

Belly Dance as a Strategy for Women's Self Care

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Dedication

FOR S.J. FOR EPITOMISING BELLY DANCE, AND IN
THAT WAY EPITOMISING WOMAN.

FOR MY PARENTS, FOR CREATING DIFFERENCE.

DECLARATION

I, Ashika Sookoo, student number 9405765 declare that

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Submitted in *partial*(for coursework) fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master in Social Sciences in the School of Social Work, University of KwaZulu-Natal.

As the candidate's Supervisor I have approved this dissertation/thesis for submission.

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Abstract

The focus of this study was the exploration of belly dance as a form of female self care.

The specific facet of self care explored was female health and well being as impacted on by belly dance.

There is a limited amount of existing scholarly studies that focus on the value of belly dance in self care. Therefore this study followed a qualitative format which promoted exploration of this under researched field.

This study occurred in a context where women's lives are busier than ever before as a result of their involvement in both the home and the workplace. Thus there is a need for them to engage in self care activities that effectively restore and replenish body, mind and soul in order to enable them to continue to meet their multiple responsibilities in a functional manner.

Facets of self care explored were psychical, mental and social health and well being as impacted on by belly dancing. To achieve this, data collection tools of focus groups and interviews, following a semi-structured format were used.

The results showed that belly dance plays a significant and positive role, not only in female self care but in enjoyment as well. Some specific aspects of belly dance found to be useful to female self care was its liberating use of the female form, its non-discriminatory aspect that unites all women in enjoyment of the dance, the absence of men, the supportive presence of women, the music, the feminine aspects, a secure environment and the opportunity that belly dance presents for women to play a different role.

Conclusions point to women viewing society as androcentric and providing little opportunity for feminine expression. A major conclusion is that women are non-verbally strong, relational beings who are predisposed to the language of dance and music. They are effectively revitalised by dance and music as presented by belly dance. This has implications for social work service delivery to women on multiple levels.

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Chapter One

Introduction to the Study

1.1. Descriptive Title

Belly dance as a strategy for women's self care.

1.2. Background and Outline of Research Problem

This chapter contains an introduction to the study, its value and relevance to the field of social work, incorporating a preliminary literature review, an explanation of the theoretical frameworks used and an outline of the research methodology.

This section aims to introduce the context of this study. This study occurred in a society where women's work is two fold – they work in the organized labour force by being economically active and producing goods, as well as in the home by being wife, mother and often daughter as well, contributing to producing sound "human beings" (Hartsock 2003, p.293). This contrasts early civilization when women were gatherers only, responsible for domesticity with their primary aim being reproduction and childrearing (Belbin 2001). Thus women's roles have evolved to become more multiplicit. But the division of labour in society always developed along sexist lines (Whorton, 2005; Hartsock 2003) with women's work in every society differing systematically from men's (Hartsock 2003, p.293) and women's work in the workplace and the home being repetitive (Hartsock 2003).

Women are more likely to seek medical care than men (Rider 2005, p.376). This is possibly due to the fact that "women experience greater stress than men regarding their multiple roles in the home and the paid workforce" (Rider 2005, p.273). The source of women's stress is seen to be the negotiation of multiple demands as well as being expected to manage in all areas of life (Black 2002). Thus stress in the workplace and at home for both men and women is receiving increasing attention, as left unattended, its escalation has far reaching consequences for the economy of a country and societal health and well being. The need is for managing stress and role multiplicity in varying ways to keep renewal fresh and continuous. Women in particular find that some methods appeal to them more than others, especially if these methods have added advantage such as maintaining physical, social and mental health and well being. From the flourishing gym and allied industries of health and beauty, it can be concluded, that some women have built health and self care methods, such as regular massages and exercise classes into their daily schedules, alongside family and work responsibilities. The fact that women make time for these activities in addition to other responsibilities attests to the need women have to self care, and to the potential benefits that they reap from doing so.

The focus of this study is on women's self care, in the present context of their multiple roles. This research responds to the need that women have to self care, and the time demands they encounter in the process of doing so. Self care is important as it enables women to engage in activities that replenish body, mind and soul, maintaining holistic well being, which includes mental, emotional and physical health. This gives them the energy to continue to cope with the demands of multi-tasking in a functional manner.

Why Belly Dance?

- The specific research focus was belly dance, which is **one** method women could use to maintain social, mental and physical health and well being. Belly dance is worthy of exploration as it has potential to enhance self care, by virtue of being a form of both dance and exercise, and both dance as therapy and as exercise are deemed to have some established benefits to holistic health (Kasiram, Pais, Ilbury and Sookoo, 2008). Further motivation for the relevance of investigating belly dance comes from Paul (2007, p.1), who claims that belly dance is seen as having therapeutic and healing benefits but there appears to be no scholarly evidence for this. This lack of scholarly evidence has led Franken, quoted in Paul (2007, p.1) to identify belly dance as one of the "least analyzed and investigated aspects of dance scholarship." So, the need to explore how belly dance impacts women's self care has been suggested and this research aims to rise to this challenge.
- My experience as a belly dance student has also guided this research focus as the benefits have been quite extraordinary both for me and colleagues who have provided anecdotal evidence of its merits. Further, I have participated in research into the attraction of general dance for health, fitness and stress management to women (Kasiram et al. 2008) and this inspired me to focus on how belly dance impacts women's self care. These impacts and benefits are worthy of academic exploration as the need is for creative, culture specific renewal methods to be included in the social worker's repertoire of interventions.
- One of the key stereotypes about belly dance amongst both men and women is that it is an art that exists for the sole pleasure, benefit and entertainment of the male gaze (verbal communication, school research committee meeting, 15/05/2008, UKZN). This is an example of an androcentric stereotype, androcentrism being the tendency to conceptualise everything from the male perspective (Rider 2005). This stereotype is so pervasive and blatant that the suggestion was to address such stereotypical notions in this chapter. From my experience as a belly

dancer, belly dance is alive and well for reasons other than this stereotypical androcentric one, and contributes significantly to women's self care. This research, by focusing on the potential benefits of belly dance to female self care, may be instrumental in challenging the dominant androcentric stereotype about belly dance. Thus the research gives social workers a potentially valuable and fun self care strategy for their own use as well as to recommend to clients. For readers that are not familiar with belly dance but also subscribe to this stereotype it is useful to bear in mind at this point, that research is based on an open system of thought (Struwig and Stead 2001, p.3), which necessitates non-prejudice as well as breaking free from the shackles of oppressive androcentrism.

- Justification for the focus on women's self care came from Payne (2005) who asserts that in most societies most social work is concerned mainly with women and that many social workers are women. Despite this, "theory in social work is constructed through a sexist process" (Langon and Day 1992, p.51). This comment further illustrates the pervasive androcentric tendency of society. As mentioned earlier the researcher has had first hand experience of the androcentric interpretation of belly dance. This research, by exploring women's self care as impacted on by belly dance, avoids androcentrism, by contextualizing women apart from and not in relation to men as the norm. This makes the research feminist, feminism being the advocacy of the rights of women (Andermahr, Lovell and Wolkowitz 2000).
- An aspect of social work is its reflexive-therapeutic component (Payne 2005, p.8). In terms of therapeutic-helping approaches, social work seeks the **best possible well being for individuals** (Payne 2005, p.8). Thus this research, by exploring belly dance as a self care strategy that potentially enhances well being, falls into the reflexive-therapeutic aspect of social work. Social work is also essentially a helping profession. Thus investigating and helping women to access self care strategies that could be of benefit, is seen as an important role of social work practice.

Background and Problem (summary)

The research problem focused on the exploration of belly dance as a possible way for women to self care in order to continue with their demanding social roles. This study explored belly dance as female self care in a societal context where women contribute to the economy by way of labour in the home as well as labour in the recognized work force, and where belly dance is generally androcentrically stereotyped as a spectator sport, the spectator being the male, with scant attention to the positive self care benefits of the dance.

Within this context belly dance may be a pastime that women engage in for its exercise and other benefits, or, possibly to even entertain their men. By exploring possible benefits that belly dance holds for women in terms of self care, this research responded to the time premium many women face in maintaining their holistic health and well being.

In summary, the research context was that of present day role multiplicity that women face, the stress that results from it and the engagement of women in different self care activities to manage this stress, one of them being belly dance which appears to be androcentrically stereotyped.

The research problem was therefore the exploration of possible benefits that belly dance holds for women's self care.

1.3. Operational Definitions

This research is concerned with belly dancing as it relates to self care.

Belly dance can be seen as a novel concept to social work and self care has many different interpretations and definitions. Thus the researcher provides operational definitions for these terms. For the sake of recognition, and uniformity of interpretation, The World Health Organization's definition of self care (Encyclopedia of Public Health: Self Care Behavior, n.d.) has been adapted and incorporated in the operational definition of self care, together with the biopsychosocial model of health which has also been applied in operationally defining self care.

For the purpose of this study belly dance is defined as a middle eastern dance type, done primarily by women, that focuses on deep muscle contraction with most movements emanating from the pelvis and hips.

Belly dance exists in English grammar as both verb and noun. The intended meaning of the word can be assessed from the sentence context.

Within the context of this study, self care is defined as those activities aimed at enhancing and restoring health (Encyclopedia of Public Health: Self Care Behavior, n.d.), which includes mental, physical, and social health and well being, as defined by the biopsychosocial model of health (Schlebusch 1990).

Health and well being are broad terms within self care which have differing personal interpretations. Therefore these terms were not operationally defined before hand, as participants may have had differing interpretations of these terms and this may have excluded their definitions of self care and thus some of their responses. These differing interpretations could have affected validity. To avoid this, the terms health and well being were contextualized for subjective meaning in the data collection process.

1.4. Preliminary Literature Study and Reasons for Choosing Topic

“Under Patriarchy women are the carers, the nurturers, both for children and men. In consequence we learn from our own mothers that we cannot expect much in terms of care and nurturance for ourselves ” (Langon and Day 1992, p.38).

This statement accurately reflects the legacy of caring for *others* left for women. However, the need to self care today is so overwhelming that women have taken responsibility for this in a variety of ways, some of which is the topic of this research, viz. through dance.

Women's lives are busier than ever before and multi-tasking is a skill of necessity and survival (Kasiram et al. 2008). Within this context women engage in self care which also entails exercise for its health benefits. Thus, it is of value to explore the potential benefits that engaging in belly dance holds for women's self care. In addition since women are involved in many different daily tasks, it is incumbent on them to find ways to engage in self care in order to replenish body, mind and spirit, which will enable them to continue with their tasks.

“The spirit of dance is within us all. Dancing is a primal and ancient form of movement that has been part of our lives from the beginning of time. Dance is the most fundamental of the arts, involving a direct expression and experience of oneself through the body” (Kasiram et al. 2008). ”

Thus dance is a universal and integral part of being human. According to Nagar (n.d.) dance has been part of every human culture as a cathartic healing tool. According to Whitehouse, Adler, Chodorow and Pallazo (2006) display of creative energy through the body or psyche is healing. These statements accurately reflect the potential dance has, to be beneficial to holistic well being which includes self care. Dance has universal applicability regardless of culture making it an available and accessible resource. But in addition to this, dance applies to women as it is an “art in which women have been and are strong both psychically and physically” (Vigier 1994, p.6). Thus dance has the potential to be both applicable and beneficial to all women, and may be helpful in maintaining their holistic health. It is this aspect of dance that will be further explored via this research.

As a belly dance student, I understand it as Middle Eastern dance type focusing on deep muscle movement, with most movement emanating from the pelvis which is seen to be the centre of gravity. In South Africa, it appears to be the exclusive dance interest of women. It is done bare foot and does not require specific garmenting.

Belly dance is for women of all ages, (Stewart 2000, p.97) shapes, sizes, races, and cultures (<http://www.visionarydance.com/bellytalktranscripts.html>) and has been done for thousands of years primarily by women for women (Vigier 1994, p.130). Thus belly dance has wide applicability amongst women.

By implication of it being indulged in by mainly women, it appears to give timeout from demands made by father, son, brother, employer, husband and partner. This time out for the creative development of the self, for the health benefits of exercise and the de-stressing effects of being away from family demands, that is potentially achieved via the single activity of dance, is consistent with women's need for multi-tasking but it also helps women to cope with the stress associated with multi-tasking.

Kasiram et al (2008) also found that men did not attend dance aerobics classes. This can potentially offset some of the negative effects of patriarchy on women's self esteem and self care, as patriarchy is "a system of thought and social relations that privileges and empowers men, and creates relationships between the genders that disenfranchise, disempower and devalue women's experiences" (Payne 2005, p.251). Thus the absence of men from dance classes that women attend, can be seen as redressing the uneven power relations between men and women and adding value to women's experiences.

Some literature points to the additional and established benefits of dance to self care:

Penedo and Dahne (2005) found that exercise is associated with better quality of life and may be beneficial across populations.

Mind and body work in tandem thus improved physical health results in improved self concept as well (Weidendorf, n. d.).

Women (of all ages, shapes and sizes) have found that belly dancing is a genuinely useful way of improving ones creativity, femininity and self esteem (<http://www.worldbellydance.com/therapy.html>).

By linking self care with a particular form of exercise, this research builds on the above literature.

Belly dance as with most dance lends itself to various forms of connection in execution.

Connection at various levels is a core benefit derived from group dance. Connection happens between dancer and instructor, between dancers themselves as well as the spiritual connection of dancer connecting with herself (Kasiram et al. 2008).

Weidendorf (n.d.) supports this benefit by saying that to be more self centered and present in the moment is a major aspect of dance. Connection with the self is an overlooked aspect of modern life where multi-tasking ensures that attention is split in multiple tasks. The connection between the dancer and the music, that

can occur in the dance, is also potentially beneficial to self care, through music, as rhythm is universal (Miller 1997) and the dancer whether amateur or professional, engages in this universal rhythm (Daly 1995) to connect with her centre. This connection of a woman with herself that can potentially happen in the dance, can possibly allow for women to remain focused, balanced and centered whilst multi-tasking in the various contexts of daily life. Tolle (2005) has also pointed out the benefits of remaining completely centered, aware of and present in the body, as a useful but neglected way of maintaining well being. This connection can happen in belly dance which necessitates awareness of, and presence in the body. The identification of the need for and the importance of connection identified by this literature, has led to the inclusion of connection and its impact on self care, as an aspect of exploration via this research.

In addition to these connections, establishing a further connection between belly dance and self care can give helping professions a fun, and new avenue of referral for women who suffer depleted self care. The aspect of connection also links with the theoretical underpinning of feminism that informs this study as there is a perception that feminism is anti men and babies when in reality it is anti nuclear families in which members are cut off from outside ties and likely to be over dependant on each other (Oakley 2002, p.117). Thus dance also has the potential to forge healthy connection between women and the outside world, through connections at the levels mentioned earlier.

The above benefits together with the liberating moves of the dance, the traditionally accepted exercise benefits and the de-stressing qualities of the music can result in an experience that is therapeutic to women's self care efforts.

Kasiram and Oliphant (2007) highlight the present need for South African social work practice to be different and call for a departure from the traditional and the taught. They draw attention to the creativity of arts and drama and its potential to provide "fresh, culture specific ways for renewal in the face of hopelessness (Kasiram and Oliphant 2007 p.78). Belly dance provides such a means for renewal as it is fresh, different and may be culture specific.

Khosa (2006) supports this view by highlighting the need for balance by investing in a variety of different activities, as the key to maintaining a healthy lifestyle in a bid to self care responsibly.

1.5. Value of the Study

- This research adds value to the field of social work by exploring the link between dance and women's self care, in an attempt to provide culturally relevant practice that is achievable via the simple process of recommending dance to our clients.

- This research is beneficial to the field of social work as its results can give social workers permission to value, engage in and renew their self care methods as an aspect of stress management. This is essential to prevent burn out.
- The outcome of the research has potential to inform context relevant changes to training and development in the social work field.
- This study enables ready referral of clients to belly dance by social workers, resulting in the use of dance as a resource in therapy.
- This study gives a legitimate voice to women and belly dance proponents who engage in belly dance for its generalized benefits, but are unable to rationally explain its benefits in specific terms.
- Dance as therapy is used in clinical practice as an expressive art therapy (Payne 2006). By exploring the possible therapeutic benefits of engaging in belly dance, outside of dance therapy, the use of belly dance for therapeutic benefit outside of the counselling arena can be seen, thus legitimizing belly dance as an adjunct to therapy, and making the benefits of dance movement therapy available outside the clinical arena.
- The outcome of this research encourages the use of dance in social work therapy, alongside the other expressive art therapies.
- Women are diverse in their needs, problems and predispositions. Thus some women may be more predisposed to the language of dance as a way to maintain and promote health and well being, as opposed to other more traditional strategies. Women of South Africa are also culturally diverse thus no one method of helping is universally applicable. This research, in exploring belly dance as potential self care meets the varied and changing needs of women towards well being.
- One of the tenets of social work is empowerment – “the process by which we support clients to identify ***the full range of possibilities*** that may meet client’s needs.” (Payne 2005, p.306). This research is empowering via its focus on exploring the potential benefit of belly dance as a possibility to meet women’s self care needs.

1.6. Research Problems and Objectives: Key Questions

The aim of the research was to establish the role that belly dancing plays in women's self care. The key questions of the research, elaborated and measured by the research tools of focus groups and interviews, focused on the impact that belly dance had on female self care.

Key questions to achieve this aim were:

- Does a woman's view of the role of belly dance in her life contribute to her self- care?
- Do the views of men in her life, enable or disable the self care value of her engagement in belly dance? This explored the support or censure women encountered as a result of belly dancing.

- What motivates women to belly dance? This aimed to explore what role belly dance plays in women lives, self care or otherwise, which is in keeping with the exploratory leaning.
- What is different about belly dance from other forms of dance that attracted women to it?
- What is the self care role of the rhythm and music of belly dance?
- Recommendations for using belly dance for self care.

The themes of self care explored, were women's social, mental and physical health and/or well being as they are impacted on by belly dancing.

The following key questions sought to explore the specific self care role of belly dance in terms of the biopsychosocial model of health and well being as defined by Schlebusch (1990).

- What is the impact of the engagement in belly dance on women's health and well being on the social level?
- What is the impact of the engagement in belly dancing on women's health and well being on the mental level?
- What is the impact of the engagement in belly dancing on women's health and well being on the physical level?

The biopsychosocial model also served as one of the informing theories of the study. Therefore these key questions are further elaborated on in the section on theoretical framework.

1.7. Research Problems and Objectives: Broader Issues Investigated

The objectives of this research, from a feminist perspective were:

- To explore whether belly dance contributes to women's self care.
- To explore how women respond to the non-verbal language of dance, rhythm and music.
- To explore whether belly dance creates connection between women that result in a feeling of sisterhood, and a supportive, safe social circle to maintain and renew their self care.
- To explore whether the presence of other women as provided by the belly dance environment is empowering to women's self care.
- To explore whether use of the distinguishing feminine form, as provided via belly dance, can result in women experiencing self care benefits.
- To explore the impact of the absence of men on the self care benefits women derive from belly dance.

1.8. Principal Theories

Two theories provided valuable backdrop for understanding the research area and for interpreting results.

The first was the theory of feminism. Feminism was justified as informing theory for this project, because, as articulated by Payne (2005 p.251), most of social work is done with women and feminism helps to understand their roles and positions.

Feminism identifies women as systematically oppressed (Andermahr, Lovell and Wolkowitz 2000, p.93). This assumption was seen as grounding the study, as the marginalized position of women can result in their need for self care not receiving enough attention and thus in their neglected attention to some forms of self care that maybe beneficial to them.

Feminism assumes society is patriarchal (Andermahr, Lovell and Wolkowitz 2000). Patriarchal views are characterized by beliefs in male supremacy (Rider 2005). According to Stacey (1993) patriarchy, or as she puts it, the valuing of the male over the female is so dominant that it is internalized by women who are socialized to believe that men are more valued. Patriarchal society objectifies and weakens women by idealizing them in terms of preferred female form (Steinem 1992). Thus women exercise as one of the various ways to change their bodies, subscribing to the patriarchal notion of the ideal woman (Urla and Swedlund 2000). This argument points to exercise becoming an extension of patriarchal control over women. This study, by exploring possible benefits of belly dance to women, can assist women reclaim exercise as an activity for their own benefit rather than for patriarchal benefit.

“Dominant patriarchal ideals of the female body are aimed at controlling women and denying the power of the female body with the desired image being male and androgynous but not curvy and round as this is considered appropriate for the belly dancer only” (Vigier 1994, p.11). Vigier (1994, p.11), studying dance in New York in 1984 noticed that the western approach to the body was very male with the emphasis being on “pull in, push up, lift up.” In terms of feminist theory this tendency is androcentric, androcentrism being the tendency to view the world from the male perspective assuming that this is the norm and the female perspective is the other (Rider 2005, p.23). In addition, feminism objects to the tendency to generalize the male experience to women (Beasley, 1999). This research, by focusing on females exclusively, within a female dominated dance type, where females are norm and men other, removes this bias, making it more likely that results will be untainted by androcentric tendency. By looking at self care in context of women apart from men, the status of women is defined independently of men and the subservient status of women in terms of power relations are nullified. This is also an important facet of social work as Payne

(2005) highlights the need that feminism in social work has to understand and value women's experiences as separate and different from that of men.

The body is a vital component to dance but it is also the difference between the male and female body that is the source of patriarchy. "Patriarchy politicizes the body with the aim of asserting male supremacy in human relations '(Vigier 1994, p.33) and with females receiving much more advertising about thinness and body shape than men (Ivy and Backlund 2004, p.106). Thus by exploring the power of the body to heal and to maintain holistic health and well being, this research aims to reconnect women with the positive aspects of being female that may have been lost in the context of patriarchy.

