

The Restorative Effects of Ecstatic Dance: A Qualitative Study

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Table of Contents

Contents	2
Acknowledgements.....	4
Abstract.....	5
Introduction.....	6
1.1 Introduction to literature on ecstatic dance	6
1.2 Dance therapy	7
1.3 Body and mind interdependence	7
1.4 Expression through dance	8
1.5 Transformation through dance	9
1.6 Emotions and dance	9
1.7 Physical benefits of dance.....	10
1.8 Social benefits of dance	11
1.9 Spirituality and dance	12
1.10 Emerging themes	12
1.11 Conclusion of literature reviewed.....	12
1.12 Objectives of present study.....	15
Methodology.....	16
2.1 Introduction.....	16
2.2 Research design	16
2.3 Apparatus	17
2.4 Participants.....	17
2.5 Procedure	17
2.6 Ethical considerations	18
2.7 Analysis	18

Presentation of findings	19
3.1 Introduction	19
3.2 Expression through dance	19
3.3 Transformation through dance	20
3.4 Emotions and dance	22
3.5 Physical benefits of dance	23
3.6 Social benefits of dance	24
3.7 Spirituality and dance	25
3.8 Emerging themes	27
3.9 Conclusion	28
Discussion	29
4.1 Introduction	29
4.2 Expression through dance	29
4.3 Transformation through dance	30
4.4 Emotions and dance	30
4.5 Physical benefits of dance	32
4.6 Social benefits of dance	32
4.7 Spirituality and dance	33
4.8 Emerging themes	34
4.9 Limitations	35
4.10 Future research.....	35
4.11 Conclusion	36
References	37
Appendix 1	40
Appendix 2.....	41

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Abstract

Research has acknowledged in recent years that health is not only the non-existence of sickness, but also a state of complete physical, emotional and social well-being. This has led to an increasing awareness of the role that dance plays as a potential means to restore individual well-being and health (Murcia, Kreutz, Clift & Bongard, 2010). This study attempted to explore the restorative effects of ecstatic dance by examining whether ecstatic dance enthusiasts experience emotional, physical, social and spiritual benefits through ecstatic dance in Ireland. By applying a qualitative research approach, a sample of six desirable participants partook in semi-structured interviews and the data was analysed using thematic analysis. The information obtained was interpreted and discussed with conclusions accordingly formed. The outcomes inferred that participants benefitted greatly from ecstatic dance as a form of communication, a coping strategy and as a spiritual practice. Ecstatic dance was also valued in terms of connection; not only in the dimension of connecting with others but also in terms of giving dancers the space to connect with their emotions. The widespread impact of stress was a factor that was highlighted by participants. It was gathered that the meditative effects of ecstatic dance hold a high value in restoring and creating serenity. The conclusion was drawn that ecstatic dance plays a significant and a restorative role in the lives of people who practice ecstatic dance in Ireland.

Introduction

Dance has long been revered for its power to restore both body and mind. Through time and culture it has also reinforced the bonds of community and allowed us to uncover the deeper aspects of who we are as human beings. Dance has also been used as a manner of worship, celebration, story-telling and myth-making, and to celebrate important rites of passage (Berggren, 2005).

Ecstatic Dance can simply be defined as a free-form style of dance inspired by music, allowing the body of the dancer to move freely without judgment or concern for the refinement or graphic aspect of the dance. It is gently facilitated with and dancers are invited to explore movement with particular areas of the body and to explore bigger themes as a whole through their movements. With it being an unstructured and unpartnered form of dance, different rhythms and forms of movement can freely be explored by the dancers (Polito, 2010). Ecstatic dance has the potential to be both striking in the visual sense and also abundant in what it reveals about perception, action, and human interaction. Regardless of these prospects, ecstatic dance has barely been introduced in research relating to social science. The research study focussed on the restorative powers of ecstatic dance in the different dimensions in the lives of ecstatic dance enthusiasts in Ireland.

1.1 Introduction to literature on ecstatic dance

Academic literature referring to ecstatic dance, in its modern form, is virtually non-existent and most of the literature available stems from ecstatic dance facilitators, practitioners and enthusiasts. In this project, the literature review will largely rely on dance research material as well as studies done on dance therapy. Ehrenreich (2007) stated in her book that documents the experiences of explorers as they travelled to the new world, that it was only with the growth of social sciences in the 1930's, that Westerners began to observe the ecstatic dance practices of non-Westerners, in a seemingly more unbiased way. With the shifting view of humanity as a collection of potential equals it was conceded that practices such as ecstatic dancing in traditional cultures was not a savage feature but an expression of a facility that may exist in anyone. Hemmet (1997) stated that in dance, the body becomes ecstatic. He further mused that if the self can be viewed as sedimentation of a certain

arrangement of stable forces, then the ecstatic body can be seen as being liberated from those stable forces. He further states that this loss of self is not only the forsaking of rational thought but also a constructive freeing of the traversing forces in the body.

1.2 Dance therapy

Ecstatic dance is not a therapy though it does have a variety of therapeutic qualities. Pratt (2004) stated in her research on dance therapy that up to the twentieth century, dance therapy played an informal role in both eastern and western medicine. The healing nature of dance as a therapy was predominantly documented in an anecdotal fashion and its restorative powers were used to heal individuals suffering from physical and mental health issues. She further stated that since 1950 research in dance therapy has veered towards being expressive and experimental.

Leseho and Maxwell (2010) stated in their research on creative movement that dance therapy was initiated by Carl Jung through his concept of the active imagination and the importance he saw in creative experiences. These in turn influenced authentic movement and later dance movement therapy. Dance movement therapy is the psychotherapeutic use of dance in a course of action which promotes the emotional, social, cognitive and bodily assimilation of the participant. Mills and Daniluk (2002) mention in their research that dance movement therapy has been used to treat addiction, eating disorders, multiple personality disorder, abused children, victims of domestic violence, older people, people with various disabilities and survivors of sexual abuse. In the different fields of dance therapy, it is the combination of psychotherapy and dance that yields therapeutic results, yet practitioners stress that the embodying effects of dance, in itself, plays an important part.

1.3 Body and mind interdependence

Leseho and Maxwell (2010) stated that many people who use movement approaches for an amalgamated experience of mental, emotional, physical health and personal growth use the interrelationship between body and mind as a recognised principle. They further add that somatic psychology subscribes to the pragmatic understanding that the body reflects the mind and the mind the body. Jonas (1993) wrote that dance is a full mind and body experience due to the way it arouses emotion and requests attention. It was further reported that dancers recollected that dance had a transcendental quality and that it belonged to affective culture.

Ilmonen(2013) shared the idea that dance as an expression encapsulates a full mind and body experience and added that it leads to insightful experiences which can be tender or joyous.

