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The Social and Cultural practice of Dance: A tool for Resilience against Nostalgia among Immigrants

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Abstract

This paper is a culmination of literature materials reviewed about nostalgia and dance movement therapy. The arguments and discussions herein try to strategically position dance as a resilient performative tool to avert or mitigate nostalgia amongst immigrants in general. It will try to discuss how most people end up in the confines of new nation-states and try to navigate contemporary ways of integration and acculturation in these new homelands. These people are normally referred to as immigrants, asylees, or refugees. Moreover, when speaking of such groups of people, the issue of nostalgia should be addressed through the lens of their disconnection, depression, and anxiety caused not only by homesickness but by the lack of acceptance in a new country.

Keywords: Immigrants, Nostalgia, Dance movement therapy, and integration.

Introduction

Nostalgia among immigrants is a recurrent theme within broader debates on issues such as migration, integration, and social cohesion. While studies have demonstrated that connection to home countries fosters cohesion and mental health in diasporic communities (Erol 2012), it is still unclear whether internal social cohesion distances these communities from the societies around or encourages relations to and exchanges with them. Although forced migrants may have little opportunity to bring material goods, all come with their bodies and the competencies of bodily praxis. In this way, dancing may be an especially important way for people to establish some freedom and individuality in the context of lives that are otherwise frequently marked by powerlessness and subsumption under ‘immigration’ and ethnic groupings. The constant struggle of feeling at home or connecting with home countries catalyzes nostalgic tendencies among immigrants.

The broad phenomenon of acculturation as a process of adjusting one’s values, beliefs, and habits according to the socio-cultural environment of an individual is an extremely complex social issue. Primarily, there is currently no clear line between acquiring new customs and habits to feel safe and comfortable within the given social context and sacrificing one’s culture and heritage to “blend in” with the rest of society. The problem is particularly relevant among immigrants since their immigration is directly correlated with a challenging socio-political situation that threatens their well-being and life back at home. Thus, there is no possibility to homogeneously claim that the decision to abandon one's native land is weighted and voluntary among immigrants and refugees. In such a context, it would be reasonable to question the extent to which people should be willing to embrace new cultures and environments, as well as the level of emotional stability required to voluntarily accumulate to such an environment.

Nostalgia, a Health issue Among Immigrants

While people are generally familiar with this notion, there currently exists a dissonance in terms of the connotative meaning behind it. Thus, as outlined in the study by Smeekes and Jetten (2019), the term “nostalgia” was first coined by Johannes Hofer, a Swiss scholar, to label a medical condition of extreme homesickness followed by anxiety, depression, and fatigue. Since then, nostalgia has been long considered as one's physically hazardous state of longing for home. According to Smeekes and

Jetten (2019), the issue of sentiment and nostalgia is now extremely widespread across the globe due to high rates of globalization and mobility followed by confusion, associating nostalgia with an inherently negative feeling. Sedikides and Wildschut (2019), on the other hand, argue that nostalgia as a social phenomenon may benefit the ingroup of immigrants in terms of self-evaluation, empathy, and mutual support. Thus, the idea of "fighting" nostalgia in this context stands for coping with homesickness and anxiety related to living abroad for a long time.

Among the crucial questions to be answered when dealing with issues of immigrants is whether they always experience a nostalgic feeling and want to come back to their homeland. Different disciplines tried to approach this question, such as anthropology, sociology, psychology, philosophy, and geography (Caldwell & Leighton, 2016). It was a significant revelation that a home is not necessarily a physical building since relationships, feelings, and practices are also exceptionally important for a better understanding of one's inner identity. This is why birthplaces do not always resemble nostalgia and vice versa, especially among immigrants. The willingness to find an ideal home is a sentiment that is characteristic of all humans, especially when it relates to the time and space that bring joy and give the feeling of safety (Harris, 2019). For any given person, the definition of home is going to be different, making nostalgia into a multifaceted concept that is frequently ignored by researchers that work with immigrants.

The fact of establishing borders and moving away from the painful memories forces many immigrants to build up imaginary thresholds to ease the pain. Nostalgia (also known as homesickness) is the biggest problem for immigrants because it forces them to experience negative thoughts and feelings that motivate them to go back to their homeland (Kawano, 2018). Despite the overall popularity of the concept, nostalgia was not covered as anything serious before the second half of the 20th century. The pathological implications of nostalgia were highlighted by researchers as one of the problems that immigrants face when held back against different values, customs, relationships, and behaviors. Any given foreign society is a source of stress, and homesickness tends to play the role of a mediator intended to protect immigrants from harsh feelings (Aranda et al., 2020). The problem of the cultural identity of immigrants can be linked directly to homesickness because their nostalgia stems from the inability to depart peacefully.