Women tend to identify closely with their bodies and their sense of identity is closely linked with their bodies (Gergen 2001, p.82). Thus women are preoccupied with their bodies. Given this preoccupation, use of the body can be seen as potentially beneficial to improving women's self care. This study aims to harness the positive influence that women's bodies can have on their lives by attempting to draw a link between use of their bodies in dance, and their self care in a positive way. This notion uses the fact that women are seen as synonymous with the body and identify closely with their bodies (Frost 2001, p.94) but attempts to explore this identification with their bodies for its potential self care benefits as opposed to its negative implications. According to Dominelli quoted in Payne (2005), one of the principles of feminist social work is to value women's strengths. Thus a feminist framework is beneficial to this study, as this study recognizes and values women's identification with the body, and investigates how this identification can be used as strength to self care via dance. In addition Vigier (1994 p.6) has asserted that women are physically and psychically strong in dance, giving value to the focus of this study on investigating the self care value of dance to women.

There is a tendency for the positions of men and women to be seen as synonymous with rational mind and irrational body, respectively (Ussher 1997, p.190). In terms of this tendency women are associated with the body and therefore seen as irrational and men are associated with the mind and therefore seen as rational. Wood (2003) supports this by saying that women are stereotyped as emotional and men as rational.

Langon and Day (1992), extend this thinking by saying that certain aspects of existence are recognized and labelled as feminine and then devalued. Therefore the tendency is for belly dance to be seen as a typically feminine past time and then discarded as irrational, emotional and not worthy of academic investigation. This study departs from this thinking and aims to add a value free, rational and logical voice to the potential value of dance to self care thus legitimizing women's self care.

Douglas quoted in Gergen (2001) asserts that women's bodies, especially sexual aspects are seen as internalized, secret and potentially polluted while men's bodies are externalized and apparent. This can be seen in society's general reaction to belly dance, as a dance that is lewd and flaunts female sexuality. But belly dance uses the same vehicle as sexuality, the women's body, and it is this property of the dance, that is perhaps the reason that it is negatively stereotyped as the tendency is to see women's bodies as potentially polluted as explained above by Gergen (2001). However, logical reasoning shows that this stereotyping is irrational and this study aims to challenge this notion and give a genuine, rational voice to what can be traditionally dismissed as a women's activity.

Payne (2005 p.251), identifies patriarchy as a system of thought and social relations that empower and privilege men and disempowers and devalues women's experience. Thus this research subscribes to feminism as it rejects what can be seen as the patriarchal tendency of society to devalue women's engagement in belly dance.

"Dance also functions within patriarchy, which has fixed the female body with meanings determined by men's productive and reproductive needs" (Vigier 1994, p26). Frost (2001) concurs with this notion saying that girls are programmed to believe that they must use their sexuality primarily for the sexual pleasure of men. By exploring meanings for female engagement in belly dance, other than in terms of men's needs, and specifically in terms of impact on women's holistic well being and self care, this research opposes patriarchy, making feminism a useful guiding theory.

In conclusion of the explanation of feminist theory's relevance, Payne (2005, p.251) identifies that feminism in social work has highlighted the need to understand and value women's experiences and lives as separate and different from that of men, to value their competence and values, their diversity and their strengths. This research, as explained above meets Payne's criteria by not comparing women to men, by respecting women's identification with the body as a strength that makes them different from men, and by respecting their diversity, competence and values.

The second theoretical approach that provided a framework for the study was the biopsychosocial model. This model was specifically applied to provide a framework to interpret the self care role of belly dance, whilst feminism was used to interpret findings presented in responses.

The biopsychosocial model is based on general systems theory and gives views on the way systems function on the biological, physical and social level (Schlebusch 1990), thus guiding this research to interpret the possible benefits of belly dance on women's self care on the level of biology or the physical level of

health and fitness, psychology or the psychological emotional and mental health level, and the social or relationship level.

According to Schlebusch (1990) each person is composed of systems which are part of bigger systems. Thus, in terms of the bi-psycho-social model, women exist on the physical, mental and social levels. This model is therefore helpful to see the effect that belly dance has on women's self care in terms of these different levels of existence. The biopsychosocial model will be used to interpret research on the effect of belly dancing on women's self care in the following way:

Social Level:

Impact of the engagement in belly dance on all aspects of the relationship sphere – work, family, marital, friends, possible support from the social circle of the belly dance group itself, possible benefits to social skills and social confidence, possible energy benefits from belly dancing that may enable women to continue to meet the demands of their multiple social roles as employees, mothers, daughters, wives or partners and friends, and attitude to new relationships.

Mental Level:

Impact of the engagement in belly dance on emotional health, including stress management and relief, ability to cope with multi-tasking, ability to complete tasks at work and home, and ability to remain focused and centered despite multiple responsibilities as well as the impact of engagement in belly dance on body image concerns, self confidence, self esteem, self consciousness, acceptance of and comfort with the body.

Physical Level:

Impact of engagement in belly dancing, on health and fitness, energy levels, body aesthetics/appearance, and the physical ability to continue with daily responsibilities.

1.9. Research Methodology and Methods

1.9.1. Broad Research Approach

Bless and Higson-Smith (1995, p.42) assert that the purpose of exploratory research is to gain early insights into a situation, phenomenon, community or person. Because belly dance and its role in self care has enjoyed little objective enquiry and appraisal, exploration at this early stage was essential, classifying this research as exploratory.

1.9.2. Research Paradigm

The research was qualitative in design. This was necessary to qualify the relationship between belly dance and its impact on self care and to illuminate aspects of the dynamic process of the interaction between self care with the dynamics of belly dance.

This study is located in the interpretive paradigm, as it includes focus groups and interviews which are interactive, qualitative and dependant on the subjective reality of the participants.

1.9.3. Data Collection Instruments

The research instruments used were 2 **focus groups** on how self care was impacted on by belly dancing, as well as 4 **individual semi structured interviews**. This was a triangulation of measures in which multiple measures were taken of the impact of belly dancing on self care (de Vos 2002, p.341). By measuring the impact of belly dancing on self care by means of focus groups and interviews, it was more likely that all aspects of the impact of belly dancing on self care could be seen, (de Vos 2002, p.341) thus improving validity and richness of data as well as contextualizing the experience of belly dancing in the lives of women.

Face validity is whether the indicator really measures the construct (Neuman 1997, p.142). Enhancing face validity in data collection was the fact that questions were posed in simple language and overtly related aspects of self care to how it is impacted on by belly dancing. The dimensions of self care measured for the purpose of this study were health and well being. Differing and subjective interpretations and definitions of these terms may have existed amongst participants and some participants may have viewed health and well being as synonymous concepts within self care, whilst others may have seen them as different. To ensure validity in data collection, the meaning of health and well being was attended to as a question dimension in data collection, thus contextualizing it and ensuring consensus and clarity in interpretation. These meanings are presented in the discussion of results to safeguard validity. Face to face contact between researcher and participants in focus groups and interviews also made it possible to clear up any misunderstandings in interpretation of questions thus ensuring validity.

According to Vithal and Jansen (2006) the validity of a study can be checked by comparing findings of one instrument with findings from other instruments and by doing multiple observations of the same event. Thus the focus groups findings were used to check for validity of the interview findings and the interview findings were used to check for validity of the focus group findings.

Focus groups and interviews contextualized the role of belly dancing in the lives of participants, and questions were open ended, allowing participants to identify the ways in which belly dance impacted on their self care.

Thus focus groups and interviews allowed for reflexivity amongst respondents, ensuring nothing was lost in data collection. The researcher used traditional social work micro skills to ensure that a warm and accepting environment was created for the focus groups and interviews, which enhanced open discussion, resulting in rich information. Focus groups also produce large amount of data in a short period of time and are a powerful means of exposing reality and investigating complex behaviour and motivation (Greef 2002, p.307). Thus they were useful in seeing the relationship between belly dance and women's self care.

Focus groups and interviews were audio recorded and scribed with participants' permission, to ensure nothing was neglected in analysis. The focus group was deemed an appropriate research tool, as it brings the strengths of the qualitative approach, in the forms of exploration, context, and interpretation, to data collection (Morgan 1998). Thus women's experiences of self care in relation to belly dance was explored, interpreted and contextualized via the focus groups. This is important to the exploratory focus of this research. Support for the importance of contextualization comes from Payne (2005) who claims that by understanding the lives and experiences of women in a context away from men, the influence of androcentrism, the tendency to see things from the male viewpoint is avoided. Thus one of the benefits of the use of focus groups is that it is true to the theoretical framework that this research utilizes. Another benefit of focus group use, is that "focus groups work best when what interests the research team is equally interesting to the participants in the group" (Morgan (1998 p.10). Thus the common engagement by researcher and focus group members in belly dance was experienced as enhancing data sharing.

Semi-structured interviews were also used. This data collection tool was appropriate to the field of belly dance and self care, as, according to Greef (2002, p.302) semi structured interviews are useful when one is interested in complexity, process or personal and controversial issues all of which are relevant to belly dance and self care. Questions asked in interviews began with the generic allowing the participant to become comfortable and rapport to be established, and then moved to specifics. A challenge of using interviews in data collection is that the quality of the interview lies in the skill of the researcher as interviewer (Greef 2002, p.292). To meet this challenge the researcher relied on her training as a social worker using traditional social work micro skills in interviewing. The limitations of interviews is that they involve cooperation (Greef 2002, p.305) but this was not a limitation here as the researcher already had a relationship with the sample population from which the women interviewed were drawn, which enhanced cooperation. The interview schedule contained specific questions relating to belly dance, its role in participants' lives, its attraction and its impact on

social, mental and physical health and/or well being. It was semi structured to allow the interviewer reflexivity to include questions that facilitated further understanding of the research question, which enhanced data collection, and allowed the participant to control the direction of the interview based on the participant's subjective knowledge and experience of belly dance as it impacts on her self care. This was important as contextualization and interpretation are key to the interpretative paradigm.

In addition interviews were important research tool in that they allowed richness, diversity, depth and contextualization of women's experiences in self care as they are impacted on by belly dancing. These were important dynamics of the process of qualitative data collection as they related both to women and to their self care which are complex and dynamic processes open to interpretation and differences in experiences between women. Thus interviews were important research tools that gave complex information as to how belly dance impacted on women's self care.

The schedule for both the focus groups and semi structured interviews were the same, with the difference in data collection lying in the different dynamics of individual interviews and focus groups. Focus groups yielded more general information being guided by group dynamics and the dominant group consensus, while interviews were more in depth, detailed and specific and changed in emphasis and direction depending on the subject's specific experience of belly dance and its impact on her self care.

1.9.4. Sampling

The sample for both interviews and focus groups was drawn from the population of about 60 women attending belly dance classes at a Durban studio. Both sampling type was purposive (Babbie and Mouton 2001, p.166) as the sample was chosen specifically for their engagement in belly dance.

The focus group consisted of two groups, in the form of 2 belly dance classes, from this population, of up to 10 members each. These groups were randomly chosen based on availability and willingness to participate.

The sample of 4 women for the interviews was randomly chosen from within the focus group participants based on availability, interest and willingness to participate in the interviews. The first four women who availed themselves were selected as the sample for the semi structured interviews.

The focus groups were conducted first followed by the semi structured interviews. This may have led to contamination of results due to interview participants being influenced by focus group consensus. However this was discouraged by assuring anonymity, confidentiality and honest sharing of information. In addition, the nature of the discussions in interviews and focus

groups were experienced as fun and light hearted and the researcher perceived that there was no reticence or contamination amongst methods of data collection.

Both samples were convenience samples(Struwig and Stead 2001, p.111) as they were chosen on the basis that the researcher has access to, and a relationship with this studio being a member there, and that the studio presented an available research population. Despite this being a convenience sample it is deemed to have generalizability as it has a cross section of South African women of all ages, sizes, fitness levels and occupations. However the exception is that black women are not represented in the studio. This is seen to be an unavoidable situation in South Africa as anecdotal evidence suggests that black women in South Africa do not generally engage in belly dance. This research paves the way for future research in which race is a variable as race is not an identified variable for the purpose of this study.

1.9.5. Procedure for Data Collection

The procedure for data collection began by obtaining studio consent, and informing women of the study. The researcher did this in person, by speaking to the studio teacher and belly dance students about the study.

Classes participated in the focus groups based on their willingness and availability. The focus group discussions occurred at the studio as this was a convenient and accessible environment for the sample who all reside in different areas of Durban making arranging an alternative venue impractical. The other advantages of using the studio as venue were that it is a familiar venue for all participants, ensuring that they felt at ease and that data collection occurred in the context in which the phenomena being investigated also occurs.

The 4 participants interviewed were selected from within the focus groups based on their availability and willingness to participate. The venue for interviews was based on the interviewee's convenience and ranged from places of work to their homes.

Both focus groups and interviews were audio recorded and scribed with permission from participants.

1.9.6. Data Analysis

The qualitative data was analyzed by first writing down the information in text form. Thereafter data was codified in terms of the different research questions and themes that emerged. This coding was an organization of raw data into categories, creating themes or concepts (Neuman 1997). This reduced data into manageable order.

Coding of qualitative data was done in 3 processes following the format outlined in Neuman (1997). By this process the first coding was an open coding in which the researcher analyzed each line of data looking for common themes, creating new themes and using themes that have been specified by respondents. The aim of this phase was to connect like with like and to build connections. This resulted in data being categorized in terms of common themes. The biopsychosocial model as defined by Schlebusch (1990) was also used to identify and codify themes.

In the second phase of coding, axial coding, the researcher followed the process of coding raw data by analyzing this codified raw data in terms of their specified themes. The aim of this phase was to look for links between themes and theory and to seek cause effect relationships. The theory of feminism was applied here and links were made between psychological or feminist theory and data, as provided by the literature review.

During the last phase of coding, selective coding, themes emerged and the data that illustrate themes were compared and discussed. Organization of the analysis around several core concepts, themes or explanations thereafter occurred and feminism was used to interpret these findings.

1.9.7. Ethical Issues

- Participation was completely voluntary.
- Participants were made aware that their participation could be withdrawn at any point without penalty.
- Anonymity and confidentiality was assured and maintained.
- Participants were made aware that if sensitive discussions/issues arose that were disturbing to them, the researcher as a trained social worker would either render counselling, or refer for appropriate counselling. However this situation did not arise.
- Studio consent was obtained.

1.9.8. Limitations

- Response bias in the form of socially desirable responding may have occurred where the subject responds in a way that makes her look good (Paulhus 1991). Response bias may have also occurred if participants responded to please the researcher or the teacher. This was minimized by explaining the purpose of the study, by taking measures to ensure that data collection was anonymous, confidential and voluntary and by creating an accepting atmosphere where women felt comfortable. The researcher is of the opinion that due to these measures being undertaken

and the light hearted, fun and open nature of the discussions, that response bias did not occur.

- As mentioned the study may have limited generalizability, as a direct result of the sample being one of convenience. The studio under study does have a cross section of women of all ages, shapes, sizes, fitness levels and occupations including students, housewives, career women, married, divorced and single women, with one serious omission, the absence of black women. The external validity of the findings will be maintained provided that researchers are aware that this research cannot be compared to research findings in which black women are represented.
- Researcher effects in the form of bias in reporting as a result of the researchers' connection to dance, as well as the researchers presence as a member of the studio may have affected reporting of results (Struwig and Stead 2001). This was minimized by a conscious effort to maintain neutrality, as well as strict usage of the analysis techniques explained above together with guided academic supervision provided by the university supervisor.
- As mentioned interviews occurred after focus groups. There is a possibility that contamination of results could have occurred as result of participants in interviews being influenced by focus group consensus. However, as mentioned, this was discouraged by assuring anonymity and confidentiality, encouraging open and honest sharing of information.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

This review locates belly dance in a present context as a form of women's self care by:

- tracing the development of gendered roles in the history of society,
- providing a historical account of women's roles and involvement in the workplace,
- providing a historical account of gendered stereotypes that has contributed to the devaluing and stereotyping of belly dance,
- providing an overview of dance and its meanings and belly dance and its development and its meanings,
- reviewing the benefits of dance in general and of belly dance, as therapy and as exercise,
- discussing the applicability of belly dance to self care and to the bio-psychosocial model of health whilst incorporating a feminist interpretation.

In the course of this review some of the literature covered in Chapter one is referred to and elaborated on to build a comprehensive view of dance and its roles and benefits to self care.

The reader is alerted to the fact that belly dance does not only exist for performance purposes. The type of belly dance referred to in the context of this study is that of belly dance as learning art form, and/or exercise, as well as performance.

2.2. The Origins of Gendered Roles

Many texts exist on the evolution of the roles of men and women. Belbin (2001) is reviewed as it provides a typical representation of the development of men's and women's roles in society.

Belbin (2001) traced the development of societal gendered roles to ancient society. According to Belbin (2001) the division of labour originated in the different functions of men and women.

In ancient society men were hunters and women gatherers (Belbin 2001; Whorton 2005). Women were then valued as life givers as well as for their skill in gathering which kept them close to domestic tasks of child rearing. In this society women's role was as important or greater than that of men as men did not make very good hunters as they could not outrun their prey, but women made good gatherers thus playing a vital role in food provision for the family (Belbin 2001). Belbin (2001) expands that this meant that women were

esteemed in ancient society. Whorton, (2005) supports Belbin (2001) by asserting that the sex that provides more for the family's survival needs in terms of food is the sex that is more valued. Whorton (2005) supports Belbin's (2001) conceptualization of women's valued roles in ancient society by concurring that woman as gatherers, provided most of the family's food needs.

Men's domain was the unexplored, and Belbin (2001) saw exploration as part of the genetic make up of the male psyche. Women did not go on voyages but tended children and the home. As man began to explore the world, the female was forced to travel around the world with him resulting in the female entering the male sphere.

According to Belbin (2001) women were physically the weaker sex making gender relations subject to imbalance. Whorton (2005) extends this argument by saying that the development of plough based agriculture meant that men being physically stronger became more involved in labour and thus became responsible for providing most of the family's food needs, decreasing the social status of women.

Whorton (2005) traces the development of gender stereotypes. Whorton (2005), outlines that when plough based agriculture began, people worked close to home and there was little separation and distinction between housework and work out of the home. This changed with urbanization and industrialization when the workplace and the home were separated and boundaries between the residential and industrial sectors developed. For the middle class the workplace was men's domain while the home, associated with housework, childrearing and emotional support was the female's domain. In the working class, families lived close to the work place and wives often also worked in clerical jobs, or as maids for middle class families, obtaining jobs close to home. The working class man worked in factories. Whorton (2005) concludes that this led to men and women being separated in terms of the qualities of the workplace and of the home. The workplace was seen as rational, competitive and achievement driven while the home was associated with domesticity, purity and submissiveness and these qualities were seen as desirable in men and women respectfully (Whorton 2005, p.86). Keddie (1991, p.2) provides support for this by asserting that it is known that the relations between the genders prior to the plough, amongst hunter-gatherers was more equitable.

2.3. The Origin of Stereotypes between Genders

Thus the division of labour resulted in man being viewed as rational and women being viewed as irrational by virtue of men being associated with the workplace and women with the home (Whorton, 2005).

These stereotypes still exist today: Gergen (2001, p.73 asserts that in accordance with historical traditions, philosophical arguments, religious doctrines and prevalent social stereotypes, maleness has been associated with culture, abstractness, and order, while femaleness has been associated with the opposite – nature, the body, concreteness, emotionality and chaos.

Wood (2003, p.227) extends the above gendered association to the present day workplace by saying that stereotypes of women that exist in the workplace today are that of sex object, mother and iron maiden. Wood (2003, p.227) explains that the women as sex object stereotype means that women are defined in terms of their sexuality, the stereotype of working women as mother in the workplace, leads to women being expected to smile, give comfort, support, sympathy, make tea, take notes and arrange socials. Coltrane quoted in Whorton (2005, p.139) supports this by saying that compulsory motherhood is a set of cultural beliefs that prescribe that women should find total fulfilment in having and taking care of children.

Thus gendered stereotypes of women are pervasive to the extent that according to Langon and Day (1992, p.35) certain aspects of human experience are recognized and labelled as feminine and then devalued. By this reasoning, belly dance, which according to Abdelmohsien (2000) is an art form dominated and largely defined by women, enjoys a devalued status by virtue of this association with women.

There has however been a change in the historical sexual division of labour. According to Hartsock, (2003, p.293) capitalist society exploits women's labour via their roles in the workforce as well as the home. Thus one view is that progress and development has blurred gendered labour lines leading to what some feminists view as an exploitation of women whose roles in current society differ drastically from previous to be more multi- faceted.

However Black (2002) has the reverse view of women's workplace involvement. Black (2002) argues that the workplace has restructured to be more feminized with an increased involvement of women in the workplace and a decreased involvement of men. Black (2002) argues that this has corresponded with an increase in service sector employment and a decrease in traditional industry and heavy manufacturing as women are more able to fit service sector employment by virtue of their natural way of being. So we see that the roles of men and women which were previously complementary in ancient society (Belbin 2001) are no longer so as women are now involved in domesticity as well as the work

place which now more readily accommodates them. Thus multi-tasking as skill of necessity for women is introduced.

Within this context, Black (2002) sees the involvement of women in the workforce as positive and views stress as natural by product of women now having multiple roles and having to cope with these multiple roles. According to Black (2002) women now engage in different activities to cope with this stress. Within this context, belly dance is one activity that women may engage in to self care, in order to maintain mental, physical and social health and well being. Several authors (Paul 2007, McGeer 2003, Coluccia, Pafrath and Putz 2005) give support for this by showing that belly dance is growing in popularity as a means of fun and fitness.

A historical account of the beginnings of belly dance and its use by women is presented in the next section.

