Beneath the Invisible Veil

Dance Movement Therapy and People of Colour

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Dance Movement Therapy, The University of Auckland, 2022

Abstract

This body of qualitative research explores how non-traditional students in western graduate Dance Movement Therapy programs navigate racial/cultural challenges in their training, education, and practice. Multiculturalism is an integral component of counselling and psychology training. The abounding prioritisation of developing cultural competencies reflects significant progress in the mental health sphere. Nonetheless, North American and Eurocentric values occupy a pedestal and dictate the theory, education and practice of counselling and therapy. In the process, multicultural strategies often recreate the oppressive arrangements they strive to dismantle. The field of Dance Movement Therapy (DMT) is complicit in enacting these narratives, reflected in its urgent call to equip Dance Movement Therapists to work with a diverse range of clients. Infrequently addressed are the experiences of students and faculty of colour in their training, education, and practice. Through a review of the literature and semi-structured interviews, this research enquires into the experiences of five non-traditional Dance Movement Therapists who pursued their training/education in graduate school programs in various western countries. Thematic analysis via a critical constructivist lens unveils the isolation, racism, cultural incompatibility, and oppression that tolerantly coexist with feelings of autonomy and freedom in the participants' experiences. The present study found that DMT pedagogy's unexamined superiority of white-anglo norms as well as interpersonal experiences of racial discrimination and cultural blindness majorly shape non-traditional students lived experiences. Apparent in participants' stories is a sense of exasperation with the status quo and an explicit desire for safe spaces, for an immersion of social justice dialogue in the curriculum, and for the acknowledgement of systemic responsibility by educational institutions. Contributing to the meagre pool of research about non-traditional DMT students, this thesis evidences the need for non-traditional voices to enrich and inform future research, theory, pedagogy and practice in Dance Movement Therapy.

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Acknowledgements

To, Mama, Papa and Divya, for your unconditional, unwavering support and belief in me.

To you Mother, for your protection, wisdom, and unconditional love.

To my grandparents, for always holding me close in your hearts, near or far.

To Ralph Buck, my dearest supervisor through the weeds that have been this past year. Thank you for your patience, tough love, encouragement, and most of all, belief in me.

To Anjali Sengupta, my advisor, for the boisterous laughs, the safe holding, and your vibrant spirit. I shine brighter because of you.

To my therapist, Nandita Sarma, for your guidance and care. I wouldn't be here without you.

To Rewa Fowles, Katherine Mandolidis, Nigel Joseph, Tanvi Rodrigues, Rachel Tomasello and Delshad Kalantry for your solidarity through some of the hardest years we've weathered. Together. Thank you for journeying my most intoxicated joys and heart-wrenching sorrows with me.

To Varun Subramanian, for your care, companionship, and love, for always seeing the brightest in me, for going through it all with me (for five more minutes?).

To Pulkit Arora, for being an unwavering flagpole in a perennial storm. I laugh louder and feel warmer because of you.

To Phoebe Heyhoe, you're all I could ask for in an employer, a friend, a mentor, a human being. Thank you for your nurturance, kindness, and encouragement.

To Avi & Ollie Kejariwal, for your unconditional friendship, support, love, and living room.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Why we're Here

Situating my identity and intent at the heart of this Master's thesis, I open the Introduction chapter by inviting the reader into my world. A glimpse into my personal context proffers a sense of the motivation for the present research. An investment into the curiosities and disconcertion from my personal experiences, the research question follows. The chapter notes the significance of the study, contextualising the research question within the relevant literature. Finally, the methodological choices that most ethically and aptly champion the research question are discussed.

1.2 Who I am

I am many things.

I am a mover.

I am a teacher.

I am a therapist in the making, a dance movement therapist.

I am a woman, a heterosexual (or at least, I think) Indian woman

I am a human being.

My one desire is to facilitate people to feel safe, strong and empowered in their bodies.

In the social justice literature, the reality of having multiple identities is known as intersectionality (Oluo, 2019) - the presence of several sub-identities in one larger, more whole identity. The several intertwined components, like a pair of wilful earphones destined to remain functionally knotted, comprise a whole. This whole body is not an entity that we possess but a being that we are. In the lived body, the conventionally compartmentalised pillars of mind, body, and work interact, grounding our experiences

as human beings (Bullington, 2009). To this human experience, safety is a paramount need - safety not just in its literal sense, but per our neurophysiology. As described by the Polyvagal Theory, when the human body detects a deep, intrinsic level of safety, it can socially engage, play, collaborate, share intimacy, and put oneself 'out there' (Porges, Dana, & Badenoch, 2018). *Neuroception*, an innate safety detector of sorts (Porges, Dana, & Badenoch, 2018), is the ability of the autonomic nervous system, the body's safety radar, to distinguish threatening stimuli from non-threatening stimuli. At the heart of *neuroception* are not conscious cognitive thought processes but various autonomic nervous system states that ignite in the presence or absence of danger. While delving into the Polyvagal theory is beyond the scope of this particular chapter, an embodied feeling of safety is not. Often sensed as a gut feeling, we know when we feel safe and when we do not. Terminology such as 'safety', 'danger', 'threat' or even 'trauma' often provokes rather extreme situations. However, to feel unseen or unheard, to question one's perception of reality, to hesitate embodying one's whole self – all classify as a lack of safety.

Here, I'd like to occupy a tangential moment - to dare and step outside one's comfort zone is not synonymous with unsafety. Contrary to instinctual thought, safety does not *always* necessitate the equivalent of a soft, cuddly blanket or a warm bath, but rather, the rootedness, the grounded-ness, the acceptance in oneself and one's environment, so much so that one may comfortably step outside their comfort zone. Embarking on a graduate-level study in a foreign country demands this level of courage. There are days when I feel safe and grounded enough to conquer the myriad complexities of being a young adult in graduate school living in a foreign country through the COVID-19 pandemic. Tottering through the demands of a multi-layered graduate school degree in (dance/movement) psychotherapy, a career as a Pilates instructor and dancer, and a restful night of sleep so as to do it all over again the next day is complex enough for me. Then, there are days when I feel metaphorically hit by a truck like I have to begin from the ground up, except there is no ground beneath my feet. I recognise that the aforementioned description of stumbling through adulthood is not an experience exclusive to my being. However, the truck is a category of truck that perhaps not every

human can relate to. Sometimes it's multiple small trucks that manifest as micro-aggressions; sometimes, it's one giant truck in the form of unequivocal racism; worst of all is the crippling fear of all the potential trucks that may wreck you, so much so that you stay locked in your home and evade the roads.

Conflict is challenging to confront, and convenient to evade. When I was initially impassioned to speak about my experiences in the name of qualitative research, my body was met with a stark internal resistance borne out of fear of conflict. I embarked upon some digging to discover if other individuals were confronting similar experiences. Amongst the presumably many Dance/Movement Therapy students of colour who may have similar stories, I uncovered only four such accounts in the form of dissertations from Columbia College Chicago in the United States. The authors of the four accounts are Gilmore (2005), Nishida (2008), Slade (2013), and Smith (2011). These four women wrote theses about personal and impersonal experiences of non-traditional students in the field of Dance Movement Therapy. Gilmore (2005)'s, an African-American student in the DMT department, researched the experiences of fellow African American students within her cohort and the chair of her department. Nishida (2008), through an autoethnographic medium, explored her bicultural identity within Columbia College's DMT program. Lastly, Smith (2011), an African American woman, utilised autoethnographic and artistic methodologies to unpack her experiences as a minority in the same DMT program. Here are a few poignant and pertinent anecdotes from their works:

> I knew that there were some practising dance/movement therapists that did not share any of the commonalities of being Caucasian, female, or formally trained in dance. I wondered why there were so few of them. My increased acceptance of my own differences inspired curiosity about how their unique backgrounds informed their experience with DMT (Slade, 2013, p. 4).

> I was confused and felt alone. At times, I questioned if my feelings were valid and common amongst other minority students that came through the program before me. Because of my insecure feelings, I began to wonder about my place in the DMT program. As I went through the program, there were many times when I did not understand what my professors were talking about. I remember sitting in class trying to get comfortable in my chair. It was very common for our class instruction to take place in a circle without desks, but for me the desk provided a sense of

> security and a boundary between myself and the others in the room. (Smith, 2011, p. 1)

The quotes above shine a light on the mere handful of personal accounts vocalised by "non-traditional students" (p. 1) in Dance Movement Therapy programs (Slade, 2013). Uncovering these accounts from the depths of google scholar offered a sense of validation and camaraderie to my experiences as a non-traditional student in a Dance Movement Therapy graduate program in Auckland, New Zealand. Simultaneously, they affirmed the validity of non-traditional experiences in DMT, the dearth of their presence in DMT literature, and the need for more such experiences to emerge at the forefront. Through my research:

1. I wish for other non-traditional DMT students and therapists to feel seen through my words, as I have through the words of Gilmore (2005), Nishida (2008), Slade (2013), and Smith (2011).

2. While experiences of perceived exclusion and possible discrimination permeate the individual, the student, and the therapist, they also reflect glaring systemic gaps in the practice and pedagogy of the Dance Movement Therapy industry. For students to encounter more equitable curricula and for graduates to render social justice-informed practices, addressing said gaps is crucial.

3. Most of the literature I have encountered at the intersection of Dance Movement Therapy, racism, self-agency, embodied trauma, and pedagogy has arisen from the United States. I wish to initiate a dialogue within the Dance Movement Therapy literature in the Australasia region.

Published literature and anecdotal dissertations that attend to questions of experiences of non-normative students/practitioners are scant, especially in Australasia, as authors have made explicit (Chang, 2016; Kawano & Chang, 2019). Difference, discrimination (intended or unintended), and privilege are generally adept at camouflaging in the darkness. Spotlighting them incites discomfort, vulnerability, fragility, fear,

defensiveness, and hostility, among other embodied reactions. Johnson (2001) notes, "The real illusion connected to difference is the popular assumption that people are naturally afraid of what they don't know or understand" (p. 55). However, the real threat is not what we don't know but what we think we affirmatively know. Our assumptions. The danger lurking in the shadows that's out to get us. When our sense of safety feels challenged, the autonomic nervous system kicks into survival mode, even in seemingly placid scenarios. In the surge of fight, flight, or freeze hormones, no wonder we feel the discomfort, the vulnerability, the fragility, the fear, the defensiveness, and the hostility; however, what happens, if we sit around a coffee table and communicate, express, and then listen?

1.3 The Research Question(s)

Experiences of cultural assumptions, micro-aggressions, and subtle exclusion are scattered throughout my tertiary education in Auckland, New Zealand, and I cannot imagine being the only one confronting them. The feeling of othering, of being an outlier, is experienced by persons of colour who do not blend into the mainstream power structures of the institutions they belong to. The felt experience of being *seen* is as powerful as that of *not being seen*. Via the gateway of my personal experiences and others akin to me, this study aims to explore the intricacies of the following research question:

> How do non-traditional students in western Dance Movement Therapy graduate-level programs navigate racial/cultural challenges in their education, training and practice?

Under this umbrella, the following sub-questions not only guide my research but also illuminate the various institutions at play:

a. How do non-traditional students confront day-to-day challenges posed by their foreign identity in DMT praxis?

b. How do embodied practices interact with cultural narratives?

c. How has Dance Movement Therapy as a field been complicit in favouring traditional/white Anglo-dominant norms?

d. How may experiences of non-traditional students have implications for the education, research, and practice of Dance/Movement Therapy?

1.4 Why my Research Matters

The colour of my skin is the component of my identity that encounters situations of resistance in the pedagogy of Dance Movement Therapy at the University of Auckland in New Zealand. It feels pertinent in various arenas of my educational experience: in the classroom, learning paradigms of western psychology, at placements, in predominantly white spaces, or engaging in supervision with my professors and/or peers.

The following anecdote from a placement at a mental health community centre began to shape the 'why' compelling my chosen research topic:

> *I am a postgraduate student in the Masters of Dance Movement Therapy program at the University of Auckland in New Zealand. I constitute the second-ever cohort of the MDMT degree at the university. I had just begun my second and last year of the programme, and it was the first day of my practicum. I made my way to a mental health community centre in West Auckland to co-facilitate a group dance therapy session with one of my peers. In the face of looming anxiety, I tried to think of this as simply offering a movement experience to a group of people.*
>
> *To subscribe to the notion of therapy as the act of 'therapising' persons with an agenda of betterment feels uncomfortable. I first met with the centre's manager, who briefly acquainted me with the building, procedures and people. Subsequently, my peer and I facilitated a 30-minute session with all the insecurities and anxieties accompanying the first day and afterwards debriefed its happenings. A key component of our training as dance movement therapists is to master the act of self-awareness, to be in touch with our mental and embodied experiences while in relation with another human being. In addition to our cerebral knowings, we rehearse, resorting to the somatic as a source of information. Together, my peer and I recounted the success and mishaps of the session on a pragmatic and felt*

> *level. Then, we travelled downstairs to share the experience with the manager (our site supervisor) and work through administrative formalities.*
>
> *The manager is a very expressive woman; she freely spoke her mind, in some instances, probably excessively. I vividly recollect sitting on the chair across the table from her, reading through a document that mandated my signature whilst struggling to keep up a conversation with her. I could multitask no more when out of the blue, I heard her remark, "you know, Indian women are some of the most beautiful women I've met - their hair, their eyes, their features". To that, I felt a surge of discomfort wriggle through my insides, which externally manifested as an insincere smile and laugh. She continued to lead the conversation, vacillating along various tangents. We were three women in a room, and so our shared subjugated experiences as women arose in the conversation. I remember passively listening until my ears perked up to a "you know what? Actually, never mind….". She repeated, "you know what? Actually, no, I am not going to say it…". I felt provoked. Was I to indulge? I chose not to... She couldn't hold her tongue for very long and splattered, "you know, I'm sorry, but I just find Indian men so gross and creepy; the way they look at me is just.. ugh".*
>
> *I felt frozen in time. In the name of professionalism, I gathered my composure and offered a calm and collected response explicating the perils of stereotyping and generalisations. I genuinely felt the need to do so - she was my praxis supervisor, she could have been a potential employer, and she was white.*
>
> *My journey back home was steeped in silence. That encounter lay on my chest for weeks, upon which numerous others layered. Micro-aggressions, they're called. Although in accumulation, they feel far from micro.*

A robust sense of self-agency and a capacity for empathy are crucial markers of a therapist (Lochte, 2017). When the job is to offer therapy, yet the sources of oppression are the very places and people at the receiving end of therapy, carrying out the job is a real dilemma. Here, I intend not to position myself and people like me as victim but to create a pathway towards understanding how enfranchising diverse practitioners may be possible. The mental health field is willingly riding the wave of 'wokeness' that has washed over the past half century (Goodman & Gorski, 2014; Gordon, 1993; Hadley, 2013; Kawano & Chang, 2019; Sue et al., 2007; Vera & Speight, 2003). An abundance of attention and innovation is devoted towards ensuring multiculturalism in professional practice, manifesting as specialised frameworks, as an essentialising "Here's what you need to know about Latinos, Here's what you need to know about the lesbian, gay, bisexual community" (Goodman & Gorski, 2015, p. 5). To not appear hyperbolic, Goodman & Gorski's (2015) book, In Multicultural Counselling and Psychotherapy: A

LifeSpan Approach, contains chapter titles such as “Counselling Asian American Clients” or “Understanding Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Clients” and more (p. 5). At play here is essentialism - the tendency to compress and homogenise the innate nature of identity (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Lynn, 2014). Such efforts, while righteously intentioned, are perilous in execution, particularly in their oversimplification of human beings and, most importantly, in iterating the colonial power structures they set out to decolonise. A soft, subtle sort of marginalisation then lingers in the frameworks of ‘multicultural counselling’ or ‘cultural competence’ and possesses the potential to harm the groups they intend to serve. A social justice lens is indispensable in orchestrating TRUE multicultural work that aims to penetrate below the surface (Goodman & Gorski, 2015). Among the many frameworks that dominate this space, I will subsequently hone in on that of ‘multicultural competence’ - interchangeably referred to as cultural competence - to contextualise my subjective experience and epitomise why this work is meaningful.

Whiffs of colonisation manifest rather insidiously, even in de-colonial practices/frameworks. For instance, whispers of ‘cultural competence’, the decade's buzzword, reach far and wide (Chang, 2018). ‘Cultural’ shines the spotlight on the social aspects of our lived experiences – individual and collective– and ‘Competence’ implies academic and experiential “active engagement” (Boas, 2013, p. 112). Chang (2018) defines cultural competence as “the ability to understand, appreciate and interact with people of cultures [races] or brief systems different from one’s own” (p. 269). Efforts to inculcate cultural competence are directed at equipping dance movement therapists to work with a diverse clientele in a manner that wholly considers a client’s racial, gendered, ethnic and cultural identity as a foundational aspect of their lived experience (Chang, 2015). Multicultural competence-driven work is extremely well intended, and these intentions are necessary. In a world where globalisation is the norm, and a mingling of nationalities and cultures is ubiquitous, cultivating safety and mutual respect within the enclosure of the therapeutic relationship lies at the forefront. However, good intentions do not ensure favourable outcomes (Gorski, 2008). Even though topics surrounding cultural competence garner attention and acknowledgement in the critical

discourse of creative arts therapies, there seems to be a disconnect between individual subjective experiences and ideological conversations. The process of attaining cultural competency is approached as anything but a process. It ends up encompassing goals with quantifiable 'finish lines' such as studying characteristics, beliefs and 'how-to's for various groups and training to inculcate 'proper' interactions when communicating with 'non-majority' groups. Apparent evidence of the insidious infiltration of colonial ideology, dichotomous thinking based on race, gender, status etc., is abundant and reinforces hegemonic norms, holding steadfast oppressive structures in place (Goodman & Gorski, 2015). Then, cultural competency is a static, linear outcome, awarded as a green tick or a red cross on a sheet of paper. As Kumagai et al. (2009) exclaimed, "One is competent in interacting with patients from a diverse background much in the way one is competent in performing a physical exam or reading an EKG. Cultural competency is not an abdominal exam" (p. 7).

Existing efforts to be culturally competent address change on a micro level. They also exclusively address therapeutic relationships comprising a traditional DMT and a 'diverse' client. The role reversal, though, is beginning to be addressed by a handful of American DMT researchers (Chang, 2016; Hadley, 2013; Kawano & Chang, 2019). Until systemic power dynamics such as "who is invited to the table, whose views are represented (beyond being decorative) in the curricula and literature, and how the dominant narrative is being reinforced in DMT" (p. 235) are addressed, the dissonance will prevail (Kawano & Chang, 2019). Mainly, the dissonance lies between a white theoretical notion of cultural competence and the lived experiences of people of colour, which may encompass students, clients, therapists, and academics. To see beyond the cursory and examine the mammoth influences of the inherent 'whiteness' of Dance Movement Therapy's epistemology, pedagogy, and practice is a call to action. With white norms at the bedrock of multicultural education, the pedagogy overlooks socio-political factors like race as a "central mechanism of oppression" (Kawano & Chang, 2019, p. 236). The shift from a micro to macro level scrutiny of multicultural competence will contribute to a more just bedrock, that of social justice. Then, every element of the Dance Movement Therapy field, including theoretical frameworks, pedagogy, practical training, health 'dysfunction' and professional practice, may be contextualised

systemically (Chang, 2015; Hadley, 2013; Johnson, 2015; Nolan, 2013; Talwar, 2015; Vera & Speight, 2003). Upon addressing this context, we as therapists in training are equipped and beholden to ask the question, *'is this truly multiculturally competent?'* More than that, '*is multicultural competence enough?'*. Excavating a pathway toward open discourse and empowering a diversity of voices to emerge can allow us to self-examine how much of DMT epistemology and what we know is reliant on a heteronormative, able, white existence. The existing literature on this topic sufficiently establishes the need for a social justice agenda, but how do we get there?

So then, as Gorisk and Goodman (2015) eloquently articulate, "true liberatory practices reject humanitarianism and approaches that view someone experiencing oppression as a passive object; instead, they embrace what he called *humanization*, which focuses on one's own power and agency in the personal and collective struggle for freedom" (p 6). Under the humanisation framework, how can a social justice lens facilitate a 'multicultural-ised', decolonised DMT praxis? For this to occur, abandoning a myopic focus on 'culture' is a hegemonically oriented "distraction" (Goodman et al., 2015, p. 7) that must be abandoned and redirected toward the nuanced experiences of disenfranchised individuals. Lived experiences surface when people experience agency to voice their lived experiences with abandon. Learning about the experiences of non-traditional students impels all those who identify with the Dance Movement Therapy industry to address the historical whiteness of the field and acknowledge the training ground of tertiary education as an inequitable playing field for that anything other than white (Chang, 2016).