Another health subject that has to be covered when describing the essential problems of immigrants related to Nostalgia is mental health. For instance, immigrant individuals could be rather moved by the condition of their children since the latter are crucially prone to behavioral and emotional difficulties resulting from relocation (Rot, 2018). It should be noted that immigration breeds Nostalgia which is a crucial source of stress that is going to pursue immigrants in the host country due to the differences in native languages, cultural expectations, and other specific issues. All these problems, combined, drive immigrants closer to severe mental health diagnoses. Given that the number of policies that consider this particular element is limited, the process of cultural adaptation has to be monitored closely by all respective care and service providers (Sheppard & Broughton, 2020). Successful adaptation of immigrants is accompanied by mental health issues in more than 80% of cases, with women being the most exposed to anxiety and depressive episodes (Kawano & Chang, 2019). Native children are not as often affected by external and internal struggles as their immigrant counterparts.

It was also claimed by Suarez-Balcazar et al. (2018) that exceptionally high levels of anxiety can be found in asylee immigrants who have already had a history of mental illness as a result of Nostalgia. The most prevalent outcome that has to be covered when discussing immigrants is depression that can be accompanied by suicidal ideation in the severest cases. Given that most immigration cases are

linked to an attempt to find better financial support and increase wealth, the presence of immigrants makes the problem of mental health in migrants even deeper (Jo et al., 2018). Similar to their parents, immigrant children reflect the behavioral struggles and mirror the emotional condition of their fathers and mothers. From anxiety to depression, practically any disorder can be copied by children, causing them to suffer even more due to the multiplying negative effects of nostalgia. This is why the decisions on whether to seek help or not are often affected by cognitive bias, where immigrants are too afraid to ask for help from the local population and service providers.

The ultimate concept that brings instability in the mental health of immigrants is the existence of discrimination. Adults, young adults, and children may face various cases of discrimination when becoming an immigrant due to the stigma that is linked to the notion of a refugee (Kawano, 2018). In this situation, anxiety and depression can be accompanied by post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms. The fact of immigration being both an individually and communally important social process makes it safe to say that discrimination could limit one's capability of engaging in therapy or seeking help in general. With this information in mind, it should be noted that most challenges met by immigrants revolve around their mental health due to the need to adjust to new norms and regulations (Caldwell & Leighton, 2016). Severe mental health issues experienced by immigrants are exceptionally visible and have to be addressed thoughtfully if therapists expect to help immigrants overcome the feeling of nostalgia and all its negative derivatives.

Dance Movement Therapy for Nostalgia

The methods of dealing with homesickness are diverse for every group yet remain closely associated with preserving one's cultural attributes such as clothing, language or dialect, music, popular culture, and dancing. However, once these aspects are concerned, scholars and the general population mostly associate them with the opportunity to raise cultural awareness and preserve one's ethnic identity rather than perceive them as a coping mechanism for homesickness. As a result, few researchers emphasized the significance of dancing and movement as a therapeutical means of addressing nostalgia. The problem of unwanted exile is what makes it impossible to resolve nostalgia on the fly and switch to positive behaviors. Therefore, the process of getting used to a new environment could be polished with the help of therapeutic interventions intended to enhance immigrants' contact with the new environment and help them cope with any emergent feelings (Kawano & Chang, 2019). From the psychological point of view, some of the most prevalent issues that could affect immigrants' mental are depression, obsessive thoughts, cognitive-behavioral symptoms, and apathy. According to Dieterich-Hartwell et al. (2020), nostalgia could be complemented by certain physical influences such as intestinal problems, sleep disturbance, headaches, fevers, and loss of appetite. The lack of instruments that could facilitate the process of adaptation makes it virtually impossible to replace nostalgic thoughts and feelings with their positive counterparts and yet in fact dance would fill this void. Some of the immigrants only cure themselves when they get back to their homeland. The ultimate problem with homesickness is that many immigrants do not want to engage in therapy and merely want to leave for their birthplace.

However, several significant studies were marking the relevance of moving and dancing psychotherapy among refugees and immigrants. First, the phenomenological research by Verreault (2017) dwelled on the notion of Dance/Movement Therapy (DMT) as a method of alleviating stress, building resilience, and connecting with other ingroup members in female refugees/ camps. Fundamentally, DMT stands for the process of using "movement to further an individual's emotional, cognitive and physical functioning" (Verreault, 2017, p. 120). During four interventions, the scholar

introduced four DMT sessions as an accompanying tool for resilience-building psychological therapy for asylum seekers, immigrants, and refugees. The results of such an intervention demonstrated that immigrants benefited from enhancing their sense of worth, self-regulation, belonging to a community, and cultural identity celebration. Hence, it became evident that "DMT can complement a resilience-oriented framework, provide group support, create a safe space and promote resource building for asylum seekers and refugees" (Verreault, 2017, p. 131). In other words, the opportunity to dance, especially as far as culturally significant dances are concerned, allows immigrants to let go of homesickness by physically experiencing their cultural identity and celebrating their homeland's ethnic heritage.