2.4. The Origins of Belly Dance, Ancient Origins

Tracing the origins of the belly dance proved to be challenging and frustrating as belly dancing and its development is not well documented.

As belly dance is thought to be Egyptian in origin an extensive search for documented evidence of Arabic women's engagement in belly dance in the history of the dance's development was done, but limited decidedly scholarly evidence of this was found despite the fact that "the middle eastern and Arab countries each claim that belly dance originated with them" (Astrid Lewis n.d). No reliable evidence of the *geographical* origin of the dance was found apart from contrary accounts. Fischer (2003) saw belly dance as originating in America and only recently being done in the Middle East. Zachariah (1996) found that belly dance has origins in Arab culture. According to Fisher (2003) the idea that belly dance originated in the Middle East, is part of the stereotypical view of the east that westerners have. Paul (2007) found that there was only one reputable study- The Encyclopedia Britannica Online, which linked belly dance with Egyptian origins.

The lack of documentation of Arab women's instrumentation in the development of belly dance provide no evidence for the natural tendency to believe in the romantic notion that the most oppressed women in the world were responsible for the development of a liberating form of women's dance. However the reason for lack of documentation could be consistent with the same oppression of Arab women – the gap in the history of the dance could be due to the fact that in the Arab countries, according to Keddie (1991) myths that portrayed women as sources of evil and sexual exploitation developed when women in ancient society were treated as subordinate and as property- "the source of evil and sexual temptation- dangerous and needing control" (Keddie 1991, p.3). Keddie (1991, p.1) also points out that "serious scholarly work on Middle Eastern women in history has been limited."

It could be that men as controlling group saw no reason for the documentation of women's engagement in the development of belly dance. Support for this notion was found in Paul (2007) citing anecdotal information given by a librarian in California, Alexandra King, who was of the opinion that the reason the history of belly dance is not well documented is that it was a women's dance and that women were not highly valued in Arab societies. In terms of feminism which is a system of thought that identifies women as systematically oppressed (Andermahr, Lovell and Wolkowitz, 2000, p.93) this can be seen as an androcentric tendency – the tendency to view the world from the male perspective, assuming that this perspective is normal (Rider 2005).

Another reason for the lack of history of the dance could be the result of the view that women's sexuality is secret, internalized and potentially polluted (Douglas quoted in Gergen 2001). As belly dancing uses the women's body, the site of women's sexuality, it may have been classified and seen as internalized, potentially polluted and secret and therefore not well documented.

A succinct article on the possible reasons for the poor documentation of belly dance was found to make the most sense of this topic - According to <http://www.phoenixbellydance.co.uk/articles/historyofbellydance.html>, (n.d.), the reasons for poor records of belly dance and for confusion as to the true beginnings of belly dance, are that the development of the dance was in ancient history and was passed on from generation to generation of women as an expression of self, ritual, tradition and /or female entertainment and was not passed on in written form, when patriarchy came to power the role of women changed and the dance was perceived differently, and lastly, the influence of different cultures in the history and development of the dance has enriched and diversified the original meanings of the dance, leading to a lack of historical record on belly dance development.

However the researcher was able to find some reliable but scant sources of the development of belly dance:

Wendy Bounaventura in her book Serpent of The Nile (1983) concurs that in the Arab society dance received scant attention in terms of documentation and artistic representation but concludes that belly dance dates to the 14th century or earlier. Both Bounaventura(1983) and Stewart (2000), see the origins of belly dance in spiritual religious expression, by women in the time before Judeo Christian religions, when women were seen to have magical powers of fertility to produce both life and crops thus being essential to the survival of the species. Belbin (2001), outlined earlier, supports this theory on the esteemed position of women in early society, and provides further support for Buonaventura (1989) and Stewarts (2000) view of women as revered in ancient society, by his assertion that the oldest artefacts that men made were figurines of women perhaps as goddesses or fertility symbols.

Bounaventura (1983) describes belly dance as existing during this time as expression of the paganistic worship of nature and of the female god by *women*. Stewart (2000) emphasizes belly dance as a birth ritual, a dance in celebration of womanhood, by women for women's purposes. Stewart (2000) and Bounaventura (1983) conceptualize the dance as having sacred meaning as religious, birth and fertility dance in the time of Paganism when the female God was prominent. Stewart (2000) believes this was consistent with the then esteemed position of women as life givers in society. Paul (2007, p.11), found evidence to support the view of the matriarchal origins of the dance: "several authors traced the origins of the dance to matriarchal societies (AL-rawi 1999; Buonaventura 1994; Dinicu 1964, 2000; Stewart 2000)." Vigier (1994) supports this view by asserting that in Egypt, records from the eighteenth dynasty (1580 - 1350 B.C .E) show evidence that *women* performed ritual, ceremonial dances in honour of the fertility Goddess Hathor, to encourage the fertility of women and the earth. No reference to indicate that men participated in the belly dance development or execution was found.

Both Stewart (2000) and Buonaventura(1989) postulate that belly dance disappeared with the birth of Judeo Christian religions that sought to destroy the power of the female god, and with it, the power of women. Some reliable support for this idea of a God as first female was found in Perot (2004) in her PHD dissertation in transpersonal psychology. Perot (2004) believed that the Goddess was peacefully worshipped prior to being replaced by a male god, which she sees as resulting in a patriarchal society. She credits the replacement of the female god with the male, with the disempowerment of women (Perot 2004).

Stewart (2000) asserts that with the advent of the new religions over Goddess worship and paganism, the dance lost its spiritual meaning becoming a dance that was seen as a means of patriarchal sexual enticement for men. In her reasoning Stewart (2000) asserts that the human senses that were used for spiritual purposes in dance then became associated with sexual purposes.

The last word on the development of the dance goes to Paul (2007) who says that one of the challenges of research into belly dance was that the history did not seem to exist and that "many authors themselves noted the challenge of constructing an accurate history of the dance" (Paul 2007, p.10).

This section on the development of belly dance shows that the first form of dance that emerged was most likely the belly dance and also strongly supports the view of dance as developing out of a sacred spiritual element and being performed originally only by women, reasserting the view of Ussher (1997) that women are seen as synonymous with the body which Ussher (1997) also sees as being identified with irrationality. By this reasoning, the association of women with dance and in particular belly dance has led to a tendency to devalue it.

2.5. Dance and Religion

Buonaventura (1989) asserts that between the fourth and eight centuries AD Christianity and Islam began to dominate the Middle East but to survive they destroyed Goddess worship rituals which meant destroying female dance relating to the celebration of women's sexuality and fertility (Buonaventura 1989, p.35). Buonaventura claims this is the reason there is scant biblical attention to women's dance in the bible, although male dancing is referred to.

Stewart (2000) credits organized religion, in particular, Christianity with introducing repentance and the subduing of the flesh that resulted in decline of dance. She quotes dance historian Agnes DeMille who said that theologians removed dance from holy ritual asserting the view that religion suppressed movement as ecstasy and rapture. According to Stewart (2000) dance then lost its use as a part of sacred religious ceremonies and became a form of entertainment. Stewart (2000) feels that dance has been removed from the Bible to such an extent that the only dancer in the Bible is the devil and that the idea of denying the body to further the spirit was introduced by newer religions and was in direct contrast to the historical use of belly dance to use the body to achieve spiritual upliftment.

Frost (2001) extends the idea of religions stigma of women's dances by asserting that Western religion has associated sexual stigma with women's bodies which has resulted in negative effects on women's confidence and comfort with the body.

Thus we see that there is evidence that religion paradoxically played a role in the devaluing of the sacred and spiritual aspect of dance.

2.6. Belly Dance and its Perceptions: a Feminist Leaning

The stereotype of belly dancing as existing for patriarchal sexual pleasure of the male is dominant (verbal communication, school research committee meeting 15 May 2008; Vigier 1994; Paul 2007).

Stewart (2000, p.81) alludes to the pervasive nature of sexually stereotyped belly dance by saying that there is a move amongst belly dancers to change the name belly dance to oriental dance, to remove the negative connotation of the name belly dance. According to Paul (2007, p.1) “belly dance is often negatively associated with sexuality and striptease and devalued because of this.” According to Shay and Sellers-Young quoted in Paul (2007, p.1) this is partly the reason that belly dance is scholarly avoided. The researcher has had first hand experience of both the existence of this view of belly dance and the tendency to deem belly dance unworthy of academic investigation as a result of this negative sexual stereotype (verbal communication, school research committee meeting, 15/05/2008, UKZN)

Bonaventura (1989) provides some historical evidence for the sexual origins of the dance *but not for the current negative sexual stereotype of the dance* – she asserts that in Greek societies, in the time of Goddess worship a form of the dance was done by women in fertility rituals designed to attract the male in copulation, but during this time there was no stigma attached to its sexual use as copulation was seen as sacred due to its function in the continuation of life and accordingly, sexuality and spirituality were linked, as were mind and spirit. Bonaventura (1989) asserts that the association of sexual energy with sin and guilt only developed with the advent of civilization and of Christian religions when women were seen as property. A possible reason for the sexual stereotype of the dance is that it has traditional associations with both erotic and religious elements (Harding, n.d.). Harding (n.d.) explains that in the time of Socrates, the female god was prominent and symbolized the reproduction of the species in all its implications – crops, rain, and fertility. As result none of the Goddesses were celibate as it was counter to their symbolism. Thus sexuality was seen positively in terms of the reproductive function of the Goddess and of women and the type of dance that was performed in worship of the Goddess emphasized the abdomen seen to be the source of fertility.

Bonaventura (1989) attempts to explain the present negative sexual stereotype of the dance by saying that the dance, when taken out of context and performed in nightclubs etc, seems out of place and is frequently met with embarrassment by spectators. This, according to Bonaventura (1989), is due to the fact that belly dance was meant to serve certain purposes for women and when offered as a spectator sport it no longer serves these purposes.

Vigier (1994) opposes the perception that belly dance exists for men’s pleasure but sees it as a birth dance primarily performed by women for women, and

asserts that in some countries the practice of using belly dance moves in the birth process still exist. According to Bounaventura (1983), one of the traditional uses of dance by young girls in the Arab world today is to attract a prospective mother in law at women's gatherings thus attacking the notion that it is a dance to entice men.

Several authors debunk the notion that belly dance exists for men's pleasure by saying that men are generally not a part of belly dance – (Bounaventura 1983; Stewart 2000; Vigier 1994, Abdelmohsien 2000; McGeer 2003).

Bounaventura provides historical reasons for the exclusion of men from belly dance by her assertion that the belief of the women as having fertility powers led to their worship of a mythical female god and men were excluded from these ceremonies.

The idea that belly dance exists for male sexual pleasure can also be interpreted through the lens of feminism, one of the theories that inform this study. Feminism assumes that society is patriarchal (Andermahr, Lovell and Wolkowitz 2000). Patriarchal views are characterized by beliefs in male supremacy (Rider 2005). According to Frost (2001) girls are programmed to believe that they must use their sexuality primarily for the sexual pleasure of men and in addition Western religion has associated sexual stigma with women's bodies. This reinforces women's self consciousness, lack of physical pleasure, lack of self confidence and lack of comfort with the body (Frost 2001). By this feminist argument, patriarchy also serves to stereotype belly dance as existing for patriarchal male gain and pleasure. This is illustrated by Stewarts (2000) assertion that belly dance is casually assumed to have its origin in the harem when in fact it is a dance by women, for women's purposes. Thus we see women's use of the body in belly dance, is associated with the stigmatized sexuality of the harem, a view that is consistent with the oppression of women.

According to feminism androcentrism is the tendency to view the world from the male perspective assuming that this is the norm and the female perspective is the other (Rider 2005, p.23). Sexuality is tied to the human condition, specifically the human body. Belly dance is largely defined and dominated by women (Abdelmohsien 2000). By exploring the use of female sexuality via the body in the exclusively female space of belly dance, where women are norm and men other, the benefits of female sexuality to the health and well being of the woman herself is investigated and the androcentric tendency to view female sexuality as existing for male pleasure is negated.

2.7. Belly Dance Today: a Feminist Leaning

Many anecdotal articles of the interpretations of belly dance as it is done today exist. However in keeping with the dearth of scholarly information on the dance, only 4 accessible scholarly accounts of what belly dance is today were found. According to Buonaventura quoted in Paul (2007, p.1) belly dance is the common name of a Middle Eastern dance form that has been gaining popularity around the world and has several names, including Middle Eastern dance, raks al –sharki, raks al –baladi, oriental dance, danse du ventre and belly dance.

According to Stewart (2000, p.97/8) belly dance consist of several basic movements – hip shimmies , hip rotations, serpentine arms, snakelike head movements and abdominal contractions with the moves working in concert ,and in combination with each other.

Vigier (1994, p.18) views belly dance as being made up of shaking and rotating of the hips, breast shimmies, and belly undulations. According to her these movements emphasize women's sexual and procreative powers and exist in women's dances throughout the world. Vigier (1994) sees these movements as emphasizing the birth movements of women in labour. Vigier (1994, p.18/19) asserts that birth dance exists in folk traditions all over the world and that the tradition of dancing the baby into the world that still exist in some parts of the middle east, is based on ancient belly dance rituals.

Thus the consensus in literature is that belly dance focuses on abdominal movement- "The basic pelvic movement is the starting point" (Abdelmohsien 2000, p.2).

A useful article on the distinct properties of the belly dance was found:

According to Vanessa van Rensburg (<http://www.dancedirectory.co.za/content/articles.asp?Mid=305&Section=bel>) what makes belly dance different from other forms of dance is that it is done barefoot, it is based on eastern music which has a variety of rhythms in the same piece making it different from western music, the dancers often use a rhythm instrument to aid the music e.g. finger cymbals, *it is uniquely designed for the female body* with emphasis on abdominals, hips moves and chest moves and smooth, flowing, complex and sensual movements of the torso, alternating with shimmying an shaking type moves and various props such as snakes, veils, swords, and candles are used in the dance.

2.8. What is Distinct about Belly Dance as Dance?

Belly dance is distinct in that it has an element of connection to the earth or anchoring of bare feet to earth, varied rhythms used in one piece that keep the element of variety separating the dance from boring repetitive motion which also entails that the dancer must listen to and be consumed with the music, thus introducing mental focus and clarity which gives time for totality of being. Support for this notion comes from Stewart (2000, p.5) who asserts that belly dance invites escape from the rational, earthly tasks and mortal burdens. Thus belly dance with its rhythmic musical accompaniment removes the pressure on women to have varied mental focus introducing clarity of mind. In terms of the bio-psychosocial model (Schlebusch 1990) this clarity of mind has self care benefit, on the level of mental health and well being.

In terms of feminism, as outlined before, society is patriarchal (Andermahr, Lovell and Wolkowitz 2000) which is characterized by beliefs in male supremacy (Rider 2005). Patriarchal society objectifies and weakens women by idealizing them in terms of the preferred female form (Steinem 1992). Thus women exercise as one of the various ways to change their bodies, subscribing to the patriarchal notion of the ideal woman (Urla and Swedlund 2000). Frost (2001) also asserts that it is an accepted fact that women who fulfil the culturally acceptable norm of physical appearance- slim and youthful looking- fare better and are more successful in all aspects of life. This argument shows that exercise has become an extension of patriarchal control over women and that women can exercise to conform to these created norms- "dominant patriarchal ideals of the female body are aimed at controlling women and denying the power of the female body with the desired image being male and androgynous but not curvy and round as this is considered appropriate for the belly dancer only" (Vigier 1994, p.11). In terms of feminist theory this tendency is androcentric, the view that the male is central and normative with no attention being given to the female way of being.

However, from the above definitions of belly dance moves, it is apparent that the belly dance uses the female anatomy in the form of stomach, hips, and chest moves in a way that is liberating, rather than denying them in an androgynous tendency. In this way "dance provides us with images that exist for women" (Vigier 1994, p.15). This can be seen as an example of cultural feminism which is the belief that women's differences from men are positive and should be celebrated rather than dismissed and denied (Rider 2005, p.12). Belly dance emphasizes, and celebrates the female anatomy in the dance, making it a liberating form of women's dance.

Buonaventura (1989, p.200) provides support for this liberating aspect of belly dance by saying that what is unique about belly dance that attracts western women to it is that it "is not an exclusive dance; no one is debarred from it by virtue of her age and physical size." Buonaventura (1989, p.200) also asserts that "many women who would love to dance are discouraged by the demands of

western dance forms such as ballet whose requirements include a body of almost anorexic proportions" and sees the body as an encumbrance. However belly dance, which by definition uses the distinctly female aspects of the anatomy in execution, does not disqualify anyone on the basis of age, or body shape. This is one of the reasons that women who are attracted to dance but are put off by the requirements of other dance forms in which the body may not be as accepted in all its variations of shapes and sizes, can do belly dance, making belly dance a self care strategy with wide applicability amongst women.

In addition Bounaventura (1989) asserts that belly dance with its tradition of beautiful feminine costumes and adornment, appeals to the feminine nature as people are natural exhibitionists but society does not afford women opportunity to dress up the way belly dance does. This adornment and embellishment that belly dance costuming affords can enable women to take pride in the more feminine aspects of their appearance, contributing to well being and health on the emotional/ mental level by enabling positive body image and acceptance of and comfort with the body. This costuming is not compulsory to all women who participate in lessons but becomes a factor in belly dance shows. Alves-Masters (1979, p.19) supports the view that belly dance affords women a feminine form of expression by quoting Rush –

"(Belly dance) is a statement of passion and energy, of pride in the fullness of form", and

"Oriental dance provides natural expression for ones femininity, sensuality and sexuality" (Alves-Masters 1979, p.19).

Thus belly dance as it is defined and exists today, gives women permission to be women by using the distinguishing aspects of female anatomy in execution rather than denying them in an androgynous tendency, by being achievable by all women regardless of shape, age and size, by enabling truly feminine forms of expression that incorporate sensuality, sexuality and femininity.

2.9. The Meaning and Significance of Dance

Across time several authors have documented the various uses and significance of dance in general. The consistency of these assertions is pointed out in this section by including references from differing time frames including earlier literature. The aim of this is to point out the pervasive recognition of the value of dance.

These consistent assertions of the meaning and value of dance to humanity on various levels, attest to the role of dance in self care and holistic well being.

2.9.1. Dance as Communication and Emotion

Laiklin and Shmais, quoted in Levy (1988, p.24) believe that dance as communication fills a basic human need. Chodorow (1991), Payne (2006), and Levy (1995) concur that dance is emotion in communication. According to Levy (1995, p. x)

“Some people can dance what they can not express in words.”

According to Payne (2006), emotion and motion are inextricably linked. (Stewart, 2000 p.5) sees dance as movement that is beyond verbal expression.

Krebs and Allen quoting Louise Steinman (2007, p.93) show that this notion of dance as communication survives today: “our voices belong first to our bodies; only secondly to our native language. We ‘voice’ our feelings before we have words to frame them in.”

Thus many authors concur that dance as communication and emotion are part of the human condition playing a role that is beyond the verbal, pointing to the universal benefits of dance to self care on the level of social and mental health and well being.

Bounaventura (1983, p.25) states that all dance come from life. But in particular it seems that the history of belly dance shows it to come from the sources of life-the women’s belly, the birth ritual, the fertility ritual designed for male- female copulation, and the worship of the supernatural, which many see as the divine source of life. Thus belly dance can be seen as a dance that centres on and is derived from the human need for and dependence on fertility, propagation, expression, communication and sacred ritual and religious rites.

2.9.2. Dance as Healing

The idea of dance as healing pervades literature-(Levy 1988); Nagar (n.d.); Stewart 2000; Levy 1995; Chodorow 1991).

Payne (2006, p.3) sums up the view of the healing property of dance:”Dance as healing art is ancient.” Stewart (2000, p.5) recognizes the healing property of dance in its cathartic nature by asserting that it provides both a physical and a cathartic release. Lange, as early as 1975 saw dance as a cathartic need humans have to relieve emotional tension (Lange 1975, p.50).

Thus dance has value in self care and holistic well being, by virtue of its specific healing and cathartic property that reduces anxiety and tension, thus enhancing mental, social and physical well being. In addition, the healing aspect of

movement as dance has been recognized consistently over time attesting to its stable and universal applicability and usefulness to humans.

2.9.3. Body Mind Link in Dance equals Dance as Therapy

The recognition of the value of dance to connect mind and body:

“Over the years there has been a resurgence of interest in body movement and dance, accompanied by a growing recognition of the profound benefits of motor activity on the mind and body” (Levy 1988, p x1),

has led to the use of dance in therapy (Krebs and Allen 2007).

Krebs and Allen (2007, p.28) highlight the mind – body connection as the basis of dance therapy: “Mind and body are inseparable and there is a strong need for non-verbal means of expression, reflected in the growing use of Dance and Kinaesthetics in therapeutic, human resources and educational settings.”

Thus use of the body in dance links mind with body having benefit to women on the level of the physical as well as the mental simultaneously. This is consistent with multi-tasking that women today face as a result of their multi-faceted roles. This illustrates the vital role that dance can play in women’s self care.

2.9.4. Dance as Spiritual Expression, Connection

According to Kasiram (2006) spiritual completion and connection involves finding meaning in life by engaging in activities that restore one.

Connection/s, spirituality, are terms that abound in dance literature, consistently documented throughout time, with connection emerging as a strong element of dance on various levels including the spiritual.

The term spirituality used here can denote a connection within the self also seen as a present moment sensory awareness, and can also mean a connection with the divine in cases where belief systems permit.

Stewart (2000), Lange (1975), Stewart (2000), Buonaventura (1989) and Chodorow (1991) assert that dance originated with a religious, sacred purpose, as a form of spiritual expression in early man. In support, Vigier (1994, p.16) asserts that all dance began as sacred activity. Thus the aspect of dance as religious and spiritual is consistently prevalent in literature over time but there has been increased recognition in dance movement therapy of late in the spiritual aspect of dance.