1.4 Expression through dance

Among social scientists there has been a renewed interest in movement studies and how movement and consequently dance, acts as a language, by communicating emotions (Roberts, 2008). Sevdalis and Keller (2011) wrote in their research on dance and social cognition that dance is a major instrument of human expression that may have originated in its basic form as long as 1.8 million years ago with the bipedal anatomy of *Homo ergaster*. Its improved anatomy enabled full body movements which enhanced the ability for gestural communication and body language. Blank (2009) states in her research on dance therapy that dance is one of the oldest forms of nonverbal communication and that, as an art form, it has been used to convey joy and religious fervour among a plethora of other emotions.

Monteiro and Wall (2011) mentioned when discussing dance rituals that dance as a medium can act as a bodily tool for feelings and thoughts, exposing points of view and desires more efficiently than verbal language, under certain circumstances. Similar sentiments were echoed by Gorham (1995) when she stated that various cultures, have during the course of history, used dance as an instrument to give prominence or meaning to significant shifts and occurrences in the lives of individuals, groups or communities. Snowber (2012) held the belief that dance has the ability to allow us to be spontaneous and unrestrained in our bodies, allowing us to think through movement. She explained that thinking in movement is basal to being in a body and that dancing summonses us to express our thoughts through movement.

Leseho and Maxwell (2010) pointed out in their research on creative movement as a coping strategy, that bodies move differently due to the causal effect of even the slightest fluctuations of emotional states and that the body thus is capable of illustrating a variance of intensity or lightness. They further wrote that dance provides the body with an opportunity to communicate and acts as a bridge between the body, mind and spirit. Ilmonen (2013) wrote that dance can be seen as the language of the body and that the deep emotions it expresses could even be hidden memories rising from the unconscious. It is added that neurologists

hold the viewpoint that intense emotional memories can be found in the tissues of the body and in turn these memories and sensations can be brought to mind through dance.

1.5 Transformation through dance

Houston (2005) found in her research that community dance participants were of the opinion that dance sessions empowered them and helped them to respond to situations in their lives in constructive and sustaining ways. The opportunity to dance gave older people a space where they were free to laugh together, celebrate and let go of self-consciousness. Prisoners that were given the opportunity to dance reported that they were able to separate their external identity as a criminal from their life as an accountable person capable of giving and receiving and they learnt to value this differentiation. In both examples the transformative powers of dance are shown through the way that marginalized people are transformed into individuals.

Monteiro and Wall (2011) found in their research that dance can play a crucial part in alleviating as well as remedying, the symptoms of psychological distress and also aid in defusing and reducing the impact of psychological trauma. It is further mentioned that in many societies, these prominent advantages of dance operate without an awareness of their mechanics yet they are perceived as treasured offshoots in themselves. Alexander and Lebaron (2012) found in their study on dance and conflict resolution that the creativity inspired by dance can aid participants in sidestepping stories of conflict. This is done through expressing and identifying deeply-rooted feelings and needs and implementation of new ways of knowing through amplified somatic perceptions, relations and consciousness. In turn an improved understanding of inner geographies where persistent conflicts dwell is developed. Due to this development, an increased collection of beneficial behaviours and new solutions is formed that assists in managing conflict, in the future.

1.6 Emotions and dance

Jeong et al. (2005) proclaimed in their study of dance therapy and emotional response that dance and rhythmic movements have been used for centuries to improve expression and alter emotions. Hoban (2000) is of the opinion that exposure to dance and movement begins during infancy when toddlers move their arms and legs in time with music and uses the example of a young child joyfully bouncing along to a happy tune. She further states that this

basic expression of emotion continues throughout life and does not need to diminish with age. Sevdalis and Keller (2011) found that the ability to decode emotions in emotional body movements such as dance develops in early life. It was found that children between the ages of four and five had already developed the ability to decode emotions such as happiness and sadness as well as their intensity while watching videos of adults dancing. Van Dyck et al. (2013) suggested that the inherent human desire to share emotions with others is fulfilled by the constant audio-visual depiction of the communal intention and collective goal of dancing, sustained by dancers moving to music.

Bajah and Vohra (2011) stated that man is shaped by emotions and that emotions are conveyed due to the force of circumstances. They further stated that pent up and clogged feelings of depression and anger can cause mental and physical discomfort and that dance can aid in releasing emotional tension. Leseho and Maxwell (2010) found that individuals who find it hard to verbalise traumatic life events and difficulties are often able to convey and discharge emotions accumulated in the body through creative movement. Dance can thus act as a liberating release and transform the emotional state of an individual through the deep feelings that are aroused. Snowber (2012) debated that the playful movements during dance can provoke body memories that act as reminders of emotions experienced during play as a child and that these movements can be emotionally touching and deep. Through the act of play, dance can thus elicit the imagination and stimulate both emotional and creative processes.

Murcia, Kreutz, Clift and Bongard (2010) stated in their research on dance and well-being that the improvement of the emotional condition of participants was not only observed while dancing but also started hours and days before while the participants were anticipating their next dance. They further found that the improvement of emotional condition lasted for hours and days after dancing. Participants were reported as saying that they found dance to be a means of emotional expression.

1.7 Physical benefits of dance

The positive effects of dancing as a therapy has been recorded in patients with Parkinson's disease, neurotrauma, depression, arthritis, cancer, fibromyalgia and cardiac insufficiency according to Murcia et al. (2010). They further mention that only recently has

there been an interest in the methodical assessment of the therapeutic influence of dancing in clinical populations.

Quin, Frazer and Edel (2007) did a study on the health benefits of creative dance and found that there was an increase in the lung capacity, flexibility and aerobic capacity of creative dance participants. Statistically they found that female participants enjoyed a larger increase in physical fitness than male participants and also that females held more positive attitudes about the dance compared with males. The suggestion was made that dance can be considered as a way of keeping active, in particular to females who find conventional sports unappealing. They also stated that both young and old, regardless of social class and proficiency, can benefit a great deal from dance. This is further aided by the fact that dance can take many shapes and personify aspects of fun, creativity and performance that makes it an appealing means to a more active and healthier lifestyle.

Murcia et al. (2010) stated in their research that many participants danced to stay in shape and felt that dancing improved their posture, body coordination and balance. Dancing also aided in relieving pain and alleviated physical impairments brought forth by chronic diseases such as osteoporosis, with one participant mentioning that dancing helped them in accepting their health impairment as a part of who they are.

1.8 Social benefits of dance

Pickering (2009) wrote on her experiences of ecstatic dance in Hawaii that the reflective characteristic of dance played a big part in daily sociality and the development of a consequential life. Christensen and Calvo-Merino (2013) mentioned in their study on dance as a subject for empirical aesthetics, that the pleasure of moving in synchrony appears in all cultures and can be observed in dance. Dance has served various functions in activities such as healing, prayer and social gatherings. Those functions of dance have acted as an important interconnection element in many societies by forming social bonds. The pleasure factor as well as the communicative aspect of dance also aids in making dance a socially cohesive experience.