In conclusion, are the anomalous lectures on "culture" within a semester's worth of curriculum comprehensive? Does a western-centric DMT curriculum mirror the life experiences of non-traditional students? Are the brewing racial and cultural assumptions about students of colour in white-dominant placement scenarios to be endured in the name of training? Amidst this, how do students of colour continue to cultivate a sense of agency in their emerging identities as therapists? There is an apparent dearth of voices

addressing these questions, and my research aims to knock on doors, urge voices, and explicitly explore the meanings of struggle, discrimination, and agency for others like me.

1.5 Conclusion and Future Direction

With embodiment at the core of the present research, the body is an instrument for experiencing, meaning-making, and expressing. The impetus for this research stems from my relational experiences whilst learning and practising the art and science of DMT. Personal narratives of non-traditional DMT students, graduates, and therapists through semi-structured interviews spearhead this research. I aim to expand the collective understanding of the wide variety of experiences in graduate DMT programs and thereby embrace the murky waters, the complexities that arise in the process of decolonising. Seeking answers to these questions involves an inevitable deep dive into literature resting at the confluence of Culture, Dance Movement Therapy, social justice, cultural competency, critical consciousness, multicultural education, and critical pedagogy. The Literature Review in Chapter Two begins this deep dive, but in no way does it free dive into the depths. Maintaining an eye on the scope of a Masters's study, the following Review of Literature outlines key literature pertinent to this study's research question. My methodological choices align with the impetus for this research, which is to enable non-traditional voices to surface. A qualitative research methodology based on critical constructivism and narrative inquiry provides an epistemological position embracing subjective complexities inevitable within our lived experience. Herein, relationship building and listening are essential to realising an emancipatory agenda. Further, a reflexive stance prioritises my critical self-evaluation as I endeavour to immerse myself in the meaning-making process of participants' stories with compassion, awareness, and critical consciousness. Humanising, rather than colonising, by research is the ultimate aim (Paris, 2011).

2 Review of Literature

2.1 Introduction

Sentiments of curiosity, aloneness and un-belonging spurred the research question: *How may non-traditional Dance Movement Therapy students from western graduate programs navigate racial/cultural challenges during their education/training?* This Chapter outlines the relevant literature, contextualising various concepts embedded within the research question. Establishing the centrality of the lived body in this research, a description of the embodied experience opens this Chapter. Experiences of oppression and trauma, particularly racial trauma, interacting with the lived body are then discussed. A critique of the field of Dance Movement Therapy, its complicity in inequitable traditions and practices, and its apparent cultural blindness follow. Subsequently, the Chapter synthesises the above concepts, exploring the individual and systemic manifestations of unexamined 'whiteness' that subsumes the Dance Movement Therapy stratosphere and the broader mental health community. Ultimately, the Chapter considers if true multicultural education and competence are possible and may be realised. The act of mental health care is not exclusive to the isolated individual but must occur within the complex webbing of social structures situating us.

2.2 The Site of the Lived Experience

We do not *have* bodies, but in fact, *are* our bodies (Bullington, 2009). The notion of the *lived body* lies at the core of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological rendition (Bullington, 2009; Johnson, 2009). Shunning dualism, it encourages a unified understanding of the mind-body-world as an entity grounded in the lived body. Within the phenomenological tradition, Hermans (2016) identified the concepts of Leib and Korper as a guide for understanding the body. While Leib denotes the inner lived world or "the physical experience of being me" (Hermans, 2016, p. 161), Korper depersonalises the human body, reducing it to tangible elements (Hermans, 2016). Leib discusses the seeing body that experiences, senses, and feels, while Korper is the

objectified body, subject to a superficial seeing. The lived body from a Leib-based lens is at the core of various individual and societal frameworks discussed in this study.

Further, Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Margaret Lock (1987) articulate three representations of the body - the individual body, the social body and the body politic. The first is the subjective felt experiences of the self, the second contextualises the body as an emblem of society and culture, and the third encompasses dominance and control of the body. This study appears at the crossroads of scholarly literature on various disciplines such as creative arts therapies (with a focus on Dance Movement Therapy), Embodiment, Culture, Oppression, Trauma, Social Justice, Self-Agency, and Pedagogy. The point of convergence is borne from my personal experience as elucidated in Chapter One and urges an investigation of the body via Scheper-Hughes and Lock's (1987) three representations. The following review of literature explores the body at an individual level, situates it in the various institutions at play mentioned above, and finally addresses the body as a source of agency and liberation through the development of critical consciousness. While each of these individual disciplines is abundantly researched, their integration into the field of Dance Movement Therapy is novel. Perhaps, exploring the serpentine relationships between the various concepts listed above can result in a more transparent, first-hand understanding of one of the most invisible yet forceful issues meandering through our global society, "the systematic and mostly unconscious oppression we inflict on one another in our simplest everyday interactions" (Johnson, 2015, p. 80).

As defined by the Dance Therapy Association of Australasia, the governing regulatory body of Dance Movement Therapy (DMT) in Australasia, "Dance movement therapy is the relational and therapeutic use of dance and movement to further the physical, emotional, cognitive, social, and cultural functioning of a person" (Dtaa, 2022). It is a unique sphere of psychotherapy that shines a light on non-verbal, tacit communication through redirecting our awareness from the declarative, 'thought out' cognitive space to the ambiguous, intangible language of the body - sensations, affects, gestures, and

movement. The shift towards a felt, “implicit, relational knowing” (Lauffenburger, 2020, p. 19) is a valuable source of information in bridging the mind and body and integrating mind, body, and other. As a movement professional, I find solace in indulging in this very process of experiencing and meaning-making through embodiment. As put forth in the Introduction chapter, this research aims to forge an understanding of felt experiences in the presence of power differentials, particularly cultural and racial. An understanding of how oppression moulds the body is imperative in this effort. The antithesis of cultural/racial stereotypes and assumptions is a ‘way of being’, a continually adaptive consciousness to the evolving and diverse needs of marginalised individuals. A constructivist lens (as outlined in Chapter Three) is employed to listen to the lived experiences of non-traditional students/therapists, who may subsequently and responsively inform an increasingly equitable DMT - playing - field (Johnson, 2015). “[W]e do more than simply perceive reality through our bodily senses; reality is constructed by the way in which we perceive it. This “somatic” point of view understands that our perceptions of the external environment affect our perceptions of the inner one” (Johnson, 2015, p. 84).

The subsequent subsection of this Chapter situates the body at the omphalos of the literature. I discuss how the body is a vessel of non-verbal communication and how environment and experience interact with our nervous systems. Subsequently, I articulate how the body, as a rich vessel/tapestry of our lived experience, is vital in experiencing and enduring traumatic stimuli and growing and healing from the same. Upon establishing the inner workings of embodied experiences, this research considers a macro lens toward oppression and anti-racism work in education and therapy, one that places the embodied experience of oppression and its cultural, institutional, and societal manifestations at the forefront. (Johnson, 2015; Menakem, 2017).

2.3 The Body as a Vessel: Embodiment, Oppression, and Racial Trauma

> *Race, racism, racial power and prejudice are all fundamentally about bodies… This work therefore must be done at the site of power and oppression: the body. Both domination and oppression are communicated through bodies, felt through bodies… and can only be transformed through bodies (White, 2019, p. 5).*

When exploring the experiences of non-traditional students in environments unfamiliar to them, a foundational understanding of how our environments interact with and mould our embodiments is contextually relevant. Therefore, understanding how privilege and oppression affect embodiment is paramount. Body-based modalities such as DMT are the perfect place to consider the intersections between the personal and political (Cantrick, Anderson, Leighton & Warning, 2018). The considerations of trauma aside, the scaffolding of Dance Movement Therapy is built upon the premise of the mind-body connection. Acolin (2016) concretely explains this seemingly metaphysical concept as relevant to the field of DMT. Under the umbrella of embodiment research, the mind-body connection illustrates the ubiquitous idea that our nervous system and physiology are the pathway between cognition and sensation, thought, and physical behaviour. An adult whose breath turns fast and shallow in a stressful situation; a hungry child who kicks and screams; a person who curls inward, holding up their arms in the face of an attack - these commonplace embodiments are tangible evidence of the mind-body connection. 'How our bodies are' in movement and in relative stillness reflects our intrapersonal mental, physical, and emotional health and interpersonal cultural/societal contexts and relationships. Functionally or expressively driven, internally or externally driven, the body is constantly in communication through expressions, gestures, actions, and the lack thereof. Just as our internal states evince in an embodied manner, embodied interventions can surpass conscious pathways and affect change. Whether subtle or amplified, the body reacts sensationally and expressively to social interactions and relationships, a phenomenon that enables Dance Movement Therapists to connect with their clients (Acolin, 2016).

Outlining the foundations of the mind-body connection in DMT theory, Acolin's ideas lay the groundwork for the felt lived experiences of non-traditional students discussed in this research. This body of knowledge permits us to accurately presume that our intrapersonal and interpersonal experiences are digested through our physical bodies, which, much like malleable clay, react or mould in response to the forces of our experiences. Except the phenomenon of neuroplasticity means that our embodied responses do not cement-like hardened pottery but are malleable to change and remoulding (A., 2015). How, then, as informed DMTs, can we better understand the mechanisms and realities of racial oppression? The following subsection unpacks an understanding of oppression and trauma through The Polyvagal Theory.

2.3.1 Understanding Trauma through The Polyvagal Theory

Through the Polyvagal Theory (PVT), this subsection foregrounds an understanding of trauma. Unpacking the embodied, profound nature of oppression within Dance Movement Therapy gives credence to its unseen ramifications. The PVT is a neuroscientific framework that has come to rationalise the subtle workings of Dance Movement Therapy. It connects the dots between the evolution of the mammalian nervous system and human behaviour, thus grounding the practice of DMT in robust biological science. Porges, Dana, & Gray (2018) conceptualise the PVT as a physiological regulatory response afforded to us by our biology that can equip health interventions to leverage our inbuilt survival strategies. While delving into the details of PVT is beyond the scope of this research, its mention is pertinent as an evidence-based '*how things work?';* in this case, it clarifies how an embodiment-based lens of social experience, rooted in evolutionary survival circuitry, governs our lived realities, particularly in environments beyond our comfort zones.

Our evolution has afforded us deeply bio-intelligent resources to combat dangerous and life-threatening situations (Gray, 2017). The PVT describes three essential neural

pathways encompassing the autonomic nervous system and the consequent physiology, behaviours, and emotions they elicit. Evolutionarily, the dorsal-vagal pathway is the most primitive of the three. Emergent in fish species, this subsystem is responsible for shutdown and immobilisation in the face of danger. The sympathetic nervous system, or the eminent fight-or-flight arousal system, is next up the evolutionary ladder. On the contrary, it surges mobilisation through the body's limbs. Lastly, the most advanced subsystem, exclusively present in mammals, is the ventral vagal pathway, occupying the ventral branch of the parasympathetic nervous system. Commonly known as the social engagement system, this nuanced pathway mediates social and attachment behaviours in mammals, enabling a collectivist survival culture (Porges & Dana, 2018). In the absence of fear, activated dorsal-vagal and sympathetic pathways manifest as tranquillity - such as meditation - and energised activation - such as in celebrations or exercise. When "online", the social engagement system enables an individual to seamlessly modulate between energised and calm states per the demands of the situation. However, the embodied expression of trauma renders it challenging to experience the positive aspects of these two pathways (Porges, Dana, & Ogden, 2018).

Vast amounts of traumatology research explain the relationship between the internal and the external, the social and the somatic. Trauma is officially documented as a physical, psychological and social experience. Traumatic experiences, even when not explicitly physical, are mediated through the physical body and manifest mentally, physiologically and physically through embodiment (A., 2015; Gray, 2017; Johnson, 2009; Johnson, 2015; Menakem, 2017; Porges, Dana, & Ogden, 2018). For instance, somatic dissociation bears a stark correlation with traumatic experiences - acute and chronic. Physical symptoms such as digestive dysfunction, headaches, nausea, dizziness, chronic pain, and immune disorders, among others, are well documented in individuals who combat the day-to-day silent symptoms of past and present trauma. Further, structural neurobiological alterations in brainwave activity, brain size, and operations of the memory and fear-related regions of the brain are abundant. Similarly, trauma-induced asynchrony between the various Polyvagal channels explains symptoms of a sensitised

sympathetic response, stress dysregulation, and hormonal and sleep disruptions (A., 2015; Johnson, 2009).

Oppression, defined as the "ideological, institutional, interpersonal and intrapersonal disempowerment of people based on sociocultural locations" (Nichols, 2019, p. 18, 19), lies along the vast spectrum of trauma and is classified as a Type III trauma - particularly discrimination, micro to macroaggressions, and individual and systemic marginalisation comprising social oppression. "Type III traumas are pervasive, repeated ongoing traumatic incidents that persist over time and are often considered the most unpredictable and severe forms of trauma" (Cantrick et al., 2018, p. 194). The somatic ramifications of traumatic experiences suggest that chronic exposure to oppression can distance the self from the body. Quite literally, "white supremacy has divided us along the lines of bodies, black and brown bodies exploited, oppressed, and dominated by white bodies" (hooks & Ensler 2014, para. 7, as cited in Cantrick et al., 2018). The body is the locus of identity and, thus, the instrument of expressing and encountering dominance and submission. Research on nonverbal communication establishes the transmission of power dynamics through the physical body, thus rendering it the perfect place to begin understanding and dismantling the phenomenon of oppression (Cantrick et al., 2018; Foucault, 1980; Henley, 1977; Johnson, 2015; Schultz, 2018). What happens to the body and how the body responds, physiologically and sociologically, is particularly pertinent in Dance Movement Therapy.

Thus, "the felt sense comes to life in the science of the Polyvagal Theory, which teaches us that the wisdom we need is within our bodies and nervous systems and is deeper than our cognitive explanations or mental assessments of danger and safety" (Porges, Dana, & Ogden, 2018, p. 48). Porges, Dana, & Ogden (2018) refer to this innate wisdom termed *neuroception*, the body's automatic and unconscious programmed ability to detect safety and danger environmental cues. Then, trauma, something that "always happens in the body" (Porges, Dana, & Ogden, 2018, p. 7), is not a weakness, a flaw, or an event but rather the body's response to ensure safety and survival. These nuanced

and subjective responses may be transmitted via nature and nurture: through families, institutions, cultural norms, unsafe structures and systems, and even our DNA (Menakem, 2017, p. 10). Safety, or the lack thereof, extends from physical safety to emotional safety, more often determined by our interpersonal than our literal physical environment (Elliot, 2021). We are social creatures in that we make sense of the self through the other by virtue of the ventral-vagal or social engagement system. Our embodied selves are wired to seek connection and intimacy, which occurs when we feel seen, heard, loved, and validated, and is exclusively possible if the body *neurocepts* safety. This deep feeling of 'I am worthy and accepted' is felt via verbal and nonverbal channels - via inter-relational gaze, prosody, body language, gesturing, quality of eye contact, tone, attention, and intention. It is tenable that nonverbal communication intricately affects and directs our interpersonal environments; upon 'double-clicking' on this file, the literature suggests that the *nonverbal-ness* of social interplay is paradoxically the seat of connection and social control (Foucault, 1980; Henley, 1977; Johnson, 2015; White, 2019). Since this research concerns non-traditional students in Dance Movement Therapy, unpacking the complexities and subtleties of nonverbal, implicit communication may guide a better understanding of their experiences.

2.3.2 Microaggressions Embodied

Asymmetrical nonverbal exchanges are an unequivocal hallmark of social interactions between individuals/groups bearing hierarchical inequality. For instance, relatively higher-status individuals are afforded greater informality, confidence, and personal space versus contextually lower-status individuals who yield those very characteristics. Seemingly irrelevant and microscopic in isolation, over time, the essence of such behaviours is 1. conditioned and 2. continue to become conditioned into permanency. The concept of *microaggressions is defined* as "everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely

upon their marginalised group membership" (Sue, 2010, p. 1) arise from these subtle asymmetries in nonverbal interactions. Research on nonverbal behaviour demonstrates that power and dominance are often imposed nonverbally from one body to another (Cantrick et al., 2018; Henley, 1977; Johnson, 2009; Menakem, 2017; Schultz, 2018).

Microaggressions negatively impact mental and physical health and affect depressive symptoms, lower self-esteem, lower resilience, heightened vulnerability, anger, hypervigilance, and isolation (Caldwell & Leighton, 2018; Nichols, 2019; Schultz, 2018). A robust body of literature suggests an association between racial oppression and numerous adverse psychological adjustment outcomes, including formal psychiatric diagnoses. Those exposed to chronic racial stressors exhibit graver symptoms of PTSD compared to a singular traumatic event (Jorden, 2021). Additionally, neurophysiology research substantiates dysregulation of the parasympathetic nervous system in response to chronic racial distress - worry, rumination, fear, and avoidance (Neblett & Robert, 2013). Emulating the idea of 'death by a thousand cuts', insidious gradual oppression on an interpersonal, cultural, and institutional level is a recipe for chronic trauma symptomatology, which manifests as numbing, constriction, disconnection from the body, hypervigilance, among other symptoms.

"The power of microaggressions lies in their invisibility to the perpetrator and, often times, the recipient" (Sue et al., 2007, p. 275). Ultimately, these asymmetries manifest beyond one's personal life - in offices, hospitals, mental health spaces, educational institutions, and politics. And literally everywhere. When enough of our lived experiences can be described as safe, nurturing and strengthening, our autonomic nervous system's safety detector learns to detect accurately. Conversely, it remains hypervigilant, continually anticipating danger and fuelling the chronic physiology of stress in the physical body. Dr Stephen Porges, the founder of the PVT, articulates, "safe states are a prerequisite not only for social behaviour but also for accessing the higher brain structures that allow humans to be creative and generative" (Porges, 2015, p. 115).

I have visceral memories of stuck-ness and the inability to successfully access said creative and generative states to conduct a DMT session. At the moment, right then and there, when my physiology as a therapist feels triggered, the process of building a genuine therapeutic relationship, allowing kinesthetic empathy to flow between myself and the individual/group, accessing creative body-based tools contingent, and exercising unbiasedness is a monumental task. An undeniable question mark remains - how is it done? Oppression intimately impacts an individual's sense of self, relational ability with the self and others, and their perception of environments – familiar and unfamiliar. Dance Movement Therapy as a field may perpetuate such oppression and, therefore, must examine its verbal and nonverbal transmission (Cantrick et al., 2018; Henley, 1977; Kawano & Chang, 2019; Nichols, 2019).

2.3.3 Race at Play

Non-traditional students abundantly experience microaggressions and racial discrimination, among other challenges (Awais & Yali, 2013; Chang, 2016; Jenkins-Hayden, 2011; Ko, 2020; Lee, 2013; Nickerson, Helms & Terrell, 1994; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Then, understanding how racially contentious encounters are traumatic in nature is indispensable to the current study's agenda. As previously articulated, trauma is a bio-intelligent bodily response to ensure safety and survival. It is as old as we humans. However, the myth of race, the concepts of whiteness and blackness, were invented in the seventeenth century – an accumulated response to the felt "sensations" and "impressions" (Menakem, 2017, p. 91) of danger, fear, invulnerability, or invincibility (of a coloured body), unattractiveness, and dirtiness, among other sensations. Incontrovertibly, these sensations or impressions are irrational, false, and often impossible; however, borne in our lizard brains, they surpass cognitive rationale and, in the perceived lack of safety, impulsively drive human racist behaviour (Menakem, 2017). Oppression and its transmission intertwine with numerous schools of thought - embodiment theories, somatic psychology, and traumatology, all of which foreground the experience of oppression as traumatic (Johnson, 2009). Trauma is often viewed as an

experience of the individual body, like a fracture or a headache. Conversely, though, trauma "routinely spreads *between* bodies, like a contagious disease" (Menakem, 2017, p. 37). Among the numerous avenues of trauma, the relationship between social oppression and trauma is pertinent here. Sincere efforts to tease apart racial oppression through verbal dialogue, discussions, training, workshops, and education, among other efforts, are ubiquitous yet seemingly insufficient (Caldwell & Leighton, 2018; Johnson, 2015; Neblett & Roberts, 2013; White, 2019). What is the missing link? Conditioning our brains to restructure how it comprehends race is insufficient because "white-body supremacy does not live in our thinking brains. It lives and breathes in our bodies" (Menakem, 2017, p. 5). Our most primal, deep emotions such as fear, anger, joy, grief, disgust, and hope are associated with an intricate chain of neurological and physiological autonomic responses in the body. Notably, as outlined in the Polyvagal theory, the vagus nerve is instrumental in connecting the brain with the major organ systems that affect and are affected by social experience. This neural system is associated with what is commonly known as the reptilian brain or the lizard brain - the evolutionarily regressive part of the human brain responsible for survival and protection (Porges, Dana, & Gray, 2018). While our thinking brains process white-body supremacy, it is most powerfully triggered in the lizard brain, gravitating towards that which fits our conditioned perception of safety and comfort and fighting or flighting from perceived fear or danger. As Menakem (2017) asserts, "the body is where we live. It is where we fear, hope and react" (p. 7). In matters of racial reconciliation, attending to the nonverbal and somatic signals of the body is paramount and must accompany cognitively spearheaded discussions, training or models attempting to address systemic racism (Elliot, 2021; Menakem, 2017).