According to Payne (2006) spirit and matter are held at the same time in the body and dance movement therapy via emphasizing the body and energy through movement and transformational dance works with the psycho spiritual aspects of the human condition.

Thus we see the idea presented by Stewart(2000) and Buonaventura(1989) that dance developed as a way in which body and mind were linked and as the vehicle via which spiritual upliftment was achieved, has been validated in the helping profession by the clinical use of dance as therapy. Thus the idea that use of the body in dance has holistic benefits in the form of self care, the subject of this study is well rooted throughout dance history and has been overtly recognized and formalized by the clinical setting.

Connection has specific applicability to Belly dance and Self Care:

Belly dance affords connection on many levels- connection with others, connection with the music and the moves, connection with the self on the level of body, mind and spirit, connection with the earth. All these connections are achieved by the simple use of the body in dance.

The aspect of being present in and connecting with the mind as applies to belly dance is explained by some authors. McGeer (2003) states that one of the reasons that women belly dance is that it is a spiritual experience. Weidendorf (n.d.) sees the chief benefit of belly dance or the hallmark Zen of belly dance as being more self-centered, comfortable in your own body, present in the moment. Coluccia, Pina and Pafrath, (2005) see belly dance as helping women to connect with their characters and their souls.

Krebs and Allen (2007, p.5) expand the theme of connection by pointing out that there is a lack of connection in society today that has lead to a sense of alienation and a crisis in meaning being faced by many people. Tolle (2001) also recognizes the importance of connection by highlighting the importance of being fully present and aware in the body in order to further the mind thus helping one to cope with everyday life and deal with anxiety.

Krebs and Allen (2007, p.13) note that depression, a growing plague, can be attributed to a lack of meaning faced by many - "the loss of soul and spirit." They suggest that the key to the soul and spiritual dimension is to recognise that we are part of the earth and not separate from it (Krebs and Allen 2007, p.13). Belly dance via its connection of bare feet to the earth (Van Rensburg n.d.) can afford women a grounding, spiritual experience that helps them to realise their existence in the world and in the universe. According to Narayan quoted in Billson (2005, p.23) harmony is an aspect of well being. Thus the connection of bare feet with earth can create a sense of harmony with the earth that is potentially congruent with well being as it can introduce the aspect of existential meaning that has self care benefits on the level of mental health by dealing with

existential anxiety and depression. Buonaventura (1989 p.25) best expresses this view by saying that dance comes “from our need to express ourselves and make sense of our existence.”

This spiritual connection belly dance affords has benefits to women’s self care on the mental level of health. It can lend time for self reflection, mental solitude and creative development of the self, which has self care benefit as it enables women to forget as well as cope with daily multiple responsibilities, while fully focusing and being aware of the body in the dance. This, according to Fuller-Good (2008, p.10) is an important aspect of dealing with stress as having the mind in a different place to the body leads to tension in the body. Thus belly dance benefits self care on the level of health as well as the mental level as it prevents and deals with stress in the mind and tension in the body.

Dance also has social benefit as it forges healthy connection with other women in the dance.

Stewart (2000, p.94/5) overtly refers to connection as existing in belly dance: “through this ancient dance women are rediscovering their power, true beauty, spirituality and connection with all women.” Kasiram et al (2008) in research into the attraction of women to general dance, found support for this social connection that dance affords by asserting that women are energized by the positive presence of others in the dance. They assert that since women tend to define themselves in relation to others they are best revitalized by the positive presence of others in dance. Alves-Masters (1979, p.65/6) refers to this connection with other women in the group as “the sisterhood” – a support group in which women bond with, and empathize with each other sharing rites of passage- births, marriages, deaths. Alves-Masters (1979, p.65/66) maintains that competition and other destructive attitudes between women are societally conditioned ones that do not come naturally to women. Via the connection with other women in belly dance women gradually become aware of these negative attitudes and learn to overcome them in favour of acceptance, support and sharing. (Alves-Masters 1979, p.65/6)

The aspect of connection links with the theoretical underpinning of feminism that informs this study as there is a perception that feminism is anti men and babies when in reality it is anti nuclear families in which members are cut off from outside ties and likely to be over dependant on each other (Oakley 2002, p.117). Thus social benefit in the form of connection with other women that can serve as support system to women is also presented by belly dance, highlighting the value of belly dance to social health and well being.

In terms of psychological theory connection can be explained by the relational model. “According to the relational model a key feature of woman’s development is connectedness to others” (Rider 2005, p.288). According to Rider (2005) this means that the individual exists in relational context and empathy is essential in establishing connections with others. In terms of the relational model, via

connectedness and mutual empathy, better understanding and acceptance of others and of the self occurs which leads to harmonious relationships, increased self confidence and supportive relationships (Rider 2005, p.288). This contributes to self care on the level of social health and well being. Khosa (20/06/2008, presentation on self care strategies, UKZN) refers to maintaining connections with “normal people” outside one’s work ambit as a strategy in which self care and stress can be managed. Thus contact between women in the belly dancing group who are from diverse backgrounds and who would possibly have never met each other outside of the belly dancing space, is an important way in which healthy self care on the level of social well being can be achieved and maintained.

Stewart (2000) also alludes to belly dance as a way in which women can rediscover their power. Alves-Masters (1979, p.66) found that “the women (who belly danced) were surprised at the curative power of their own bodies, and vocalized how they would literally be swept up into the positive energy of the dance”. Thus belly dance also has the potential to connect women with the power of the body which has benefits to self care on the level of self confidence as well as the physical level of health and fitness. Thus connection with the moves in the dance can give the physical health benefit traditionally associated with exercise. Support for this was found in Kasiram et al (2008) who found that women were attracted to dance by the fact that it connected them with positive energy of the moves, the music and the presence of others that they found energizing, inspiring and revitalizing. This connection or way of being fully present in the body or in the moment via belly dance is a way in which the body in belly dance can be used for the positive benefit to the mind rather than patriarchal benefit of the male gaze.

Kasiram et al (2008) also found that the motivation of body appearance concerns was not chief in women attending dance exercise classes but that the energy and rejuvenation benefit that the class afforded were the chief attractions. This is a central finding in terms of feminism given the fact that patriarchal society objectifies and weakens women by idealizing them in terms of the preferred female form (Steinem 1992). Thus women can exercise as one of the various ways to change their bodies, subscribing to the patriarchal notion of the ideal woman (Urla and Swedlung 2000). But belly dance is applicable to all women regardless of age, shape and size (Buonaventura 1989). Within this view the finding by Kasiram et al (2008), evidences the fact that women are reclaiming dance for their own purposes as “dance provides us with images that exist for women ” (Vigier 1994 p.15).

Khosa (20/06/2008, presentation on self care strategies, UKZN) identifies taking regular breaks and developing personal boundaries and space as a means of maintaining self care, preventing burnout and managing stress. Belly dancing with its non-emphasis on body size and shape can enable women to take breaks from the demands of androcentric, patriarchal society. It can also help women

develop personal boundaries and space by creating time for themselves, away from the demands and stresses of work and family.

This highlights the point made by Gavin and McBreerty (n.d.) that consumers are demanding fitness programs that focus less on the *body* and more on the mind and spirit and that the fitness industry has responded by offering mind-body programming that has more meaning in people's everyday lives. According to Harter quoted in Gavin and McBreerty (n.d.) "research has shown a close association between how we feel in our bodies and what we think about ourselves." They term this mind-body exercise- exercise that impacts on the mind positively.

The researcher is of the opinion that the current trend amongst gyms and health clubs to offer belly dancing in addition to other exercise classes is in keeping with this emphasis on mind body connection.

From this it is evident that women look for and are motivated by various levels of energizing connection in dance. This further highlights that connection on various levels gives self care benefits that are sought after by women as an aspect of dance.

This section presents the well supported view that the body and mind are one in dance and using the body in dance can lead to benefits to the mind in the form of mental, social and physical benefits which is the subject of this research. In other words,

"Dance is the relationship between emotion and motion and is the channel through which one can achieve a deeper connection with the self" (Payne 2006, Preface).

In summary then, dance and in particular belly dance began as a spiritual religious expression based on its power to unite body, mind and soul which has resulted in certain self care benefits, the chief of which is termed here as "in the moment being." Thus there are physical, social and mental health benefits to "in the moment being" that dance affords further highlighting the benefits of dance to self care.

2.10. The Benefits of Dance in the Form of Exercise

Mental health and physical health benefits of exercise have been well documented and established pointing to the value that dance has in self care.

According to Van Der Merwe, Du Plessis, Strydom and Wilders (2006, p.277) *“the positive effects of physical activity on well being and health have been well documented.”*

Further support for the mental as well as physical health benefits of exercise comes from Penedo and Dahne (2005, p.191): “In addition to the physical health benefits of physical activity, several studies suggest that engaging in physical activity or exercise programs can also benefit emotional well being.”

Statements highlighting the powerful benefits of physical activity are contained in past studies:

Van Der Merwe, Du Plessis, Strydom and Wilders, (2006, p.277): “*De Vries, 1981 found that physical activity can have a better relaxation effect at certain intensity than medication or no medication.*”

McInman and Berger (1993) found that short term changes in mood were associated with participation in a single aerobic session. In addition Callaghan (2004) reports that throughout history exercise has been used to prevent disease and promote emotional health and well being and there is evidence that exercise benefits mental health, specifically anxiety, depression, negative mood, self esteem and cognitive functioning.

Kasiram et al (2008) support this by saying that dance as exercise and as therapy has benefits.

Dorian Cabral quoted in “Armed against Anxiety”(2008, p.54) sees exercise as beneficial in stress relief as it releases feel good endorphins, increases fitness, reduces mental fatigue during the day and helps people be more productive at work. According to Cabral women are increasingly using exercise as stress management because they can see tangible benefit from it and it helps with performance at the workplace and in daily living. This is evidence that women today are now recognizing the benefit of exercise on their holistic health and well being, a benefit which was previously mostly academically recognized.

This supports Black’s (2002) notion that women are now increasingly involved in the workplace and turning to different avenues of self care to manage the stress as a result of their now multiple roles.

"Armed against anxiety "(2008) defines any activity that demands physical exertion as exercise. This makes belly dance a form of exercise that gives traditional exercise benefits thus contributing to women's self care and holistic well being on a social, mental and physical level.

Within this context, several authors (Paul, 2007, McGeer 2003, Coluccia, Pafrath A, Putz J. 2005) show that belly dance is growing in popularity as a means of fun and fitness.

Despite the growing benefits of exercise to women's self care and ability to negotiate their multiple demands Callaghan (2004) found that exercise is seldom recognized by mainstream mental health professional as an effective intervention in health care. This study serves to promote the use of exercise in the form of a popular and growing form of dance thus recognizing the holistic benefits of exercise.

In keeping with the lack of information on belly dance it was also found that the benefits of belly dance are not well documented, although some information was found.

2.11. Review of Previous Studies

In attempting to trace previous studies, the researcher concluded, as did Paul (2007) that although belly dance is credited as having healing or therapeutic benefit, the nature of the evidence appears anecdotal rather than scholarly. In fact Franken, quoted by Paul (2007, p.4) identified belly dance as one of the least researched aspects of dance scholarship.

There is an abundant presence of online information on the alleged self care benefits of belly dancing that range from improvements in posture, fitness, femininity, self confidence, self esteem etc. However, only 2 previous scholarly studies on belly dance benefits were found. These were: The Physical and Psychological Effects of Belly dancing: A Multiple Case Study, done by Paul (2007) at the Faculty of Saybrooke Graduate School and Research Centre, and a study by Alves – Masters, Changing Self Esteem of Women Through Middle Eastern Dance, done in 1979, at the University of Georgia.

In keeping with the problematic access to information on belly dance, Paul's (2007) study could not be accessed in full. Thus it was not possible to include the results of this study here although a preview of it containing a limited literature review and abstract was accessed and has been incorporated in this literature review.

Alves –Masters (1979) explored the hypothesis that women performing the belly dance role will experience increased self esteem. Alves –Masters and a dance teacher designed a belly dance course, advertised it as, “the most pleasant, feminine, and graceful way to exercise and muscle tone.” Eighty-four participants participated, and were given pre and post test questionnaires that analyzed self esteem based on the participants’ self-perceived attractiveness, femininity, inhibition, intellect, physical activity, self-confidence, sensuality, sexuality, and subservience. Findings were that women who belly dance achieve increased self perceived attractiveness, increased self perceived femininity, increased self perceived physical activity, increased self perceived self confidence, an “increased number of positive self concepts” (Alves-Masters 1979, p.140) and increased self perceived sensuality and sexuality. The study concluded that improved self esteem was achieved by a significant proportion of the students; pointing to the potential that belly dance has to benefit women’s self care on the level of mental health and well being.

2.12. Benefits of Music

One aspect of the benefit of belly dance to self care that remains outstanding here is the music. This section shows that there is scientifically proven evidence of the role that music plays in self care.

Music reduces stress, tension and pain and boosts emotional and physical well being (Menen 2005, front cover). Researchers believe that music together with song and dance were the forms of communication before language developed (Menen 2005) making music combined with dance, a part of the human condition that has the potential to transcend verbal language.

Menen (2005, p.38) asserts that science proves this:

“Music is related to certain basis physiological processes. This has been proved scientifically. Music speaks to us”.

“There is also no doubt that music works as a therapeutic agent.” (Menen 2005, p.38)

Menen (2005) asserts that music works as a therapeutic agent as the rhythm can calm the body by slowing down and deepening breathing patterns, and by changing the heart rate, producing relaxation.

On the physical level of self care music is beneficial as it releases muscle tension, increases endorphins, the natural pain relievers of the body, and decreases the levels of stress hormones (Menen 2005), thus contributing to stress management.

On the level of mental health Menen (2005, p.27) asserts that music in different types and styles can either sharpen mental acuity or aid relaxation. On the level of emotional health Menen (2005, p.27) asserts that music can influence emotion by creating feelings of calmness, tension, excitement or romance , and can present an “opportunity to contain feelings for a period of time so that these can be explored, examined and worked through(Menen 2005, p.41). Thus music can enable women to achieve perspective and distance from stressful situations in their lives that can lead to focus and clarity. This is an important aspect of stress management.

Menen (2005) asserts that the principles via which music achieve the above well being benefit is through entrainment and diversion. Entrainment is the process by which the body automatically adjusts to the rhythm of the music, and diversion is the use of music to take the focus from an unpleasant or undesirable situation. Thus music can achieve harmony of the body as well as diversion of the mind further contributing to achieving a present moment sensory awareness or “in the moment being.”

Music, in particular drum music, is used in belly dancing and as mentioned before has varied rhythms in one piece thus forcing the dancer to listen attentively, to exist in the moment. This act alone gives mental focus and clarity and forces awareness in the body thus affording self care benefit to mental health.

Music in general is recognized for its universal de-stressing property but according to Stewart (2000) and Sharif (n.d.) drum music in particular has value to self care, healing and well being.

Stewart (2000) notes that drum music is used as healing in every culture. Both Stewart (2000) and Sharif (n.d.) note that drums are instant in their effect and produce a vibrational energy that is absorbed by the dancer as well as an instant physiological effect on the dancer. Thus drum music is beneficial to self care on the physical level as it is energizing. Sharif (n.d.) has noted that belly dancing is particularly responsive to the energies of the drum.

Stewart (2000) asserts that this vibration as energy helps us to connect the physical with the spiritual thus connecting mind with body and realizing our place in the universe. This connection of the physical with the spiritual or mental can be beneficial to women as it gives them pause to reconnect with themselves in the midst of their multiple and multi-tasking daily roles and responsibilities.

Menen (2005, p.60) best portrays the benefit of music to self care:

"It is a powerful sensory stimulus that can work simultaneously on the body, mind and spirit."

Thus via the grounding connection of bare feet to earth, the liberating and energizing vibration of the drums, the connection with other women and the therapeutic benefit of movement to holistic health, belly dance affords simultaneous aspects of freedom, clarity, comforting anchoring and realization of the self and of the universe. This gives a much needed sense of meaning, purpose, balance and *healing*, much sought after in today's fast paced crime ridden world.

2.13. Theoretical Conclusions

The model of health used to interpret findings in this study is the bio-psychosocial model that sees health as existing on the mental, social and emotional levels (Schlebusch, 1990). The above literature review has demonstrated how dance in general and belly dance in particular has potential to benefit women on the level of mental health by improving mood, cognitive ability, self esteem, mental focus and clarity, ability to cope with multi-tasking, reducing tension and anxiety. It serves as a form of relaxation therapy that is potentially better than medication and by giving sense of existential meaning in the world.

On the level of the social, health is enhanced by forging healthy connection with others outside the nuclear family, by connecting with the energizing presence of others and by establishing a relationship with a supportive social circle of other women in the dance. Narayan et al quoted in Billson (2005, p.23) points out the importance of this by noting that good social relations are key to well being and thus holistic health.

Narayan quoted in Billson (2005) also notes that freedom of choice is an aspect of well being. This freedom of choice exists on the level of emotional or mental health as it is an aspect of empowerment and independence. Thus women, by choosing to engage in belly dance, despite its perceived negative erotic reputation and its overt use of the female body, are able to exercise their right to make their own decisions, thus showing their independence and empowerment. This empowerment is a facet of the helping discipline of social work as, according to Payne (2005, p.306) one of the tenets of social work is empowerment – “the process by which we support clients to identify *the full range of possibilities that may meet client's needs.*” Thus by exercising their freedom of choice to engage in belly dance, women possibly achieve mental well being as they then realize their empowerment. This empowerment and freedom of choice also impacts on the social level of health and well being as it is an

important aspect of women's relationships with significant others who may oppose or support their decisions to engage in belly dance, as a result of the dances perceived negative sexual reputation and/or its overt and empowering use of the female form. This censure or support will be covered in data collection to gage the extent to which it is a factor in women's relationships.

On the physical level belly dance has the traditional exercise benefits associated with exercise but also potentially has added benefit to women by virtue of its focus on pelvic movements, and on the specific anatomical structure of women.

Feminism provides an adequate and empowering framework to acknowledge the power and strength of the essentially female aspects of self care benefits to women that belly dance holds, especially in terms of women's roles in current society and in ancient society, the time of the origin of the belly dance. The function and role of women in the propagation of life has changed little since ancient times of the belly dance worship, birth and/or fertility ritual. Belly dance is a power dance that also has changed little since its ancient beginnings (Abdelmohsien 2000). Thus belly dance thought to have developed in a time when women were esteemed, highlights and uses the *power* of the female body in a way that is beyond stigmatized patriarchal sexual meanings:

"Dance provides us with images that exist for women. This is particularly true of those images preserved from cultures and times where patriarchy had not yet stamped its value on the female body and restricted its meaning under a controlling male gaze" (Vigier 1994, p.15).

Thus the belly dance still presents a means to celebrate women's power as life giver and fertility source thus connecting women with the powerful and defining aspects of the female body and assisting women to realise and celebrate this strength of the body. But the body is a source of both stress and strength to women as is overtly recognised by feminism:

"Feminism has a history of deep ambivalence towards the body (female) which has figured alternatively as the source of women's oppression and as the locus of a specifically female power" (Andermahr, Lovell and Wolkowitz 2000, p.25).

This research by exploring belly dance and its role in self care recognises the strength of the female body to empower rather than oppress, which is congruent with today's need for and importance of maintaining holistic health and well being. The intention of stressing the role of the female body in procreation and self care is not to advocate compulsory motherhood, but rather to stress the value and capacity that accessing the uniquely female characteristics of the body via belly dance, can have to female self care.

From the above review of literature it seems that dance is part of the human condition and has multiple benefits and applications. This research recognizes the benefits of dance as movement and seeks to further investigate the potential of a popular form of dance, belly dance, to meet women's need for maintaining mental, social and physical health and well being.

Chapter 3

Analysis of Results

3.1. Introduction

This study focused on belly dance as it contributes to well being for women.

It was a qualitative study and research instruments used were 2 focus groups and 4 individual interviews derived from the women members of a specific Durban belly dance studio known to the researcher.

Methods of data analysis focused on coding responses in terms of specific themes that were explored in both research instruments.

To analyze data interviews and focus groups, data were transcribed and codified into different categories or themes. The results of this process are presented here, alongside reflections and analysis against literature reviewed earlier.

Rider (2005, p.5) defines reflexivity as an awareness of how our personal values and beliefs affect our research. Reflexivity is present in this research as the researcher has experiential awareness and knowledge of the culture and process of belly dance, stemming from her personal experience of belly dancing and her involvement as a member of the studio from which the sample was drawn. The researcher found that this identification with belly dance, as well as her position as studio member or fellow belly dance learner, gave what Rider (2005) terms as a collaborative relationship between researcher and participant in which there was no hierarchical differences in which one is seen as the expert. Thus an element of collaboration, exploration, discussion, camaraderie and cooperation was experienced in data collection as a result of this reflexivity or common experience of researcher and respondents. This enhanced data collection.

3.2. Presentation of Findings

This chapter presents and discusses findings in the form of responses that were given in data collection.

To begin presenting and discussing findings, belly dance is contextualized and discussed in terms of the role that it plays in women's lives. This is followed by the attraction it holds for women as opposed to other dance forms. This focus on contextualization is important, as feminism, one of the guiding theories in this study, stresses the importance of viewing phenomena from women's perspectives.

The specific self care role that women perceived belly dance as playing in their lives is thereafter presented in terms of the biopsychosocial model of health, as defined by Schlebusch (1990). The impact of the absence of men when women take charge of their self care in belly dance is incorporated under the specific self care role of belly dance. The self care role of the music of belly dance concludes the discussion on the specific self care role of belly dance. The support or censure that women experience as a result of belly dance, follows. Recommendations by participants, for using belly dance as self care conclude the presentation of findings.

