The Restorative Effects of Ecstatic Dance: A Qualitative Study

Jacques Rooke (1507488), Supervisor Name: Siobán O'Donnell

Abstract
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. The study concluded 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 restorative and significant role in the lives of people who practice ecstatic dance in Ireland.

Introduction
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. Ecstatic dance has barely been introduced in research in social science and the present study will ascertain the benefits that participants of ecstatic dance in Ireland experience. Research has shown that there are numerous benefits that can be reaped through other forms of dance. The study will investigate whether ecstatic dance shares those benefits and restorative effects. The research offers 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. With the vast body of dance research studies being done overseas the present study will also provide a unique Irish perspective. The research can act as platform for future research enabling people to reap the restorative benefits of ecstatic dance.

Method
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. Semi-structured interviews were conducted on six ecstatic dance participants in Dublin and Greystones. Semi-structured interviews were favoured as they allowed the interviewer to veer from the set of questions and not only gain information but also a deeper insight into the views and feelings of the interviewees. 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. 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. The interviews were recorded and the The transcribed interview scripts were thematically analysed by using Nvivo10 Software. Participants were informed that participation was voluntary and asked to fill out consent forms. They were aware that they could stop the interview and informed that anonymity would be ensured.

Results
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 quiets internal dialogues.

Discussion
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 connection 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 creating as well as restoring serenity.

References

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