Oppression may have explicit manifestations, but in light of the body's inner physiological workings, it is inflicted and endured as subtle, felt experiences inaccessible not only to the outside eye but also to the individual's conscious brain. To review this robustness thus feels necessary. In this grey area lies the potential for a convenient dismissing or gaslighting of marginalised groups' experiences as cryptic opinions. The consequences of inequity and inequality on the lived experiences of people of colour

are real, multi-layered, and often instil indelible ways of relating to power and privilege differentials (Christofferson, 2018; Foucault, 1980). The cultural norms and expectations complicit in oppressing and re-oppressing are perhaps so deeply entrenched that they are imperceptible and denied (Chang, 2015; Gorski, 2008; Hadley, 2013; Kawano & Chang, 2019; White, 2019). The effects of oppression manifest not only as intrapersonal sensations of restriction, disconnection, and hypervigilance but as an embodied acculturation palpable in accents, movement patterns, body language, and in general, meshing into the normative, hegemonic way of being (Caldwell & Leighton, 2018; Nichols, 2019). "The implicit nonverbal effects of oppression on individuals of marginalised socio-cultural identities must be understood by therapists, activists and allies given the link between oppression and trauma symptoms" (Nichols, 2019, p. 22,23).

A form of psychotherapy grounded in the empirically supported mind-body connection, Dance Movement Therapy facilitates kinesthetic awareness - the individual's awareness of their embodied sensations and emotions, mindfulness, rhythmic movement, and proprioception. Then, DMT prompts the development of a reliable interoception - a sense of the body's internal state, which can enable an individual to contextualise physiological processes as thoughts and feelings (Johnson, 2015; Porges, Dana, & Gray, 2018). Additionally, DMT-based tools can be employed to shift the body's autonomic physiological states consciously, rendering novel neural pathways and physiological habits (White, 2019).

During my Dance Movement Therapy education in and out of the classroom, I have experienced racial and cultural un-belongingness and discrimination. It is clear that the aftermath of oppression hinders access to the body, nonverbal communication, expression and connection with others. The literature reviewed in this section offers a robust background about how social experiences interact with the lived body and how the lived body responds on a micro, individual level. Acknowledging the intrapersonal complexities of racial discrimination engenders a solid foundation to then receive and

make sense of the experiences of non-traditional students. As we begin to understand the intersection of embodiment, oppression, and trauma, we see how the DMT stratosphere is "well positioned to consider how larger societal frameworks, which perpetuate and reiterate oppression through the body, maintain oppressive dynamics in marginalised populations" (Cantrick et al., 2018, p. 195).

2.4 Dance Movement Therapy: A Deconstruction

While the literature on white normativity and racial discrimination - spanning from individual microaggressions and overt racism to an institutional bias toward whiteness - is rampant in the counselling and mental health field, its presence in Dance Movement Therapy is limited in the United States and practically absent in Australasia. According to Cantrick et al. (2018), "the current peer-reviewed counselling literature itself does not fully represent diverse populations. This is problematic because the current research is inseparable from a privileged bias" (p. 196). Therefore, a critical deconstruction and examination of the field of Dance Movement Therapy follow. This subsection details the inception of Dance Movement Therapy as a profession and the ethnocentric context in which it was born. Subsequently, it charts the unexamined and unconscious prioritisation of Western norms in the field. Various DMT assessment, observation and intervention tools are also critically explored in the process. The prevalent myth of 'dance as universal' contributes to the whiteness and cultural blindness of the field of DMT – this concept is meticulously untangled. Finally, owing to the above-mentioned biases, this section calls to question the power dynamics inherent in DMT's education and practice that may ultimately impact the experiences of non-traditional students pursuing their graduate training in DMT.

2.4.1 Whitewashed

"People move and belong to movement communities just as they speak and belong to speech communities" (Caldwell, 2013, p. 2). This idea is only recently gaining recognition within the movement-centred profession of Dance Movement Therapy (DMT). DMT is an embodied, relatively progressive mode of psychotherapy that contends with conventional verbal psychotherapy. However, it does not hold as an exception in prioritising values of the West or the Global North, within which attributes concerned with whiteness are the norm. DMT's inception as a documented profession occurred in the 1940s and 1950s, following World War II, when the white male indubitably reigned (Kawano & Chang, 2019). It faced ample scepticism and resistance as a female-dominant and body-based psychotherapeutic intervention. In many ways, the existence of DMT in and of itself is radical. In a world that prioritises cognition over the felt senses, DMT occupies a reformist position. Lost in the enchantment of its revolutionary stance, the lack of critical thought lent to the inherent 'whiteness' of its epistemology is then considered barely problematic and seeps through the cracks, camouflaged as normative, in DMT education and training (Kawano & Chang, 2019; Jorden, 2021). "The DMT norms that are not explicitly stated may manifest in practice as unintended oppression of trainees as well as peers" (Kawano & Chang, 2019, p. 234).

Through the lens of culture, "an unconscious blind spot of bias" (Nichols, 2019, p. 3) permeates the pedagogy and therapeutic practice of DMT in reference to how communities organise their physical bodies, their communities, how they relate to others, how they learn, and how they move. Orchestrating a DMT session is deeply reliant on movement observation and assessment. A therapist's lived embodied experience, education and training dictate the lens through which they observe and assess an individual. Further, one's *psychophysical habitus*, a term coined by Chang (2009), refers to "embodied and encompassing, unconscious and unavailable to linear thinking, mind and body prototype that is instilled preverbally" is at play here (p. 304). In other words, it explains the spectrum of unconscious and conscious elements of body movement, - including observing and interpreting another's movement (Caldwell, 2013;

Chang, 2009;). One's DMT professional training may mould a particular psychophysical orientation and possibly sit at odds with their familiar 'way of being' and embodied habits, leading to potential dissonance.

2.4.2 In Question: Assessment, Observation, and Intervention Tools

Assessment, observation, and intervention tools are employed within DMT practice to work with an individual on an embodied level. The Laban Movement Analysis (LMA), – alternatively referred to as the Laban Bartenieff Movement System (LBMS), - and the Kestenburg Movement Profile (KMP) are two such widely utilised tools. Rudolph Von Laban, a Hungarian choreographer, was the face of modern dance in Germany between 1934 and 1937 (Dickson, 2016). LMA, widely utilised in dance choreography and subsequently, as a movement analysis method in DMT, was founded upon his work. It explicates qualitative aspects of time, shape, space, and effort in human movement and addresses the spectrum between various dichotomies in movement - internal/externally driven; functional/expressive; free flow/bound (White, 2019). Nevertheless, governed by a euro-centric psychophysical habitus, the LMA possesses several gaps and premature inferences, rendering it cross-culturally deficient (Carmichael, 2012; Chang, 2009; Desmond, 1997). Upon further scrutiny by Irmgard Bartenieff, Kestenberg Amighi, and Martha Davis, premature interpretations and projection of movement parameters to psychological health or pathology permeate the LMA. (Caldwell, 2013; Nichols, 2019). Serving as Germany's dance master, Rudolf Laban's role as Germany's dance master, for which Hitler offered him refuge during the Nazi era, indicates that the cultural relevancy of his teachings was irrelevant (Dickson, 2016). Although Irmgard Bartenieff and Kestenberg's work (KMP) built upon the Laban Movement Analysis, they contribute to its white-centric myopic viewpoint. It is of concern that the cultural exclusiveness and biased perspectives of these assessment tools remain unassessed within the field (Nichols, 2019).

Why does this matter in the current study? The primary reliance on the Laban movement analysis system risks excluding or pathologising individuals who may embody anything other than a white normative *psychophysical habitus*. Another example favouring the inaccurate generalisability of DMT norms and techniques is Authentic Movement, - a widely utilised practice of movement improvisation developed by Mary Stark Whitehouse in the 1950s. Authentic Movement explores the moving relationship between a mover and a witness, focusing on this idea of *being seen*. The mover is encouraged to move in response to their inner impulses and connect with their most profound 'authentic' self (Stromsted, 2007). The witness' role is not to *look at* the mover but rather to attend to the essence of their movement quality with a deep embodied presence. However, this form of witnessing is not untouched by race, gender, class, and ability biases. In a white-supremacist world, oppressive behaviours are more likely in the absence of acknowledging the subconscious, internalised biases we possess - whether we like it or not (Nichols 2019, Jorden 2021). The historical context of racial oppression means that being seen is a vastly different experience for white bodies compared to bodies of colour. This explicit critique of authentic movement comes from Jorden's (2021) work, Acknowledging the Past: Trauma-Informed Social Justice & Dance Movement Therapy, which is the most recent piece of published literature on the social justice state of Dance Movement Therapy. In critically analysing the practice of Authentic Movement, she aptly quotes the following excerpt from the book *Oppression and the Body:*

A foundation of somatic counselling is the observation of clients' bodies as part of the therapeutic process. The language of being seen is often used in connection with the client's healing. But, in the context of white supremacy, my Black body knows that being focused upon is dangerous. For centuries, being merely noticed by whiteness has led to violence against and the death of, Black bodies. (Caldwell & Leighton, 2018, p. 150, as cited in Jordan, 2021).

After all, we do not inherently witness from a neutral, unbiased blank slate. What we know and how we know is a product of sociocultural conditioning that must be acknowledged to confront the differential experiences at play in said witnessing. This research is interested in the myriad, complex experiences of non-traditional students. To do this endeavour justice, we must acknowledge that everyone arrives at the table with their unique share of privileges and disadvantages. There is no blank slate.

2.4.3 Universality: A Myth

Neutrality is a myth, as is universality. 'Dance' is universal in that almost every culture practices and celebrates it; however, within this ubiquitous connection, it takes multiple forms and meanings, and to claim that it is a universally relatable phenomenon is problematic. "Dance is located within a specific socio-historical-geographical context and embodies class, gender, ethnicity, and the various entanglements of cultures" (Kawano & Chang, 2019, p. 241). The prevalence of 'universal' movement frameworks or tools indicates a lack of awareness or *cultural blindness* - "the result of a belief that culture and race are not relevant and that any approach to, intervention in, or attitude toward the dominant culture is equally valid and beneficial to all" (Nichols, 2019, p. 45). Analogous to the ubiquitous 'I do not see colour' narrative, cultural blindness may stem from the intent to abolish racism but is, in fact, deeply problematic in negligence of the nuanced, multifaceted ways in which a person's skin colour impacts their lived experience.

A quest for said universal frameworks is pervasive beyond DMT in the broader mental health and counselling stratosphere as traditional mainstream psychology subscribes to such all-encompassing models to cater to large populations. For instance, ethical guidelines and standards of practice explicitly favour a one-size-fits-all approach and consequently reduce complex and diverse human experiences to mechanistic 'how-to's (Goodman et al., 2015; Mayor, 2012). Daneshpour and Fisek advise against such cross-

cultural application of structural approaches as "some of its foundational principles (hierarchy, power, rule flexibility, and boundary proximity) are strongly influenced by the norms of a culture" (as cited in Cole, 2008, p. 428). This is germane because as long as an insistence on utopian, universal mental health paradigms prevail, diverse communities' nuanced views and needs remain bypassed (Nichols, 2019).

The Dance Therapy Association of Australasia (DTAA), the governing regulatory body of DMT in Australasia, designed their first guide for the practice of Dance Movement Therapists in the year 2000. Over the years, this document has been through a few iterations, attempting to comprehensively answer the question, 'what do Dance Movement Therapists do?' Its latest iteration in October 2019, titled the "2019 Competency Standards", was created "to identify competencies expected of contemporary dance movement therapists in Australasia" (Denning, Dunphy & Lauffenburger, 2019, p. 5). It seems unclear whether "contemporary" alludes to the genre of dance or serves as an adjective for therapists; in the case of the former, exclusion of those who are not trained in western contemporary dance training seems implied. Further in the document, the following competencies broach the subject of diversity and culture:

1.1.3 Demonstrates awareness of the healing dance practices of Indigenous peoples in Australasia (p. 7).

2.1.3 Uses skills in movement improvisation to support therapeutic practice (p. 7).

3.3.2 Articulates how family, environment, culture and other systems impact movement preferences (p. 7).

5.3.1 Utilises awareness of aspects of human diversity (including gender, sexuality, age, ability, socioeconomic status, cultural background, religious affiliation and aboriginality) for effective assessment (p. 9)

5.4.1 Considers elements of human diversity (including gender, sexuality, age, ability, socio-economic status, cultural background, religious affiliation and Indigenous identification) for effective planning and evaluation (p. 9)

Originally exclusive to DMT in Australia, the DTAA expanded its membership and support to Australasia - including New Zealand, Hong Kong, and Singapore - in 2016. The lack of specificity evident in the Competency Standards, especially in the absence of what, how and why surrounding 'human diversity, may serve to accommodate a range of populations from various countries/continents. However, competencies that start and finish with considering and utilising 'awareness' of diverse groups may imply the sufficiency of a surface-level understanding of non-traditional identities as competent (Gipson, 2015; Goodman et al., 2015; Kumagai & Lypson, 2009; Mayor, 2012). It breeds the idea outlined in Chapter One that cultural competency is merely attained by checking off a to-do list of a particular group's knowledge, skills, and attitudes. The American Dance Therapy Association's (ADTA) revised Standards of Education and Training (2017) documents urge educators and supervisors to critically engage in dialogue surrounding the 'pioneers' of DMT. While DMT education amplifies the ground-breaking radicality of said pioneers, there is a lack of critical thought given to *what makes a pioneer? Who is a pioneer?* For instance, the Dance Therapy Association of Australasia states in its Competency Standards 2019 document that the requirement to utilise the Laban Bartenieff Movement System (LBMS) as a primary observational and assessment tool:

5.8.2 Applies Laban Bartenieff Movement Systems (LBMS) to identify and describe movement from functional, expressive and developmental perspectives;

5.8.3 Applies LMBS to identify the relationship between movement, expression and emotion (Denning, Dunphy, & Lauffenburger, 2019, p. 10).

The overarching requirement to employ the LBMS system in DMT pedagogy and practice honours the history of DMT and constitutes a singular valuable element of the practice. What is lost in translation, though, are the nuanced variations in non-traditional bodies, which may live, move, and exist much differently than their western counterparts. While the foundational premise of DMT, "movement is healing" (Carmichael, 2012, p. 102), holds intuitive, physical and neurological validity, it is an oversimplified claim; its very

roots cling onto Western ideologies and are pioneered by western bodies (Carmicheal, 2012). Then, how might this context affect the non-traditional students in DMT?

2.4.4 Who Holds the Power?

It is noteworthy that perspectives represented in mainstream DMT curricula and literature are not wrong, but they are *singular perspectives*. DMTs of colour have been effaced from the headlines, only to have white scholars abscond with credit (Kawano & Chang, 2019). Characteristics of dance forms beyond Eurocentric convention, such as the polyrhythmic patterns of African diasporic dance, have only recently garnered attention and validity in DMT praxis. Even still, the dominant narrative of modern dance and western psychology elicits incongruity within trainees/students coerced to conform to and practice according to foreign ideals (Jenkins-Hayden, 2011; Ko, 2020; Kawano & Chang, 2019; Nichols, 2019).

Additionally, the non-hierarchical and experiential pedagogical methods in creative arts therapies are exclusive to western culture and education, encompassing tenets of self-disclosure, individualistic self-identification and self-efficacy, and open sharing/expressivity. Predominant in individualistic cultures, such American and Eurocentric values may be unfamiliar to non-western individuals (Carducci, 2012; Chang, 2002; Chang, 2016; Gudykunst, Matsumoto, Ting-Toomey, Nishida, Kim & Heyman, 1996). “Identifying with those who hold power allows those who are marginalised to survive but can create both a personal and internal as well as professional schism” (Kawano & Chang, 2019, p. 241-242). In the classroom/practicum setting, students from marginalised groups may carry the burden of how they are seen, how their bodies are perceived in movement, and whether they fit the part relative to what is normative. Sometimes, such experiences remain private and manifest as individuals having to offer justification on behalf of their entire culture (Kumagai & Lypson, 2009). The following propositions/questions aid my ongoing reflection: how are

'atypical' behaviours of a student interpreted? Are educators cognizant of their preconceived notions (and the embodiment of those notions) in movement interpretation and curriculum creation? Are aspects of the student's cultural experience addressed in the classroom? What are students' traditional views of mental health? How and where, then, may non-traditional students (and perhaps faculty) conjure agency within their identities and professional practice? Across nationalities, beliefs about self-awareness, self-expression, familial relational dynamics, relationship to authority, and emotional expression are varied and culturally entrenched. Therefore, it may be ethically contentious to overlook the culture-specific subjectivity and nuance in nonverbal communication, body language, movement patterns, movement quality, music preferences, and relational and societal norms (Boas, 2013; Caldwell, 2013; Nichols, 2019). DMT's unexamined biases about the embodied self, projected through these very channels, may be "a conduit for the somatic abuse of power" (Caldwell, 2013, p. 189; Foucault, 1980).

In addressing the power differentials within DMT, we question the following: who has access to DMT education? Who can offer DMT? Who are the recipients of DMT? Within the existing widespread discourse on culturally competent and culturally responsive Dance Movement Therapy, there is an understandable but disproportionate critique towards the last of those questions - the complexities surrounding white-Anglo DMTs providing therapeutic services to non-traditional clients/POC (people of colour) (Boas, 2013; Caldwell, 2013; Carmichael, 2012; Chang, 2016; Chen, Kakkad & Balzano, 2008; Kawano & Chang, 2019; Dosamantes-Beaudry, 1999; Mayor, 2012). However, studies emerging from DMT professionals and faculty of colour have received significantly less attention in the literature (Kawano & Chang, 2019). In a recent analysis of Dance Movement Therapy pedagogy, Kawano and Chang (2019) uphold the prevalence of microaggressions and similar acts of 'othering' endured by DMT students and faculty who rest within intersectional non-traditional sociocultural identities. The current study is impelled by the fact that non-traditional students and faculty manifest as literal black sheep in the DMT community, one that has historically constituted white, non-disabled, upper-middle-class, cis and heterosexual women. "Students and professional

dance/movement therapists continue to experience subtle and unconscious racial, cultural, gender, and ethnic bias within the classroom and clinical setting from faculty, other students, and clinical supervisors" (Chang, 2016, p. 271; Gilmore, 2005; Nishida, 2008; Slade, 2013; Smith, 2011).

The current study responds to a lack of literature on the experiences of non-traditional students and faculty members in Australasia. American DMT field has affirmatively seen a burgeoning number of students of colour in graduate programs in the past 50 years (Chang, 2016), and attempts to keep abreast are discernible in graduate education in North America, mainly (Hervey & Stuart, 2012). Additionally, this research draws upon numerous sources of literature from the American DMT stratosphere. The prioritisation of multiculturalism comes as a radical shift in an already radical profession, considering historical neglect of sociocultural identity. A tangible example is the documented disproportionate ratio of professors of colour v/s white faculty in the United States. Incomplete representation at the faculty level manifests itself at the student level, and ways of being of individuals of colour are 'othered', exoticised, or dismissed (Chang, 2016). Efforts towards *cultural competency; cultural congruency* - utilising culturally germane movement assessment and intervention tools*;* and *mutuality* – a co-created and adaptable approach to movement interpretation accounting for the individual's cultural authority - in recent years respond to systemic and socio-political power structures in the DMT field and their adverse impacts on mental health (Carmichael 2012; Chang 2016; Foucault, 1980). Inviting and prioritising these ideologies in the classroom may narrow the chasm between what a therapist is professionally trained to do, how they are trained to be, and what may be truly safe, culturally appropriate, and authentic to their lived experiences (Cole, 2008; Nolan, 2013; Kawano & Chang 2019).