Murcia et al. (2010) stated that dancing can be seen as an avenue for expanding leisure-time, physical and social activity. They mention that modern technology has lessened

individuals need to move and those passive and individual activities such as watching the television, listening to music and spending time online are the activities now used increasingly to fill leisure-time. Through dance, individuals are able to generate feelings of affiliation and are granted the opportunity to meet people and cultivate personal contacts. The emotionally intense aspect of dance intensifies communication on a social level which makes it easier for acquaintances to become closer.

1.9 Spirituality and dance

Blank (2009) used the example of medicine men and women in Native American tribes when discussing the use of dance in healing rituals and mentioned that the spiritual use of dance to ward off evil spirits or to lift spirits goes back to ancient times. She furthermore mentions that in most cultures throughout history, dance has played an important role in ceremonial and religious proceedings. Monteiro and Wall (2011) regaled how traditional African dance is associated with ritualistic and spiritual healing practices and that it is used to address a wide range of maladies. The intrinsic belief in African culture is that to enable healing in the community, both the body and mind need to be assimilated into the healing system. By using dance in the healing system both the individual and the group are thus transformed and empowered and the community as a whole enjoy a spiritually cathartic experience.

Berggren (2005) mentioned that dance played a significant role in spiritual activities and that one can see the importance dance held in ancient tribal life, as it is the second most customary pursuit shown in prehistoric cave paintings, with hunting being the first. The Bemba tribe of Zambia uses a dance ritual to mark the evolution from a girl-child to a woman by the movements of women dancing with the child from a childhood group to an adult group, wrote Gorham (1995). It was reported that the women in charge of this ritual were firm in the belief that they were instigating supernatural changes to take place in the girls involved in this ritual.

1.10 Emerging themes

During the research study and across different questions, two themes prominently emerged. They were stress and meditation. The bulk of the participants revealed that they view ecstatic dance as a tool for relieving and managing stress. Hogan (2013) found that

stress can have a negative impact on health and that stress occurs for a range of external and internal reasons. Stress is often initiated by a clash between the ways in which an individual perceives occurrences and the anticipations of the individual. Babatunde (2013) found in his research on occupational stress that it amplified undesirable health and performance concerns in assorted organisational and social studies. He also found that work stress is a widespread occurrence that inflicted members of a wide range of occupations.

Aldahadha(2013) found in his study on meditation and mindfulness that individuals searching for alternatives to conventional medicine are frequently intrigued by the compelling results and health benefits of meditation. It was reported that meditation has gained popularity in the west for the recuperation of conditions such as depression and anxiety. It is furthermore mentioned that individuals searching for alternatives to conventional medicine are attracted by the undeniable upshots and health benefits of meditation. Van Hoof and Baas (2013) stated in their study on recovery by means of meditation that people are increasingly using meditation to release themselves from daily difficulties and that meditation courses have grown in esteem. They further asserted that on a daily basis individuals typically encounter physically, emotionally and cognitively stressful situations. An emphasis was also place on the value of mediation as a tool to aid the recovery from stress.

1.10 Conclusion of literature reviewed

Throughout the different sections of literature reviewed it can be seen that the various benefits reaped from dance have a symbiotic effect on each other and this therefore could contribute to the restorative effect of ecstatic dance. Leseho and Maxwell (2010) point out the interdependence between bodily and mental health and Jonas (1993) and Ilmonen (2013) both share the idea that dance is a full body and mind experience that can lead to deeply emotional and insightful experiences.

Sevdalis and Keller (2011) and Blank (2009) both point out that dance can act as a form of nonverbal communication and that it predates verbal communication and Berrgren (2005) mentions the prominence of dance in prehistoric cave paintings which verifies their viewpoints. Blank (2009) and Sevdalis and Keller(2011) both agree that dance is one of the oldest forms of nonverbal communication and discuss at length the importance of dance as a

major instrument of human expression. Ilmonen (2013) referred to dance as a language of the body and Monteiro and Wall (2011) brought to the fore that dance can, under certain circumstances express feelings and thoughts more efficiently than verbal language. Gorham (1995) stated that through the course of history not only individuals but also groups and communities have used dance to mark and add prominence to shifts and occurrences in their lives.

Transformation through dance can be observed in the research of Houston (2005) wherein marginalized people are transformed into individuals through participating in community dance. When investigating dance as a form of expression, it can be seen in studies that it correlates with dance as a form of transformation. Alexander and Lebaron (2012) found in their study that individuals in conflict situations can express deeply rooted feelings through creative dance and this in turn leads to transformation.

Hoban (2000) and Keller (2011) expressed the view that emotional ties through, and benefits of dance, start developing at a very young age. Bajah and Vohra (2011) in their research on dance in India discussed that individuals are shaped by emotions and that circumstances dictate how emotions are conveyed. They further stated that pent up emotions can lead to tension and that dance can act as a release. Leseho and Maxwell (2009) similarly stated that dance can act as a liberating release for individuals who have difficulty in verbalising traumatic life events and other hardships and that dance can aid them in conveying and discharging emotions accumulated in the body.

In terms of the physical benefits of dance Quin et al. (2007) found in their study that females received a larger increase in physical fitness than males and that females also held more positive attitudes concerning dance in comparison to males. In their study on creative dance they found that participants measured an increase in lung capacity, flexibility and aerobic capacity. Murcia et al. (2010) found that dance alleviated the discomfort of various ailments and also improved balance, posture and body coordination.

In regards to the social benefits of dance, Christensen and Calvo-Merino (2013) found in their study that dance acts as an important interconnection element in society through the social bonds that it can form and that this appears in all cultures. They place an emphasis on the communicative aspect of dance, which draws a correlation between dance as a form of

expression and the social benefits of dance. Murcia et al. (2010) found that dance produces feelings of affiliation and provides individuals the opportunity to cultivate social contacts by acting as an avenue for social activity. The connection between spirituality and dance has been studied at length and researchers found that it is prevalent throughout history. Blank (2009) mentioned how the medicine men and women of Native American tribes used dance in healing rituals and to ward off evil spirits. Gorham (1995) stated that the Bemba tribe in Zambia use a dance ritual to mark the transition of a child from girlhood to womanhood.

1.11 Objectives of present study

Ecstatic dance has barely been introduced in research in social science and the present study could ascertain the benefits that participants of ecstatic dance in Ireland experience. It was hoped that the multi-faceted nature of the benefits will in turn uncover many beneficial features. Areas such as such as movement as a form of communication, ecstatic dance as a coping strategy and transformation through dance were investigated. With the vast body of research on other forms of dances being done overseas the present study could also provide a unique Irish perspective. The research could act as platform for future research enabling people to reap the benefits brought on by the emotive and embodying effects of ecstatic dance.