In summary, the presentation of results follows the following format which also formed the categories that data were codified in:

- Contextualization of the role of belly dance in women's lives.
- The motivation to belly dance.
- What is different about belly dance from other forms of exercise or dance that attracted women?
- The general understanding women have of health and well being, including the role of health and well being in their lives.
- The specific self care role of belly dance in terms of the biopsychosocial model of health.
- The impact of the absence of men women's self care in belly dance.
- The role of the music of belly dance.
- The support or censure that women receive as a result of belly dancing.
- Recommendations for using belly dance as a form of self care.

The aim of this chapter was not to arrive at conclusions. However certain themes emerged so strongly that it was apparent that some key findings evident were directly related to the research questions. Thus themes that resulted in conclusions, directly answering some research questions, emerged in responses. To present a logical argument, as well as to show the concrete relationship between responses about belly dancing and key questions, these conclusions are alluded to here but are also more succinctly presented again in Chapter 4.

In addition some overlap and repetition across questions were experienced and these are referred to as they indicate women's systemic existence and thinking, as well as the multiple roles and benefits of belly dance for women.

Data from focus groups and interviews are presented and discussed together as they yielded similar responses with interviews serving to illuminate and give depth to the more general information of the focus groups.

Verbal quotes were also seen as important as Rider (2005, p.450) sees the need for feminist research to capture and value the diversity of women's lives, without generalizing all women's experiences as universal. Thus verbal quotes,

presented here lend richness to the female experience, describing diverse cultural experiences which ultimately allow a better understanding of the role of belly dance in women's self care. This research also falls into the interpretative paradigm as the focus is on the subjective reality and qualitative interpretations of women's self care experiences relating to belly dance. The researcher has also relied on verbal quotes to accurately reflect the true essence of key themes explored in this study. Therefore verbal quotes in this qualitative study are multiple, but with understanding that they add depth to women's experiences of belly dance.

In addition depth of information from individual interviews translated to multiple perspectives which resulted in more than one theme emerging per question. These differences relate to different areas of women's functioning and thinking and serves to identify the complexity of women's experiences and perceptions relating to belly dance in their lives.

3.3. Theoretical Frameworks

As mentioned, 2 theories provide a backdrop to this study. These are feminism and the biopsychosocial model of health. Both theories provide equal impetus as feminism is used to interpret responses and findings, and the biopsychosocial model, as outlined in chapter one, forms the theory against which the specific self care benefit of belly dance is measured and explored.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the word belly dance can be used as both noun and verb. Both uses are incorporated here depending on the sentence context and meaning.

3.4. Contextualization of Belly Dance for Women

This question was designed as an ice breaker, to create rapport and to get women talking about the role of belly dance in their lives. To elicit accurate in depth results, the question was posed in 3 different ways –“What does belly dancing mean for you?”, “Why do you belly dance?”, “What role does belly dance play in your life?”.

Typical responses included the following words and phrases:

“support”, “fun”, “pleasure”, “concentration”, “a relaxing time”, “self confidence”, “health”, “challenge”, “stress reliever,” “gracefulness”, “enjoyment,” “a combination of challenge, seriousness, fun, learning, femininity, a form of expression”, “time for myself,” “enjoyment.”

Also common was that belly dance afforded “*frivolity*”, a way to “*let ones hair down*” and “*relax*.”

An individual respondent showed that belly dancing afforded a means to be feminine in a way that usual roles in society did not:

“It allows you to be something completely different from almost the facade that you have to put up in your profession. It allows you to wear all the sparkly things you wouldn’t normally wear in your job.”

Typical themes were that women felt that belly dancing gave them means to express themselves, referring to the non verbal expression that belly dance affords e.g.

“I feel that belly dancing is a way to express myself in a way that words can not because music and dancing are more expressive.”

“Belly dance is a feminine form of expression.”

The presence of this theme of belly dance as a form of expression in responses accurately gives voice to what Stewart (2000 p.5) alluded to- that dance is movement that is beyond verbal expression. Women’s recognition of this gives voice to Vigier’s (1994) assertion that women are psychically strong in dance and hints at a predisposition to the language of dance and movement that women may have.

It seems that women have need for this non-verbal expression afforded by belly dance, a finding that will be reiterated as a conclusion in chapter 4.

It became evident from the responses that women contextualized the role of belly dance in their lives as directly related to their self care. This was not expected as the significance of belly dance in women’s lives was designed as contextual questioning that did not specifically aim to uncover the self care benefit of belly dance so early. However, respondents showed that women were grateful for belly dance in their self care.

In summary, responses on the role of belly dance in women’s lives typically showed that women felt that belly dance contributed to their self care contextually by virtue of being:

- Relaxing and providing stress relief.
- Fun and pleasurable.
- Supportive.
- Mental focus in the form of concentration while learning.
- Fun whilst learning.

- Self confidence benefits
- A learning challenge.
- A means of enabling women to let go off their inhibitions thus increasing confidence.
- A means of allowing women to be more feminine in a departure from work roles.
- An opportunity for women to be feminine in garb, movement and non-verbal expression which they see as being absent in their other roles in society.
- A non verbal means of expression.
- An activity that creates time for the self.
- An activity that promotes health.

The above benefits clearly show the positive self care impact of belly dance.

3.5. The Motivation to Belly Dance

Various reasons were given here with respondents in individual interviews being more contextual. Certain prominent individual and multiple themes emerged in single interviews where women related the motivation to belly dance to different areas of their lives. To accurately reflect the diversity in response, the different themes are identified, separated and discussed via typical verbal quotes that reflected responses.

3.5.1 Childhood longings to dance realized via belly dancing

“I always wanted to dance, from a child ...”

This childhood ambition, need to fulfil “a longing” to dance was identified by a woman over 40.

Thus it seems that women are attracted to dance at any age, and that belly dancing presents an achievable way to engage in dance, regardless of age, a view shared by Stewart’s (2000, p.97). This again prompts the idea that women have a predisposition to the language of dance, now showing that this predisposition operates across age span.

3.5.2. The need to realize the self

“Belly dancing allows me to be myself.”

“This is who I am.”

These respondents showed that women found belly dance accepting of them, indicating an acceptance of age, life stage, physical forms and limitations as well as ability levels.

The self esteem benefits of the dance were referred to here:

"The crises with my back operations added hugely to a feeling of physical repugnance which had already been fostered by my husband's constant criticism. (Belly) dancing saved me from this."

In terms of the biopsychosocial frame, this indicates the self care benefit of the dance to mental health, specifically to self confidence and self esteem.

This respondent also indicated the perception that belly dancing is an activity that adds to emotional health. This reinforces the finding by Alves-Masters (1979) that women who belly dance experience improved self concept.

In addition this respondent showed that belly dance is a dance that is acceptable or applicable to women with problems with their physical health. Thus the wide applicability of the dance amongst women becomes again apparent as an element of the dance that served as a reason that women began belly dancing.

3.5.3. The self confidence effects of the dance

"I was urged by a friend then found it was a dance that made you feel a lot better about yourself."

This was typical of the overwhelming responses that overtly recognized the perceived self confidence value of the dance, giving support to Alves-Masters (1979) who found that women experience greater self confidence as a result of belly dancing. In terms of the biopsychosocial frame, this shows the self care value of the dance on the mental health level.

3.5.4. Motivated by connections with friends as a social activity

It emerged that belly dance was something that women commonly started as a social activity with friends.

".....a friend of mine suggested I try belly dancing.a couple of us went along to have a look at a lesson and it looked like fun"

Thus belly dance was often used as a vehicle to connect with friends showing the social benefit of the dance.

3.5.5. Need to fill a spiritual gap, find existential meaning in life

“...spending 12-18 hours a day, seven days a week (working) is not conducive to a rounded existence. It (belly dancing) filled a gap, gave me a reason...it just rounds me as a person the way that nothing else could.”

This respondent showed that belly dance offers meaning and completion in life. It was given by a woman who had been through a failed relationship, who defined herself by her work, working long days. For her, belly dance filled a void, gave a sense of meaning, enrichment and depth to life, also presenting a leisure or hobby activity that was a diversion from work. This shows Kasiram's (2004) assertion that spiritual completion and connection involves finding meaning in life through engaging in activities that restore one.

Similarly, Stewart (2000), Lange (1975), Buonaventura (1989) and Chodorow (1991) asserted that dance originated as a form of spiritual expression in early man and the idea that dance persists as a manifestation of spiritual expression via belly dance, is apparent here. This respondent also highlighted that connection with leisure activities that belly dance presents can help women find depth and meaning in life, and remove unhealthy and obsessive focus on work and overdependence on family.

3.5.6. Motivated to be uninhibited

One respondent showed that belly dancing helped her to be herself by letting go of inhibitions:

“For the first time in decades, literally, I could be me, and feel lovely and free from all the inhibitions. My friend who referred me to belly dance told me at the time that I can be the person I always want to be when I dance. I didn’t understand at the time. Now I do.”

Several themes emerge here. This woman saw belly dance as presenting an opportunity to be herself. She perceived belly dance as speaking to her on a sensory level by making her feel “free” and attractive-“lovely”. This indicates that feeling beautiful rather than looking beautiful is an important element of belly dance, making the self care benefit of the dance to mental health apparent.

Clearly belly dance can also make women feel uninhibited, an indication of its liberating aspect. Thus the mental health benefit of belly dance to self confidence is again evident.

3.5.7. Love, enjoyment of dance

"I love dancing." "I love every kind of dance."

This further supports the idea that women are psychically strong in dance and predisposed to dance that was referred to in 3.5.1.

This shows the health benefit of belly dance in terms of the biopsychosocial frame, as enjoyment in life is essential to mental health and well being.

3.5.8. Motivated to fill an emotional need

"....emotionally I had little to live for. My kids had grown up.....they did not need me anymore."

This contextual response showed that belly dance gave a sense of direction in life as well as an opportunity to fill time no longer required in child rearing. Thus belly dance as hobby for personal emotional benefit was a reason women began to belly dance.

An interview respondent also referred to the anti-depressive qualities of the dance:

"At a time when I was very down in my life all sorts of ways..... a friend suggested I try belly dance.....and I loved it."

This indicates that women may begin to belly dance to combat sadness or depression attesting to what is generally accepted as the well established anti-depressive qualities of exercise. In terms of the biopsychosocial frame, belly dance therefore contributes to health on the mental level by having a positive effect on depression.

3.5.9. Attraction to visual beauty

"We (friends) went to a show and we saw (The Teacher) dance."

This visual beauty of belly dance emerged recurrently in responses. Women extended this visual beauty to all aspects of the dance, including costuming and the dance in performance.

This also shows that women, rather than compete with each other, appreciate and are attracted to the beauty and grace displayed by other women via belly dance. This shows support for the social benefit of the dance, showing that the language of belly dance can nullify destructive relationships between women and reinforce women's appreciation of feminine beauty.

3.5.10. Attraction to femininity

In extension of the above theme of visual beauty, respondents showed that the “costumes, bling, femininity, loveliness” of the dance were attractions. Thus women perceived belly dance to be beautiful in a feminine way indicated by their use of language –“loveliness.”

In summary of the key elements of this section, respondents showed that the love of dance as well as the influence of friends was instrumental in them beginning belly dance. This tendency indicates that women place a high value on the opinions and recommendations of friends and are also encouraged by the presence of friends in undertaking dance as a social activity. This emphasizes women as relational beings who respect and value their female friends.

Respondents showed strong attraction to belly dance as presenting an achievable way to dance at any age and at different levels of health.

It emerged here that women see belly dance as an aspect of their self care management serving a contextual role in their lives. Although this was not anticipated, it seems that women were motivated to belly dance by the contextual self care effects of the dance. The specific self care benefit of belly dance in terms of the biopsychosocial model of health and well being is discussed in 5 of this chapter. This gives further illumination on the specific self care aspects of belly dance.

Support emerged for Gavin and McBreerty's (n.d.) idea, that consumers are interested in fitness programs that focus less on the body and more on the mind and spirit. Respondents thus far clearly show that belly dance is such an activity by offering benefits that operate in the mind-body duality. In other words belly dance makes women feel better in the mind via use of the body in dance. This reiterates what Stewart (2000) and Buonaventura (1989) say that dance developed as a way in which body and mind were linked, being true for belly dance today.

This section again serves to identify belly dance as playing a role as a female art form in meeting women's self care needs and is a finding that will be discussed as a conclusion in chapter 4.

3.6. What's Different about Belly Dance?

This question was designed to identify what women perceived to be present in belly dance and absent in other dance that served to attract them to belly dance. This question differs from the previous categories as the aim here was to identify what women see as unique about belly dance that may hold self care value for

women. It was asked after the above more general questions on belly dance were asked, when an atmosphere conducive to discussion and information sharing was achieved. It was expected that women would find this aspect a little more difficult to respond to and that more introspection would be required but this was not the case. It became evident in responses that women were conscious of the uniqueness of belly dance which attracted them to it.

Again several themes or properties of belly dance were common in responses and verbal quotes typical of responses under identified themes are reflected here.

3.6.1. Femininity and sensuality

As discussed in 3.5.10. and 3.4. respondents highlighted femininity, but now adding that this femininity that women see in belly dance, is absent in other dances and in society:

"Belly dancing is a very feminine thing in a world where you are driven ... to conform to standards that are often almost masculine I think it's really important to be able to embrace the softer side of being a woman and this is what this dance form allows you to be. Ballet and ballroom are very structured, very disciplined, belly dance is softness."

Women also brought in the dances sensuality alongside femininity:

'It's more sensual...a way to show that women aren't just there that they have feelings.....hip-hop is more a masculine dance while belly dance is more feminine".

Respondents showed the idea that other dance, together with society is an extension of androcentrism, androcentrism being defined as the tendency to view the world from the male perspective (Rider 2005) where structure, discipline and drive are valued above creativity. Clearly, belly dance can rise above these androcentric perspectives.

3.6.2. The way the dance uses the body

The way the dance isolates different body parts was regarded as unique and attracted women to it e.g.

"The movement The way you move your mid section and nowhere else in your body ... attracted me."

Women were also attracted to the way the dance uses the body in a unique way that they found to be different from other dances:

"Doing different things with the body you would not dream of doing before. In the beginning I thought this was not gonna be my thing to wobble my bits at people."

This quote also reflects the perception amongst respondents that belly dance uses the female body in a liberating manner that other dances do not.

3.6.3. Women found the dance achievable

Women found belly dancing physically more accommodating, natural and achievable to them than other dance forms:

"It's a lot less demanding on your body.... I did ballet and it was physically demanding on my body. You ache, every single muscle in your body aches. So physically belly dance is not as demanding."

This indicates the perception that belly dance is not something women viewed as hard work, an unattainable way of using the body. This gives support to Vigier's (1994, p.11) assertion, that the western approach to the body is very male with the emphasis being on "pull in, push up, lift up." This male approach to the body in dance often results in muscle tightness or body aches, as discussed by the respondent and can also be seen as an androcentric approach to dance.

As mentioned in 3.5.1., women again found this dance achievable across ages, as opposed to other dances and this served as an attraction for them.

3.6.4. Dancing with other women

One respondent identified that dancing with other women in belly dance was very different from dancing alone:

"Coming here and dancing with other women is so energizing, relaxing. You can put the music on and dance at home but it's not the same as coming here and dancing with other women. It's the fact that other women are here that makes the difference."

This shows attraction to the opportunity to dance with other women presented by belly dance, as well as to the energy and relaxation effects that dancing with other women presents.

It is significant that this respondent is a full time student, living with her parents and sisters, 2 of whom are studying belly dance with her. She has a significant amount of contact with other women via her family and student life yet still considers important, the contact with other women in the belly dance. This

indicates that women can be systemically sensitive, relaxed, energized and attracted by the positive energy produced by belly dancing with other women. It seems that women consider this a significant benefit of the dance, clearly indicating the self care benefit of dancing with other women in belly dance.

Respondents here and throughout this study showed that women see this social connection with other women in the belly dance as an aspect of the dance that makes belly dance unique. Kasiram, Pais, Ilbury and Sookoo (2008), in research into the attraction of women to general dance, also found support for this social connection that dance affords by asserting that women are energized by the positive presence of others in the dance, adding that since women tend to define themselves in relation to others they seem to be best revitalized by the positive presence of others. However, this study goes a step further in identifying that belly dancing with other women is not only energizing but also relaxing. This leads to the conclusion that belly dance plays a role as female art form in meeting women's self care needs by being relaxing and energizing via the presence of other women in the dance.

3.6.5. The difference of belly dance

This theme emerged as an attraction to belly dance:

"I started belly dancing because I just wanted to try something different."

It was commonly shown that the dance was different to what people expected. This difference extended to the dance's use of clothing or costumes, make up, ornamentation and "bling" in adornment, again highlighting the femininity of the dance that women perceived to be absent in other dances.

This motivation that belly dancing was a way to do something different also attests to the need women have to break away from the dull, boring and mundane aspects of every day existence. One respondent explained that belly dance was a way to let ones hair down and take a break from "*almost the façade you have to put up in whatever you do...*" Belly dance thus contributes to self care by being different, fulfilling need for variety.

3.6.6. Belly dance was accepting of the female form

Extending what was said in 3.6.3. of this chapter, the wide applicability of the dance was mentioned here, with respondents now saying that this extends to women's diversities of shape and size. Women felt that other dance forms were less acceptable to their diversities in shape and size and thus were attracted to this non-discriminatory aspect of belly dance e.g.

"You gotta be slim and slinky (in other dances) which just doesn't apply here....you are who you are and that's that."

"Every person (in belly dance) is unique. You can be fat, you can be thin. It doesn't matter."

Clearly women see other dance as dictating conformity to shape and size, but perceive this to be absent in belly dance.

A parallel can be drawn here with feminist assertions in the literature review, chapter 2, where it was pointed out that feminism assumes that society is patriarchal (Andermahr, Lovell and Wolkowitz 2000) and patriarchal views are characterized by beliefs in male supremacy (Rider 2005). In addition, patriarchal society objectifies and weakens women by idealizing them in terms of the preferred female form (Steinem 1992). Thus women can exercise as a way to change their bodies (*"You gotta be slim and slinky which just doesn't apply here....you are who you are and that's that."*), to conform to the patriarchal ideal of the ideal woman (Urla and Swedlung 2000). However the perception that belly dance is applicable to all women regardless of age, shape and size, suggests that women are reclaiming dance, in the form of belly dance, for their own purposes.

Vigier (1994, p.15) accurately points out "dance provides us with images that exist for women" and this is clearly apparent in the above response. This also confirms Bounaventura's (1989) assertion that women who would love to dance can be put off by the requirements of western dance, which may require a body of almost "anorexic" proportions, viewing the body as an encumbrance in the dance. This can prevent the use of the body as a positive vehicle in dance, via which the potentially multiple self care benefits of dancing can be achieved.

Thus respondents clearly showed that belly dance can contribute to female self care, as women believe it to be both non-discriminatory and non-dictating. It has thus far emerged that this non-discrimination operates on the levels of age, some health problems, use of the body and body shape and size.

Thus the non-discriminatory aspect of the dance contributes to self care by making women feel more accepted by and comfortable with this dance form, rather than feeling they have to change their appearance to conform to it.

3.6.7. Belly dance for personal benefit

"I enjoy other dance but belly dance is more personal, for yourself."

This shows that belly dance is a way of being with, experiencing or connecting with the self, indicating the spiritual connection the dance affords dancer. This

supports McGeer's (2003) idea that one of the reasons women belly dance is that it is a spiritual experience. This spiritual connection creates time for the self, has stress relieving and relaxation properties, all of which can be of great value in assisting women retain focus in the midst of multi-tasking. This illustrates the self care value of the dance, to mental health in terms of the biopsychosocial frame.

This quote also highlights that women belly dance for themselves, rather than the dance benefiting others. This is a direct opposition to the commonly held perception that the dance exists for the patriarchal pleasure of the male gaze or the sexual stimulation of the male (verbal communication, school research committee meeting, 15/05/2008, UKZN), which is an androcentric notion that these female respondents did not follow.

In summary of this category, respondents again showed that women see belly dance as non-discriminating amongst women, now extending this non-discrimination to encompass being achievable, applicable and acceptable to them in their diversities of shape, size, age and some health problems. This supports Buenaventura's (1989) assertion that belly dance is not an exclusive dance, debarring no woman on basis of age or physical size. This shows the wide potential self care applicability that belly dance can have for women.

Respondents also showed attraction to the self care benefits of dancing with other women in belly dance. This was the typical perception elicited across question categories that contained the idea that belly dance affords social connection with other women and reiterates the value that women place on this social connection. Therefore social connection and/or the presence of other women as it impacts on self care from belly dance, is a common thread running throughout this chapter. Its presence is included under the different question categories and should not be seen as mere repetition, as it shows the multiple and systemic self care effects that women perceive in this social connection. The self care benefit of this aspect is more succinctly explained in chapter 4.

Women showed attraction to the sensuality of the dance. It emerged that women look for and are attracted by the femininity in this dance, which they overtly perceive to be not only absent in other dance, but also in society. The aspect of femininity was clearly important as its recurrent presence became apparent in responses.

Women appear to see not only other dances but also society as androcentric. This also shows that women perceive belly dance as presenting a means to be feminine in a world that is decidedly unfeminine- an androcentric world. Respondents thus serve to support feminism which objects to generalizing male experience to women (Beasley 1999).

Femininity now becomes a key theme of this research supporting Bounaventura's (1989) assertion that belly dance with its tradition of beautiful feminine costumes and adornment, appeals to the feminine spirit.