2.5 Intertwining: White Supremacy, Cultural Competency, Multicultural Education and Critical Consciousness

2.5.1 Cultural Nuances

The relationship between our bodies and the societies and environments surrounding our bodies is reciprocal and bi-directional. Still, formal definitions of culture often neglect the role of the human body in how cultural dynamics manifest themselves (Dosamantes-Beaudry, 1997). "Why not then begin with the premise that the fact of our embodiment can be a valuable starting point for rethinking the nature of culture and our existential situation as cultural beings?" (Csordas, 1994, p. 6). Each culture holds its subjective meanings about the nature of the core self (Kim & Sherman, 2007). This study revolves around the experiences of non-traditional students, all of whom come from non-western cultures, deeming it pertinent to address the nuances of cultural groups. Specifically, the Individualistic-Collectivist cultural continuum discusses this. The term 'continuum' dismantles a prevalent myth about cultural categories - that they exist as rigid, binary entities. In reality, they exist on a spectrum as individuals from individualistic cultures may possess collectivist traits and vice versa. Individualistic and Collectivist tendencies dictate how we are socialised within our communities, influencing how we think of ourselves, others, and the norms and values we come to personify. Herein, we explicate individualism and collectivism separately; although both exist in every culture in varied proportions, one is generally predominant (Gudykunst et al., 1996). The independent self, one who is a distinct entity, lies at the crux of individualistic cultures, whereas the group or collective is considered the basic unit of collectivist cultures. Individualistic cultures, generally in North American and Western European countries, regard an individual's personal needs, motives, and goals as paramount, whereas collectivist cultures amplify social belonging and group harmony relative to individual satisfaction (Kim & Sherman, 2007; Gudykunst et al., 1996). Thereby, individualistic cultures inevitably champion self-expression, independent decision-making, and emotional self-disclosure, traits which are generally difficult and undervalued by collectivist cultures. Conversely, collectivist cultures highly regard

conformity to group/public norms with high expectations to make decisions and endure self-sacrifice for the 'greater good'. However, this also means that individuals in collectivist cultures can rely on and are benevolently taken by their kind or in-group members, unlike individualistic cultures that bear more of an 'each to their own' attitude (Carducci, 2012; Ko, 2020; Lee, 2013). Correspondingly, differences in social support-seeking behaviour align congruously. Research suggests that Asians and Asian Americans across the board hesitate to actively seek social support compared to European Americans (Kim et al., 2008). The classroom culture reflects the aforementioned values and norms unsurprisingly, Western environments encourage self-expression, self-directed work, asking questions, speaking up, and engaging in critical thought to challenge the status quo. In contrast, classrooms in collectivist cultures harbour a strict hierarchical relationship between teacher and student and necessitate following rules, listening to the teacher, and obscuring personal/emotional content (Ko, 2020).

When non-traditional students move to western countries to pursue their education, many challenges await them. Of these, language difficulties, social support and the incongruity with social values and norms reign supreme and contribute to acculturative stress, a phenomenon that, "accompanies emotional pain, such as feelings of powerlessness, marginality, inferiority, loneliness, and perceived alienation and discrimination" (Yeh & Inose, 2003, p. 17). Difficulties with the English language, educational values emulating conventional Eurocentric individualistic values, financial stressors and unconscious stigmas surrounding international students' accents compound the acculturative stress they experience. For instance, students with non-native accents are met with unconscious biases regarding their social status, intelligence, social attractiveness, and education, leading to negative stereotyping and discrimination (Lee, 2013). As this thesis dismantles the 'ways of being' and 'ways of thinking' that are often incontestably assumed as normative or universal, a contextual understanding of cultural nuances guide may enable a more critical, informed analysis (Lee, 2013).

2.5.2 White Supremacy

Defining the insidious epidemic that is white supremacy is indispensable in unpacking social inequities. As defined by DiAngelo (2012), White Supremacy is a "political-economic social system of domination" (p. 145). An eerily nasty force bearing roots in colonisation and slavery, White Supremacy encompasses institutionalised, societal and cultural 'ways of being' that place white culture and white people on a pedestal. "Whiteness", borne from White Supremacy, implies a conscious or subconscious normative 'way of being', thus categorising every non-white as 'other', 'cultural, 'exotic' or 'of colour'. As per the philosophy of White Supremacy, everything, every being, exists relative to that which is white (Menakem, 2017; Leonardo, 2004; hooks, 1992). As White (2019) judiciously articulates, "white people's bodies and cultural practices are "unmarked"" - they simply *are* - "...while people of colour's bodies are "marked" (p. 3). An "invisible veil", a term coined by Sue and Sue (1999), defined as "a cultural phenomenon that allows individuals to unconsciously develop worldviews that are based in ideological systems of exclusion" (p. 142), appositely describes the veneer of White Supremacy in DMT pedagogy and practice (Gipson, 2015). In daily teaching, supervision, and practice, it is the invisible and thus unexamined and habitual supremacy of 'ways of being' and 'ways of doing' - present but inconspicuous. "It is the vantage point from where one can assume normalcy and unquestioned authenticity" (Kawano & Chang, 2019, p. 239). A consequence of the uncontested domineering force of White Supremacy in every aspect of society is a rapidly developing body of academic literature aiming to critically consider how to embed multiculturalism at the core of pedagogy, research, and practice (Speight & Vera, 2004).

2.5.3 Cultural Competency: Is it Sufficient?

As Gipson (2015) boldly poses, "can... [we] confidently believe that the components of cultural competency - knowledge, skills, and awareness - make the invisible veil visible?

Can teaching cultural competency prepare students to raise critical consciousness and resist oppression?" (p. 142). For reference, an explication of what, why, and how of cultural competency sits in Chapter 1 of this investigation.

A commendable piece of scholarship by Hervey & Stuart (2012) offers partial insight into the current state of cultural competency education in DMT graduate programs in the United States and subsequent pedagogical challenges and recommendations. Their method of inquiry entailed interviews with ten administrators and educators from six schools. Their literature review includes an assessment of the Council for Accreditation of Counselling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) 's multicultural curriculum standards. In response to the CACREP's bylaws, several scholars underscore the development of cultural competence as a continual, nurturing process. As Suyemoto et al. argue, "it is not enough for a training program to initiate this learning process, it must also continually cultivate it in all aspects of training, including academic coursework, research training, and supervised clinical practice" (Suyemoto et al., 2007, p. 211 as cited by Hervey & Stuart, 2012). The interviews in Hervey & Stuart's (2012) study sought to understand how cultural competency is taught at a graduate level in DMT. Interview responses that are relevant to the current investigation are as follows:

- One interviewee expressed the indispensable need to learn one's way out of deep-rooted racism in nonverbal communication.

- Five interviewees expressed the myopic normative bias inherent in predominant movement analysis methods.

- Several instructors expressed frustration around the education of cultural competency "skills".

- In five out of six programs, interviewees vouched for the quality of multicultural education in their respective programs. These programs also had distinct courses designed to address multicultural issues, engineered into the curriculum.

Overall, interview responses suggested a greater prevalence of challenges over successes. It is highly noteworthy that all interviewees were white women who felt unequipped and uncomfortable offering education about different cultures/races. The most conspicuous and resonant challenge was the lack of awareness - mostly white - students possess regarding their own cultures, value systems and inherent privileges. Hervey and Stuart (2012) note, "This seems to be exacerbated by the minimal exposure students have with students and faculty representing diverse cultures and other minorities… The impact on students' cultural competencies resulting from cross-cultural encounters with faculty, site supervisors, or peers versus with clients (in terms of the power and privilege differential) is worth exploring further" (p. 93).

Correspondingly, a resonant disappointment regarding the lack of representation of faculty and students of colour manifested in interview responses (Hervey & Stuart, 2012). Developing and nurturing cultural competency hinges upon Cultural Humility, "the ability to maintain a stance that is open to other aspects of cultural identity" (Nichols, 2019, p. 10). Then, echoing Hervey & Stuart (2012) and Suyemoto et al. (2007), Nichols (2019) suggests that cultural competency is not a destination, but a value system, a way of being, nurtured by cultivating heedful introspection, self-re-evaluation and cultural humility (Nichols, 2019). How does this inform my research?

Tormala, Patel, Soukup, and Clark (2018) conducted another such study, exploring cultural competence and cultural humility. A cohort of second-year clinical psychology PhD students enrolled in a Culturally Competent Counselling course was required to complete Cultural Formulation (CF) assignments. Two such assignments were assigned during the middle and end of the course and followed a thematic analysis. Six themes: 1. Cultural self-awareness 2. Intersectionality 3. Perspective-taking 4. Unsupported cultural statements 5. Scientific mindedness, and 6. Power/privilege differential manifested. Enhancements in attitudes and beliefs along most of these themes evidenced that students' understandings and capabilities of working with a diverse group of clients advanced through the implementation of a Cultural Competency-based course. The

aforementioned studies corroborate the positive development of culturally sensitive care in the mental health field.

Finally, Awais & Yali's (2013) 's research summarises concise and concrete strategies led by successful graduate programs that intentionally prioritise diversification and liberatory education in Psychology: Prioritising representation by augmenting the faculty's racial diversity; Conscious recruitment techniques that offer an equitable playing field for non-traditional students; Implement retention strategies, enabling non-traditional students to feel valued, through multicultural competency courses, social justice-oriented research and mentorships between students and faculty of colour; and lastly, fostering an overarching critically conscious and racially inclusive environment (p. 131). Therefore, Cultural competence is a definite step in the right direction; however, the recruitment, representation and consideration of non-traditional students and faculty (of colour) - bound to diversify and enrich the DMT playing field with their unique lived experiences - have been left to 'serendipitous happenings'. Instead, this must be strategically prioritised (Awais & Yali, 2013; Chang, 2016; Hammond & Yung, 1993; Talwar, 2004).

Sue (1998), one of the first scholars to address this subject, emphasises that cultural competence can be effective beyond an appreciation and acknowledgement of diverse cultural 'ways of being'. Effective multicultural competence hinges upon expanding from micro-level individual dynamics to a macro-level consideration of MCC in DMT as a social justice agenda. Intrapersonal, interpersonal, and societal models of mental health are imperative contributors. Then, communities and societies would guide interventions as much as person-to-person frameworks (Speight & Vera, 2004; Vera & Speight, 2003). As Cantrick et al. (2018) impeccably articulate, "socially justice practices within the field of DMT involve a combination of body-based [micro-level] and social justice [macro-level] lenses to create a comprehensive understanding of oppression" (p. 193).

In further supplementing Cantrick et al. (2018)'s claim, a multifaceted approach enables a comprehensive understanding and an effective toolbox to dismantle oppression. Herein, the messy process of confronting our power, privilege, systemic oppression, and the infiltrating effects of white supremacy is ineluctable. Open dialectic discourse is central to decentring a normative, exclusionary DMT epistemology. DMT's longstanding goal of attaining multicultural standards is contingent upon an authentic investment in the experiences of non-traditional students, "to truly honour the experiences of those who are not in advantaged groups" (Hadley, 2013, p. 380) so as avoid re-oppressing systemically disadvantaged groups of people (Abrams & Moio, 2009; Awais & Yali, 2013; Gipson, 2015; Kawano & Chang, 2019).

2.5.4 DMT's Next Door Neighbour: A Glimpse

Within the realm of creative arts therapies, Drama Therapy, Art Therapy, and Music Therapy have engaged in research on liberatory practices in their respective professions. Here, Art therapy dominates most of the literature on the discourse of cultural competence (Talwar, 2015; Gipson, 2015; Awais & Yali, 2013; Hadley, 2013). Sajnani (2012) is a prominent drama therapist and scholar dedicated to uplifting the field with critical race feminist theories. Music therapists have similarly capitalised on feminist pedagogical practices to encourage critical discourse and co-create "anti-oppressive music therapy" (Kawano & Chang, 2019, p. 239). So far, art therapy has most prominently advanced towards addressing underrepresented social identities (Awais & Yali, 2013); decentring art therapy norms at a tertiary education level (Talwar, 2015); and, of course, akin dance therapy, dismantling white hegemonic ideologies in the white therapist-diverse client dynamic (Hamrick & Byma, 2017). Within DMT, the academic literature abundantly consists of Multicultural Competence guidelines that enable a counsellor/therapist to serve a diverse clientele.

Delving into what the competencies are and how educators and practitioners administer and implement them lies beyond the scope of this study. Instead, I am invested in exploring how the state of cultural competency, or the lack thereof, in DMT graduate school programs translates to the experiences of non-traditional students. The scant research in Dance Movement Therapy is a burning call to action to address how normative educational frameworks enact their dominant ideas through counter-narratives from non-traditional students.

2.6 Multicultural Education and Social Justice DMT

2.6.1 Addressing the Chasm

> *As a therapist, I enjoyed my power and ability to diagnose and provide treatment to people. In my heart, however, I did not want to reduce a person to psychopathological diagnosis that could be oppressive rather than empowering. I realized I had been romanced into thinking that individual psychotherapy could heal, but what I saw over time was that many clients who met treatment goals ended up isolated from family and friends, many who were viewed as "unhealthy". My questioning the status quo created a "rupture" in my professional identity. (Nolan, 2003, p. 177).*

This section opens with an account of Nolan (2013)'s journey toward establishing her practice as an intersectional art therapist. A trained art psychotherapist in the United States, working in private practice of over 100 therapists, Nolan could see that which was a blind spot for her co-workers. She saw the inconspicuous disparity between the normative system that pathologises and individualises clients' problems versus the need to consider clients as integral constituents of their broader familial and social contexts and the bidirectional connection between them. Echoing Kawano & Chang (2019), her experience too depicted "an incongruence between theory and practice because applying the learned theories with non-normative bodies may not even be addressed in their training" (p. 237).

Driven to establish her private practice by pioneering an emancipatory approach to art therapy, she cultivated a space where familial and societal connection and individual psychotherapy are concomitantly possible. (Nolan, 2003, p. 177). Integrating a critical theory framework, "a movement that challenges psychology to work towards emancipation and social justice, and that opposes the use of psychology to perpetuate oppression and injustice" (Austin and Prilleltensky, 2001, p. 1, as cited in Nolan, 2003). Then, healing happens not *to* clients but *with* them. Such a liberatory and critical perspective sets the stage for the remaining section, calling to question and imagining what a truly multicultural and socially justice field of Dance Movement Therapy may look like (Nolan, 2003).

2.6.2 A Critical Agenda

Thus far, it has become evident that we must critically envisage what it means to be multiculturally competent. To think critically is to be evaluative, analytical, and logical. Berbules and Berk (1999) define a critical thinker as "a critical consumer of information: [they] are driven to seek reasons and evidence. Part of this is mastering certain skills of thought: learning to diagnose invalid forms of argument, knowing how to make and defend distinctions, and on '' (Berbules & Berk, 1999, as cited in Kumagai & Lypson, 2009, p. 783). Although highly reliant on the relational felt senses of the body, Dance Movement Therapy can seem at odds with the agenda of critical thinking. However, a critical thinking lens demands questioning how we know what we know and hereby questions how a system may "promote social justice and human liberation rather than human suffering and social control" (Austin & Prilleltensky, 2001, p.2, as cited in Nolan, 2003).

Social justice in its simplest form is "defined as the equitable treatment of all people" (Cantrick et al., 2018, p. 191), and "the relationship between DMT and social justice exists because social oppression is experienced in and through the body" (Cantrick et

al., 2018, p. 192). Much of what we know in Dance Movement Therapy, as discussed thus far, is implicated in hegemonic white, able-bodied, heteronormative norms that fail to serve everyone (Boas, 2013; Caldwell, 2013; Cantrick et al., 2018; Carmichael, 2012; Chang, 2015; Chang, 2016; Dosmantes-Beaudry, 1999; Gilmore, 2005; Hadley, 2013; Hervey & Stuart, 2012; Jenkins-Hayden, 2011; Jorden, 2021; Kawano & Chang, 2019; Ko, 2020; Mayor, 2012; Nichols, 2019; Nishida, 2008; Sajnani, 2012; Schultz, 2018; Slade, 2013; Smith, 2011; White, 2019). Kawano & Chang's (2019)'s work is the latest published call to action urging answers and ramifications for social justice work in DMT. Per their expertise, in addition to other like-minded scholars, oppression presently manifests in two predominant forms in the DMT industry - through the "marginalized positions of the professional identity of dance/movement therapists" and "unexamined cultural practices in the field" (Kawano & Chang, 2019, p. 240). The scope of this research is the former. How does it show up in the student experience? This research frequently draws upon Kawano & Chang's (2019) work, *Applying Critical Consciousness to Dance/Movement Therapy Pedagogy and the Politics of the Body* seeing as it is the only body of work in the arena of social justice DMT that extends the cause of multicultural competence to the student and faculty experience. They address the implications of the lack of multicultural competence not just on the client experience but also on the therapist-in-the-making (who, in turn, guides the client experience). Of relevance to the present study is heed paid to the therapist-in-the-making of colour.

Kawano & Chang (2019) pose a few potent questions that help make tangible and help unpack the complex socio-political dynamics at play: Who can learn? Who is allowed in? Once allowed in, who bears privilege and how? Who is teaching? What comprises the curriculum? Does its epistemology perpetuate hierarchies? (p. 240). This process lends itself to developing a Critical Consciousness, a concept grounded in the teaching philosophy of critical pedagogy, with roots in the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's work (Freire, 2014). In conjunction with Foucault (1980)'s theories, Freire's eminent Pedagogy of the Oppressed disseminates the idea that power lives and breathes in the bodies of the animate and the inanimate. I - it is embodied within theories, ideologies, institutions, and techniques and is thus inherited unconsciously. The critical thinker is always in

relation to others. Developing a critical consciousness is then an ongoing process of reflexivity of the power and privilege inherent in all relationships. This process of "reading the world" (Kumagai & Lypson, 2009, p. 783) enables adopting a social justice 'way of thinking' and 'way of being'. Both cerebral and affective in nature, it offers a "rehumanisation of human relationships" (Kumagai & Lypson, 2009, p. 783).

How does this complement the existing Multicultural Competency framework?

An unconsciousness around the fact that our thoughts, behaviours, and practices exist as culturally influenced entities breeds a lack of true multicultural competency. For instance, the Eurocentric assumption of its culture as normal overlooks its dominance over other cultures and, subsequently, the power it possesses. As Nichols (2019) cleverly articulates, "these standards of the dominant culture can make it difficult for therapists to view themselves as anything less than culturally competent" (p. 14). In developing a critical consciousness mindset, maximum saliency is no longer placed on a series of lists of knowledge and attributes or a memorised skill set of questions regarding a particular culture but rather an awareness through a 'bird's eye view' of all intersecting factors and identities at play. More substantially, in a critical pedagogy framework, students are taught to reflect on their own lived experiences as a jumping-off point and truly deconstruct the assumptions inherent in their worldview (Gipson, 2015; Johnson, 2015; Lynn, 2004; Mayor, 2012). B.J. Love in Adams et al. (2018), a social justice scholar and activist, elucidates the four pillars of building a critical consciousness from the ground up: cyclical awareness; analysis; action; and accountability/allyship of the oppression (as cited in Kawano & Chang, 2019). These steps designed as "neither mysterious nor difficult, static nor fixed" (Adams et al., 2018, p. 471) are subject to practice day by day, situation by situation, whenever social inequities may be instrumental. While it is not within the scope of this chapter to make recommendations about implementing a critical consciousness framework, its mention establishes the value of exploring lived experiences to guide truly socially just social justice frameworks.

Engendering multicultural competency also requires dethroning individual counselling/psychotherapy off its current pedestal. Traditional education and practice disproportionately isolate the cause of the individual in intervention strategies and entails the sequestration of an individual from their socio-political structures alongside an overemphasis on 'fixing' the individual (Goodman et al., 2015; Nolan, 2013; Speight & Vera, 2004). However, "individual interventions will not provide liberation for people because they do not alter the prevailing social conditions… Liberation is a social project requiring concerted, focused effort by a committed conscious, interdependent collective" (Speight & Vera, 2004, p. 114). In contrast to western psychology's myopic credence in individualism, a multicultural framework may warrant the consideration of systemic factors, thus viewing the individual as part of a larger, complex cultural unit. Rather than framing problems intra-psychically and individually, a socially just, critically conscious, multicultural lens underscores the social environment and its subjective constructions in pedagogy and practice (Chang, 2015; Speight & Vera, 2004; Chang, 2015). Such a deconstruction of pedagogical norms and methods fosters an embodied knowing and generates theory through dialogue. What Boler (2004) refers to as the critical pedagogy of "discomfort" then "invites us to examine how our modes of seeing have been specifically shaped by the dominant culture of our historical moment" (p.xx). It is beyond the one-on-one awareness intervention strategies of working with a person of colour but instead calls upon an investment of the practitioner as a social justice thinker and advocate on a systemic level (Cantrick et al., 2018; Gipson, 2015; Speight & Vera, 2004).