Methodology

2.1 Introduction

The research offered an examination as to whether ecstatic dance participants experience emotional, physical, social and spiritual benefits, encapsulated by the term restorative effects, by partaking in ecstatic dance. In the literature review it was found that participants in different forms of dance and creative movement enjoyed these benefits. The research attempted to ascertain whether ecstatic dance participants benefitted in those spheres by partaking in ecstatic dance.

2.2 Research design

The design of the research was a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is strongly advocated by researchers who take an interpretive view and feel that the interpretation of social phenomena is the basis of sociology. Qualitative research in turn, offers methods that deliver a deep and opulent interpretation of social phenomena. Dance participants have varied personal experiences and a qualitative design can aid and entice them to share their views and experiences. Qualitative research methodology is a way of thinking about and studying social reality. It is rooted in anthropology, interpretivism and psychoanalysis and it encompasses both a systematic and philosophical approach (McQueen & Knussen, 2002). Flexibility is a strong characteristic of qualitative research as it has the advantage of enabling a researcher to alter its research design (Babbie, 2010). This characteristic offers the participants freedom that can aid them in bringing forth topics that were not covered in the literature review.

Semi-structured interviews were favoured as they allowed the interviewer to veer from the arranged questions and not only gain information but also a deeper insight into the views and feelings of the interviewees. This method was chosen as a format and the questions applied during the interviews were adjusted to allow diversity to be shown by each interviewee. Researchers are faced with the choice of using the interview transcript as a source and solely analysing it or by using the interview in a more organic sense by combining the interview with the social context. In the first instance the focal point will shift towards the language used by the subject and in the second instance the interaction between the interviewer and the subject (Flick, 2006).

2.3 Apparatus

The interviews were recorded using a Zoom H1 Handy Recorder and the recordings were uploaded on a password protected Lenovo personal computer. The transcribed interview scripts were thematically analysed by using Nvivo10 Software.

2.4 Participants

Ecstatic dance participants with two years of regular dance experience were sought for the research. Information leaflets regarding the study were distributed at three different ecstatic dance groups in Dublin and Greystones and eight participants initially volunteered. The researcher communicated via e-mail with the participants, answering any queries and outlining the practical details of the study. The participants were provided with consent forms (Appendix 1) prior to the interviews and the interviews were conducted at times and locations that were convenient for the participants. The first interview was adopted as a pilot study and six more interviews were conducted with one participant having to withdraw due to illness. The age of the participants ranged between twenty eight and forty two and two were male and four were female. The age and gender ratio reflected in the sample seemed like an accurate reflection of the ratios in Irish ecstatic dance groups.

2.5 Procedure

An interview schedule (Appendix 2) was developed after studying the topics highlighted in the literature review as well as the objectives of the study. The semi-structured interview format gave the researcher the leverage of adapting questions to suit the participants and to ascertain how the participants benefitted from ecstatic dance. Three of the interviews were conducted in Dublin and the researcher travelled to Greystones on two occasions to do the other three interviews.

Participants were told beforehand that the interviews would be conducted like a conversation and the researcher made certain that the interviewees felt comfortable. On commencement of the interviews, the researcher introduced himself and explained the informed consent form and how anonymity of the data would be ensured. Participants were eased into conversation by the initial questions that explored how they became involved in

dance, what their first experiences were like and they were asked how they would describe ecstatic dance to friends and family. Once a rapport was established the questions then delved deeper into the themes disclosed in the literature review. The researcher made a list of prompts beforehand that were used to entice information from the participants in case their answers were unsubstantial. Participants were allowed the freedom to fill in possible gaps in the literature review by being affirmed that their personal experiences were valued and appreciated. They were also asked prior to finishing the interview if they felt that they could add anything that was not addressed. After the interview the participants were thoroughly thanked for their participation.

2.6 Ethical considerations

It is utterly important that ethical issues are given a high priority during the planning stages of a qualitative research project and that those ethical guidelines are kept in motion. By finding solutions to ethical issues research is legitimised (Flick, 2006). It was decided that participants be selected with at least two years ecstatic dance experience to avoid vulnerable individuals who might be under the misconception that ecstatic dance is a form of therapy. Information forms disclosing the nature of the research and the general aim of the interview were used as they are crucial when using interviews in qualitative research (McQueen & Knussen, 2002). Participants were informed that participation was voluntary and asked to fill out consent forms (Appendix 1). They were aware that they could stop the interview and they were informed that participation was confidential. The researcher also ensured that the interview, and all associated documentation were securely stored on a password protected computer and the information used would be destroyed after this study was completed. To ensure anonymity the names of the participants were coded by using the letters X, Y and Z when quoting them.

2.7 Analysis

The transcribed interview scripts were thematically analysed by using Nvivo10 Software. Thematic analysis is one of the most commonly used methods of qualitative analysis. After transcribing the interview scripts the data was coded. The researcher then tried to identify themes which assimilate significant sets of those codes. The next step for the researcher was to pinpoint examples of each theme to demonstrate what the analysis has accomplished.

Presentation of findings

3.1 Introduction

The aim of the research was to reveal the restorative effects of ecstatic dance and it was hoped that participants would shed light on how ecstatic dance has restored wellbeing and health in their lives. A sample population was interviewed in depth and the data gathered revealed their experiences. A thematic analysis of the collected data revealed six main themes that were foreseen from the literature review. They will now be discussed and the alternate themes that emerged will be added at the end.

3.2 Expression through dance

Analysis of the data brought to light that the majority of participants viewed ecstatic dance as a means of expression. The value of dance as a means of expression differed; for some dancers it was a deep and passionate form of expression while for others it was a more playful and communicative means of expression. The dancers who found it expressive on a deeper level were very aware of its significance and were very passionate in their descriptions.

Dance allows you to express your emotions, your feelings, to channel it and it's also a mirror, it's coming back to you, you are expressing it in dance and by doing it, it comes back in a cognitive way. (YXY)

I think that is what dance is, somehow when you are moving whatever needs to be expressed seems to come out, especially in that free improvised dance space. (ZZY)

It's a nice way in particular with connecting with personal loss and moving and freeing some of the energy, and so that would be expressed in my movement. (XXZ)

Expressiveness through dance was valued as it enabled dancers to communicate with the other dancers in the space; talking is not allowed during the dance session and the

facilitator encourages dancers to communicate with each other through movement instead of verbally.

You know you don't even have to have a conversation; there is no time or room for conversation. It's like a conversation with your arms, legs, feet, smiles. (ZXZ)

An element of playfulness and escapism was also observed during questions on the theme of expression. Participants mentioned that movements, whether exaggerated or subtle, expressed different feelings and that dance allowed them to escape self-consciousness and to be exuberant and imaginative.