Immigrants represent a crucially vulnerable population that could be affected by the need to relocate almost as much as outright refugees. The rationale for considering this group of individuals is that their potentially pathologic condition can be synonymous with a loss that generates unlimited stress (Luth-Hanssen et al., 2020). For any immigrant, the inability to experience a nostalgic feeling could have outcomes as devastating as the loss of homeland. When being not able to cope with their emotions, immigrants can agree to participate in therapy. For instance, dance therapy is one of the elements of art therapy that can be utilized to address clients' predicaments and reduce the complexity of asylees' experiences (Massing et al., 2016).

It's imperative to note that the history of dance therapy began in the 19th century, but the majority of consistent strategies intended to help individuals started appearing around the first half of the 20th century. This was the time biomedicine was introduced and popularized among different care providers. Even though dance and music therapies were not included in the concept of biomedicine, it quickly became evident that Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) methods could be rather important for healthcare across the globe (Panagiotopoulou, 2018). Approximately a century ago, the ideological constructs of dance therapy were established, allowing for a much more rational, scientific approach to mental health. The majority of negative connotations from the past were overturned, unlocking a set of healing resources that had not been investigated previously (Dieterich-Hartwell et al., 2020). It was an upside to therapists because of the dominant practices of the 20th century and an opportunity to implement methods that did not go in line with traditional medicine. Based on the classic meaning of CAM, the concept of art therapy was founded. It was expected that the new therapeutic approach would make unconventional approaches more significant and help people express themselves without worrying about bias or societal judgment (Marsh, 2017). Even though the broader sense of art therapy involves drama, music, and visual arts in addition to dance, the decision to utilize dancing moves as a cure could be explained through the prism of symbolism and expression. The problem of helping immigrants with their mental health grew uncontrollably, causing therapists to expand their professional and training backgrounds. They had to learn about performing arts and the possibility of helping immigrants overcome the nostalgia feeling with the aid of dance moves.

Social and Cultural Contexts of Dance Therapy

When reconsidering dance as a proper therapeutic tool for Nostalgia among immigrants, it should be first considered that cultural and spiritual traditional practices have to be included in the therapy for it to be as relevant as possible. In other words, there have to be larger cultural schemes that are utilized to align people against moral and social boundaries that set the ground for curing or treating mental and physical illnesses (Rafieifar & Macgowan, 2021). The presence of art therapies, in general, requires the therapist to integrate social and cultural contexts into the process of treatment to respect the philosophical and theoretical foundations of CAM. This is why dance therapy is an important tool

intended as a communication medium for the therapist and immigrant clients (Aranda et al., 2020). Irrespective of the client's cultural background, there will always be an opportunity to connect via the spiritual channel, depending on the strength of the nostalgic feeling. Nevertheless, it should be crucial to protect any given person's cultural identity and address their approach to therapy rather carefully so as not to expose them to the smallest signs of discrimination or racism.

Dance therapy is also a rather relevant approach to validating the importance of art therapy because immigrants and refugees often escape the homeland due to irreconcilable differences. In other words, dance is an instrument of expression that can help people mediate their exposure to negativity and pick a more peaceful manner of settlement (Harris, 2019). Compared to the outdated CAMs, dance therapy is much more beneficial because it pays attention to cultural differences and respects the inner qualities of the person involved in the therapy process. For immigrants, the dance could be an instrument of reconnecting to the culture of the birthplace and developing new skills at the same time. Networking is a crucial activity that many immigrants tend to escape instead of embracing, which makes it safe to say that dance therapy is an opportunity to bring people together, too. The bridge between cultures is exceptionally necessary in the case where biomedicine and empowerment could not lead to enough positive outcomes. Eventually, this is one of the key reasons why dance therapy has to be implemented when immigrants are too fixated on the homeland and the feeling of nostalgia.

The fact that some immigrants could be prone to choosing biomedicine options when coping with homesickness should be a motivating factor for counselors to develop dance therapy and broaden its areas of use. Mental health issues are becoming much more complex nowadays, causing people to cope with them while not being aware of the consequences of problems with mental health (Kawano & Chang, 2019). Dance therapy seems to be an exceptionally non-invasive way of promoting mental wellbeing and helping individuals maintain their cultural identity without any "brute force" methods. Knowing that stress, depression, and anxiety affect the majority of asylee immigrants, it should be noted that dance is one of the best therapeutic instruments to address issues that go beyond physical manifestations of nostalgia (Rot, 2018). The inherent value of expressions makes dance therapy irreplaceable and genuinely unmatched in terms of how it affects the participants. With the survivors of child abuse and expatriates, the use of dance therapy can be validated through the interface of the possibility to work with implicit memories and consciousness.