Research suggests that counselling and psychology students exposed to a social justice-oriented educational framework possess the emotional impetus to understand social injustice and demonstrate the willingness to orchestrate social change (Vaillancourt, 2012). The past decade has cemented the necessity for multiculturalism initiatives in counselling, psychology, and creative arts therapies, which is to say, it is no longer a topic of contention (Goodman et al., 2015). Although well-intended, multicultural competencies at large have not accomplished all that they sought. Still rooted in the values of the Global North, well-intended multicultural education is incongruous with

developing a critical consciousness about complex matters surrounding identity politics and with the simple process of listening. DMT is an ideal microcosm to explore social injustice, not just overtly but non-verbally and subtly. Akin to the portrayal of DMT as a microcosm for the broader mental health field, the therapy room, the educator-student relationship, or the therapeutic relationship serves as a microcosm for social activism. Such a foresighted outlook toward therapy promotes the integration of the wider community/society in the interpersonal relationship. What multicultural education does not *yet* achieve is listening to and applying the lived experiences of diverse groups of people (Kawano & Chang, 2019; Chen, Kakkad & Balzano, 2008; Gorski, 2007). Multicultural education subsumed in a social justice vision would equip and encourage the DMT community to think critically about the systemic nature of psychological health and reconsider the definition of 'dysfunction'. Tangibly put, social justice therapists would be "strengths-based, trauma-informed… client-defined" (Cantrick et al., 2018, p. 198)

2.7 Assimilating

As Freire (2014) suggests in his work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, we constantly create and renovate our socio-political-cultural identities, moment to moment. No matter the potency of the invisible veil over oppression, we can collectively engender social transformation through the development of critical consciousness. Via awareness, reflection, and action, social transformation is our prerogative. Part and parcel of honing this skill are voicing and lending a voice in the presence of manipulation, dismissing, silencing, and coercion (Johnson, 2015). As Johnson (2015) highlights in his work, "in the spirit of these counter-hegemonic approaches, I believe it is important to treat the learners as central to the process. My role is not to impart knowledge or information, but to help prepare learners to become actively engaged in understanding and working with their own experiences" (Johnson, 2014, p. 87). In this spirit, I end this chapter with a few guiding ruminations: how represented do non-traditional students feel in DMT graduate

programs? What are their needs? How are their needs catered to, if at all? How does a pedagogical approach reliant on an inadequate multicultural competency-based framework inadvertently affect the experiences of students of colour? Moreover, how does the enhanced representation and views of students and faculty of colour augment the agenda of existing cultural competency efforts? As Nolan (2003) suggests, the demystification and unpacking of oppression begin in one’s education and training, as is occurring in mine. Imbibing a critically conscious, socially just, multicultural ‘way of thinking' does not have to feel as heavy as the world's weight. It can begin when we students are encouraged to consider our intersecting identities, our positions in the broader social context and their contribution to the same. “Able to build upon our knowledge and experience, we can become more mindful of our own oppression and the oppression to which we contribute” (Nolan, 2003, p. 180).

3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Unpacking concerns and opportunities presented by qualitative research paradigms opens this chapter. Resolving to work within the qualitative paradigm, constructivism provides an epistemological position that frames my relationship with knowledge and also the knowledge-making in this thesis. The chapter outlines how semi-structured interview techniques are used to elicit often unheard voices. Narrative inquiry and thematic analysis are briefly outlined as they provide the means for sharing and distilling the key themes emerging from the five interviews. The chapter concludes by briefly discussing notions of trustworthiness and this study's limitations.

3.2 The 'Dirty' Word: Qualitative Research

A tolerance of contradiction, an acceptance of the unity of opposites and an understanding of the coexistence of opposites as permanent, not conditional or transitory, are part of everyday lay perception and thought (Spencer-Rodgers, Williams, & Peng, 2007, p. 265 as cited in Liu, 2011, p. 217)

Qualitative Research means many things, all at once. Akin to much of reality, qualitative research bears a complex history, cutting through myriad disciplines and schools of thought that are multi-paradigmatic in nature. Fundamentally, qualitative research is "a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p.4). The essence of the present research aims to answer the question:

> How do non-traditional students in western Dance Movement Therapy graduate programs navigate racial/cultural challenges in their education and training?

Seeking various interpretations of a common human experience must presume and welcome identical, similar, dissimilar, opposite, and everything in between points of view. Upon first sight, the research question in and of itself is a political one, politically charged with the coexistence of hegemonic dichotomies such as 'non-traditional' and 'western'. The content at the heart of this study embodies a tolerance of contradictions and intersections.

Throughout this study, I situate myself as a criticalist, a student, a researcher, a social critic, an artist, a therapist, a learner, and a female person of Indian origin. As described by Denzin & Lincoln (2011), a criticalist is an individual who finds home in the following fundamental assumptions:

- Thought is socially and historically contextual and is governed by power dynamics.
- Society constitutes a hierarchical ladder of privilege enforced through oppression - which continues to be reinforced as long as subordinates accept their status as inevitable.
- Oppression is chameleon-like, and manifests in many ways - its various personas are intertwined through intersectionality
- Conventional research practices are complicit in race, class and, gender based oppression (Kincheloe, McLaren & Steinberg, 2011).

My experiences as a non-traditional student in a DMT graduate program in New Zealand often situated me at the receiving end of oppressive actions; whether I allowed myself to be oppressed by said actions is another discussion. Safe to say, curiosities emerged during my enrolment, which led me to similarly enquire into the experiences of students/ex-students who are/have been in my position. Meanings of oppression, how oppression is experienced, and how it is dealt with are all profoundly subjective. My position as a criticalist warrants a fearless objective to unveil that which is typically

veiled, question what is taken for granted, and "consummate a relationship with emancipatory consciousness" (Kincheloe et al., 2011, p. 164). While this research necessitates an emancipatory and investigative stance, it does so from the baseline assumption of complexity. Grounded in an epistemology of complexity, I acknowledge the complexities of lived experience and the varied dimensions of power (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Foucault, 1980). The literature review chapter introduces the embodiment of an unapologetic stance as it explores the social constructions of consciousness surrounding DMT and its pedagogy and the political inscriptions shrouded within. Default western 'ways-of-being' entrenched in various aspects of the DMT graduate school experience is highlighted as they may coexist in a turbulent *or* harmonious *or* both relationship with non-traditional students.

The reticent need to accept a "unity of opposites" (Spencer-Rodgers, Williams, & Peng, 2007, p. 265 as cited in Liu, 2011, p. 217) presented itself as I began to look for an appropriate research paradigm and method to scaffold this thesis project. Qualitative research bears a dirty aftertaste. As Smith (1999), cited in Denzin & Lincoln (2008), states, "The word itself is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary" (p. 1). Qualitative research came to life through the colonizer's quest to report about exotic, 'Other' worlds. Under the disguise of social science subjects such as sociology and anthropology, qualitative researchers, usually white settlers, invaded foreign lands to examine their traditions and customs, concealing an implicit agenda to further the colonial initiative (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Despite its subjective, interpretive and seemingly empathetic intention of "concern for the other", the primitive, non-white, 'Other', qualitative research, from the start, "was implicated in a racist project". (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 2).

Like most things, qualitative research, too, has evolved from its colonial roots. The lifespan of qualitative research is an extensive one and comprises a massive breadth of ontologies, epistemologies, and ideologies. What began as a European-led colonised ethnography project has transcended through postmodern and post-structural faces,

abandoning preconceived values and prejudices and demanding accountability. Along this journey, qualitative research has evolved from a purely positivist process to offering various possibilities for critical, emancipatory, feminist, and Afrocentric perspectives. Between the two extremes lies a multitude of paradigms and strategies of inquiry, delving into which is out of the scope of this chapter. It is pertinent to assert that "the qualitative research act can no longer be viewed from within a neutral or object positivist perspective. Class, race, gender, and ethnicity shape inquiry, making research a multicultural process" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 28). This research project is a politically charged journey, as is our present lived experience. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

As a graduate student at the University of Auckland, I am pursuing my education within a western educational curriculum framework. There are a set of challenges at play, especially during a global pandemic, in pursuing a purely decolonised methodology, within which I, too, question: can research methodology be entirely decolonised? This project's production and validation of knowledge are contingent upon fulfilling academic criteria based on western empiricism. Moreover, the overarching dominance of western ideas and practices in Asian education itself is evident in the adoption and extolment of western epistemology, structure and content by Asian social sciences (Liu, 2011). The indisputable power and resource imbalances between the west and east, western v/s non-western scholars, and correspondingly English v/s non-English speaking individuals and countries have furthered said glorification. Asian universities strive for western ideals with their prestige contingent upon fulfilling a certain threshold of publications in European and American journals. The tolerance of contradiction is once again apparent. There is no way out. A blank slate cannot be created and is not the end goal. As Liu (2011) stated, "Rather in the near future, global psychology will emerge as a patchwork quilt of pluralistic practices connected to a still-dominant American centre" (p. 219). The paradox here, then, is to take a step towards a decolonised embodiment with colonised means.

3.3 Bricoleur

Here, the notion of a qualitative researcher as a bricoleur is instrumental (Kincheloe et al, 2011; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). In the face of blurredness, the bricolage represents critical consciousness-driven research. A bricoleur is a resourceful maker of quilts who creatively makes do with what is at their disposal. The bricolage, or the "poetic making-do" (de Certeau, 1984, p. xv), results from the researcher's novel piecing together of tools and techniques to conduct research based on interpretive and liberatory values (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). In a research setting, the bricolage embraces complexity and 'multidisciplinarity', proactively weaving appropriate research methods contrary to the passive application of that which is conventional and correct. Grounded in self and social awareness, a bricolage reveals the individual entangled in their web of social structures, as is intended in this thesis. Where applicable, western insights and non-western wisdom are woven together by the bricoleur in their concern for social transformation. Therefore, Kincheloe (2011)'s notion of the bricolage is instrumental in marrying both my "hermeneutical search for understanding and the critical concern with social change for social justice" (Kincheloe et al., 2011, p. 169). Central to this critical hermeneutical outlook is a tantamount understanding of the oppressive forces affecting disadvantaged individuals and the stories and experiences of non-traditional groups. Albeit conducted through hermeneutical methods bearing colonial history, knowledge production and dissemination can be liberatory when traditionally marginalised groups leverage it.

Within my process as a bricoleur, as a researcher, the distance of objectivity is actively rejected. Instead, the invested act of "being in the world" (Kincheloe et al., 2011, p. 169) and the research are prioritised, enabling the rich, thick, and complex realities to surface. A proactive hermeneutical awareness in the process may empower trust and safety in research relationships, which ultimately determine the authenticity of the 'data' procured (Kincheloe et al., 2011; Manning & Kunkel, 2014). In her case study research situated in Xantin, a Chuj Maya town in Guatemala, novice researcher Alexandra Allweiss claims

to be “lost in a mountain” (Bhopal et al., 2016, p. 9). The analogy encapsulates the ups and downs of her process in a marginalised community, all through which she centred her relationships and friendships with individuals of the community. To find one’s way through the mountain, Alexandra emphasizes the researcher’s prerogative to critically appraise one’s positionality and the history of chosen research methods. “I questioned my complicity in the troubled colonist and imperialist history of qualitative research,” says Alexandra (Bhopal et al., 2016, p. 12). Akin to her process, I hope to lay bare the tensions and tolerance of contradictions inherent in pursuing my research and, through the relational power of trust, safety and vulnerability in the interview process, do due diligence to voices that traditionally are not handed the microphone (Bhopal et al., 2016).

Similarly, I am not determined to offer solutions but to provoke more questions and introspection regarding the experiences of Dance Movement Therapy students in western graduate school programs. In this research, I anticipate incongruities between participants' experiences to arise. The object of inquiry - the experiences of non-traditional students - is multifaceted, occupying myriad contexts and histories. These differences may be that of language, culture, value systems, opinions, interpretations, race, gender, class, epistemology, and more. “Because all observers view an object of inquiry from their own vantage points in the web of reality, no portrait of a social phenomenon is ever exactly the same as another” (Kincheloe et al., 2011, p. 170). Each of these vantage points arises from a unique weaving of historical, social, psychological, biological, and cultural factors. Alongside its critical focus on power, an interpretivist paradigm such as constructivism will champion the meaning-making of such complexity and diversity in the data (Kincheloe et al., 2011). As an interpretive bricoleur, I aim to embrace the complexities of my participant’s lived experiences, their “being-in-the-world” (Kincheloe et al., 2011, p. 170) and the social structures that serpentine through their lives.

3.4 Critical Constructivism

To venture into an inquiry of diverse experiences necessitates the art of relationship building, listening and accepting the spectrum of constructions people create and offer. Constructivism affords me the space to navigate the labyrinth of unconventional experiences in a traditionally constructed social world. The works of Lincoln & Guba (2013) are instrumental in charting the values and ideologies that situate my research in the constructivist realm. Fundamentally, constructivism assumes that reality is socially and experientially constructed, leaving room for multiple realities to coexist and prioritising intersubjective experiences (Eisner, 1998). When I forge a relationship and engage in conversation with a participant, the research findings emerge from nuances and vulnerabilities of interaction. In this spirit, our lived experiences do not taint, but rather mould the knowledge we generate. The persona of the unbiased, detached inquirer is irrelevant here (Willis, 2007; Bentley, 2003). The social and cultural constructs of identity, education, mental health, and embodiment are relevant to this research; it is not 'us' and 'them', us being the participants, interpersonal space, and me being the 'them'. Rather, it is 'us' *among* 'them', affecting them and being affected by them. The truth then unveils as a "composite picture of how people think", a bricolage assembled with assorted bricoles (Appleton & King, 2002, p. 643). An element of uniformity is anticipated in that the interviewees and I share a sense of 'outsiderness' (Merriam, Johnson-Bailey, Lee, Kee, Ntseane, and Muhamad, 2001). Nevertheless, our histories, cultural, socioeconomic, racial and educational backgrounds contribute to a nonlinear coalition of meanings of a singular phenomenon (Merriam et al., 2001; Willig, 2016). Each individual's unique contexts and corresponding relationality are more meaningful to my understanding than a unanimous generalised conclusion, this is how non-traditional students live and breathe, and this is what they need. In going narrow yet deep, by interviewing only five individuals, this study extends precedence to thick

descriptions (Bentley, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 2013; Willig, 2013). This approach is cardinal to denouncing the reductionist and diluted traditions outlined in the literature review. As Paris (2011) argued, it is essential that we "humanize through research rather than colonize by research" (p.40).

3.5 Data Collection

3.5.1 Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is a relational research methodology, framing the study's data collection process. It mirrors the constructivist, personalised ontology of this research, in which realities are socially constructed. Fundamentally, narrative inquiry offers insight into the meanings of an individual's experience (Savin-Baden & Niekerk, 2007). The way humans experience their worlds is best understood through stories, and it is through these stories that we understand, interpret, and document a spectrum of lived experiences (Savin-Baden & Niekerk, 2007). These lived experiences are felt and narrated not vacuously, but in a specific social, cultural and institutional context (Clandinin & Caine, 2008). As the current study is concerned with evoking personal experiences in a conscientious manner, an ethical stance of curiosity, open-mindedness and confidentiality is adopted. Then, nurturing relationships between researcher(s) and participants is central to the research process (Clandinin & Caine, 2008; Savin-Baden & Niekerk, 2007). A step prior to the interpersonal relationship cultivated between myself and my participants, narrative inquiry necessitates the researcher's exploration, my exploration, of my own inner world and lived experiences (Clandinin & Caine, 2008). Seeing as my own experiences as a non-traditional Dance Movement Therapy student inspire my research, I first inquire into my own lived experience. Inviting my own experiences into the relational space of the interview serves several purposes, such as forging a sense of a connection with the participant; embodying the sort of vulnerability I hope to co-create in the interview process; and setting a direction for the conversation,

whilst dismantling the hierarchical dynamic of myself as the interviewer coaxing answers from the participant (Clandinin, 2006).

As Bhopal et al. (2016) insightfully articulate, "researchers cannot be attentive and respectful to their participant's voices, perspectives and positionality before they engage in self-research" (p. 37). Understanding the self and the other allows for a deeper understanding of the self, relative to the other's stories. Developing the interview questions for this research required me to introspect on my intentions, motivations, and contexts in this study. A stance of transparency and vulnerability about these matters set the stage for a human-to-human dynamic between my participants and me as we treated the interview as a co-created space to learn about one another's experiences (Roer-Strier & Sands, 2015).

Semi-structured interviews scaffolded the interpersonal stories or data. Within the initial few minutes or the relation-building stage of the process, I anecdotally shared the prominent intentions, feelings, and experiences serving as the bedrock of this research with my participant. My questions were designed to evoke descriptive responses contextual to my research interest. However, I not only acknowledged but encouraged diversions from the perceived boundaries of my interview questions. I concur with Savin-Baden & Niekerk (2007) in that the stories elicit need not adhere to a structured storyline. Rather, much like real, lived lives, the stories can and will travel along tangents, face interruptions and/or flow smoothly. For the participant to wholly and authentically share their stories and tangential ones they may trigger took precedence over my predetermined and myopic agendas. Approaching the interview process from a stance of curiosity allowed the participants' stories to guide the conversation, taking it places I could have never planned for it to go. Here, valuing the interpretivist and representational values of a constructivist stance becomes indispensable to, as best as possible, grasp another's meanings of a phenomenon. This begs an exploration of the bias and reflexivity in the research process, discussed at the end of the chapter.

3.5.2 Semi-structured Interviewing

The interviews that you do or that you study are not asocial, ahistorical, events. You do not leave behind your anxieties, your hopes, your blind spots, your prejudices, your class, race, or gender, your location in global social structure, your age and historical positions, your emotions, your past and your sense of possible futures when you set up an interview, and nor does your interviewee when he or she [or they]] agrees to an interview and you both come nervously into the same room. (Wengraf, 2001, p. 4-5).

The data, or rather, sets of stories gathered in this research, surfaced through semi-structured interviews. However, scaffolded with an interview agenda, this style of interviewing enabled participants to freely share their experiences about the phenomenon in question. Structured, or scrupulously unstructured, just enough, semi-structured interviews are designed to foreground the participant's stories and voices (Schostak, 2006; Willig, 2008). Behind the façade of a conversational informality lies a deliberate imprecision. Often, my predetermined *and* spontaneous curiosities steered the interview trajectory. While my predetermined questions fringed the research agenda yet, if participants veered away from the central discussion, the pathway was considered meaningful, allowing the participant room to "redefine the topic" (Willig, 2008, p. 24). In this spirit, power is transferred to the interviewees, and the concept of a singular expert is nullified (Foucault, 1980; Roer-Strier & Sands, 2015). As such, semi-structured interviews are strategically organised yet adaptable enough, allowing room for the unpredicted to surface (Galletta & Cross, 2013; Wengraf, 2001).

For the relevance of this research, I implemented purposive sampling to intentionally recruit non-traditional and international voices (Willig, 2013). The group of participants collectively encompassed and represented lived experiences from New Zealand, India, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Brazil, the UK, and the USA. As I co-created the interviews with my participants, the vast spectrum, even within a mere five candidates, of perceptions

and experiences became apparent. The individual experiences within each interview bore coexisting dichotomies, as did the collective experience, those of autonomy versus isolation, independence versus oppression, and resilience versus resistance. A safe space, or as Roer-Strier & Strands (2015) articulate, ″a home for pain″ (p. 264) as I attempted to model non-judgmental, transparent, and vulnerable sharing during the interview. A mutual acknowledgement and acceptance of difficult emotions solidified the relational space. Another dichotomy pertinent to semi-structured interviews is the delicate balance between flexibility and focus. Co-creating a genuine relational dynamic through dialogue offers the safety to generate personal, meaningful stories (Kelly, 2010; Manning & Kunkel, 2014). Seemingly ambiguous, such a method of data collection may appear to defy the rigour of research data. While a quantitative research setting may equate rigorous research processes with accuracy and generalisability in data, the constructivist lens, as explicated, places the acquisition of diverse, thick descriptions on a high pedestal. In this methodological context, rigour lies in the coexistence of not one but many correct answers (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Galletta & Cross, 2013).). In this spirit, intentionally selected data collection methods of narrative inquiry and semi-structured interviewing elicited honest, nuanced stories.