There is the idea of being danced by the music, a flow, where I am not really thinking about it and just going. I feel like I am expanding my body to the tips and open up and feel that the movements that I make are expressive and it's an expression, an aspect of my personality, the permission to dance the extroverted side and perhaps less self-conscious side and the creative and fun side. (XXZ)

3.3 Transformation through dance

On the theme of transformation through dance, the researcher found that all the participants had found ecstatic dance transformative in their lives. The degrees of transformation varied and the personal fields in which dancers experienced it varied as well. Shyness was a recurring theme during the interviews. Many of the participants felt that shyness could be resolved through ecstatic dance; both while dancing and also in the long run.

Someone who is really shy could be a great dancer or someone feeling socially awkward socially could feel really different through dance so I think it's an opportunity to contradict the label you were given growing up or growing through or life. Well at least it has done for me in some respect. You don't have to have to correspond to the image you were given. (YXY)

There have been times in my life when I have been quite shy and I think I have grown as a person. (XZX)

Ecstatic dance is renowned for being inclusive and ecstatic dance enthusiasts are spread across all social, economic, and ethnic groups. For some of the participants the transformative effects of ecstatic dance were complemented by the openness of the dancers and the non-judgemental ambience of the dance space.

When I went into dance I was able to access feelings more, your healing is about embodying those feelings, healing the heart and connections through people you meet, the dancing community, meeting the people that opened your heart, its more tactile, you are engaging with people, you'd be hugging people; I was not brought up like that, I found it hard and then it became part of my life; older people, younger people, people from all walks of life, it really opened things up for me. That was very transformative. (ZZY)

Participants expressed that the transformative effects could be witnessed in numerous spheres of their lives. It was mentioned by a few participants that in a country such as Ireland where alcohol plays such a large role recreationally, ecstatic dance offers a constructive and a sober alternative.

It has shown me how to have fun sober but you can go deep, it can clear so much and works on so many levels; physical, emotional, mental, it's very healing. It transforms all of those. It frees one up, there is no feeling self-consciousness, maybe at the start, but there are big shifts and it continues, it's an on-going process. (ZXZ)

Through the interviews relationships between the different themes could also be seen. Participants reported for instance that transformations have interacted across different levels and this substantiates the claims made in the discussion section of the reviewed literature.

Two particular things have transformed. One is my relationship to my body and knowing that if something happens that it is in my body and I need to get it out fast. I need to go for a swim or go for a dance, so what would have transformed is realising the impact of negative emotions on your body. (XYX)

3.4 Emotions and dance

During the interviews all participants made it clear that ecstatic dance is esteemed by them in terms of the emotional benefits that it can offer. Participants felt that ecstatic dance afforded them the opportunity to connect with themselves on an emotional level. The emotional benefits were felt both during the dance when the music and movement elicited an emotional response as well as in the long term with what they felt they took home from the dance.

My kids and friends would know I have been dancing because they would see me glowing, though it can work on both sides. Now I am more surface, when I go dancing now on Thursdays I feel so light and lovely for days afterwards. Whenever I have not been able to go I have really missed it, feeling like I need my fix. (XZX)

I find and no matter what you come in with I always find I feel much better after dancing. (ZZZ)

The majority of participants also felt that at times there was an element of play in ecstatic dance when questioned about the emotional benefits of dance. It was reported that the play element allowed them to return to a childlike state which was a rare feeling for most of them as adults.

Sometimes we do silly things reverting back to childhood, being silly, and I think that is beautiful. That you allow yourself to come back to the beginning, that senses of innocence, play. I think that is unique. (YXY)

The issue of emotions and masculinities was also raised, with one of the male participants reflecting that ecstatic dance offers him an inimitable opportunity to connect with himself on an emotional level. This was facilitated by the environment as well as the instrumental manner in which ecstatic dance can enable dancers the freedom to be emotionally explorative.

It's a great way as a man to express myself safely and to connect emotionally, my own vulnerability and struggles, because it is a loving and protective space it affords me the freedom to do so and that brings in a therapeutic element. As a man, connecting with my vulnerability is a huge challenge. It does afford me the space to do that in a medium I am comfortable in and at my own pace. (XXZ)

On an emotional level, participants also reported that ecstatic dancing has the ability to prepare them emotionally for impending matters that could drain emotional resources. By taking pre-emptive measures they were thus enabled to tackle those concerns in a more proficient way.

If something is coming up in life, I take it into dance with me and I set it up in my body for that thing. It's like knowing to get yourself into a physiological state for a situation, so it's like, I can take on sitting in my chair because I have built myself up for it. So now if something is coming up I'll be ready for it. I'll know to bring it in early. I have had so many amazing experiences in dancing that has solved a lot of stuff for me. (XYX)

The issue of emotions and dance also raised the fact that negative emotions as well as issues to do with anger, sadness and loss can come up during dancing. The researcher avoided probing these issues in order to discourage the interviews crossing ethical boundaries.

Dance does have this cathartic affect, it does sometimes bring out grief and difficult feelings, it has happened to me. After different stages of your life and dancing you could well want to have fun, if there is a lot of emphasis on how you are feeling it can be heavy, I love the movements though, it's the only time I have seen adults have really good fun, especially sober people. (ZZY)

3.5 Physical benefits of dance

During the research it was concluded that all the participants viewed ecstatic dance as physically beneficial though for all of them it is seen as a secondary result. Not a

single participant viewed it as their primary reason for dancing though it was agreed that it is of tremendous physical benefit.

It's a by-product, because only recently I have started thinking of it as exercise. Well I have heard of people speaking of it as being a great workout but I don't want to think of it as that else it would become that. (XYX)

It is amazingly good for keeping fit, though it's not primarily what it's about. The priority is movement and expression. (ZZY)

A couple of participants did say that they have described it as exercise to outsiders when they have been queried about ecstatic dance when feeling that a more imaginative explanation would be lost on them. The physical aspect and benefits of ecstatic dance has also been a point that the interviewees have mentioned when endeavouring to get friends or family to give it a try.

For fitness, definitely I would say that to people, I would say you can just come and think of it as an exercise. I would say grand you can now eat that chocolate cake. (XZX)

3.6 Social benefits of dance

Ecstatic dance is an unpartnered form of dance with dancers occasionally being invited by the facilitator to join up in pairs or groups for a small part of the session. In the study connection was a word that came up not only when discussing emotions and dance but also in terms of connecting with other dancers. Most of the participants enjoyed the moments spent dancing with others though some reported that it made them self-conscious and took away from their focus on themselves and their emotions by making them aware of the other dancers. The tolerance and open mindedness of the dance community was highly valued by the participants as well as the role that the dancers play in contributing to the ambience of the dance space.