This concludes the contextual aspect of findings. The specific self care role of belly dance is now presented. It is introduced by presenting the general findings on health and well being and belly dance. Thereafter the specific self care benefit of belly dance in terms of the biopsychosocial model is presented.

3.7. Health and Well being and Belly Dance

This question on health and well being was used to introduce the discussion on the specific self care role of belly dance. As mentioned some overlap and repetition between contextual findings already discussed, and the specific self care role of belly dance exists. Therefore some earlier findings are briefly alluded to when discussing the self care benefits in relation to the biopsychosocial model.

To begin health and well being is defined and explored, followed by the relationship between belly dance and health and well being in general and thereafter the specific self care role of belly dance in terms of the biopsychosocial model of health as defined by Schlebusch (1990).

As stated in Chapter 1, the terms health and well being were not operationally defined before implementing this study. This was done to prevent narrow use of these general terms, and to prevent imposing definitions on respondents who may have different understandings of these terms. Therefore contextualization of the role that health and well being plays in women's lives, as well as their understanding of these terms were explored in data collection, to reach grounding consensus and understanding of the meaning of health and well being. This also maintained the study's validity.

Respondents showed that women who multi-task identify energy, stamina and strength as important in reaping the full benefit and enjoyment from life:

"Health is a massive thing in my life; I need to have the strength and stamina to do my job, to enjoy my life Emotional and mental health is absolutely critical as well."

Black (2002) similarly referred to women's roles as becoming increasingly multi-fold, stress being a natural by-product of this.

Responses ranged from being acutely aware of health and well being and striving to maintain it to not actively taking it into account in everyday life e.g.

"I actively try and maintain my health and well being."

"I don't think about it. I only think about it when I'm sick otherwise I never think about it."

This range of response from the one extreme of not thinking about health and well being, to being acutely aware of it, is considered to be reflective of the diverse attitudes that women have towards their self care management.

Women were also asked to contextualize what being in good health and having an adequate level of well being meant. Consensus was that to have good health meant that "everything was working properly" and there were "no aches and pains" – "I'm feeling fine and well", "feeling good about myself." This indicates women recognize that health and well being exists in the body as well as the mind - the body- mind duality. This shows that women view themselves as systemic beings, a view that is again consistent with the multi-tasking that has now become necessary for most women.

Some respondents directly attributed belly dancing to encouraging health and well being:

"Belly dancing does impact on my health and well being in a positive way."

Thus respondents overtly recognized belly dance as contributing to self care management. This is a significant finding as it again becomes apparent that belly dancing is seen by women to play a positive as well as contextual role in their self care.

3.8. The specific Self Care Impact of Belly dance Introduction

This question differs from the preceding aspects as it focused exclusively on the specific self care role of belly dance.

As discussed in Chapter 1, this research defines self care as those activities aimed at enhancing and restoring health (Encyclopedia of Public Health: Self Care Behavior, n.d.), which includes mental, physical, and social health and well being, as defined by the biopsychosocial model of health (Schlebusch, 1990). The focus of the sections that follow, (specifically 3.9., 3.10., and 3.11) are structured to represent these identified dimensions or levels of health and well being.

3.9. Social Health and Well being

This aspect of the research, as mentioned in chapter 1, sought to explore the impact of belly dance on all aspects of the relationship sphere, specifically:

- Work.
- Family and marriage.
- Support from the social circle of the belly dance group itself.
- Benefits to social skills and social confidence.
- Energy benefits that may enable women to continue to meet the demands of their multiple social roles as employees, mothers, daughters, wives or partners and friends.

3.9.1. Impact on Work Relationships

a). Women were more patient, open minded and accepting of other people at work:

"I tend to be a very intolerant person. At work I could tear my hair out with people that just don't get it... They don't understand what we are doing, they don't understand why we are doing it and I can get very hard on people that I just think are being plain stupid. So what this has done for me is just opened my mind to accepting that everybody's different and to letting go of that agro that I feel when people are just being in my opinion, difficult when in fact, maybe, they just have a different view."

Thus it seems that belly dance helps women be more relaxed, understanding and forgiving at work, a mental health benefit that additionally impacts positively on work productivity.

b). Respondents felt that belly dancing helped them gain perspective and let go off control issues e.g.

"I'm a complete control freak (at work) and belly dancing has helped me let go."

This respondent, in an individual interview, also identified belly dance as having impact on her patience and tolerance levels when interacting with others at work. This respondent is a leader and manager, who had been through a divorce and physical health complaints that contributed to low self confidence and poor body image. The results of these life experiences may have led to a lack of tolerance in interaction with other people, and a highly driven nature with overemphasis on work. In addition, her work involvement was the source of meaning in her life during times when her personal life was problematic. Her involvement with belly dance allowed her to let go and be more patient and tolerant at work, recognizing that the achievement of work goals could also be attained by adopting a more people oriented, process driven approach, which would possibly result in less stress to herself, as well as the people with whom she interacts.

c). The view was that belly dancing gives women self confidence which helped them cope with problems at work:

"Because you are a bit more happy with yourself you are able to take what life gives you, whatever happens (at work) you can handle it."

Thus women had more confidence and were able to deal more effectively with work challenges. This now extends the self confidence benefits of the dance referred to in 3.4. and 3.5.3. of this chapter to the work arena as well.

3.9.2. Impact on Family Relationships

a). Energy for Family Roles

Women typically said that "*belly dancing has given me more energy for relationships with family.*" This indicates the physical self care benefits as well as the social benefit of belly dance. This overlap in categories also showed that belly dancing for self care is congruent with women's need for multi-tasking and reaping maximum benefit from their time investments.

b). Marriage Relationships

The typical response was that belly dancing improved marital relationships due to the fact that husbands were proud that their wives belly danced e.g.

"At the concert was the first time I'd seen my husband so proud of me."

This can have a positive effect on marital relationships with a systemic positive effect on families.

Husbands also helped women prepare for “*grading*”, a belly dance exam, indicating the dance brings partners together in common learning activity. The response that “*my husband tries to correct my pelvic circle cos he thinks he can do it better*” also shows that belly dance contributes to marital and family relationships by bringing an element of light hearted fun and learning in families.

It was interesting to both researcher and participants that the consensus amongst women was that no one belly danced for their husbands – “*I don't dance for my husband as he'd laugh. He'd think it's very funny.*”

This together with what was said in 3.6.7. of this chapter emphasizes belly dance as dance that women use for their own purposes. This again directly opposes the commonly held negative notion that belly dance is a dance for the patriarchal sexual pleasure of the male gaze by the finding that it improved marital and family relationships.

c). Relationships with Children

Interview participants saw no direct relationship between belly dancing and relationships with children except for the fact that it gave them more energy for managing relationships. This is presumably because women who were interviewed either had no children or had adult children who were no longer dependant on them. These women did not see a relationship between belly dance and impact on their relationships with their adult children.

A focus group response was that belly dance added to relationships with children as indicated by -“*my children want to be involved, they want to do belly dancing with me.*”

This further opposes the negative sexual stereotypes of the dance and again indicates the unifying element of belly dance in families.

The consensual responses of focus groups indicated the principle of security in numbers or group opinion that can occur in focus group data. The difference in response between data collection instruments here illustrates the different dynamic of information exchange between focus groups and interviews that can result in different content and findings.

This category shows that women's connection with leisure activities outside the home via belly dance, impacts positively and systemically on families. This results in healthy families in which members learn from and are exposed to different things as a result of the mother's healthy connection with the outside world. This brings an element of variety to families, a departure from routine

mundane existence. This supports Oakley's (2002, p.117) assertion that feminism, the guiding paradigm of this study, is not anti men and babies but anti nuclear families in which members are cut off from outside ties and likely to be over dependant on each other. Thus women's connection with the belly dance provides fresh and varied learning opportunity, which has a systemic positive and unifying effect on families.

3.9.3. Support from the Social Circle of Belly Dance

Respondents focused on the contact with other women in the belly dance group and not on impact of belly dancing on existing relationships with friends. In fact, respondents in both interviews and focus groups typically indicated that belly dancing did not have impact on relationships with existing friends apart from being an activity that some women typically began as a social activity with friends. Thus an overlap exists in the categories of impact of belly dance on relationship with friends and support from the social circle in the belly dance group.

- a). Typical responses were that- "*belly dancing has added to my female friends,*" and the opportunity to have contact with different women from all walks of life that respondents would not have otherwise met:

"It's a different group of people than I would normally meet....its not like there's a certain type of person; we are all sorts and that's what I like."

Themes of bonding- "*you find that you've definitely formed a bond*", friendship- "*the friendship is a bonus, it's not something you expect to find*", were present.

- b). All identified that the presence of other women in the class was "*supportive*", "*our class is supportive..... of each other...we encourage each other, we draw from each other.*"

- c) Respondents showed they found this contact with other women relaxing and enjoyable:

"....nice get together with a group of women, and enjoy yourself, relax."
The presence of other women was seen as "*comfortable.*" Language used typically reflected that women perceived the presence of other women in the belly dance as nurturing ,supportive, giving "*a feeling of security.*"

- d). Respondents identified that age, shapes and achievement level in the dance were not variables in the quality of this social contact with other women in the dance:

" We have a lot of fun even tho there are women that are older or younger and women with lots of different shapes and sizes, when we are dancing we are all just doing the same thing and having fun and laughing about it."

Clearly women perceive belly dance as uniting all women in enjoyment of the dance despite differences of shapes, sizes, achievement or ability level in the dance, and age. The non-discriminatory aspect of belly dance inviting and accepting all types, shapes and sizes of women is noted here again.

e). One respondent went a step further and identified the importance of female friends:

"I've always been a great believer in having women friends. To a woman, women friends are such a support. I don't think I could survive without my women friends. The misconception is that a lot of women are catty and bitchy and I must say I've not come across that a lot. We all human and we all have our moments, maybe a bit of gossip here and there but generally I find women are supportive."

This respondent showed that women place great value on contact with other women not only in the belly dance but in life. This illustrates what Alves-Masters (1979) asserted- women relate to each other with support in the belly dance and attitudes of competition between women are societally conditioned ones that do not come naturally to women. Instead cooperation and camaraderie appear to take precedence as belly dance is enjoyed.

f). Women saw the supportive, nurturing and relaxing relationships formed with other women in belly dancing as not dependant on the verbal but on the language of belly dance e.g.

"It's so nice that you can spend time together even tho you don't get the time to know each other and really talk to each other."

Thus the social self care benefit of the connection with other women in belly dance is multiple and effectively transcends the verbal.

3.9.4. Benefits to Social Skills, Social Confidence, Energy for Social Roles

Generally women said that they feel energized after belly dancing and had more energy for all round activities including social roles and responsibilities in relationships.

An interview respondent indicated being more open to new relationships as a result of belly dancing:

"I'm more open to new relationships now. I haven't been in the past."

Focus group respondents typically reflected that women felt more socially confident but were not necessarily more open to new relationships as a result of belly dancing.

This difference in responses between focus groups and interviews is likely to be the result of interviews being more in depth and life context specific, enabling women to discuss their lives contextually. This may have resulted in them making links between belly dancing and their attitude to new relationships. In addition, the researcher's social work training clearly allowed respondents in individual interviews to confide more depth than they did during the focus groups.

One respondent said she had more confidence in speaking to people she did not know. Another said that belly dancing gave her social and emotional confidence to embark on a new relationship after a divorce and enduring constant criticism from her now ex husband. This indicates the role that belly dance can play in improving deep seated negative feelings that are created or contributed to by relationships.

This concludes the findings on impact of belly dancing on the social level of health and well being in terms of the biopsychosocial frame. What follows covers the impact of belly dancing on the mental level of health and well being, as defined by the biopsychosocial frame.

3.10. Mental Health and Well Being

This aspect of health and well being, as mentioned in chapter 1, focused on the impact of the engagement in belly dance on emotional health, specifically:

- Self esteem and self confidence.
- Comfort with the body, acceptance of the body, body image.
- Mental focus in midst of multi -tasking including ability to cope with multi-tasking.
- Stress management and relief.

In addition to the above, the impact of the absence of men on women's self care benefits from belly dancing is discussed in this section as it was found to have an impact on women's mental health and well being.

3.10.1. Self Confidence, Self Esteem

This question was designed to see if women perceived a relationship between belly dance and their mental health in the form of improved self esteem and/or self confidence and was posed in a general and open ended manner. The researcher found an overwhelming positive response that illuminated responses in 3.5.2., 3.5.3., 3.4. and 3.9.4. of this chapter. In fact in focus groups women virtually screamed out their response that belly dance did contribute to self esteem and self confidence, virtually before the researcher had finished asking the question!

a). Belly dance gave an overall feeling of self confidence relating to comfort and safety:

"(belly dance)gives me a feeling of security."

This respondent is a married woman with adult children. She is from the UK but is now living with her husband in Durban. It is interesting that her occupation is also related to the performing arts, which requires some degree of confidence, yet she still sees herself as benefiting from the feeling of security that she perceives belly dance gives. This illustrates that being part of a group of women, learning belly dance can also give a sense of community or belonging (described as "a feeling of security") to someone who is a foreigner to South Africa.

b). Respondents showed more social confidence around other women, as well as other people as a result of belly dancing—"...*I am more confident..... especially out there around other women, around other people..*" This response was given by a woman who already considered herself to be self confident but also saw an increase in her self confidence as a result of belly dance. She is also employed in the public or human relations arena where self esteem and self confidence are necessary. She too found that belly dance added to her self esteem and self confidence.

c). Diminished self consciousness was also prominent as a self care benefit, supporting responses mentioned in 3.5.6. This shows that diminished self consciousness is a self care benefit of belly dance on the contextual level as well as the specific self care level. Consensus was that in the initial phases of belly dancing women were self conscious which then diminished after a period of dancing e.g. "*When I first started I used to worry – am I looking stupid- now I worry – am I doing it right.*"

One respondent aptly summed up themes in all responses regarding self consciousness:

"I remember one of my first lessons with (the teacher), I said to her – you actually learned how to do this without looking around you to see who's watching you. And I don't think about that anymore. I haven't for a long time. I think it important to get to that stage to actually enjoy it and get all the benefits that it offers."

Several key elements are evident here. The first is the amazement of the beginner belly dancer at the lack of self consciousness displayed by the teacher and the recognition that it was this lack of self consciousness that enabled the teacher to achieve what she had with belly dancing. Thus being exposed to an attitude of limited or no self consciousness in use of the body, displayed by a person who is recognized and practiced in the field, impacted on and prompted her to re-evaluate her own self consciousness.

What Elements of Belly Dance Increased Self Confidence?

This was an improvised aspect of the study. This question was posed in order to understand what elements of belly dance were instrumental in producing positive effects on self esteem and self confidence.

The researcher was encouraged to probe this after seeing the overwhelming positive response about the self esteem and self confidence effects of belly dancing. But the researcher was also motivated by her own curiosity about something that "*may not be worthy of academic investigation*", (verbal communication, school research committee meeting, 15/05/2008, UKZN) and that could effortlessly achieve such overwhelming therapeutic effects.

- Learning Something New

The consensus was that belly dance presented a means to learn something new and different and this learning increased confidence:

"Learning new things does make you more confident."

- Secure Environment

Responses showed that belly dance impacted on self esteem by giving a "*feeling of security*", an aspect that was mentioned in 3.10.1.(a) and was also given in this category.

- Presence of other Women

The contact with other women that belly dance affords was again identified as affording self confidence e.g.

'I'm able to do it even tho I'm making a fool of myself and I know these women are not gonna laugh, so the women also make me feel a lot better about myself.'

"Being around other women has made me more confident. I never thought I'd say that but it has."

The above response was given in an individual interview by a woman whose occupation entails working closely with other women. The popular perception is that women are naturally competitive and "catty" with each other but that the surprising reality that this individual found, was that this was not the case in belly dancing. It seems from this that belly dance provides an environment in which women can draw support, self confidence and comfort from each other creating what Alves-Masters (1979) termed the "sisterhood" of women in the belly dance.

- The Moves

The moves of belly dance made women feel more confident e.g.

"I now have the self confidence to do the moves, not worrying about whether it looks funny or not."

"....more awareness of the body because you do things you don't normally do like shimmy's... and you think – Oh, there's a bit of use there having a bit of a bottom after all."

"You're not self conscious at all. If you asked to wobble your tummy you'll wobble your tummy."

Wobbling the tummy can also be the consequence of a shimmy movement in which women allow the body to vibrate or shake with the primary movement emanating from either hips or shoulders. According to Vigier (1994) belly dance moves, made up of shaking and rotating of the hips, breast shimmies, and belly undulations emphasize women's sexual and procreative powers. This adds to the liberating sexuality of the dance. This reiterates the theme of belly dances liberating use of the female form stated in 3.6.2.of this chapter but now shows that the liberating use of the female anatomy has self care benefits to mental health in the form of improving self confidence and self esteem. Thus belly dance emphasizes, and celebrates the female anatomy, making it a liberating form of women's dance. This is a major conclusion that will be again presented in chapter 4.

- Performance

Respondents referred to the performance aspect in the annual studio show as increasing self confidence. One respondent explained that performing for their classes helped women prepare for their belly dance exams and increasing self confidence. Thus the performance opportunity that belly dance can afford can be instrumental in improving self confidence.

- Costuming

Respondents reflected that “costumes are a big part of it.” All said the costuming used in the studio shows that took place once a year made them feel “nice”, “glamorous”, “pretty”, “feminine” “confident”. Typical was the perception that women would not otherwise wear these costumes- “I wouldn’t have been caught dead in before, now I’ve got 3 costumes”.

This emphasis on costumes as playing a self care role was not expected, as costumes are typically not used in classes but in annual studio shows. However women overtly related the costumes as being part of the feminine experience of belly dance again showing that women are attracted by the feminine aspects of this dance.

One respondent related the self care value of the costumes in a novel way by referring to the fact that some women sew their own costumes:

“I was really impressed by how much artistic talent ladies have in putting costumes together, the creativity is mind blowing.”

- The Teacher

The modelling influence of the teacher was referred to as promoting self confidence and self esteem:

“We actually follow what she’s doing (the teacher). She being confident....and relaxed herself makes us feel confident.... and relaxed.”

This respondent also showed how the teacher’s behaviour in the class contributed to women’s stress management by making them more relaxed.

A further response was that the teacher encouraged self confidence by using her teaching skills in encouraging every woman to learn and enjoy the dance:

“One of (the teachers) brilliant talents as far as I’m concerned, is she doesn’t make anyone feel that they aren’t capable of doing something.”

3.10.2. Comfort with the Body, Acceptance of the Body, Body Image

This question was intended to see if women perceived any positive change in body image, comfort with the body and acceptance of the body as a result of belly dancing. It was posed following questions on self esteem and self consciousness as a natural progression of discussion, thought flow and information sharing. It may seem that many verbal quotes are reflected here, but the purpose of these is to adequately reflect themes that emerged in responses and to show the relationship that existed between responses, key questions and

thus conclusions within the feminist theoretical leaning of this study. Verbal quotes were also seen to be important as they were more eloquent than the researcher could be in reflecting key thoughts and ideas that were contained in responses. All women showed a healthier body image, and increased comfort with and acceptance of the body as a result of belly dancing.

All women were more comfortable with the body and had healthier body image as a result of belly dancing:

"It's made me easier with my body because there are so many different shapes and sizes of women doing it, you don't feel you have to be a perfect figure, which I certainly am not. Especially in class and on stage, that's what I find amazing, there's all these different kinds of women that do it and they all seem to be quite happy with themselves, you know, who they are."

Evident here is due to belly dance being receptive to diversities of women and exposing women to these diversities in each other, women were more comfortable with their own bodies.

Women also said that continued participation in belly dance leads to acceptance of the body e.g.

"I would never in my early days of going to class dared to bear my tummy. Now I accept it, that's what I am and I think it something that I've actually just learned to live with."

One respondent said that belly dancing made her develop a healthier attitude to her body, despite her age:

"It's made me develop a much healthier attitude to my own body, when you get to my age, I mean I'm a grandmother now and you just feel more comfortable in who you are."

This shows that the self care benefits of belly dance in the form of healthy body image is applicable to women across ages. This leads to the conclusion that not only is belly dance applicable to all ages, shapes, sizes, fitness and ability levels, but its self care properties in the form of positive body image, healthier relationship with the body and greater acceptance of and comfort with the body, are also applicable across ages and roles.

Typical was the perception that acceptance of body image was not promoted by other dances e.g.

"As a woman who's had children and who's aged you gotta learn to accept these things. Other dance forms in fact require you to lose the flab, lose the

tummy, develop these abs and all the rest of it and I don't think it's possible with my physical situation the way it is with my back problems ...”

This also shows that the process of life or the role of women in the circle of life-having children- can play a role in body image issues and affect comfort with the body. This response also accurately shows the typical perception encountered in responses that other dances do not accept women as they are.

Respondents identified that the media has a negative role in creating healthy attitudes to the body amongst females, and that belly dance overcomes this e.g.

“I think it(belly dancing) is very good for women because with all the advertisingyou know these perfect people....you bound to feel you don't add up to what the perception of the perfect women is which I think is rubbish... I prefer different shapes to stick insects. Girls that are so thin they don't even look like women. It's very artificial. And I think young girls really are under a lot of pressure now days,’ and

“Women are conditioned to look slim.”

These quotes accurately show that “dominant patriarchal ideals of the female body are aimed at controlling women and denying the power of the female body with the desired image being male and androgynous but not curvy and round and yet this is considered appropriate for the belly dancer (Vigier 1994, p.11). Respondents illustrated that women see belly dance as giving them permission to be women in a departure from patriarchy supporting Vigier's(1994, p.11) suggestion that belly dance gives women permission to be women.