3.6 Thematic Analysis

Delving into a description of data analysis necessitates introspection regarding the purpose of the analysis. Although my research aims to make diverse stories heard, as per a thematic analysis, these stories are sifted through, coded, and categorised to serve the research question. It is naïve, inaccurate, and disempowering to claim that I, as a researcher, am unadulteratedly “giving voice” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 80) to a participant. Rather, the “giving voice” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 80) essence of thematic analysis seeks “an empathic understanding of individuals' experiences” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 80) through thick descriptions and narrative tools. Thematic analysis is a

"method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within the data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Here, within the present thesis, a thematic analysis aims to organise distinct perspectives of a singular phenomenon – the non-traditional student experience in a western Dance Movement Therapy graduate program. Employing thematic analysis to splice and classify the obtained stories into patterns is a veracious meaning-making interpretive process for the researcher, myself (Joffe, 2012; Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process is iterative and inductive, in which themes arose gradually as I immersed myself in the data and allowed it to influence me while still being active in meaning-making (Fugard & Potts, 2019). The high-quality qualitative analysis aims to fuse inductive delineation of a theme from the raw data and deductive delineation of themes from pre-existing theoretical data brought to the research (Joffe, 2012). The dearth of existing research on this topic within the creative arts therapies prioritised an inductive approach.

A tinge of the analytical process appeared during the interviews as participants revealed moments of significance through their language, prosody, gestures, and involvement. As participants' stories unveiled overlapping sentiments, thoughts, and beliefs, an analytical sorting began at this stage itself. Equally, themes arose as I continually engaged with the data during transcription, immersion, and coding of similar meanings and experiences throughout the analysis process. To do this process justice, I repetitively listened to and read through each interview for about 30-40 days. During the initial stages, as Orona (1990) accurately describes, "I literally sat for days on end with the transcribed interviews spread out before me, absorbing them into my consciousness and letting them "float"" (Orona, 1990, as cited in Ezzy, 2013, p. 90). The process of comparing a single participant's ideas among multiple participants' experiences and between myself and the participants' stances became inherent to the coding process (Fugard & Potts, 2019). General themes and their properties emerged during the initial *open coding* phase (Ezzy, 2013). Subsequently, I indulged in the process of *constant comparison,* continually contrasting pieces of data to one another and hunting for nuances that will guide proper categorisation. Here, branching subthemes emerged as I began to identify tiny distinctions between related pieces of data. Finally, via *selective coding,* I repeatedly

combed through the transcribed data, rechecked the data's assortment, and cemented and named the core themes outlined in Chapters 4 and 5 (Ezzy, 2013). Immersing myself in the data with such intensity uncovered new meanings and new interpretations with each engagement. Prioritising subjective meanings in the data and my interpretation of those meanings implicates the constructivist stance of this research. Then, authentication by multiple coders or theories is disregarded in service of myriad, unique, complex constructions. Once again, a tolerance of contradictions surfaced as I resisted the urge to excessively impose my experiences upon my participants' stories while surrendering to the inherently biased nature of a constructivist process and allowing my interpretations of their stories to occupy space. Intuitive yet orchestrated, creative yet logical, and detail-oriented yet chaotic, the entire analysis process, too, embodies a tolerance of contradictions (Ezzy, 2013).

3.7 Ethical Considerations

The final subsection of this chapter outlines the ethical considerations and limitations inherent in this research. Firstly, the ethical considerations in 3.7.1 comprise the Procedural Ethics portion describing the measures taken by the study to ensure the safety, confidentiality, and veracity of the research process and those involved. Secondly, 'ethics in practice', referring to the consideration of reflexivity and positionality and an "ethics that is always/already concerned about power and oppression even as it avoids constructing power as a new truth" (Canella & Lincoln, p. 81; Christoffersen, 2018; Foucault, 1980).

3.7.1 Trustworthiness and Consent

From its conceptualisation, this thesis has maintained a critical, liberatory ethical orientation with a commitment to exploring diverse realities, repositioning questions, methodologies, and constructs towards a social justice agenda, engaging with my own power/privilege, and intently evading the reconstruction of power/privilege through my research (Canella & Lincoln, 2011). My research was conducted under the umbrella of the "Dance is Alive: diverse meanings of dance in different communities" project at The University of Auckland. The call for participation explicitly emphasised the value of diverse lived experiences and stories relating to Dance, recognising that common themes may surface among the narratives. I reached out to my existing network of Dance Movement Therapists, DMT students, and faculty members to recruit five interview participants – some of these individuals were acquaintances, and some were strangers. Pseudonyms were assigned to the participants to establish and maintain anonymity: Trisha, Maeve, Sophie, Sheena, and Jana. As previously mentioned, semi-structured interviews provided a safe and adaptable framework for stories to be shared. Consent forms provided to and signed by participants honoured voluntary participation and withdrawal at any stage; data withdrawal for up to two months after the data collection process was also assured. Virtual interviews were my only avenue for data collection due to my participants' global residential statuses and the COVID-19 pandemic. Upon receiving participants' informed consent, a virtual interview was scheduled with each participant. During the week of the interview, participants were emailed the Consent Form and Participant Information Sheet. An approximately one-hour virtual interview was conducted and digitally recorded with prior authorisation – a disclaimer in the Information Sheet and acquired verbal consent at the beginning of the interview, doubly assured the authorisation. In addition to the consent form, anonymity was verbally guaranteed. Then, interviews were meticulously transcribed and stored on a single password-protected computer. The consent form also transparently assured safety and inclusion and the absence of adverse outcomes. In case of transgressions, teachers, parents, support personnel and/or counselling staff could intervene. Previously mentioned pseudonyms are utilised throughout this thesis to preserve participants' privacy and anonymity. No monetary exchange/compensation was part of the

agreement. The limitations of this research process have been outlined at the beginning of Chapter 4.

Beyond the tangible, procedural ethical measures mentioned above, I want to spotlight subsection *3.3 Bricoleur* and accent the felt sense of trustworthiness such a stance cultivates. In summary, I believe when a researcher: critically appraises their own positionality and history of chosen research methods; acknowledges and tackles the inherent power dynamics present, even in emancipatory research; harnesses the power of authentic relationality in research relationships; embraces their own inherent unbiasedness and imperfectness; makes apparent their stance of curiosity and non-judgment, verbally and non-verbally, they foster safety and trust between themselves and their participant.

3.7.2 Reflexivity and Positionality

My identity as a researcher coexists with those of person of colour, woman, millennial, student, educator, and artist, among others. What I bring to the table as a researcher then is neither naively devoid of external influence nor tainted by bias; rather, it is rendered colourful by the intersection of the various identities. Unbiasedness is implausible, and my contribution to co-created meanings is meaningful (Roer-Strier & Sands, 2015). I value reflexivity as a core feature of the research process in exploring how my identities, values, beliefs, research interests, and research design shape the stories that are told (Willig, 2008). The role of the self in knowledge production is unremitting, from the research question's evolution to the data's analysis and interpretation. The purpose of “continual internal dialogue” and “critical self-evaluation” is not to erase the situatedness of the self in the process but to take responsibility for how it may enhance or limit the storytelling and story-gathering (Berger, 2013, p. 220). It is non-exploitative, curious, and empathetic towards the self and the participants.

Some themes alive in my experiences as a non-traditional DMT student involved discrimination, oppression, a felt lack of agency, anger, and frustration. I stepped into my research process, knowing that my participants may or may not (at all) reflect these themes. While unique perceptions prevail, I broadly yet intricately know the joys and struggles of pursuing a career as a creative arts therapist and have navigated the feeling of being a foreigner. Bearing this distinctive insider status meticulously moulded my interview questions, body language, prosody, and awareness of the other and thus supported and enhanced the exploration of my research question. My vaguely 'insider' status as a researcher, in that I embody a non-traditional DMT much like my participants, seemed to elicit relatability, familiarity and comfort in the relationship building, and ergo impacted what and how much my participants shared (Berger, 2013). Coming from a "shared experience position", I was able to "hear the unsaid, probe more efficiently, and ferret out hints that others might miss" (Berger, 2013, p. 223). Despite my 'insider' status, I quickly recognised the vast differences between our lived experiences and our respective training institutions. When I noticed myself probing for responses that weren't resonant with my experience, I surrendered to the story and allowed the participant space to speak; I permitted their response to further direct my curiosities. I encouraged myself to tolerate the coexistence of contradiction. As per Berger's (2013)'s stance, a decolonisation of the research process is possible when a reflexive self-awareness allows for pausing and listening, for the participants' discourse to prevail authentically, even though my worldview will certainly steer how the data is digested.

4 Results

The data in this chapter is presented as a product of a comprehensive thematic analysis and is raw, real, and meaningful in and of itself. Although data, it bears rich and vulnerable experiences shared within the container of a trusting relationship between myself and the participants. Nevertheless, the data bears the following limitations:

- Due to the restrictions of a Masters's level thesis project, time, and a global pandemic, the data incorporates the perspectives of only five individuals from myriad cultural, ethnic, spiritual, religious, education, and socioeconomic backgrounds. The participants were chosen as per their willingness, availability, and relevance to the research criteria i.e. non-traditional Dance Movement Therapists who are/have trained at graduate school programs in the west.

- The stories put forth as data encompass the thoughts, feelings, and personal interpretations of participants' experiences. Synchronous to the constructivist essence of this research, these perspectives are not deemed objective truths about Dance Movement Therapy, its pedagogy, or any educational institutions. However, they are valid and worthy subjective truths that call to heed the Dance Movement Therapy community.

- Based on their personal comfortability, participants chose to reveal as little or as much about their experiences as personally desired. Accordingly, the participants guide how much or how little space they desired to take up in this process, with careful nudging, and without coercion.

- A single respondent took the title of being a Movement and Drama therapist. However, this person also delivered dance therapy and hence was included in the study.

- The participants occupy different stages in their careers as Dance Movement Therapists, ranging from those at the tail end of their training to those who have been practising for over a decade. This rich diversity in ages and experience

means that the data, although shared today, inhabits various times in history and their respective socio-cultural contexts.

The stories articulated in the data collection process generally followed a chronological narrative, centred around their life before, during and after their graduate school training. Experiences encompassing the participant's unique journey into the field of Dance Movement Therapy, within their training grounds, and their practice as a licensed therapist, if applicable, comprise the data. However, therapists' experiences during their time in graduate school are spotlighted. From these stories, six primary themes emerged:

- The Nuanced, Foreign Experience
- The Shades of Racism
- The Role of the Institutions/Curriculum
- Diverse Cultural Norms/Expectations
- Racial/Cultural Incompatibility
- Voice & Agency

Each of these themes emerged from conversations between five individuals:

Trisha, an Indian international student from Mumbai, India pursuing her Masters of Dance Movement Therapy qualification in New Zealand; Sheena, an Indian Drama and Movement Therapist from Delhi, India who pursued her training in the United Kingdom; Maeve, a Chinese Dance Movement Therapist from Honk Kong who pursued her training in the United States; Jana, a Taiwanese Dance Movement Therapist who pursued her training the United States; and Sophie, a Brazilian Dance Movement Therapist who pursued her training Germany. Each of these individuals contributes to a broad spectrum of learnings, challenges, lessons, and insights expressed in this chapter. From such sundry walks of life, their stories add to the breadth of what non-traditional dance

movement therapy students experience, cherish, endure, and persevere through in their academic journeys.

4.1 The Nuanced, Foreign Experience

4.1.1 Overwhelmed, Autonomy, Liberation

"How do you like… take in all of this?" said Trisha. Sentiments of feeling overwhelmed, excluded and unseen coexisted with those of autonomy, liberation, and freedom flooded participants' stories when their identities as a foreigner were highlighted. For both Trisha and Sheena, it was their first time leaving their home country to live by themselves in a dramatically different culture. "It's a very deep feeling like you're not at home," said Maeve, resounding the feeling of isolation. Underlying these feelings was the pressure to acclimate, to be seen, to fit in, to have to *do the thing*. Sophie agreed as she spoke of the judgement and pressure not only from the white folks she lived among but the self-imposed pressure to prove oneself. Interestingly, all participants fervently expressed the paradoxical yet very real feeling of freeness in this fresh new start. "I'm allowed to yawn in class, like, I'm allowed to move in class!" exclaimed Sheena. Likewise, Maeve reflected upon her early days in New York City relative to her life in Hong Kong. "[In Hong Kong], we don't ask questions; it's disrespectful", she said as she reflected on her school experiences there. Whereas, in New York City:

> I feel so excited! I feel, WHOA, I can explore the other part of myself. And then that part in me probably is like always suppressed in my own culture. If I'm being really vocal, I want to confront others, and probably in Hong Kong, that is unacceptable. I cannot be that expressive to share how I feel… my people in Hong Kong they don't have that much capacity to accept that part of me.

The values and norms of the west mean that individuals can tap into previously untapped aspects of their identity and revel in the simple joys of unadulterated self-expression. Jana echoed, "I realised my body is creative, and I am creative, which was something

that hadn't been, you know, part of my identity growing up in Taiwan, you know, we were always told to do this and that and following the rules".

4.1.2 Unseen, Unheard

The cost of this liberation, as noted above, is, again, a concomitantly expressed smallness, feeling unseen as a minority. Trisha opens the conversation, sharing how it felt to live away from her home country all alone for the first time:

> I think I definitely felt like a minority, and I'm sure I was… [It was] a new experience for me because also the first time that um, I was in a foreign university, as well as like the first time of me living on my own, um, and [in an] international country like for such a long period of time. So I guess there were a lot of firsts that were happening for me. This was like really overwhelming and huge, so I felt like a *really* tiny insignificant speck, almost.

In her course, Sheena explicated how her program required her to seek a Jungian psychoanalyst as a non-negotiable requirement for her degree. Sheena vividly described the process of scrolling through lists of therapists, in pursuit of a single brown face or a single brown name. As a result, Sheena reticently went through "therapy" with a white therapist, for the sake of completing her hours, and more often than not, felt unseen and unheard by her therapist:

> I was just literally completing my number of hours, which I was required to complete and having therapists who weren't able to understand by culture, who weren't able to understand, like, how is it for an Indian student to be among authority figures? How is it for an Indian student to be in a class where all the classmates are older to them?

These were among a handful of obstacles lending to a feeling of isolation within her therapy sessions and her broader training.

Another participant, Maeve, shared her lived experience as a woman speaking English as a second language. “I feel like um, fear, or feel inferior of speaking. Yeah, um, I’m afraid that I cannot express myself well, and uh, probably people didn’t understand me”. In the western education culture, where expressing curiosity and criticality via asking questions is valued, she concurrently felt she was thrilled for the opportunity to be vocal and speak her mind, yet experienced reticence. Sophie resonated with these views as she attempted to articulate how incredibly challenging it was to survive in Germany as a non-German speaking woman and to pursue her education in the German language. “It was difficult for me to understand myself in the context of how they told me how I should be”. While discussions of race and culture permeated Maeve’s graduate classroom experience, she felt bemused as an Asian woman. Preceding her move to the United States, while Maeve possessed a brief knowledge of the US’s slavery history, she was oblivious to the intricate racial dynamics of the present day. She remembered having to read race-related course materials on topics such as “white fragility” and palpably shared her enthusiasm around learning something new, “learning about the culture in America”. However, her zealousness accompanied an earnest feeling of exclusion

> It's only about white and black, there’s nothing about Chinese, nothing about the other students from the other culture”.... “I felt invisible… I don’t want to say anything as well, I just want to hide.

4.2 The Shades of Racism

The experience of racism, no matter what flavour, accompanies a spectrum of thoughts, feelings, responses, or lack thereof. There is no one way or no right way to process a racist encounter. This theme acknowledges a few among many discriminatory experiences embedded in participants’ stories and divulges the myriad ways in which these participants were affected.

4.2.1 Discrimination: An Insider Status

"The bias, the assumption, everything is about my skin, just my skin colour, just because of my culture," says Maeve, disillusioned. During her time in graduate school, Maeve recounts a field trip to Nicaragua with a diverse group of therapists, including her own peer cohort. On a particular bus journey, a white woman asked to switch seats with her, and upon denial, she proceeded to utter curses and slurs. "I know that was my first time to see, okay, that is really discrimination. Oh yeah, I'm being discriminated against, but I don't know how to react?" One of her Black classmates intervened in the situation and defended Maeve in the heat of the moment. On the same journey, she also witnessed another white woman asking a black colleague to sit at the back of the bus, an act that bears a distasteful history.

As Maeve articulated, discrimination bears a rather explicit flavour or it appears as micro-aggressions, shared Trisha. It is subtle,

> like emotional abuse, like it's so sad. You can't tell when it's happening; you don't know when it's happening, but later if you reflect on it or if it happens over a period of time, you're like, wait, this is a problem.

At a placement site, Trisha encountered the following scenario:

> I guess if we're talking about like relating to a client who's from different ethnicity, like I think somebody once told me, "oh, which land have you come from?"… Um, like it was such an awkward, weird moment then again, how do you relate to, uh, how do you respond to this question? Like one… you want to be sensitive, but you don't stoop down to that level. Two, you're also in mind that that person has a certain diagnosis, the person also at a different age and yeah like you're trying to be the rational one out there.

She was dumbfounded in this multi-layered, complex, "awkward and weird" scenario. On one hand, she wanted to speak up for herself; however, she grappled with several

conflicting realities - the need to be "sensitive" in her role as a therapist, the urge to not "stoop down", and a mature, courageous awareness of the diagnosis, age and cognitive state of the individual across from her.

> What you're saying is incorrect, but at this point, like who has to take the higher road, the therapist has to take the higher road at all times, or that's what, um… is that expected? But it's just, how do you address it, or is there a point of addressing it?

The individual in front of her was a 70-75-year-old person with a terminal diagnosis and declining cognitive function. "There's many components, complexity, like too many layers to deal with, and I guess you have to prioritise what's most important at that point". Catering to your own needs, your client's needs, and rationally assessing the context at hand, all while supporting yourself emotionally, is an exigent balancing act:

> There's still many components, complexity, too many layers to deal with. And I guess you have to prioritise what's most important at that point… It's just about like weighing to see what scale it is, but of course, every situation is different. Like it depends on the magnitude of what was said to you.. and how you will respond to it. And if you're capable to like put that down and walk past it, but if it's affecting your work or hindering your work or your own self-esteem, then I think that um, is a bigger problem out there.

A certain sensibility, autonomy, and resilience were apparent in Trisha's experiences. Sheena enabled us to carry forth the conversation here as she divulged the nuances of western-driven autonomy in a classroom setting. "Freedom comes with oppression, as well, that, you know, that because it makes us more vulnerable in that moment to those white professors". The advocacy of self-expression and speaking up in a western classroom was an unfamiliar, empowering experience for Sheena. However, it also led her to place "those white professors" on a pedestal, lending to a felt sense of obligation, reassurance and vulnerability towards them. Placing the white man on a pedestal is customary in the context of India's British colonial history, a fact and feeling of which her white peers and professors were entirely oblivious. Outside the classroom, Sheena really struggled to find a suitable therapist to work with. After having to give up her pursuit of a brown therapist, she disconcertedly began seeing a white Jungian

psychotherapist for the mere purpose of fulfilling a checklist of requirements. Here she felt “the direct impact of oppressive forces”. “They were clear-cut racist”, she recounts as she shares an incident where her therapist blatantly categorised Indians as an emotionally unintelligent population. “I don’t know what on Earth gave her that right. That really impacted me a lot”, revealed Sheena as she shared the toll the accumulation of discrimination took on her mental health. Compelled to take a year-long break from school to nurture the severe depression she found herself in, Sheena returned to India for a year to recharge herself during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through this journey, she often doubted and minimised herself, as though she was responsible for her experiences.

> So, the first thing was that finding a therapist. So in my two years there, I wasn’t able to find a therapist. Like I did find a therapist, but then I had to just make the compromises. Like I was just literally completing my number of hours, which I was required to complete and having therapists who weren’t able to understand my culture… So I don’t think like they were able to understand the nuance of all of that, and as training therapists, like that becomes an important holding for us, which really contains us, which really helps us remain sane. So I do not have that space. And on that as well, like I remember, I used to look at the faces of the therapist like the photographs, and I used to, you know, like look for the brown face or like someone whose name would be Indian. Like not knowing if they’re actually from India or not, like, would just look for that.