I think it's like there's a lovely respectful community, primarily I am there for the dance but it has revolved in a lovely respectful community. (XXZ)

Some of the participants also spoke at length about the good friendships they have formed and of the deep bonds they have forged. Social gatherings that now take place outside of the dance group were also mentioned.

I have met some really amazing people through dance and some of my closest friends are now from the dance community. I have gotten so much help from the dance community in my life. (XZX)

It was also noted that some of the participants were wary of forming bonds that extended outside the dance space. That was due to the fact that they hold the space as well as ecstatic dancing dear. In turn it led to them being cautious of how relationships with dancers on the outside could affect the dynamic.

I think there is a risk for me in that and I want to make sure I keep the boundary, it's important to me. I think the last thing you want at the dance is to think he or she does not like me because then it goes against the reason you went in the first place, with it being your sacred space. (YXY)

3.7 Spirituality and dance

The majority of the participants felt that there is a spiritual dimension to ecstatic dance and that it is a major factor and benefit of the dance practice. Half of the participants had enjoyed the benefits of Buddhist practices at stages of their lives and most of the participants described themselves as not being religious. Many of the participants found it hard to define the term spiritual describing it as something they could feel rather than articulate.

I find dance spiritual but it's hard to explain. (XYX)

Ecstatic dance is very spiritual; spiritual is a word I feel is difficult to understand though. (ZXZ)

Some of the participants felt that the spiritual element of ecstatic dance was the main drawing point. The dance space was also described by participants as being a prayer space, a sacred space and a church. Those descriptions added weight to the perspective that participants feel that ecstatic dance holds spiritual benefits.

Spirituality for me it's the primary reason why I dance, it's hard to describe, dance started being my church, a space to pray and that then connected evolved to most of my dancing I am not religious but am quite spiritual, in the dance I often pray for my children. (XZX)

I do feel the need for a spiritual dimension in my life. I have struggled with the Catholic Church as an institution and this brings in an element of spirituality and the dance becomes a prayer space, a respectful community, dance provides me with a space to reflect and I think that is a prayer space, it's a spiritual thing. (XXZ)

Ecstatic dance was also described by some of the participants as having a trance effect and bringing forth an altered state of consciousness. A few references were also made to shamanic and tribal dance practices. Two of the participants felt though that ecstatic dance cannot be viewed as a main spiritual practice and that it is complementary to other spiritual paths.

In regards to how I think dance is spiritual and how I have experienced it as a spiritual practice is that I have come out of dance feeling godly, as if anything is possible, a feeling of great power, an altered state of consciousness. (YXY)

I think you need guidance to make it a spiritual experience. I think processes come out of your cells and body; you need spiritual guidance from somewhere else. I don't think only dance can give you enlightenment. (ZZY)

3.8 Emerging themes

Two themes that emerged during the interviews and across different questions were stress and meditation. Stress relief and management through ecstatic dance were mentioned by five of the participants. Sources of stress varied between work and personal life and the participants emphasised the value of dance in alleviating the stress. The interviewees mentioned that stress could be experienced in the body as well as emotionally and that the restorative effects of ecstatic dance in terms of stress were highly tangible.

I'll come out afterwards feeling refreshed and invigorated and alive and I think that's due to the movement, the relieving of stress. I hold a lot of stress in my chest and upper body and I find dancing very good for relieving that. (XXZ)

I recently had family stress-and when I went dancing I got most of it out. I did not even know it was there and felt great afterwards. (ZZY)

It's like you can dance the stress away. (ZZZ)

Meditation as a theme emerged through all the interviews and across a variety of questions. It was mentioned when probed on dance and spirituality but also in how participants would describe ecstatic dance to outsiders. The value of the meditative effects of ecstatic dance was also praised for the manner in which it can quieten internal dialogues. A few of the participants viewed ecstatic dance as meditation through movement.

Dance can be compared to meditation though. It helps switch off the thought process, all the chatter inside the head, going within, letting go. (ZZZ)

Meditation would have a role in dance. I would feel a strong connection to the beyond when I dance, similarly to meditation. (XYX)

I'd say it's more of a meditation dance and it's you go with yourself and it's a way of connecting with yourself and it's not restricted. (XZX)

3.9 Conclusion

During the analysis of the six different interviews it became evident that there was a similar pattern running through them. The observed pattern was that the different themes that were brought to light have a synergetic effect on each other. Participants placed different values on different themes though common threads were running in the themes regarding emotions and transformation. The data further reflected that participants generally felt that the transformational, emotional and spiritual elements of ecstatic dance held the largest appeal.

Two themes that emerged during the interviews and across different questions were stress and meditation. Stress relief and management through ecstatic dance were mentioned by five of the participants and the sources of stress differed. The meditative qualities of ecstatic dance were mentioned in regards to spirituality but also for the way in which it quietens internal dialogues.

Discussion

4.1 Introduction

The aim of the research was to ascertain the restorative effects of ecstatic dance. The restorative effects were investigated across a wide range of dimensions in which other forms of dance have previously been shown to have a restorative effect. Due to a lack of scholarly studies on ecstatic dance it was theorised that ecstatic dance could hold the myriad of benefits that other forms of dance have. Those benefits are restorative in nature and the study hoped to substantiate that ecstatic dance has properties that are restorative.

4.2 Expression through dance

Ilmonen (2013) documented in her study on dance movement therapy that dance can be perceived as the language of the body and that the deep emotions it expresses could be hidden memories rising from the unconscious. Participants held different views on expression through ecstatic dance; for some their movements mirrored their emotions and provided them the opportunity to analyse their emotions. For other participants, ecstatic dance afforded them the opportunity to escape societal constraints and to express a side of their personalities that are usually shielded.

Monteiro and Wall (2011) mentioned in their study on African dance that dance can act as a bodily tool for feelings and thoughts and that it has the ability to expose points of view and desires more efficiently than verbal language, under certain circumstances. Participants in the research study echoed similar sentiments and added the importance of the dance space in assisting them the freedom to be expressive. They reported that this freedom is afforded through the open-minded attitudes of the other dancers and by the way the dance is facilitated. Leseho and Maxwell (2010) documented in their study on creative movement that dance provides the body with the opportunity to communicate and that movement can be used as a coping strategy. Participants mentioned that through movement they are able to connect with and process personal loss and. Those feelings are thus brought to the surface and consequently dealt with, encapsulated and expressed through their movements.

4.2 Transformation through dance

Houston (2005) found in her research on community dance that dance has an empowering effect and the ability to transform individuals into being able to respond to life situations in constructive and sustaining ways. Initial feelings of awkwardness were reported by participants upon being introduced to ecstatic dance but those feelings soon subsided and participants reported feelings of rigidity being replaced by a loss of inhibitions. These bodily transformations were then seen as a catalyst for transformations that took part in other arenas of their lives. The revelation of, and ability to, have fun while sober through ecstatic dance was also mentioned by a few participants. This indicated a fair level of transformation in the societal context of a country such as Ireland where alcohol plays such a large and normative part in terms of having fun.