Thus focus groups and interviews were unanimous in the response that belly dance had improved their comfort with the body, their acceptance of the body and led to healthy body image.

Frost (2001) asserts that it is an accepted fact that women who fulfil the culturally acceptable norm of physical appearance- slim and youthful looking- are more successful in all aspects of life. Respondents showed that women have this perception of other dances as well but they consider belly dance to be accepting of their diversities in physical manifestations. Respondents also accurately confirm Ivy and Buckland's (2004, p.106) assertion that females receive much more advertising about thinness and body shape than men. Respondents identified that belly dance serves to oppose this supporting the idea that “dance provides us with images that exist for women” (Vigier 1994, p.15). But the more significant idea demonstrated by respondents is that belly dance benefits women's health and well being by allowing women to be the images that exist for women in a departure from androcentric society.

The intention of this study was not to identify other dances as not beneficial to self care, or as controlling to women. But these findings were apparent in responses. The reality may be different and may necessitate further study, as the potential self care benefit other dances hold for women should not be devalued until they are researched. Payne (2005) highlights the need that feminism in social work has to understand and value women's experiences as separate and different from that of men.

How is this Achieved?

This again, was not a planned aspect of the study but responses in interviews served to identify the properties of belly dance that led to healthy body image and acceptance of and comfort with the body. This demonstrates the advantage of individual interviews in bringing depth and richness to data.

- The Moves

"If you have a problem with a certain move it's likely that you have a problem with that area of the body."

This shows that if a woman is not comfortable with a certain move she is likely to be uncomfortable with the part of the body the move focuses on or isolates.

- The Teacher

"I've had two teachers.... and both had the same approach. They encourage you to be part of a group and to accept yourself as a woman and they respect what your limitations are which is great."

"At no stage does (the teacher) show any embarrassment or attempt to cover up what she has and she never points to flaws in any of us. She actually encourages us all the time."

"I think seeing (the teacher) with her sort of shape and nothing looks ugly whether she's shimmying, it looks so nice. She's very graceful"

Thus the teacher was identified as playing a role by modelling acceptance of and comfort with her body, by encouraging women to respect and accept themselves rather than deny their physical selves as women, and by encouraging women to be part of a group of women sharing universal similarities as women.

- Other Women

"It's just amazing that you can get together and spend time together and it's so easy. There's similarity that we all share.....And nobody looks at you if you can't do something. It doesn't matter if you can't do something properly."

This quote clearly shows, the recurrent theme running through responses, and as discussed in chapter 1, that dance has social benefit as it forges healthy connection with other women in the dance. Stewart (2000, p.94/5) also referred to this social benefit in the belly dance: "through this ancient dance women are rediscovering their power, true beauty, spirituality and connection with all women." Thus exposure to the universal aspects of being woman, via connection with other women in the language of belly dance, not only effectively leads to decreased self consciousness in women, but also has multiple self care benefits.

3.10.3. The Impact of Absence of Men on Women's Self Care

Women were asked what would change for their self care if men were a part of the belly dance space. This aspect is discussed here as respondents felt that this would affect their self care on the level of mental health, specifically their self confidence, self esteem and body image issues.

The overwhelming response was that if men were present, the impact would be on women's self care from belly dance would be negative. Consensus was that:

"Belly dance has become a pretty safe place for us without men,"

and that they women would be less comfortable, more self consciousness, less expressive and less confident in the dance if there were men present. Only one respondent showed that nothing would change for her if men were a part of the belly dancing space but even she qualified this with "*depending on what type of men they were.*"

Individual respondents identified the male gaze as constraining to self care benefits from belly dance as well as their behaviour in the dance:

"...you've not worried that someone's gonna look at that fat wobbly tummy cos I think that's what men do. They very critical meanwhile they could do with a bit of firming up themselves but that doesn't seem to bother them."

Male presence was clearly found to be negatively affecting self consciousness, self confidence, comfort with the body and healthy body image:

"I would be much more self conscious, shy about doing anything. I think the fact that here are no men there, it just a perfect relaxed acceptance of your body and yourself. Women don't even talk about flaws in figures, we just there, relaxed, dancing, enjoying ourselves."

This recurrent theme of the positive and multiple self care impact of the connection between women in belly dance (present in 3.5.4., 3.5.9., 3.6.4.,

3.9.3., 3.10.1.and pages 81-82) illustrates Rider's (2005) idea that women are governed by the relational model in which a central feature of female development is connectedness to others.

The presence of men was seen as nullifying the above positive self care effects women reap from connecting with other women in belly dance:

"Once men come into the picture it isn't a dance for women, it becomes an erotic thing. A lot of men have that perception that belly dance is erotic and I think they would look at it that way initially anyway. They might change their minds afterwards."

The above quotes show that respondents identified the presence of men as creating an androcentric environment in which belly dance is related to male benefit. This shows that the belly dance space without men is a direct opposition to this androcentrism, creating an environment in which women are central.

Patriarchy empowers males and disempowers women. In saying that if men were in the belly dance space, the dance would become a dance no longer for women, but a dance for male pleasure, respondents identified that society is patriarchal. Therefore the presence of men changes this dance in purpose, relating it to men's benefit as privileged and empowered group, no longer serving women. This occurs despite women's bodies being the vehicle of the dance, which presumably should enable women to reap positive benefits from the dance regardless of male presence.

In this way respondents demonstrated that that "dance also functions within patriarchy, which has fixed the female body with meanings determined by men's productive and reproductive needs" (Vigier 1994, p.26). Similarly Frost (2001) says that girls are programmed to believe they must use their sexuality primarily for the sexual pleasure of men. The above quotes illustrate this by clearly showing women's perception that when men arrive in the belly dance space, it becomes a dance that changes in purpose, becoming androcentrically interpreted.

Respondents showed that this patriarchal politicization of the female body extends to labelling the female body in belly dance by both male and female, as a dance for male erotic pleasure, and that this transformation in the dances perception is achieved simply by the presence of men in the belly dance space.

3.10.4. Mental Focus in Midst of Multi –tasking

This aspect sought to identify if belly dancing helped women cope with multi-tasking, and retaining mental focus despite multiple responsibilities. All felt that this was a benefit of belly dance further emphasizing what was alluded to in 3.6.7. and showing that this was a specific self care benefit that also played a contextual role in women lives.

Respondents felt that belly dance gave mental focus or spiritual contact with the self in the midst of busy schedules that contributed to stress effects e. g.

“Belly dancing helps me switch off. I’m a person who can’t sleep. I have nightmares at night but belly dancing helps me switch off.”

A direct relationship existed in responses between this mental focus and doing the moves:

“When I’m here I’m only thinking about belly dancing...my mind is saying what’s the next step, I’m concentrating on what we’re doing. Otherwise my mind is usually a mental fog.”

“I can be completely in the dance.”

Clearly the introspective self care properties of belly dance, as referred to in 3.6.7. of this chapter extends to enabling women to centre themselves, have time for themselves, let go of varied responsibilities and create respite from this. This seems to lead to spiritual contact with the self which can bring mind in sync with body, enabling women to prevent anxiety and stress, as asserted by Fuller-Good (2008, p.10). Thus in this way, belly dance can remove the pressure on women to have varied mental focus and introduce clarity of mind.

This spiritual contact with the self in the midst of and despite multi-tasking shows the self care properties of the dance. Similarly, Tolle (2001) highlights the importance of being fully present and aware in the body in order to further the mind thus helping one to cope with everyday life and deal with anxiety.

The benefit of belly dance in terms of giving mental perspective was referred to:

“Sometimes you get so bogged down you actually don’t see the wood for the trees and that’s something I’m learning to do now and this(belly dance) is part of itwhen I go home and sit in front of my PC again I’m able to reslot things without actually thinking about it into a different perspective and focus.”

Thus stepping out of involving work tasks and preoccupations to belly dance for a while gave mental focus, perspective and clarity, when the task is picked up again after a belly dance respite.

Respondents thus showed that belly dance helps women concentrate and focus their mental energies in midst of busy days thus helping them cope with multiple responsibilities. In this way belly dance benefits women by affording them an experience that promotes being in the moment.

3.10.5. Stress Management and Relief

The contextual section has already shown that women see belly dance as a contextual aspect of self care by offering stress relief, relaxation, support, fun and pleasure, and time for the self and these responses are reiterated here.

Belly dance was stress management and relief as it gave time for the self amidst hectic schedules of multitasking:

'Its time for myself without the guilt.'

'Its pause in the helter- skelter of life.'

These responses show that women can feel guilty about taking time out for themselves from their busy schedules, but that this guilt does not apply to belly dance. This could be because of multiple positive self care value the dance holds, that gives multiple benefits against relatively minimal time investment.

Women with children felt this self care benefit:

"Wednesdays are such a rush, I have to drop the kids at my brother (etc) But when I get here its so relaxing, it's just my time off."

As did students:

"It's so nice that you can get here and dance even tho you have exams to write, it makes you forget about everything."

One respondent showed a relationship between the moves and the stress benefits of the dance:

"I carry a lot of stress and tension in my body....and I think belly dancing being able to isolate a certain part of your body, I'm able to relax a little bit."

Respondents gave support for Stewart (2000, p.5) who asserts that belly dance invites escape from the rational, earthly tasks and mortal burdens. This in itself can help women cope with multi-tasking.

3.11. Physical Level of Health and Well being

This aspect, as mentioned in chapter 1, sought to explore the impact of engagement in belly dancing on:

- Body aesthetics/appearance.
- Health and fitness including energy levels and the physical ability to continue with daily responsibilities.

3.11.1. Body Aesthetics/Appearance

Consensus here was that all women felt they had become “*top heavy*” indicating that breasts were fuller or bigger and that they stood up straighter. The reason given for this top heaviness was that the belly dance uses or exercises the underlying muscles that support breasts, again showing the liberating qualities of the moves. The researcher presents the reason that women, via belly dance are also encouraged to be more comfortable with the female aspects of the body-breasts included, through correct posture and perceived size benefits.

All respondents showed that their stomachs had changed shape indicating more toned and stronger stomach muscles. Women indicated that they were surprised by this change which was not expected. This also shows improved health and fitness of the core muscles that support the body.

3.11.2. Health and Fitness

Women reported feeling fitter, more energized e.g.

‘Belly dancing has definitely increased my energy levels cos I feel much fitterable to walk up stairs now and I definitely have lost weight and I think it’s definitely because of belly dancing.’

These benefits were more evident after a class:

“I feel pumped up after a class.”

“I feel happy, energetic, and chatty. (after a class)”

“I can put the music on and dance some more.”

These responses identify the energizing effect of exercise as well as its anti-depressive properties. The energy benefits of belly dance also imply that women are more physically able to continue with their daily responsibilities.

One respondent said that she had lost some weight after starting belly dancing. Another said that it had improved her flexibility.

Responses included being more aware of the control over the body:

"I'm more aware of my body – can control it more."

Women reported more awareness of strength in the body:

"The moves have made me stronger. I feel more in control of my body. I can do things with bits of me I never thought I could do."

Thus women said that belly dance made them feel stronger and appreciate the power of their bodies more. This shows that belly dance results in a feeling of physical empowerment for women.

One respondent indicated belly dance helped her with back problems that had not responded to a personal trainer or any other exercise:

"Helped with my back the way nothing else could have."

An overall feeling of wellbeing was experienced after belly dancing class:

"I feel very, very good after a class."

Thus belly dance made women more aware of the power of the body as well as the control they have over the body which has systemic positive effect on self confidence. It also helped with energy levels, mood improvement, weight loss and specific health problems. These self care benefits can also give women the strength and energy to cope with their daily and multiple roles and responsibilities. This illustrates how engagement in belly dance can systemically improve women's physical ability to continue with their daily responsibilities.

3.12. Self Care Impact of the Music

All women found the music enjoyable. All said that “*its not music you would usually listen to*” indicating that the difference of the dance extends to its use of music- “*you are exposed to a different culture via the music*”. This shows how the different type of music in belly dance also fulfils women’s need for variety providing a fresh break from routine.

The difference of the music can also make women listen attentively, exercising concentration that releases rather than consumes energy.

It seems that the feminine aspect in belly dance also extends to the music:

“*The music makes you feel lovely.*”

This indicates that the music benefits self care on the mental level of the biopsychosocial frame, by making women feel good. This supports Stewart (2000) who said that music is recognized for its universal de-stressing property.

Although different women had different preferences in music depending on individual taste, the majority found “*belly dance type music with strong rhythm motivating.*” The general consensus amongst was that the “*drum music*” was the type of music that they enjoyed the most because it was “*energizing*”, “*motivating*” and helped them remember the moves. This shows that women experience mental rejuvenation and alertness from belly dancing to drum music. This gives support to Sharif (n.d.) who said that belly dancing is particularly responsive to the energies of the drum. Similarly, Stewart (2000) and Sharif (n.d.) referring to the energizing effect of drum music, noted that drums are instant in their effect, producing vibrational energy that is instantly absorbed by the dancer.

3.13. Support or Censure Received

There was a mixture of support and censure experienced by women who belly danced, with support generally encountered from family, and censure by people not familiar with belly dance.

The stereotypical perception that belly dance exists for patriarchal, erotic pleasure of the male and was a lewd dance form associated with stripping and pole dancing, was encountered by women as censure e.g.

“*There’s absolutely no doubt that people out there associate belly dance with pole dancing or something tacky like that ..*”

The negative sexual perception of the dance as well as the problematic sexuality of the female form was prominent here again:

"I have a cousin who has a problem with a women's form. When he found out his wife wanted to do belly dancing he hit the roof. Because the idea of seeing women wobble their flab around was totally disgusting to him and he had made an issue of it which he passed on to her."

This again shows the dances liberating use of the female form that was mentioned in 3.6.2. and on page 77 of this chapter, but now shows that some men object to this liberation of women in this dance. Thus Douglas quoted in Gergen (2001) asserts that women's bodies, especially sexual aspects are seen as internalized, secret and potentially polluted while men's bodies are externalized and apparent. Therefore the liberating use of the female body (which is a sexual entity) via this dance leads to its devalued existence. In contrast, society does not associate the use of men's bodies in any dance or sport with the same negative attitude making the male form value-free, and non-judgmental. It appears then that women are discriminated against and devalued via their sexual existence.

Consensus was that people who know about and are familiar with belly dance do not share this negative perception which is overcome once they watch a show or attend a lesson:

"Anybody who's been to a concert or a lesson has a completely different understanding but if they've never been then they have a completely wrong attitude to the dance form."

As mentioned before, husbands were typically supportive e.g.

"I'm the average chorus person. Four years ago if you said I'd be dancing belly dancing on a stage I'd have said- you mad. I've never danced before. My husband is very proud of me up there doing something that's totally out of my comfort zone, even tho I never do it at home."

Although no respondents had directly experienced censure from their partners as a result of their belly dancing, they had knowledge of a fellow dancer, who had received censure and criticism from her husband:

".... her husband said flat out, no, she's not gonna do the show because he didn't want her there. The whole year long she was practicing for the show, and she had a physical disability as well, her one leg was shorter than the other, and this was the first dance she was able to do in her whole life... she didn't do the show.... He was one of those husbands where they just say – no way."

This demonstrates that women perceive belly dance to be the only dance applicable to women with physical disabilities. This now extends the non-discriminatory aspect of belly dance to include age, shape, size, some health problems and even some physical disabilities.

The women concerned could not be interviewed as she had left the studio because of this censure from her husband but this report shows that she was unable to exert her freedom of choice, which Narayan et al quoted in Billson (2005) see as diminishing well being. Thus, male partners preventing their female partners from belly dancing may prevent women's empowerment and source of well being. Clearly belly dancing can influence self care by contributing to women's freedom of choice to belly dance.

3.14. Women's Recommendations for using Belly Dance in Self Care

1. Choice of teacher.

"Find the right teacher."

"Unfortunately there is some belly dancers who portray this sleazy image. That's why I would never leave (my teacher) cos she's not like that."

Whilst doing this study the researcher became aware of behaviour amongst other teachers that contradict the self care value of the dance. This was in the form of a teacher dictating dress that exposed a student in a way that made her more self conscious. In the studio where this study was located, no form of dress is prescribed except that women should not expose themselves in an unacceptable way that serves to reinforce the negative striptease image of the dance.

2. Be open to it.

In other words *"Do it with a passion, throw yourself into it,"* and you are sure to gain optimally on the biopsychosocial fronts.

3. Test the environment.

"Be in an environment with a group of people and a teacher who encourage you to let go off all you inhibitions and just do it."

The researcher adds the caution that some studios and teachers may create environments that oppose the self care benefit of the dance. The studio this research studied is an example of one in which women are supportive to each other and the teacher recognizes her multiple responsibilities in guiding her members in a healthy manner. This responsibility has even extended to asking members who related to other members with dishonesty and destructive attitudes, to leave the studio. It is therefore essential that the prospective belly dancer assesses the studio she chooses, to reap the maximum self care benefit.

3.15. Conclusion

In succinct summary of the holistic value of belly dance to health and well being and of all the themes covered in this chapter:

'It's just an overall feeling of well being.'

Chapter 4

Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1. Introduction

This research is concerned with belly dance as it contributes to health and well being for women.

In the course of this study, the researcher became aware of only 2 other scholastic studies devoted to this specific topic, the value of belly dance in female self care- The Physical and Psychological Effects of Belly Dancing: A Multiple Case Study, done by Paul (2007) at the Faculty of Saybrooke Graduate School and Research Center, and a study by Alves – Masters, Changing Self Esteem of Women Through Middle Eastern Dance, done in 1979, at the University of Georgia. With limited research on this topic then, this research was exploratory in nature in keeping with the lack of scholarly studies on the value of belly dance.

In addition to, and maybe because of this reason, the focus of this research on belly dance as having academic merit was initially met with some resistance in the initial stages of proposal presentation and refinement. However this resistance can be explained and rationalized in terms of the theory of feminism, a grounding theory used in this study. As mentioned, feminism is a theoretical paradigm that views women as devalued and systematically oppressed in society and in human relations. Feminism also advocates that women are discriminated against on the basis of their sexuality which is a gender construct. Thus belly dance which is seen by people unfamiliar with it exclusively as a sexual dance, is devalued as an aspect of feminine sexuality.

This study was qualitative. It utilized the data collection instruments of focus groups and individual interviews that followed a semi-structured format. The semi-structured format was found to be useful and pertinent to the exploratory focus of the study. It was also found that it encouraged open discussion and sharing of information amongst women in an atmosphere of enjoyment, friendship and camaraderie.

The sample was derived from the women members of a Durban belly dance studio. Data collection instruments were 2 focus group discussions and 4 individual interviews. The different dynamics of these 2 data collection instruments sometimes led to different content emerging but always where the women remained enthusiastic and willing to share rich and valuable information.

Information gleaned from focus groups was more generic, exploratory and consensual in keeping with the dynamics and nature of focus groups as a data collection method. Individual interviews yielded information that was richer, more detailed and life context specific. No reticence or hesitancy was experienced

amongst women in the data collection process. In fact women seemed to enjoy talking about belly dance. This was especially applicable to discussing the different meanings, roles and significance of belly dance in their lives as well as what in their general and specific life contexts, motivated them to belly dance.

This high importance of and attention to context as it related to belly dance in women's lives highlighted the importance of contextualization, meaning and interpretation to women. This contextualization of women experiences is a key feature of feminism, one of the guiding theories of this study.

Women's experiences regarding the self care value of belly dance to them was discussed and compared to the key features of the theory of feminism. As mentioned, feminism as pertaining to this study is defined as a system of thought that views women as a marginalized group in society, one which is discriminated against on the basis of gender.

The other guiding paradigm of this study was the biopsychosocial model of health and well being as defined by Schlebusch (1990). This theory or model was used to holistically define health and well being as existing on the physical, mental and social levels of human functioning. This served as the basis to frame research questions on the usefulness of belly dance at these various levels. There was some difficulty in completely isolating all levels and aspects of women's health and well being according to this structure, as the interrelationship of these aspects became significant as together having an impact. This was attributed to the fact that functioning on one level of health, for example more energy after belly dancing, can also impact on another health dimension, namely improved ability to cope with multi-tasking. Similarly relaxation benefits from belly dancing can also impact on ability to cope with multi-tasking.

This chapter summarizes findings and discusses conclusions and recommendations pertinent to this study.

This chapter is oriented as follows:

- Definition of health and well being.**
- A summary of major findings and conclusions.**
- Recommendations for services, education, training and research.**

4.2. Definition of Health and Well Being

It is important to be reminded of how health and well being is interpreted for the purpose of the study so as to appreciate and contextualize the study findings.

For the purpose of this study, health and well being as it applies to women, are defined as an adequate and satisfactory state of physical, mental and social functioning and existence, in which women are unaware of any dysfunctions in the body and have adequate emotional and physical strength to meet their responsibilities. This definition was derived and formulated from women's responses on questions pertaining to the definition and role of health and well being in their lives.

4.3. Summary of the Major Findings and Conclusions

This section is discussed in accord with the research objectives and questions devised in chapter one. Due to the systemic nature of the research focus, and that biopsychosocial effects supplement and complement each other, some overlap existed in findings. Thus some themes are conflated because of similarity and overlap in responses relating to key questions. The discussion and analysis in this chapter follows the key objectives of the study, structured now as themes, as follows:

Themes

- **Belly dance meeting women's self care needs. This incorporates the specific bio-psychosocial benefit of belly dance, as well as whether a woman's view of the role of belly dance in her life contributes to her self-care.**
- **Specific components of belly dance conducive to female self care and enjoyment.**
- **Female connection, female environment and presence of women as related to belly dance self care and enjoyment**
- **Use of the distinguishing feminine form in belly dance and women's self care benefits.**
- **The impact of the absence of men on the self care benefits women derive from belly dance. Do the views of men in her life, enable or disable the self care value of her engagement in belly dance?**

- **Women's recommendations for using belly dance for self care.**

4.3.1. Belly Dance meeting Women's Self Care Needs

Belly dance was overwhelmingly described as significant in female self care. Women perceived belly dance to play a contextual as well as specifically self care role in their lives. Thus a woman's view of the role of belly dance in her life contributes to her self care. It was also clear that belly dance was viewed as an art and that engaging and indulging in refining this artistic side also fulfilled a self care need.