Gaslighting her own reality followed, compounding and convoluting the feelings of shrinkage and self-doubt. “It felt to me like as if I’m being racist by letting that impact me”, declared Sheena. She shared her therapist’s views on India’s colonial history and Indian people:

> In the aspect of individual therapy, I think I felt the direct impact of like those oppressive forces on me, and my therapist were actually very racist as well. Like they were clear-cut racist that, you know, like Indians are not emotionally intelligent. Yeah.
>
> In the therapy, the therapist would focus more on the fact that how things have changed now or how to say the worst, that how, when the British came to India, they gave many good things as well, and that things are not black and white, that things are grey.

Then, it is no wonder that Sheena was impelled to gaslight her perceptions.

To Sophie, the feeling of self-doubt, of unseen-ness, was all too familiar. Her classroom experience frequently involved working in self-selected small groups with her peers. Every time students began to huddle themselves into groups, she found herself left out as the last pick like her presence was burdensome.

> I was not the one, the big choice because, uh, she (refers to self in third person) not so great in writing or, you know, kind of be that she don't speak so well… it starts nobody near me… I was a little bit, the one put away, or the [one who] works alone.

She remembered frequently being the third, the outsider in a core group of two. These instances of exclusion were also resonant at her workplace, a school, where she utilised the medium of dance and movement to work with "naughty kids". Sophie describes dance and movement as part of her ancestry; she sees her people as people who dance. Even before embarking upon her official training in dance therapy, Sophie utilised dance and movement as a tool to work with a group of children from diverse backgrounds who had but one thing in common - the Portuguese language. She recounts taking on the responsibility to work with all the children who had been deemed lost causes by the school staff because they (the kids) refused to "follow the rules". Sophie, though, recognised that they weren't naughty but merely expressed themselves differently.

An exasperated account by Trisha caps this section – an impassioned desire to be seen for the unique individual she is:

> Exotic. I'm fed up of hearing the word exotic. I think I just don't like it at all. "India is so exotic. Are you going to teach us Bollywood". No, I haven't trained in Bollywood!... The dance is like everyone expects you to know it. I don't know, but I guess this ties into like stereotypes… How do you break these stereotypes, and how do you like encourage a sense of just like more conversation, more dialogue where you can, everyone can live in harmony? The same can be encouraged within class.

Numbing, freezing, self-doubt, self-minimising, depression, and anger are some of the many responses to experiences of discrimination outlined above.

4.3 The Role of the Institution and/or Curriculum

How do non-traditional students interact with the racial and cultural aspects of their identity, situated within the context of their educational institutions and respective curriculums? We gain insight into the cultural pillar of Dance Movement Therapy education through participants' personal experiences. Further, participants' stories reveal aspects of their education that they value and cherish and those they regard as deficient. A brief exploration of their perceived needs also follows. This particular theme encompasses stark distinctions in participants' realities, and each of these realities will be acknowledged.

4.3.1 Cultural Identity in the Course Material

Does the curriculum create space for the role cultural dynamics play in the pedagogy and practice of Dance/Movement Therapy? Participants reflect upon various aspects of their educational journey to contribute to an understanding of this question. Elaborately articulated in the previous theme, we return to a meaningful moment in Trisha's training, where she navigated the complexities of a micro-aggression at her placement site. In the context of this event, Trisha shares the role her training played in the meaning-making and processing of discriminatory encounters in the therapeutic space. Rather candidly, she shares,

> I don't think my education has prepared me at all, like higher education specifically. I think whatever this is, is all based on like life experiences. And that is what has generally taught you how to manage these complex situations and how to navigate something.

The lived experience of a person of colour in this world is just that, sequences of lived experiences that one learns from. There is no holy guide that prepares one for the metaphorical battle that is a person of colour's (POC) lived experience. However, the need for collective responsibility and burden sharing on a micro and macro level is instrumental in engendering a critical consciousness. Trisha continued to share,

> Because no one talks about things like racism in class, even like everyone will say like, oh my gosh, like, you cannot do this, but no one is talking about examples of what to do, what does... Like this is a micro-aggression? Or what could they look like? Or how subtle…

Sheena's contributions to this conversation were resonant. Her curriculum comprised a rudimentary skim of "significant historical events" that socio-politically impact us as a society today but lacked proactive, critical dialogue about multicultural competencies and dynamics. Correspondingly, she shared:

> I feel like that was such a minimum; that's something which I can also facilitate now. It should have been like more in-depth, and at that time, everyone's eyes were big, and I think that's not a good thing. Like everyone's eyes shouldn't be big on these conversations. Like it should be something which is like normal to talk about, and it should be the minimum knowledge that therapists should have.

Her previously articulated challenges around seeking a suitable therapist in the United Kingdom are germane here. During her year off in India, she came to view a Jungian psychotherapist as requisite as culturally inappropriate and inaccessible. "Now, I would've kept it as a condition that I should be allowed to seek therapist from a therapist in India in an online format", she affirms. "When you're making it compulsory for me to go to a Jungian analyst, how you're again putting me in an oppressive structure".

Maeve's classroom environment seemed to contrast the utter lack of acknowledgement of identity here. Maeve's curriculum consisted of a course entirely dedicated to unpacking cultural competency. Designed around small group discussions, the course

engendered a space to challenge contentious theoretical material and practical experiences that arose during the course of their training. Moreover, intentionally assigned readings that would nurture a socially aware and just group of therapists perfused the syllabus. “I treasure that space,” said Maeve.

4.3.2 Support and Solidarity with Peers/Faculty

A sense of solidarity among one’s cohort, meaningful connections with a faculty member, diverse representation within one’s cohort and a general sense of being fully seen have indeed augmented most participants’ experiences. On the contrary, the participants in the present study have deeply felt the absence of these.

Maeve shared with me the complexities of conducting a DMT session in Hong Kong versus the United States. Compared to offering DMT in the US, her sessions in HK often involved more structured, directed movement; self-expression and improvisation weren’t natural ways of being. Maeve felt comfortable bringing these conversations to the table in her cultural competency course. They were well-received by her professors and peers, and frequently enriched the conversations in the classroom.

> …Our professors are really welcoming, like, yeah. They just feel like it’s more like they’re learning from the foreign students as well... And then I don’t feel that shutdown, like people what to shut me down. No. Actually, [they] give me a space to really speak… then I try my best to speak, and they empower my voice as well. They helped me find my voice as well.

Despite her struggles, Sheena, too, often sought respite in her relationships with certain faculty members. “They really went with my pace, they really gave a lot of patience. And when I did not have a therapist, they really held space for me. However, again, I think their lens was individual”. Sheena experienced authentic connection and safety in these relationships. Still, owing to the cultural disparity, she knew that her professors failed to

grasp the complexity of her identity as a woman from an Indian collectivist society. Similarly, Jana described her professors as highly supportive and caring but did not feel "particularly connected to them". Then too, she remembers her faculty as a group of individuals open to learning from her experiences, considering the culture shock she felt moving from Taiwan to Philadelphia.

To echo previous sentiments, there was a lack of addressing the "intercultural" aspect of the curriculum; however, there was a felt sense of inclusion - "whenever we share something [it's] valued… they're keen to learn about your voice, your culture". Jana's anchor, though, was her cohort consisting of students from diverse cultural backgrounds. By assisting her with her English language skills or forging a community through shared 'pot luck' dinners and other social gatherings, Jana felt held by her peers. Further, the DMT program at her university existed within a more extensive Expressive Arts Therapy program, rendering a distinct sense of belonging to every community member.

On the other hand, Trisha felt burdened and stressed by the apparent disconnect between the university and her placement sites. In situations of conflict/discrimination, there lacked a clear pathway of communication and support. Addressing a contentious situation required Trisha to weigh her options and seek out a reliable confidante who may listen and act. She details the emotional labour of reporting a situation,

> If the student has brought it to your notice, it has taken a lot for that student… to go through the different thought processes, like, of course, self-doubt and questioning… and that should not be dismissed at any point of time because it prevents the student from coming back to you the next time… how is that relationship dealt with in the moment, especially during these triggering moments?

4.3.3 Desire for Safety, Critical Dialogue, and Mutual Responsibility

This particular sub-theme harmoniously represents the desire for more safety and mutual responsibility within one's educational environment. "How can they actively try and create a safer environment for people of different ethnicities? Like what can, what can they actively do?" urged Trisha in response to feeling lost and burdened in unanticipated situations of discrimination.

> So, something I would've really liked to just have that space to acknowledge that yes, we're all different in XYZ forms and having the opportunity to share like, how is yours different from it? Because it's also a sense of like almost like education for the others… It'd be education for me as well to hear somebody else's perspective… But what I don't like is the fact that this is a blanket way of how things are, and this is what we need to work with. And like the rigid, I don't want to be boxed in either.

She also reflects on how the lack of a culture surrounding critical dialogue may impact an emerging therapist, such as her, to do their job judiciously:

> If you haven't had these [discriminatory] experiences, how then are you sensitive to other people's needs? You know? And that's where it needs to also be addressed within an educational setting of like… everyone may not come from a so-called privileged background... So how do you still be sensitive to these things and not turn a blind eye when you're in the role of the therapist?

Sheena concurred as she wishes for shared responsibility between the self, the curriculum, placement sites, and the university to cultivate safer, more proactive environments for international students of colour to thrive within.

> I think one thing would be, which would have definitely benefitted me was if there was a theoretical understanding in the group and among the professors about how our cultural context impacts. For example, in one of the group process when I expressed that you know, Indian has a colonial history and when I look at white men, I placed them in the authority figure… so I think it was very new knowledge for most of the white classmates and even for white professors. So having to face these situations where for the minimum amount of analysis, I have to take responsibility for my own self. Instead if that responsibility was in the curriculum, then I would have eventually felt more supported. Then I wouldn't have gaslighted myself.

Jana's continual efforts to seek solidarity among her peer group reflected this very desire for safety and dialogue. Concluding remarks in Maeve's interview aptly wrap up this conversation as she says, "How can we bring the global perspective of Dance Movement Therapy? It's not just about America". Maeve articulated her desire for a platform for reciprocal exchange between students and faculty of different backgrounds, a version where foreign students learn about the domestic way of being as much as domestic students respectfully embrace and learn foreign perspectives as mere differences, not anomalies.

4.4 Diverse Cultural Norms/Expectations

Most participants whose stories comprise this research were born and raised in Asian countries besides Sophie, who calls Brazil her home. Within these stories emerge a discernible contrast between values of the Global North or the West, i.e. North American and European values and those of the Global South, i.e. Latin America, Asia, Africa, and Oceania. Countries of the Global South frequently tend to be previously colonised nations. The aforementioned contrast in this theme often manifests as friction and resistance, but sometimes with adaptability, as a welcomed way of being. While the distinction between the Global North and South or the West and East may appear binary and antagonistic, the stories outlined in this theme occupy myriad shades of grey. Cultural differences between the West and the East, as well as between the numerous cultures within the East, comprise this theme.

Within the realm of Dance Movement Therapy, these differences are conspicuous even on a non-verbal movement level. During her training, Sophie describes a particular instance where she observed two of her peers - a fellow Brazilian student and a Chinese student - in a dance. Central to DMT is the concept of mirroring, where one individual literally mirrors the movement of the other. I refer to the two as 'Chinese student' and 'Brazilian student' due to the mere fact that their names remained undisclosed in the

interview. In this embodied exploration, it was the Chinese student's turn to mirror the Brazilian student. During the dance, Sophie markedly remembers watching her - "I saw her body open. I saw she was smiling", says Sophie. However, when she (the Chinese student) completed the dance and reflected verbally, she claimed to experience "too much movement", chaos, and stress. In comparison, the Brazilian student claimed to embody openness, expressivity and joy. In the context of the Chinese student's upbringing, which prioritised following rules, obeying instructions, and being small, the openness of the Brazilian student's movement felt threatening. "Sometimes they say something, but the body movement is completely different to what they say," remarks Sophie.

As a Taiwanese woman, Jana reflects on a similar sentiment "Part of my identity growing up in Taiwan, you know, we were always told to do this and that and following the rules. Um, and I don't feel like, I didn't feel like I'm creative". While Jana views DMT as a modality that enables connection, transcending cultural and societal barriers, she experienced her fair share of cultural dissonance when she moved from Taiwan to the United States for her education. She found solace in her peer group, consisting primarily of international students. During her two years in graduate school, "What does it mean for me to be Taiwanese?" was a significant, driving question. Considering Taiwan is a fairly westernised society, it felt incumbent to unpack what she brings to the table and what she chooses to learn and unlearn as a Taiwanese woman. Among these struggles, the dance therapy circle was her safe space. "When I was in the dance therapy field or group, a lot of times I will feel this very special connection that I don't feel with my people like my Taiwanese friends or families". The shared valuing of the body and somatic connection became a unifying factor.

On the other hand, Maeve brings more nuance to the conversation as she speaks about the internalised aggrandisement of western knowledge and values within the Dance Therapy space. Dance Therapy practitioners often conducted workshops in Hong Kong, where the profession is still in its infancy.

> I feel like I, in the past… really adore like admire for the western knowledge. Like the people, the foreigner, the white people, they come to Hong Kong for teaching, and everybody just said, wow, this is like phenomenal experience… I was one of them I really like treasure the outside because seems like they know more, they have a more like liberal freedom… Even like the locals feel like okay, you can go overseas for studying or work, then you're superior

Consolidating the various elements of this conversation, Trisha reflects on how her education in New Zealand influenced her work with a young pre-teen Indian child. In her work, Trisha highlights the use of the Laban Movement Analysis technique as an assessment tool to gauge her client's level and quality of embodied-ness. However, as the sessions progressed, her client's lived reality, and Trisha's personal lived experiences as an Indian woman became increasingly pertinent to her client's success. She facilitated these sessions on zoom, where the client was frequently in their bedroom alongside other family members in the same space. Extended joint family systems are quite normative in Indian households, and Trisha found herself navigating western norms of privacy, boundaries, individuality, and personal space in this context.

> …household relations, like sleeping in the same bed as your parents or something like that. Like that's unheard of in other parts of the world… It's so different… even living with like a grandparent or being taken care of by a grandparent and not somebody else, or maybe like. A mix of like help at home plus a grandparent.

Trisha contextualises this idea in her sessions with her client in India, a young pre-teen child:

> Over here, even if it's in her bedroom, there is somebody sitting in the room with somebody else, I may not know who it is. I may not even be able to see who they are, but it's another family member… it just reflects how like what a close-knit relationship she has with her family that she's perfectly alright with another person sitting in the room, be it her cousin or her sister. And um, I think they live in a joint family, so she lives with her grandparents as well as probably, I don't know, another cousin or not, but there's always the odd cousin visiting or staying in the house… I can just see like how it's very community-oriented. And then sometimes she's in her Nani's [grandmother] house… she's here, and she's there with her laptop… there's always someone coming in and out.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the need for zoom sessions brought to the fore another range of issues such as limited data access, limited private spaces, family relationships and norms within a family not otherwise shared outside the home.

Trisha contrasts this scenario with her online work with a group of teenagers in New Zealand:

> So over there, like these kids are on their own, they have their own space. Their parents are hanging around but they are hanging around to assist in session. They're not hanging out to like see what's happening or something like that. Like they're there to help them navigate zoom or like movement and stuff. But over here (with the Indian client), like she's left on her own, but there's someone coming in to get something from the room, somebody knocking on the door saying hurry up I need to do something else.

4.5 Racial/Cultural Incompatibility

This theme highlights various anecdotes from participants' stories reflecting the inability of their particular course curriculums or those of conventional Dance Movement Therapy techniques and traditions to capture the breadth/diversity of the embodied human experience across cultures.

Like Trisha, Sheena describes how the Laban Movement Analysis technique bears an aftertaste that assigns reductive meaning to certain embodiments. In Laban training, it appears as though smaller, closed, compact embodiments are assigned meanings of constriction, reservation or coyness and bigger, open, outward embodiments are assigned meanings of confidence and extravertedness. Sheena brings to the table the example of Indian homemakers,

> In the case of working with Indian women who are homemakers and like how sometimes, um, the way we are occupying our body is so similar… Like it's a thing of a group, like my mom, my Mami, my Chachi, how they using their body in buses, it's like almost similar. And if someone pathologises that, that you know these women are not confident like that might be a very non-nuanced way to look

> at it. Like it might just be the fact that they are protecting themselves from the threat of the male gaze or male attack". So yeah, like was just thinking from that perspective, and it is something which a white person will never be aware about, about India, like why women are occupying lesser space while walking or why are women always looking here and there while walking.

Maeve echoes the feeling of alienation from and incompatibility with aspects of DMT. A moment of contention is fresh in Maeve's memory when one of her Black classmates indulged in a movement exploration in the classroom. From the lens of Laban, her fellow classmates and professor labelled it as an aggressive effort quality. "She brought it up to the teacher as well, as she got mad. Yeah. She got mad because it's misunderstood!" exclaims Maeve. She reflects upon her own bias and her own experience concerning her classmate. Maeve comes from a ballet and contemporary dance background and shares her sense of embodied ease in a DMT group for this reason. She notices the palpable difference between her natural movement quality and her Black peer's relatively grounded, rhythmic movement proclivities. "It's just different, it's neutral, it's not good, it's not bad!". The Laban Movement Analysis is instrumental in DMT practice, especially in ascribing language to movement. Nevertheless, it is indispensable to consider its roots and lineage when considering its utility, expresses Sophie.

> For me, it was very important to study Laban, to understand his vision, his way to see… but in real life… he was connected to different people. It was a lot of European and ballet look, the class, and this time people that did ballet, come on! It was white, rich people because, uh, you know, it wasn't poor, black, dark [people]. That was not accepted anyway. They need to be skinny… Yeah, it's another reality. So, but this is good to have this as a background. It's good to know, but… we live in another reality, and we have different, completely different body shapes and way in the culture and way to, to move!

Beyond the Laban Movement Analysis, Sheena articulates the desire for racial compatibility in the curriculum through another anecdote. Through representation and recruitment of individuals of colour, and a consideration of racial/cultural dynamics when holding all students to identical, 'universal' standards:

> When these courses they design, like who should be your therapist, they should be aware of the fact, or at least they should talk about the fact what's the demography

> of the therapist in that area. So how many brown Jungian analysts do we have? How many black Jungian analysts do we have and when you're making it compulsory for me to go to a Jungian analyst, how you're again, putting me in an oppressive structure… so that should really be acknowledged.
>
> Now I would have kept it as a condition that I should be allowed to seek therapy from a therapist in India in an online format. I would have totally requested that and putting this condition as well, that you need to find a Jungian analyst is not very culturally appropriate.

4.6 Voice & Agency

Unanimously, anecdotes reflecting empowerment, self-agency, and self-assuredness, resilience arise within this theme. Unsurprisingly, several of these are borne from a space of powerlessness. Stories journey experiences of struggle, smallness, and self-discovery and cohesively result in participants' feeling a sense of ownership over their abilities, decisions, and their voices as therapists.

4.6.1 Community Support

Here, we revisit Sheena's encounter at her placement with older adults. The discomfort, lack of resonance and feeling of inadequacy compared to her white peers in evident in her reflection. Sentiments of guilt and shame made Sheena feel powerless and small.

> So I think there was a lot of loss of power that I felt like all the places are making me feel smaller. The feeling of smallness again, I was individualising it at the time or my therapists were individualising it at the time and not having this perspective that it's happening because of the societal structures again, um, really made me feel even more smaller and smaller.

In similar moments of aloneness, of exclusion, Maeve draws upon her peer group for support. Finding a sense of solidarity in her peers, especially her peers of colour, was monumental in the process of owning her voice.

> I'm glad I am not alone. I was not alone. I have the others, like my peers from India as well. We, we bring our voice back because it's interesting that…I felt invisible.