Alexander and Lebaron (2012) stated in their study on dance and conflict resolution that an improved understanding of inner geographies where persistent conflicts dwell can be developed through dancing. In the future, dancers can use an increased collection of beneficial behaviours and new solutions that have been formed to assist in managing conflict. Participants in the research study mentioned similarly that through ecstatic dance an improved relationship with their bodies was formed. The improved relationship with their bodies led to a deeper understanding of the impact of negative emotions or being in a sedentary role. Ecstatic dance provided them with an awareness of, as well as an avenue, to deal with those matters. This awareness extended to using ecstatic dance as a tool to preemptively prepare themselves for emotionally strenuous events in the future.

Houston (2005) further found that dance afforded people a space where they were free to laugh together, celebrate and let go of self-consciousness. Participants in the research study reported that they were able to relinquish self-consciousness and shyness and have fun. Participants additionally mentioned that ecstatic dance granted them the opportunity to revisit states of play that they had not experienced since childhood. Those playful states were coupled with feelings of innocence.

3.4 Emotions and dance

Bajah and Vohra (2011) stated in their study on the therapeutic implications of dance that repressed and clogged feelings of depression and anger can cause mental and physical

discomfort and that dance can aid in liberating emotional tension. Leseho and Maxwell (2010) stated that dance can act as a liberating release and transform the emotional state of an individual. This rang true in particular with individuals who find it hard to verbalise traumatic life events and difficulties. During the research study the issue of emotions and dance raised the fact that negative emotions as well as issues to do with anger, sadness and loss can come up through ecstatic dance. Participants found that ecstatic dance gave them the chance to analyse and process these issues in a safe and protected environment. The researcher steered clear of delving into these issues in order to discourage the interviews crossing ethical boundaries.

Pratt (2004) commented in her study on art, dance and music therapy that the healing qualities of dance have been revered in both western and eastern medicine, up to the twentieth century. It was additionally stated that the healing nature of dance and its restorative powers were used to heal individuals suffering from physical and mental health issues. The term healing was observed at numerous times during the research study with participants commenting on the healing capacity of ecstatic dance. Participants mentioned that it heals the heart, thereby asserting that it is emotionally beneficial. Mentions were further made regarding the ability of ecstatic dance in terms of healing properties on a physical and mental level.

Snowber (2012) observed in her dance research that the playful movements during dance can be emotionally touching and deep and stated that dance can thus provoke the imagination and encourage emotional processes. It was mentioned that those playful movements can act as recaps of emotions experienced during play as a child. Participants in the research study valued the play element in ecstatic dance and pointed out that it held inimitability in terms of enabling them to relapse to playful states not experienced since childhood. The themes of play and having fun popped up time and again during the study with participants appreciating the innocent and light emotions that go with these themes. Participants pointed out that healing through ecstatic dance was a progressive process and likened it to a journey.

Murcia et al. (2010) found in their research on dance and well-being that an improvement in the emotional condition of dancers lasted not only for the duration of dance sessions but for hours and days afterwards. During the research study it was observed that

participants experienced the same lasting improvement in emotional condition after an ecstatic dance session. On a physical level participants reported feeling tired after dancing with some feeling the need for solitude. The day after dancing and for days thereafter participants reported feeling energised as well as emotionally renewed. It was remarked that their loved ones could observe changes in them after dancing; in terms of physical appearance as well as an improvement in disposition.

4.5 Physical benefits of dance

Murcia et al. (2010) stated in their research that a myriad of physical benefits can be reaped through dance and that many participants danced to keep fit. Quin et al. (2007) regaled in their research on the health benefits of creative dance that dance held a particular lure to those who find conventional sports unappealing. In the research study it was found that most participants agreed that ecstatic dance could raise fitness levels. Participants did however not view ecstatic dance as a workout and a raise in fitness levels was seen as a by-product and a secondary benefit. The participants generally felt that the transformational, emotional and spiritual dimensions of ecstatic dance held a larger allure than the aspect of improved fitness.

Quin et al. (2007) stated that both young and old, regardless of social class and proficiency, can benefit a great deal from dance. This is further aided by the fact that dance can take many shapes and personify aspects of fun, creativity and performance. In turn those factors present dance as an appealing means to a more active and healthier lifestyle. Participants in the research study mentioned that they would sometimes accentuate ecstatic dancing as being physically beneficial when enticing outsiders to give it a try. This would be done largely when it would seem as if a deeper definition of ecstatic dance could be lost on the person they are trying to describe it to.

4.6 Social benefits of dance

In research conducted by Christensen and Calvo-Merino (2013) on dance and empirical aesthetics it was stated that dance is a socially cohesive experience due to the communicative aspect of it as well as it being a pleasurable activity. They found that across different cultures and throughout history dance has enabled social bonding due to its use in activities that interconnect elements in society. In the research study ecstatic dance

participants mentioned that they appreciated the freedom to choose whether they want to dance with others or dance on their own. Mentions were made of the high value they placed on the tolerance and open mindedness of the dance community. It was also explained that a subtle connection exists between dancers due to the emotional and expressive nature of ecstatic dance. Participants spoke extensively about friendships that have been forged and how it has led to other social activities.

Murcia et al. (2010) stated in their research on dance and well-being that through dancing individuals are able to generate feelings of affiliation and are granted the opportunity to meet people and cultivate personal contacts. The emotionally intense aspect of dance intensifies communication on a social level which makes it easier for acquaintances to become closer. In the research study ecstatic dance participants mentioned that a strong support network exists in the ecstatic dance community. The deep emotional experiences that are experienced and sometimes shared by ecstatic dance enthusiasts forges deep bonds which shows a connection between the emotional and social aspects of ecstatic dance. Some of the participants were wary though of extending friendships beyond the dance space. This was largely due to a fear of the impact that it could have on the space as relationships outside the dance space could add feelings of obligation that would change the existing dynamic. Participants added that they were afraid of the consequences that strained relationships with other dancers could have.

4.7 Spirituality and dance

Blank (2009) stated in her research on dance therapy that spiritual use of dance to ward off evil spirits or to lift spirits goes back to ancient times and that in some contemporary societies dance is still used to heal the spirit. It was additionally revealed that in most cultures throughout history, dance has played a significant role in ceremonial and religious proceedings. The spiritual dimension of ecstatic dance was a factor that appealed to most of the participants in the research study. A common viewpoint was that participants found it hard to define spirituality. This was due to spirituality being something that they felt on a deep level and that the experiential nature of the spiritual made it difficult to put into words.

