as the opportunity to clean up unfinished business from the past, to enjoy increased clarity and heightened creativity, to take time for herself, and to take pleasure in her renewed freedom. With all these principles in mind she has remodeled part of her house into a dance studio and resumed performing. Nowadays, she is the founder of the Amira Jamal School of Middle-Eastern Dance in Brooklyn (since 1981), where she taught hundreds of dancers from beginning through professional levels, and which now functions on its own while she teaches again from her home in Boston and occasionally in workshops.

Lafata, Lorraine. “*Belly Dancing as a Healing Dance*”, 2000, <http://www.visionarydance.com> as of October, 2005.

The therapist Lorraine writes about how at the age of 33, while working as a sexual assault/domestic violence counselor, Belly Dance helped her overcome the tragedy of a miscarriage followed by a prolonged and acute interstitial cystitis that drove her deep into two and half years of despair and depression. A class in Belly Dance and Women's Spirituality facilitated her emotional recovery and physical healing from the chronic pain caused by her condition. Practicing Belly Dance exposed her to a whole set of new and affirmative experiences and beliefs that gave her the opportunity to examine her fear-based body patterns that inhibited her ability to fully breathe into and occupy her own strong self. These realizations and the movements she was performing gave her a sense of freedom, and the strength, stability and energy she longed for, as well as a sisterhood of like-minded and hearted women who were also in their quests for healing and opening and experiencing changes in their bodies and psyches. Nowadays, Lorraine works with Body Centered Psychotherapy for Women, has remarried, and is mother to a healthy son.

Lafata, Lorraine. “*The Embracing Aphrodite Series*”, Column 36, *Belly Dancing as healing Dance*, July 2003, <http://www.visionarydance.com>, as of October, 2005.

This column describes the four parts of a workshop series that reaffirms the misunderstood and devalued goddess archetype of love, sex, passion, pleasure and beauty, as the initiator of life and vital forces, of change, growth and birth.

Lara (Clinical Psychologist), *Psychological Benefits of Belly Dancing*, <http://www.dreamingofjeannie.com/psychological.html>, as of November, 2005.

The author delves into the importance for women to take time for themselves for fun and pleasure, relaxation, music therapy, endorphin release, and positive social interactions, therefore boosting their moods and lowering stress levels. She also writes about Belly Dancing for the improvement of self-esteem, contrasting it with aerobics or ballet and their social pressure for slimness.

Laura. *Stereotypes of Bellydancing*. <http://www.dreamingofjeannie.com.au/laura/stereotypes.html>, as of November, 2005.

This article deals with the terms and images associated with the dance that create a negative stereotype, the accuracy of people's perception of the dance, common misconceptions, common issues in the field such as the audience, the dance's proper name, and men dancers.

Lipschitz, Lucy. *How Middle-Eastern Dance gave me recovery*. <http://www.lucylipschitz.com/medrecov.html>, as of November, 2005.

This is a personal testimonial of a girl who was abused at sixteen and how years of dancing have slowly helped her resolved her issues with sexuality and her body.

Maria, Anna “*Embodied Sexuality & Female Power*” Column #3, Belly Dancing as Healing Dance, March 2002, <http://www.visionarydance.com>, as of October, 2005.

Anna Maria, a massage therapist with a Bachelor's Degree in Cultural Studies from Lesley University, explores her personal experience of Belly Dance as a way to learn how to embody her sexuality and celebrate female power through dance as ritual, as healing, and as expression of female power, sexuality, spirituality, authority, and anger. Through journal entries of her thesis work and explanations of her perceptions of Belly Dance books, videos, performances and classes, she explains how she achieved a feeling of openness and harmony with her own body, worked through her intimacy issues, and overcame shame and negative body image utilizing Belly Dance as a “corrective experience” that transforms subjective knowing into kinetic knowledge. Belly Dance facilitated her transition in contacting others through her own humanness, while healing her shame of seeing and being seen and freely expressing herself artistically, becoming a woman in body-mind-soul harmony instead of a fragmented person.

McAghon, Monica. “*Danse Orientale for Mastectomy Recovery*”. Healing Dance Testimonials, <http://www.tahya.com/danceheals.html>, as of October, 2005.

This article expresses the author's love for the organic feeling of Belly Dance and for the way in which performing it made her feel special. Belly Dance made her feel a reverence for fertility and womanhood, which improved her recovery from a surgery that was a psychological blow to her feelings of femininity.

Sharifa, *The Healing Power of Dance – Understanding Ourselves Through Movement*, Dance Therapy by Sharifa for the Gilded Serpent, <http://www.gildedserpent.com/articles16/sharifa%27spiece.htm>, as of November, 2005.

A Middle Eastern dance performer and teacher with 31 years of experience who is a licensed psychotherapist with training in therapy through expressive arts, explores the

reasons why people approach the dance. She points out that, in her personal experience, those that become enamored with Belly Dance are often the women who come from abusive childhoods and have a “need” for its therapeutic healing.

Shira. “*Healing Through Orientale Danse: Part I, Physical Healing*”. Suite 101 Website - Middle Eastern Dance Category, October 2000, <http://www.shira.net/heal-phys1.htm>, as of October, 2005.

This article thoroughly presents the physiological benefits of Belly Dance as a form of exercise. It explains how Belly Dance promotes good health by improving circulation, lubricating the joints, reducing blood pressure, and burning calories. It gives special attention to the physical benefits of belly dancing for women recovering from breast cancer. It provides testimonials from people that utilized Belly Dance as a tool to recover from whiplash, back problems, high blood pressure, rickets, and a prosthesis surgery after breaking a hip. It specifies some movements to be careful with when using Oriental dance for physical healing,

Shira. “*Healing Through Orientale Danse: Part II, Emotional Healing*”. Suite 101 Website - Middle Eastern Dance Category, October 2000, <http://www.shira.net/heal-phys1.htm>, as of October, 2005.