Another significant study was conducted by Cantrick et al. in 2018, focusing on the body as a primary instrument of dealing with self-identity crisis and oppression. Thus, according to Cantrick et al. (2018), the human body serves as a manifestation of a person's background and history, as facial cues, skin color, the peculiarities of one's physique, and garments reflect one's historical and ethnic heritage. As a result, one's movement and physical expression of emotion through dance can mirror both explicit and implicit details of culture and ethnicity, as the body tends to be tenser and confined because of oppression, insecurity, an undermined sense of self-worth due to implicit socio-cultural discrimination. Once a person can feel a proper connection within their body with the help of a dance, they tend to feel more confident and less oppressed (Cantrick et al., 2018). Essentially, dancing obtains a power of cultural identity embodiment through movement, which makes people undergoing DMT more self-aware and resistant to external pressure.

Indeed, while dancing, people can take over control over their bodies and move according to their desires and rhythm. In such a way, they are not susceptible to external pressure, as they are in charge of their physical movements. Hence, in some way, similar cognitive processes happen in people's

minds when they think of adjusting to the new environment. The literal freedom of movement during a dance helps people understand their freedom to express their ethnic affiliation even when they are physically unable to return to their homelands. As Cantrick et al. (2018) state, there is a significant correlation between DMT and cultural empowerment. To enjoy the dance, a person must combine awareness of their body and the power to move or let go of the pressure. A similar cognitive process is noted during acculturation, as it is of paramount importance to remain aware of one's heritage and have the power to move on while adjusting to a new environment.

Another important theory to this discourse is the Dance of Awareness in Theory. This is one of the theories developed by Tim Brown (2005), a body psychotherapist, and Clare Osbond (2010) a dance movement therapist. This is a new approach to working with movement, dance, and awareness. It follows a methodological approach developed by Tim Brown and Clare Osbond which is phenomenological and influenced by Gestalt and non-dual concepts of awareness. By 'non-dual' it means an appreciation of awareness as the unchanging ground of experience, whatever emerges into awareness may be given shape, take form, and find expression in movement. Nostalgia being a state of mind among immigrants, this theory encourages participants to respond spontaneously by following their internal impulses and trying out new ways of moving and interacting. This calls for the courage and a willingness to be self-directed and take responsibility for their process.

Over time, countless approaches have evolved for working with the body mind. Some work principally with the body, others seek to increase awareness of the embodied self, whilst more therapeutic approaches also support psychological and spiritual development most if not all these constitute to the nostalgic phenomenon. Many of these approaches and schools of psychology have developed quite independently, and consequently, address human experience and behavior from different perspectives and especially in the diaspora with different frameworks. The theoretical framework of DoA draws on psychoanalytic theory, objects relations, and developmental psychology, set in a context of experiential movement exploration. Therefore, it is a group movement practice that aims to increase self-awareness and self-acceptance. It can be a resource for continuing wellbeing on physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual levels if practiced regularly and DoA has been growing since 2003.

Many of these approaches and schools of psychology have developed quite independently, and consequently, address human experience and behavior from different perspectives and with different frameworks, it is because so many of these countless approaches have evolved or working with the body-mind. Some work principally with the body, others seek to increase awareness of the embodied self, whilst more therapeutic approaches also support psychological and spiritual development. This theoretical framework of DoA draws on psychoanalytic theory, objects relations, and developmental psychology, set in a context of experiential movement exploration. For example, infants go through their unique process of learning how to interact with others, exploring space, and relating to gravity Ruella (2001). The development of infants is mainly directed towards accomplishing tasks in relation to their mother or primary caregiver and their emerging gestures, postures, and breathing patterns adopted reflect and express that relationship. Consequently, the developing experience of self is being shaped by the infant's interaction with his/ her environment. Although new behaviors and capacities emerge in the new homes with the movement patterns, these are overlay previous subjective experiences of self, rather than replacing them (Stern 1985). Therefore, we not only continue to shape and are shaped by our contact with the environment but also the past interacts with the present as the self continues to develop in overlapping waves of old and new places.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it would be reasonable to assume that given the circumstances, immigrants will not

have to battle nostalgia once their ethnic identity is welcomed elsewhere. Indeed, there is no direct correlation between one's geographical location and sense of belonging, as it is the culture and customs that make one's homeland special. Therefore, dance, being physically freeing, aesthetically pleasing, and culturally significant at the same time, helps immigrants feel more confident and positive about their future outside their homeland, as they realize they are not deprived of their ethnic heritage. For this reason, it is critical to ensure that immigrants have a safe space of self-reflection, connection to the ingroup, and embodiment of their culture.

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