Berggren (2005) pointed out while discussing ecstatic dance that throughout the history of mankind it has been noted that dance has played a prominent role in spiritual practices. Participants had a shared view of the dance space; it was seen as being a sacred space as well as prayer space with the reflective qualities of dance being likened to prayer. Ecstatic dance was also referred to as having a trance effect and bringing forth an altered state of consciousness. These metaphysical characteristics of ecstatic dance share the same qualities as many forms of spirituality. Comparisons between Buddhist and shamanic practices and ecstatic dance were also made by some of the participants.

4.8 Emerging themes

During the interviews and across different questions, two themes prominently emerged. They were stress and meditation. The majority of the participants mentioned that they view ecstatic dance as a tool for relieving and managing stress.

Hogan (2013) found in his study on stress management that stress occurs for a range of external and internal reasons and that stress can have a negative impact on health. Stress is often caused by a clash between the ways in which an individual perceives events and the expectations of the individual. Babatunde (2013) found in his research on occupational stress that work stress is a widespread occurrence across various occupations. He furthermore found that occupational stress increased undesirable health and performance concerns in assorted organisational and social studies.

In the research study participants highlighted the value of ecstatic dance in relieving stress brought forth from sources such as work and personal life. It was mentioned that stress could be experienced in the body with stressful events manifesting themselves as bodily aches and stiffness. Participants reported that those physical consequences of stress were improved and remedied through ecstatic dance. It was further stated that on an emotional level the restorative effects of ecstatic dance in terms of relieving stress were highly tangible.

Aldahadha (2013) found in his study on meditation and mindfulness that meditation has gained popularity in the west for the improvement of conditions such as depression and anxiety. It was reported that individuals searching for alternatives to

conventional medicine are frequently intrigued by the compelling results and health benefits of meditation. Meditation as a theme emerged through all the interviews and across a variety of questions in the research study. It was also mentioned by participants while discussing ecstatic dance and spirituality due to the way that meditation features in some spiritual practices.

On the emotional front meditation was compared with ecstatic dance for the manner in which it can quieten internal dialogues. Some of the participants viewed ecstatic dance as meditation through movement and also felt that the meditative qualities of ecstatic dance were a practical way of defining ecstatic dance to outsiders.

Van Hoof and Baas (2013) stated in their study on recovery by means of meditation that people are increasingly using meditation to liberate themselves from everyday difficulties. They further asserted that individuals typically encounter physically, emotionally and cognitively stressful situations on a daily basis and that meditation is a valuable tool to aid the recovery from stress. Their study further showed that that participants who used meditation as a recovery activity gave accounts of increased calmness and composure.

These observations showed a relationship between the emerging themes of stress and meditation in the research study. Ecstatic dance participants could thus have highlighted these themes due to the fact that the one is a common hassle that is remedied by the other. The study set out to show the restorative effects of ecstatic dance and through the emerging themes it can be seen that the meditative qualities of ecstatic dance restore the negative effects of stress.

4.9 Limitations

Time constraints turned out to be a limitation in the study as it prevented the researcher from gathering a larger sample. It would have advanced future studies if a larger sample size could have been accessed as it would have enhanced the results being analysed and discussed. Another limitation is that thematic analysis is interpretive and subjective thus a different researcher may have interpreted the data in a different way.

4.10 Future research

Through analysing the data the researcher realised that a fair number of options for future research exist. The fact that ecstatic dance has barely been introduced in research in social science contributes to ecstatic dance being a subject that is ripe for exploration.

A prospect that can be explored in the future is ecstatic dance and masculinities. A male perspective on ecstatic dance as a tool for emotional exploration could involve exploring the value of the ecstatic dance space. This could be done from the viewpoint of the dance space as being free from the gendered societal constraints that hamper men from connecting and dealing with emotional matters. Ecstatic dance as a coping strategy in terms of loss, grief and anger could also be explored in future studies, these issues were raised but the researcher sidestepped them to avoid ethical issues. With the extensive body of research on other forms of dances being done overseas the future studies will also provide a unique Irish perspective.

4.11 Conclusion

The research study aimed to ascertain the benefits that participants of ecstatic dance in Ireland experience. It was found that participants benefitted greatly from ecstatic dance as a form of communication, a coping strategy and as a spiritual practice. Ecstatic dance was also valued in terms of connection; not only in the dimension of connecting with others but also in terms of giving dancers the space to connect with their emotions. The widespread impact of stress was a factor that was highlighted by participants. It was gathered that the meditative effects of ecstatic dance hold a high value in restoring as well as creating serenity. The study aimed to explore and draw attention to the restorative qualities that ecstatic dance has by giving a voice to ecstatic dance participants. It can now be concluded that ecstatic dance plays a restorative and significant role in the lives of those people.

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Appendix 1



A qualitative study into ecstatic dance and the restorative effects of music and movement.

My name is Jacques Rooke and I am conducting research that explores the restorative effects of ecstatic dance.

You are invited to take part in this study and participation involves an interview that will take roughly 40 minutes.

Participation is completely voluntary and so you are not obliged to take part. If you do take part and any of the questions do raise difficult feelings, you do not have to answer that question, and/or continue with the interview.

Participation is anonymous. If, after the interview has been completed, you wish to have your interview removed from the study this can be accommodated within two weeks of participating. The interview, and all associated documentation, will be securely stored and stored on a password protected computer.

Should you require any further information about the research, please contact

Student: Jacques Rooke e-mail: jacquesrooke@hotmail.com

Research Supervisor: Siobáin O'Donnell e-mail: Siobain.ODonnell@dbs.ie

Thank you for participating in this study.

Participant Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix 2

Interview schedule

- How were you introduced to ecstatic dance? (Probe previous dance experience, opportunity to ease into the topic)
- Can you describe the initial experience the first time you attended an ecstatic dance? (Probe how the experience has changed)
- How would you describe ecstatic dance to a friend/family member who was aware of your participation?(Probe if they have ever invited anyone along,-how they would describe/promote it to a newcomer)
- Can you tell me if ecstatic dance is a means of expression for you? (Probe non-verbal communication,-dance as a way of expressing emotions, putting feelings into movement)
- Has ecstatic dance been transformative in your life? (Probe changes since dancing,- imagining how life would be different should the interviewing not have been introduced to ecstatic dance?)
- Can you identify with ecstatic dance being an emotionally beneficial activity?(Probe whether feelings are restricted to duration of dance or longer lasting)
- Has ecstatic dance been of physically beneficial to you?(Probe play factor, exercise, mind and body interdependence)
- Does ecstatic dance hold any social benefits to you?
- Can you identify with ecstatic dance being a spiritual experience?
- Is there anything else you would like to mention concerning ecstatic dance? (Place emphasis on individual experience, value of input and opinion)

Thank participant for partaking in the study.