This article thoroughly presents the emotional benefits of Belly Dance as a form of therapy. It explains how Belly Dance releases tension through exercise and promotes emotional health by releasing endorphins, providing inner strength and maintaining well-being. It provides testimonials from people that utilized Belly Dance as a tool to recover from rape & sexual abuse, bulimia, breast cancer, depression. It specifies instructions to help readers who want to try Belly Dance and Dance Therapy for themselves, and who are choosing a teacher for emotional healing. It also presents a list of ten related articles that the reader might find helpful.

Sophia, Christina (Registered Nurse, Spiritual Healer, Dance Teacher). *The Goddess is Dancing*; and Atéa (Simon, Cheryl). *Creating Inner Peace with Oriental Dance*. <http://www.bellydancingvideo.com/bellydance1.htm>, as of November, 2005.

These articles are an anthropological outlook into the use of hypnotic drums music and energetic movement in Eastern societies that create a sense of peace, exercise the body, and relieve stress. They discuss the mutual influence of religion and dance in society and vice versa. They also describe the cultural phenomenon behind the current blooming of the Middle-Eastern Dance community, as well as the social-cultural revolution of Earth-centered/Goddess religions and feminism.

Stricklin, Pat. *Belly Dancing and Cultural Influences on Body Image*. http://www.visionarydance.com/cultural_influence.html, as of November, 2005.

Stricklin is concerned with the body-image and self-esteem issues caused in women by our patriarchal, arbitrary, role-placing society. She states that the belief that we are “notably less than perfect” is currently used as marketing tools to sell women “quick fixes”, further increasing our need for approval and acceptance. She presents feminine spirituality and the practice of Belly Dance as a solution and healing process for body acceptance, self-love.

Stricklin, Pat. “*Belly Dance to Inspire Healing*” Column #4, Belly Dancing as Healing Dance, June 2002, <http://www.visionarydance.com>, as of October, 2005.

In this article a Belly Dancer explains how she started studying this art form in her search for energy, enthusiasm, passion, and creativity. She soon learned to communicate with and through her own body and became interested in female spirituality and healing. She was soon after diagnosed with hypothyroidism, which sent her on a quest for understanding her self and developing her personality while looking for corrective treatments and hormone dosage for her disease. Throughout this process she discovered a wilder and freer sense of herself. Belly Dance helped her accept herself as she was, assume that she was not broken but perfect, and begin to be fully alive all the way to good healthy hormone levels.

Tahya. “*Danse Orientale – A Healing Dance... designed to kindle our creative sprit for relaxation and healing*”. <http://www.tahya.com/danceheals.html>, as of October, 2005.

Tahya considers that Belly Dance is a way to use the body to seek psychological, spiritual, emotional and physical balance, by discovering a heightened sense of creativity, femininity, self-esteem, and fulfillment.

Wright, Nancy. “*Healing Through Belly Dance*” Column #5, Belly Dancing as Healing Dance, June 2002, <http://www.visionarydance.com>, as of October, 2005.

In this article a writer and former Weight Watcher explains how Belly Dance changed her life. She explains the impact dancing bare foot, watching herself dance in front of a mirror, dancing in front of other dancers, exposing her belly and performing had on her, improving her sense of dignity, grace and beauty. Inspired by the sacred aspects of Orientale Danse, she traveled to Egypt, where she wrote the book “*Suitcase Down The Nile: A Spunky Woman’s Transformational Journey Through Egypt*”, and then led her to many other corners of the world. Additionally, she explores the issues of how society and fashion erode women’s self esteem by making them think that there is something wrong with their bodies in order to then sell them the solutions to those “flaws”.

SURVEY GIVEN ON THE FIRST AND FOURTH LESSONS

1. I feel comfortable with my body.

(Totally Agree) 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 (Totally DISagree)

1. My sexual trauma affects my self esteem, how I feel about myself and my body.

(Totally Agree) 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 (Totally DISagree)

N/A

2. I do not suffer from any self-esteem issues.

(Totally Agree) 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 (Totally DISagree)

3. I am confident.

(Totally Agree) 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 (Totally DISagree)

4. My sexual trauma affects how I look at sex.

(Totally Agree) 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 (Totally DISagree)

N/A

5. I am comfortable with my sexuality and/or enjoy a healthy sexual life.

(Totally Agree) 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 (Totally DISagree)

6. My sexual trauma affects my relationship with my loved ones.

(Totally Agree) 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 (Totally DISagree)

N/A

7. I do not have relationship issues.

(Totally Agree) 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 (Totally DISagree)

SURVEY GIVEN AT THE END OF THE COURSE

1. I feel comfortable with my body.

(Totally Agree) 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 (Totally DISagree)

2. My sexual trauma affects my self esteem, how I feel about myself and my body.

(Totally Agree) 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 (Totally DISagree)

N/A

3. I do not suffer from any self-esteem issues.

(Totally Agree) 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 (Totally DISagree)

4. I am confident.

(Totally Agree) 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 (Totally DISagree)

5. My sexual trauma affects how I look at sex.

(Totally Agree) 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 (Totally DISagree)

N/A

6. I am comfortable with my sexuality and/or enjoy a healthy sexual life.

(Totally Agree) 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 (Totally DISagree)

7. My sexual trauma affects my relationship with my loved ones.

(Totally Agree) 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 (Totally DISagree)

N/A

8. I do not have relationship issues.

(Totally Agree) 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 (Totally DISagree)

9. Do you feel this class has been beneficial to you?

10. If so, could you share specific ways this class has helped you (i.e., feel more comfortable walking around, improved self esteem, outlook on sex, etc.)

11. What is at least one thing you have taken away from this class?