Belly dance for women was found to have multiple uses, affording women maximum return for their time investment in belly dance as self care. This is in keeping with the time premium faced by most women as a result of their evolving and multiplicit roles in both the home and the workplace.

Belly dance as a self care strategy was found to benefit self care on the mental health, social health and physical health levels of the biopsychosocial frame of health and well being.

Findings showed that belly dance benefits female self care on the mental health level by:

- Being fun and enjoyment.
- Being relaxing.
- Providing stress relief.
- Providing time for the self.
- Providing a diversion from women's traditional and prescribed roles.
- Being fun whilst learning.
- Providing a varied and achievable learning activity.
- Fulfilling women's need for variety in self care.
- Improving self esteem and self confidence and decreasing self consciousness.
- Improving comfort with and acceptance of the body.
- Improving body image.
- Enabling women to cope with multi-tasking. This also impacts positively on energy levels on the level of physical health.
- Giving mental focus in the midst of multi-tasking.
- Being energizing. This also impacts positively on physical health and well being.
- Being motivating.
- Providing a feeling of safety, comfort and security.

Human beings function as holistic entities whose health and well being is governed by the mind, body and spirit connection. Thus the above self care benefits of belly dance to mental health also complement and are complemented by the dance's self care benefit to social health.

Findings showed that belly dance benefits female social self care on the social health level by:

- Having a unifying effect on some couples.
- Having a unifying effect on women's relationships with their children.
- Having a positive effect on work relationships as well as ability to cope with work in general. This also benefits mental health, specifically stress relief and management.
- Giving women more energy for social roles, relationships and responsibilities.
- Improving women's social skills and social confidence.
- Giving some women a positive attitude to new relationships.
- Giving multiple benefits, to all levels of self care, from the social circle of women present in the belly dance. These benefits are similar to the therapeutic benefits that groups give.

The above self care benefits of belly dance to mental and social health also systemically complement and are complemented by the dance's self care benefit to physical health.

Findings showed that belly dance benefits female self care on the physical level of health by:

- Improving posture.
- Improving strength and appearance of stomach muscles indicating an improvement in core strength.
- Improving appearance of breasts.
- Assisting in weight loss.
- Improving flexibility.
- Making women feel stronger and fitter.
- Assisting with some back problems.
- Energizing women.
- Giving women a feeling of empowerment and control over the body.

All of these benefits to the physical level of self care can also have a systemic positive effect on mental health specifically to self confidence, self esteem, self consciousness, body image and comfort with the body. These benefits together can in turn also impact positively on women's social well being as they can have more confidence in relationships as well as more energy to invest in social relationships.

The study identified the following elements of belly dance as effective in the above self care benefits and as contributing to women's enjoyment of the dance.

4.3.2. Components of Belly Dance Conducive to Female Self Care and Enjoyment

Findings showed that women responded to the language of dance, music and rhythm presented by the vehicle of belly dance with relaxation, liberation, spontaneity, enjoyment and the abovementioned self care benefits.

The liberating moves of belly dance provided a vehicle that made women enjoy and appreciate the female aspects of the body, including sexuality, exploring the value of these aspects to female self care.

This study showed that women see society and other dance in general as dictating conformity of women's shapes and sizes. Belly dance was found to be a self care vehicle that opposes society's discriminatory programming of women shapes, size and behaviour which improves women's comfort with the body making women feel better about themselves. Thus belly dance has self care benefits as it accepts women as they are. This non-discriminatory aspect of the dance means that it has wide applicability amongst fitness levels, ages, life stage, shape and size and some physical disabilities. This is part of its appeal and effectiveness as enjoyable female self care, since not only is belly dance widely applicable *amongst* women but its self care benefits are also widely applicable *to* women.

This study found that women see the androcentric way of using the body that exists in some dances as painful, unachievable and unnatural. They are attracted to belly dance as a vehicle that provides a non-androcentric, value free space for women to explore their self care. In this way belly dance's departure from androcentrism has self care and enjoyment value to women. Thus women were attracted to and enjoy achievability in self care that is effectively provided by belly dance.

Findings showed that women perceive their roles in society to be dull, boring, restricted and androcentric with little opportunity for femininity. Thus they enjoyed and were attracted to difference and femininity in self care that is afforded via belly dance. This shows that women perceive femininity and variety to have self care value.

This study showed that the difference of the dance also extends to its use of music. Thus the music of belly dance has self care and enjoyment value.

Women also found belly dance to be sensual and this sensuality has self care and enjoyment benefit to women.

In addition, it was found that women are natural exhibitionists and this has self care and enjoyment value to them, but society does not readily afford them this expression. Thus belly dance presented a vehicle for women to indulge feminine aspects of their existence that embrace garb, adornment, expression, female company and display.

Findings also pointed to belly dance being a spiritual experience for women, another self care and enjoyment opportunity that women valued.

Women showed attraction to the non-verbal self care and expression that belly dance provides. Thus women are psychically and physically strong in dance (Vigier 1994, p.6) and can readily reap multiple self care benefits from use of the body via the non-verbal means presented by music and dance. This indicates that women identify closely with their bodies (Frost, 2001, p.94) and relate to self care via the body readily and with enjoyment. Thus this study shows that the body as means of self care, therapy or expression is a valuable therapeutic avenue for women.

Women were mostly attracted to and enjoyed the opportunity to dance with other women. This shows the self care value of the presence of other women in belly dance, an aspect that is more extensively discussed as a separate theme in this chapter.

Finally, women responded positively and enjoyed self care in an environment that makes them feel safe or secure, belly dancing presenting such an environment via its use of music and dance and its abovementioned elements.

4.3.3. Female Connection, Presence and Environment

It was found that the female environment, as provided by belly dance, is an important ingredient in meeting women's self care needs. It created connection between women that resulted in a feeling of sisterhood, and a supportive, safe social circle to maintain and renew their self care.

In specific, the female connection in belly dance was found to be effective in self care as it made women feel comfortable, relaxed, energized, self confident, supported, accepted, motivated, less self conscious, part of a universal group of women and it opposed androcentrism and societal programming of women's appearance. The positive modelling influence of other women in belly dance was found to be valuable to female self care, here, specifically on the mental health

level. Thus the multiple benefits of spending time with other women, to female health and well being, were evident in this study.

This shows that competitive, conflictual and unhealthy relationships amongst women seem to be societally conditioned ones and can disappear once women move away from androcentric society. The language of belly dance is a vehicle that negates competitive and unhealthy relationships amongst women in favour of supportive and nurturing ones that is enjoyable and has positive self care potential.

Thus the study results confirm Rider's (2005 p.288) assertion that women are governed by the relational model.

4.3.4. Absence of Men on Female Self Care in Belly Dance

Results confirm that the absence of men in belly dance impacted positively on women's self care. Women perceived the presence of the male as disabling the self care benefit of the dance to women themselves, in favour of male patriarchal benefit. This dynamic affects self care at the mental health level, specifically self esteem, body image concerns and comfort with the body. Thus the presence of women and the absence of men is an avenue via which belly dance contributes to the self care benefit.

It was also found that the views of some men in women's lives can either disable or enable the self care value of the dance for women. These findings illustrate patriarchal views that some men can have towards their female partners, patriarchy, as mentioned, being "a system of thought and social relations that privileges and empowers men, and creates relationships between the genders that disenfranchise, disempower and devalue women's experiences' (Payne, 2005, p.251).

4.3.5. Use of Feminine Form and Women's Self Care Benefit

This study showed that use of the distinguishing female form in belly dance in a liberating and non-androgynous manner has enjoyment and self care benefits to female mental health and well being, specifically in comfort with the body, body image, self confidence and self consciousness. This again suggests that the absence of men in the belly dance space enables women to reap the self care benefit of the dance for themselves and not for the patriarchal benefit of the male gaze. This effectively shows that women and men are programmed to believe that female sexuality, manifested here in use of the body in belly dance, is an entity that exists for male benefit. Thus again, the dances opposition to societal programming and dictation of female appearance, present in its utilization of the female form, positively benefits women who have the courage to belly dance for themselves.

4.3.6. Women's Recommendations for using Belly Dance as Self Care

Belly dance can be effective for self care to women who have an open minded receptive attitude to the dance and who are able to embrace the dance with passion.

Belly dance becomes effective self care if women find a teacher and an environment or studio that promotes the self care properties of the dance rather than oppose them. The right teacher was viewed as essential in reaping the self care benefit as the teacher has a great responsibility in maximizing the self care value that women reap from belly dance. This responsibility extends to her appropriate use of modelling behaviour, non-verbal behaviour, teaching skills and relationship building skills that encourage women to be relaxed and comfortable with themselves in order to reap the self care benefits of enjoying the dance.

4.4. Recommendations for Services

4.4.1. Casework

Service delivery must recognize that women are non-verbally strong, a strength that is easily overlooked when a problem saturated stance is adopted. Women seem to be predisposed to the language of dance, making dance movement therapy and possibly other art therapies useful interventions for them. Non-verbal means of therapy may be easily neglected in social work casework with women.

This research has shown that for women to achieve the therapeutic effects of dance as therapy, professional dance skills and specific dance therapy in the clinical arena are not requirements. Therapeutic effects can be achieved by simple referral of women to belly dance, as activity that is achievable, accepting of the female form and non-discriminatory for women.

Findings showed that women identify readily with the body confirming Gergen's (2001, p.82) assertion. Thus women can reap multiple self care benefit from activities that use the body as a vehicle in self care. This extends to massages, facials, female adornment, hair and make-up etc. Therefore practitioners can and should legitimately encourage women to engage in these activities for self care as adjuncts to more traditional therapeutic interventions. Payne (2005, p.251) mentioned that feminism in social work highlights the need to see women's experiences and lives as separate and different from that of men, to value their competence, their diversity, strengths and needs. Such therapeutic self care activities take heed of this point and acknowledge the special and different interventions that are female-specific.

Social workers can legitimately refer women to belly dance as an appropriate self care strategy to prevent burnout and stress related concerns. Belly dance can be recommended for women who multi-task as it can help them to cope better with multi-tasking, give them time for themselves, help them deal with stress and anxiety and help them retain mental focus.

Women respond to belly dance positively and therapeutically. Therefore women who are less verbal or resistant to verbal therapy can be referred to belly dance to complement traditional therapy or for this to be bolstered in order that positive change is accelerated.

Women who are affected by body hatred issues or negative focus on the body such as anorexia and bulimia can be referred to belly dance as an adjunct to therapy. This maybe useful as these illnesses stem from the non-acceptance of the body, poor body image and the overwhelming need for control. Belly dance can be effective complementary therapy for this as it emphasizes letting go, liberation, positive use of and acceptance of the body.

Women with chronic health issues and complaints can be assessed for referral to belly dance as therapy. Belly dance can empower these women as it makes women more aware of the strength of the body. Similarly women with disabilities can also be assessed for referral to belly dance as it is achievable and empowering. Since terminal illness can affect both the body and mind, belly dance can have positive effects on the mind together with the body which need healing and helping simultaneously. Women who have also wanted to dance but have age, physical or health barriers can be referred to belly dance.

Since the results indicated positive benefits for several categories of "problems", these are included as suggestions for who and where dance as therapy is appropriate- for women with depression, women who experience the empty nest syndrome, women who feel guilty about attending to themselves, women who are grieving and women battling with spirituality issues as it has potential for facilitating problem solving in these areas.

Belly dance is a vehicle that uses the sexuality of the female body as a positive, liberating entity for the exclusive benefit of the woman herself. Thus women who are victims of trauma such as sexual crimes can be assessed for referral to belly dance. Similarly women who have become disempowered as a result of life events such as divorce, loss, or unhealthy relationships can be assessed for referral to belly dance.

Results showed that women enjoyed connectedness to other women through belly dance. Women who have difficulty bonding with or making friends with other females, to the detriment of their self care, can be referred to belly dance. Women who are also isolated from other women or have little opportunity to spend time with other women can be referred to belly dance. Belly dance can

also be recommended for women who are socially isolated as it presents a ready and captive group of female companions.

Belly dance can be recommended to women in abusive relationships for its liberating and empowering aspects. It is also an activity that exposes women to different aspects of being that are beyond their narrow sometimes prescribed social roles. Thus exploring different ways of female well being are important aspects of self care for oppressed women and can result in women finding the best possible well being for themselves.

Women whose self care is blocked, diminished, prevented or negatively impacted on by the men in their lives can be referred to belly dance as belly dance gives time out from the oppressing views and demands of others. Belly dance can thus be recommended for women who are oppressed by societal norms that are androcentric. This includes women who live in and are governed by the oppressive influence of extended families, a phenomena common to the Indian and African communities in South Africa.

Women who have boundary issues to the detriment of their self care and are unable to create sufficient solitary time for self care can be referred to belly dancing. Belly dancing will give these women timeout from the demands of others in addition to its self care benefits.

Although this research focus was on dance, it pointed to women placing value on meanings, interpretations and contexts to the experiences in their lives. Thus interventions that consider these aspects could be used effectively when working with women. Such interventions could include family therapy or family therapy oriented therapies with its emphasis on intrapersonal and interpersonal meanings. Further, when the family's verbal communication is ineffective and frustrating, belly dance may be used to re-introduce healthy communication and unify family members by using the dance as extension of choreography and sculpting.

Findings show that women see learning new things as making them feel better about themselves. Thus practitioners can encourage women to engage in activities that promote continuous and different learning opportunities, such as belly dance. Women who are bored with or do not respond to more traditional avenues of self care can be referred to belly dance for the difference and variety that it presents in self care.

Women helping professionals who are exclusively surrounded by similar professionals to the detriment of spending time with other females from different walks of life can use belly dance as a form of self care for its social benefits. Similarly social workers and other female helping professionals can use belly dance to prevent and deal with burnout and to maximize and value their own self

care. Belly dance can also be used by practitioners for its relaxing, energizing and supportive element that puts back rather than takes out.

The above recommendations mainly involve social workers referring women to belly dance. Findings showed that the correct choice of teacher and environment is important in reaping self care benefits from belly dance. It is therefore advisable that social workers network with belly dance teachers or studios in order to refer women to belly dance teachers who offer belly dance lessons conducive to female self care.

4.4.2. Groupwork

Groupwork uses the unifying and supportive presence of the group as a therapeutic intervention.

This study has shown that belly dance, via its unifying, supportive and nurturing aspects on the social level can provide effective group therapy. Therefore women who are in need of the therapeutic benefits of groupwork but are not willing to attend a purely therapeutic group can be referred to belly dance. This is also useful as the logistics and cost of organizing groups in formal social work may be difficult in practice. Belly dance can be used instead for its therapeutic groupwork benefits with women. After the activity and dance itself, traditional talk can follow.

Findings show that women respond positively and therapeutically to the presence of other women. The learning is that social workers should value more the use of the supportive therapeutic intervention of groupwork using all women groups. These groups can incorporate non-verbal therapies as findings show that women relate to each other with support, comfort and relaxation readily via non-verbal means.

In addition dance or belly dance can be used in therapeutic groupwork for its ability to be a form of human expression beyond the verbal. This will be especially applicable to groups containing members from different cultures and language groups.

4.4.3. Community Outreach and Development

Community work focuses on empowering communities and dealing with problems at the level of the community thus achieving primary prevention. Dance via its empowering and unifying elements as well as its multiple health and well being benefits can be efficient in reaching these community work goals.

The unifying aspect of dance and music can be beneficial in racial violence, trauma work and domestic violence. The recent xenophobia attacks present such an example. The liberating and unifying aspect of dance and music in general can be useful in community empowerment and mobilization, especially in initiating camaraderie which can then be harnessed towards community action.

The therapeutic effects of dance and music in expression can be effective in healing communities alongside narrative therapies, spiritual social work and family therapies. Dance can easily be used in communities as an expression of spirituality. This can be especially useful when dealing with grieving or traumatized communities faced by mass loss and trauma. Dance and music can be effective at community level in dealing with and expressing destructive emotions such as anger, hostility, and violence.

Dance can be used in youth groups to occupy youth who are affected by poverty, destructive cults, gangsterism and drug use. Creative outlets for energy through dance may thereby enhance community-hood and could even be used to raise funds for special causes.

Dance can be used in children's homes to assist children with feelings of anger and displacement. Dance, especially belly dance can be used for its fun, revitalizing, anti-depressive and energizing effects with aged populations, with hospice patients and in institutions such as old age homes and drug and alcohol rehabilitation centres.

This study reinforces the value of dance as expression. Therefore dance can also be used as communication mode with some mental patients who have a problem with organizing and using verbal means of communications.

4.4.4. Recommendations for Specialized Services: HIV/AIDS Affected and Infected

HIV/AIDS is a social problem that is threatening the economic, social, mental and physical well being of the country and of the world. This also has impact on female self care as women remain the classic nurturers and care givers in society. Thus it is necessary to include recommendations for service delivery to HIV/AIDS infected and affected, stemming from this study.

Belly dance and dance in general has energy and relaxation benefits that this group can benefit from. The positive energy of others in the dance can be used for its systemic positive, energizing and relaxation effects on this group.

Belly dance and dance in general can be effective therapy for its stress relieving benefits. Dance can also be used as a therapy that takes away obsessive and unhealthy preoccupation with negative thoughts that detract from coping. Thus belly dance and dance in general can be used as coping strategy, both to enhance and promote coping.

Belly dance and dance in general can be used for its anti-depressive qualities as well as to prevent social isolation that this population may experience as a result of their diagnosis.

Dance and music can be effectively used to enliven teaching and social awareness in HIV/AIDS prevention and education programs.

Findings also suggest that belly dance may be useful for female HIV/AIDS infected and affected who have lost touch with their sexuality, femininity and other aspects of female well being.

Thus dance can be used with this population for its multiple and holistic therapeutic benefits to self care.

4.5. Recommendations for Training and Development

Dance as a therapeutic intervention for women as well as for all populations is a neglected aspect of social work training. Findings indicate a need to include the therapeutic benefits and uses of music and dance in university level courses. This should ideally occur alongside training on the use of more traditional art therapies such as play and art therapy.

Women form the backbone of our society. As indicated, their roles as nurturers have evolved to be more multiplicit and demanding. Thus findings suggest a need to include the therapeutic treatment and needs of women as a separate population having different self care needs and preferences. The positive impact of the more “frivolous” activities to women’s self care such as make up, adornment, bright colours, female bonding should be noted in training for its effortless and achievable therapeutic effect.

Findings suggest a need to include the unifying therapeutic aspect of dance as a groupwork strategy in groupwork university training.

Findings suggest that university level courses must move away from exclusive emphasis on traditional therapeutic avenues to include alternative, varied, fresh and creative means of achieving therapeutic outcomes. This will also achieve culturally relevant practice.

The unifying aspect of dance should be noted for conflict resolution training modules. The unifying, liberating, supportive, accepting and mobilizing quality of dance should be noted in teaching community work modules.

Findings suggest that dance has powerful effects both as a form of non-verbal expression as well as treating sensitive, deep seated issues. Thus dance is indicated in training modules with trauma work, spiritual social work and grief therapy.

Findings suggest a need to include training on use of dance as therapy with mentally ill such as schizophrenics who have disorganized communication patterns.

4.6. Recommendations for Further Study

- This study indicates that women feel that other dance forms may be discriminating against them. Therefore there is a need to explore the value of other dance forms to women’s self care.
- This study indicates the multiple and therapeutic benefits of belly dance to women’s health and well being, as a marginalized population. There is a need to investigate these benefits as applicable to other marginalized populations.

- Future studies could explore the usefulness of dance and music as adjuncts to several areas as discussed in this report: institutional social work, domestic violence, family therapy, family preservation and reunification work, trauma work, grief work, spiritual social work, and group and community work.
- This study was essentially exploratory with a small sample at one dance studio. Future studies could use larger samples covering more geographical distance and could supplement qualitative methods with quantitative strategies.

4.7. Conclusion

The theoretical underpinning of this study being that of feminism was useful in establishing that women have different self care and enjoyment needs that can sometimes be negatively impacted on by patriarchy and androcentrism. In effect this showed that **the needs of women cannot be generalized to those of men in an androcentric tendency.** Thus women must find self care activities that oppose patriarchy and androcentrism to maximize *their* health and well being.

Using the biopsychosocial model, this study has also demonstrated how holistic well being may be achieved, via a different and fresh means. It is important for all role players to incorporate new and varied means outside of the traditional focus to introduce and sustain therapeutic benefits. This constitutes effective and achievable primary prevention. The suggestion therefore is for helping professionals and the academic arena's that birth them to be open minded, diverse and creative in their thinking and their teaching.

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6. Annexure One

Interview Schedule- Focus Groups and Individual Interviews

Themes for Exploration

1. Role of Belly dance.
2. Attraction of Belly dance. What's different about belly dance as opposed to other dances?
3. Definition/meaning of health and well being.
4. Relationship between belly dancing and well being.
 - ✓ Impact on mental health- stress management etc.
 - ✓ Impact on social well being- relationship with others, with work, with family, with partner, with friends.
 - ✓ Impact on physical well being- health and fitness, energy levels, ability to carry out tasks.
5. Effect of presence of other women in relation to well being.
6. Self care impact of the music used in belly dance
7. Suggestions for using belly dance in self care?