In the classroom setting, Maeve often brought conversations of cultural discrepancies to the table. We revisit an incident in theme 4.2, where Maeve vocalised the cultural nuances of conducting a DMT group session in Hong Kong as compared to her professors in the US. The space, encouragement, and openness reflected back by her faculty were instrumental in uplifting her voice. In the context of her educational background in Hong Kong, where obedience and compliance were relational norms in the classroom, Maeve's ability to challenge the status quo and authentically and courageously contribute to her lectures was deeply meaningful to her. "I can't really speak, okay. Then I try my best to speak, and that actually, they [the professors] empower my voice as well. They helped me find my voice as well", reflects Maeve. Outside the classroom, Maeve additionally sought a psychotherapy group session to process her experiences as an Asian woman living in the United States during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the year following her education, Maeve worked in a nursing home with a culturally diverse population of individuals, primarily the elderly. Here, she was often subjected to implicit and explicit racism – "I don't like your country" "China is doing lots of bad things". "No matter what you are, Japanese, Korean etc, you look like Chinese, and then you get attacked," says Maeve. Initially, she understandably felt personally attacked in these confrontations. However, her supervisor and the psychotherapy group enabled Maeve to unpack these experiences and perceive them differently. Eventually, she was able to emotionally distance herself from these incidents.

> [It's] just like a lot of projection… I will use that [these encounters], to ask "tell me more, what's going on about that"… In [their] head, it's not about the country, not just about the person.

Although Maeve is not obligated to, she felt empowered to have a sense of detached curiosity in moments of discrimination. Compared to racist encounters in the past where she felt frozen, unable to speak, and had her friends speak up for her, Maeve grew to feel self-equipped, to possess a sense of power and agency in emotionally challenging moments.

4.6.2 Doing the Work

"There was two years of deep work on myself. They always say, you only can help others if you help yourself," reflects Sophie on her journey to becoming a Dance Movement Therapist. Unravelling her own voice, and empowering her clients to discover theirs has been a pivotal aspect of her professional journey. Her Dance Movement Therapy groups welcomed women from myriad backgrounds and languages. In the presence of communication barriers, she encouraged her clients to express themselves in their language of choice, of comfort. "This is more about to express yourself, to say… I don't need to understand, you know, because you say for yourself", says Sophie. She herself is multilingual, with English being her fourth language, ranked as per fluency and comfortability. Although my interview with Sophie was conducted in English, I offered her the option to express herself in another language of choice alongside an attempted English translation, or through movement. Enabling Sophie to communicate the true essence of her story was as significant to me as was collecting data.

Sophie's confidence and self-assuredness are borne from a breadth of challenges during her training. As a Brazilian woman living in Germany, studying in a program conducted in German, the pressure to acclimate and blend in was incessant. "You're losing your roots, you're losing your roots!" she recounts being told so by one of her most revered professors - a woman described as eccentric, yet wholeheartedly her authentic self. And indeed, Sophie did feel lost - "I want to be seen, I want to be, I want to look like them," she reflects. This pivotal moment triggered a journey of introspection, self-acceptance and healing,

> When I start to, to change this from the inside and I say, no judge[ment] for myself, because it's anyway, it's kind of come from the outside. Well, it will always come. This is enough. I don't want it from the inside as well. I need to accept myself like that. I need to be proud for what I am and what I have. And then if I have this, every other thing will be small.

These sentiments of unwavering pride and embracement of one's cultural identity were also evident in Maeve's anecdotes. Maeve's Master's thesis explored the integration of the elements of traditional Chinese medicine with Dance Therapy, her unique attempt at adapting DMT to her cultural background. In this context, Maeve audaciously states,

> I needed to bring back my cultural piece. And actually, it is a big thing for me too. I'm not just learning the American way. Like what? I thought that, oh, I love the western culture in the past. Now, I notice there is something that in Chinese culture, in Hong Kong culture, I really appreciate it. And I want to bring it in dance movement therapy as well, not the European-centric Dance Movement Therapy.

Maeve's interview concludes with a similarly valiant statement

> This is almost the drive and motivation that I want to do something. I need to bring my voice in. If not, I [am] just being my, the self that [does not] want to rock the boat. No, I paid [money]. So I need to express, I need to speak!

4.7 Summary

An utter submersion into the participants' stories has unveiled six emergent themes, manifesting as research data. These themes included: Nuances of the International Student Experience; The Shades of Racism; The Role of Institutions/Curriculum; Diverse Cultural Norms/expectations in the East v/s the West; Racial/Cultural Incompatibility; and, Voice & Agency. These six pronounced categories encapsulated the immense breadth of experiences, thoughts, feelings, and desires of non-traditional students/therapists who have undergone rigourous DMT training in western graduate programs. The subsequent discussion chapter will collate the acquired stories with the pertinent literature, both encapsulated within my voice as a researcher, a Dance Movement Therapist, a student, a mover, and a human being.

5 Discussion

5.1 Introduction

> *I would say in the first half like I wasn't looking at anything critically because I was just enjoying these like newly found ways of learning and like experiential learning where I'm allowed to yawn in class where like I'm allowed to move in class like that in itself was like quite liberating for me. And, but in the second half of the first year I got really sick. Like I got into depression, and that's why I had to take the suspension to study break. And I think this part is interesting, like why I felt sick. And now, when I look back, like where do I place myself in the context as compared to my white classmates? - Sheena*

A tolerance of contradictions appears to be thematically perfused through this study. Feelings of enjoyment, liberation, depression and confusion are present within the data. Sheena's statement above indicates an apparent coexistence of contradictions between her feelings, all in a singular anecdote. Traversing theme by theme, similar to the structure of Chapter 4, this discussion chapter endeavours to embrace the intrapersonal and interpersonal contradictions that emerge in this research, further enveloped within my constructions as a Bricoleur and the array of literature presented in Chapter 2.

My research coursed the following question: How do non-traditional students from western Dance Movement Therapy programs navigate racial/cultural challenges during their education, training, and practice? This question led me to interview five Dance Movement Therapists from various parts of the world bearing the common identity of non-traditional students in a western normative environment. As participants' stories unfold in the data, they provide clarity on several sub-questions posed in Chapter 1. The following chapter answers the research question by examining the dominant themes that arose in the data. Unpacking a range of cultural nuances in section 5.2 deepens our understanding of how non-traditional students may confront the day-to-day challenges posed by their foreign identities in DMT praxis. Correspondingly, the oppression *and* freedom afforded by embodied practices such as DMT are better

understood as section 5.3 examines non-traditional students' experiences of navigating and coping with racism. Lastly, section 5.4 explores the DMT microcosm's complicity in favouring white-Anglo dominant norms as personal experiences are contextualised and humanised within the already established literature surrounding the topic.

5.2 Culture, Embodied

As outlined in Chapter 4 - sections 4.1 The Nuanced, Foreign Experience and 4.4 Dichotomous Cultural Norms & Expectations, the act of listening and meaning-making scaffolds this sub-section of the discussion chapter. Dipping its toes into the international student experience, this section highlights its acutely paradoxical nature. It investigates the intersection of language, tradition, social norms, identity and relationships foregrounded in culture. Similar to Chapter 4, this chapter is organised as a meaning-making process of a narrative, a conversation between individuals.

Section 4.1, titled The Nuanced, Foreign experience, encapsulates two predominant ideas, and both underlie the dramatic shift in geographic location, climate, culture, and social norms faced by the participants. As the data reveals, this shift, or culture shock, is digested in stages. Initially marked by the 'honeymoon phase', all participants, particularly Maeve, Sheena and Jana, fervently expressed the embodied and verbal liberation they felt. This makes sense, contextualised within the shared heritage of collectivist cultures. For these three individuals in the present study, cultures wherein embedded groups or communities are considered the basic unit of society (Boas, 2013; Pederson, 1995).To openly welcome differences and feel excited, adventurous and stimulated is characteristic in the early stages of migration to a novel culture. Participants experienced this marked shift, particularly in the context of the educational environment. Sheena's embodied emancipation to yawn and move in the classroom, Jana's acquaintance with her creative self and Maeve's connection with the long-denied vocal, expressive, audacious side of her were affordances of the western learning environment that promotes assertion of individuality and emotional self-expression. To represent

Asian culture as a lumped aggregate is hypocritical to the essence of this research; however, it is noteworthy that broadly speaking, cultures of the Global South are generally collectivist and possess fewer differences amongst themselves than they do with those of the Global North, which tend to be individualistic (Carducci, 2012). Reflected in Maeve, Sheena, and Jana's stories, classroom environments in the east value listening, impersonality, and passive reception of information over asking questions and performing self-directed tasks (Boas, 2013; Kim & Sherman, 2007; Ko, 2020; Pallaro, 1997).

"Freedom comes with oppression", said Sheena in her stories. Almost all participants experienced the joys and downfalls, the advantages and disadvantages of living amidst western norms and value systems. Herein, I draw upon Trisha's vivid account as she describes digesting the feeling of being overwhelmed and the newness of moving to a new country:

> I think I definitely felt like a minority, and I'm sure I was… [It was] a new experience for me because also the first time that um, I was in a foreign university, as well as like the first time of me living on my own, um, and [in an] international country like for such a long period of time. So I guess there were a lot of firsts that were happening for me. This was like really overwhelming and huge, so I felt like a really tiny insignificant speck, almost.

Much like the other research participants, it was Trisha's first time leaving her entire life behind to pursue her ambitions in a foreign country, New Zealand. I do not intend to paint this embarkation with pity but rather as an explicit acknowledgement of the challenges accompanying this experience. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, New Zealand's borders were closed for two years, which meant Trisha was away from her general sense of familiarity, comfort, and safety for two straight years. The statement "Overwhelming and huge" encompassed the financial, academic, legal, cultural and social adjustments that ensued. Noteworthy in this discussion is Trisha feeling like an "insignificant speck" among the metaphorical tornado surrounding her. The compounding acculturative stress, which encompasses feelings of powerlessness,

marginality, and loneliness, is discernible (Yeh & Inose, 2003). Subsequent stories further demonstrate similar feelings.

Every participant interviewed was a member of a traditionally collectivist culture; here, educational environments tended to reward 'fitting in' relative to newly introduced western classroom environments where participants were expected to 'stand out' for validation and recognition.

Specifically, Maeve shared:

> I feel like, um, fear, or feel inferior of speaking. Yeah, um, I'm afraid that I cannot express myself well, and uh, probably people didn't understand me.

Although provided the space, Maeve's nervous system feared the unfamiliarity of being vocal, assertive, and expressive. As Maeve articulated, speaking up at the risk of "rocking the boat" risked the disruption of group harmony - an attribute conventionally met with disdain in collectivist cultures. Further, since English was not her first language, as was the case for all participants but one, her ability to speak up confidently was incongruent with her desire and enthusiasm to do so.

The cultural norms inherent in American/Academic English, bearing a Eurocentric emphasis, can be unfamiliar to individuals from varied cultures for whom lived experiences and storytelling may be a valued form of knowledge exchange. Utter inexperience with the standards of western academic expectations also lent to the feeling of inferiority (Kawano & Chang, 2019; Lee, 2013). Ignorance of the nuances at play can render an inequitable academic and emotional experience for students who identify as foreign. Delving deeper, Sheena, too, felt inferior and insufficient in the face of these cultural differences. Her inability to embrace the nuances of a western 'way of being'

often felt like her way was wrong, that she had to learn more, she had to be different, be better:

> At that time, I used to guess… like it's some problem in me that I'm not able to find a good therapist for myself or, or that like, there are cultural differences, it is meant for my learning. Like I need to be smart, I need to learn from them…

"I need to be smart; I need to learn from them…" These few words weigh heavy. The hegemonic pedestalisation of the white-anglo narratives is broadly prevalent and deeply felt. The internalised subservience is a consequence of generations of oppression, inherited through the lived body, manifesting as constriction, smallness, and vigilance (Johnson, 2015; Leonardo, 2004; Menakem, 2017; White, 2019). It is anything but anomalous for DMT students and emerging professionals like Sheena and Maeve to feel 'othered' for possessing cultural identities that are strikingly distinct in texture, flavour, sound, sight, and movement relative to the dominant status of western ideals within which their institutions operate (Chang, 2016). The invisible and unexamined precedence of western 'ways of being' means that individuals like Jana, Sophie, Maeve and Sheena undertook the self-assigned responsibility to "want to be, want to look like them", as Sophie courageously articulated (Gipson, 2015; Kawano & Chang, 2019; Sue & Sue; 1999).

How people relate to one another and seek social-emotional support from each other is palpably distinct in individualistic versus collectivist cultures. At the forefront here, is an anecdote from Sheena's experience at one of her placement sites:

> I was just literally completing my number of hours, which I was required to complete and having therapists who weren't able to understand by culture, who weren't able to understand, like, how is it for an Indian student to be among authority figures? How is it for an Indian student to be in a class where all the classmates are older to them?

As an Indian woman, Sheena's culture is markedly different from the white-anglo culture that values the power-distance dimension of cultural theories (Boas, 2013; Hofstede,

1991). The power distance dimension categorises a cultural group's relationship with hierarchy and how hierarchical relationships, if in existence, are expressed. Sheena comes from a high power distance culture where age generally determines hierarchy, and hierarchical relationships prevail in all social sectors, including education. Apparent in verbal and non-verbal communication, elders must be granted more power and treated with the utmost respect. 'Talking back' or 'seeing eye to eye' with elderly family members, relatives, teachers or even strangers is considered disrespectful and conveys a disregard for the hierarchical family structure. Going against the grain is traditionally frowned upon, as compliance with the prescribed social order ensures social group harmony (Boas, 2013; Chang, 2015; Foucault, 1980; Kim et al., 2008; Kawano & Chang, 2019).

Within her classroom environment, Sheena found herself one of the youngest individuals. As an Indian woman myself, I can say that such age disparity is rather uncommon in the Indian classroom environment. The power dynamics and societal norms intertwined within Sheena's position as the younger, smaller individual confronted her "authority figures" - her white professors and her classmates, which compounded the 'otherness' she felt. Being the youngest in a classroom and therapeutic setting in the west is an experience vastly less loaded with restraint, expectations, and rules. Nonetheless, for Sheena, her cultural context really impacted how she applied herself in the pedagogical context of her studies. Her cultural context informed her relationships with teachers and peers, and she felt that her culture, her 'being' as a class member, was not 'seen' nor respected.

A common discussion about racial dynamics in peer relations and social support ensues as we veer toward Jana and Sheena's stories. As Jana noted,

> So certainly, the level of support, um, is quite different than what we might receive in Taiwan. Um, you know, like there's a lot more individualism, and you have to, you know… you have to seek out for help. No one will come to you, you know? Uh, so it's different in that way. And people are quite separate individually, you know, doing their life and things like that… I notice the difference between, you

> know, the Asian students like Indian, um, you know, Korean students and myself and the other white students as well. They're much more individual, you know, even in the lunch break, you notice the difference eating together v/s not possibly just not.

And as Sheena commented,

> None of my white professors were aware of the fact how English is treated in India and how it's a power symbol in India. So when they were commenting on my English, "Wow, how's your English so good when it's not your first language!" Like I think like it should have been an awareness that should have been there in them already and having to express my emotions in English, having to think in English, having to like… I think it was very concrete barrier for me. Like I would say like, my white classmates used to talk amongst themselves in, um, English during the lunch breaks, and at that time, I used to just nod my head without understanding a word of what they're saying like, so it really prevented me from making friends with my classmates in the first year and they would not understand my accent. I wouldn't understand their accent and, um, and but then it just doesn't become about the language difference, it also becomes about the fact that it's English, it's the language of the colonisers.

Among innumerable micro-aggressions, Sheena's faculty members were often obliviously and astonishingly surprised at her English proficiency on account of her foreign status. Considering India's British colonial history, Sheena felt frustrated that her faculty members were inconspicuous of the historical meanings of the English language in India. While ostensibly innocuous, the remark "Wow, how is your English so good!" displayed a distasteful ignorance surrounding the ramifications of global colonialism and carries a prejudiced connotation of stupidity or illiteracy towards the receiving individual (Lee, 2013; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Although she fluently spoke English, it was not her first language and certainly was not her instinctive medium of expression. As an international student, the extent of her challenges was invisible and overlooked. Natural processes such as thinking, feeling, and expressing in a certain language were now conscious efforts, all of which were an impediment to her academic adjustment and sense of competency and belonging (Kawano & Chang, 2019; Lee, 2013). She vividly articulates attempts at seeking social support and assimilating into her community, only to feel like an outsider.

Jana is privy to the disparities between her white and non-white classmates by observing peer relationships in her cohort. She was attuned to the individualism inherent in seeking social support in the west. Unlike some cultures, where individuals may offer help instinctively because 'that is just what you do', living in the west taught her to ask for support proactively when in need. Mutually, Jana and Sheena commented on similar "lunch break" practices at their respective institutions where students of colour often gravitated toward one another, and white students congregated amongst themselves. Familiarity, shared values and life circumstances, and cultural similarities could be possible reasons. Nevertheless, non-traditional students like Jana and Sheena felt significantly more comfortable, at ease, and expressive around their fellow non-traditional peers than their white peers (Awais & Yali, 2013; Chang, 2016; Kawano & Chang, 2019; Nichols, 2019; Slade, 2013).

Sheena highlights the discrepancy between her and her peers' accents as a potential cause for their rift. Discrimination and subjugation owing to accent discrepancies are ubiquitous among international student populations, and unfortunately, Sheena faced alienation on this account. Her account sustains an implication that her peers, bearing a native accent, made no active effort to integrate with her socially. Unconscious associations about intelligence and higher social status pertaining to one's accent may be part and parcel of these behaviours (Kawano and Chang, 2019; Lee, 2013). It is anything but anomalous that she felt a lack of confidence and belonging contextual to these experiences. Minimal cross-cultural encounters between faculty and students enable a lack of awareness about unfamiliar cultures, inherent privileges in one's own culture, and a subsequent ineptitude to work cross-culturally (Abrams & Moio, 2009; Hervey & Stuart, 2012).

Beyond the classroom spaces, cultural nuance also adds layers of complexity to the therapist-client space, often unattended to in one's training and education. Reflecting upon one of her online placements over zoom, Trisha addresses this ambiguity:

> Over here, even if it's in her bedroom, there is somebody sitting in the room with somebody else, I may not know who it is. I may not even be able to see who they are, but it's another family member… it just reflects how like what a close-knit relationship she has with her family that she's perfectly alright with another person sitting in the room, be it her cousin or her sister. And um, I think they live in a joint family, so she lives with her grandparents as well as probably, I don't know, another cousin or not, but there's always the odd cousin visiting or staying in the house… I can just see like how it's very community-oriented. And then sometimes she's in her Nani's [grandmother] house… she's here, and she's there with her laptop… there's always someone coming in and out.

As the world resorted to digital channels during the COVID-19 pandemic, Trisha, too, transmuted several of her graduate school placement sessions online. One of these was with a young pre-teen from India. Trisha is an Indian woman pursuing her training in New Zealand. In this scenario, her training and education in the classroom seemed majorly extraneous to her work with her client. The myopic focus on individual psychotherapy in the western classroom is rooted in western-normative relational and family systems, disregarding the family and social contexts within which the individual prevails. In collectivist cultures, the individual is deeply connected to their family and social contexts, as evidenced by Trisha's client's familial dynamics. Trisha wrestled with the stark contrast between the skills and education she imbibed and her client's contextual needs and realities (Nolan, 2013). During her session, the child was often in her own house, in her nuclear family environment, or at her Nani's (grandmother) house. The child was left to their own devices in either space but shared the living space with another family member. Family members frequently and nonchalantly entered and exited the room as required. While Trisha was uncomfortable that her client shared the therapeutic space with other individuals, she did not and could not impose her desire for said privacy onto the client. Western psychotherapy primarily characterises the 'therapy' spaces as a deeply intrapersonal and private space, something Trisha imbibed in her educational setting; however, these ideas were direly opposed in Trisha's lived experience with her client. 'Ways of being' characteristic to relationships in collectivist societies may be pathologised, or deemed 'unhealthy', 'abnormal' or 'co-dependent' by western normative mental health ideals. Concepts of personal space, boundaries, social

support and family relations are called into question. (Chang 2015; Kawano & Chang 2019; Kim et al,. 2008; Ko, 2020; Nolan, 2013; Vera & Speight, 2003). Questions arise here: how can educational institutions account for these vast differences in 'ways of being' among their students?; how do emerging therapists from foreign cultures navigate therapeutic spaces within their own cultures without abandoning their training? Most importantly, how do students and emerging therapists from foreign cultures navigate the felt experience of dissonance between their lived experience versus their learned experience? Then, mental health becomes inextricable from a social justice agenda. To question the hegemonic status of individualism in psychotherapy and the pathologising of ideals, values and narratives that are anything but white-anglo in nature is a liberatory, political, social justice-driven agenda (Chang 2015; Speight & Vera, 2004).

Navigating the spotlight on Sophie's story, we explore how the aforementioned cultural nuances manifest on a non-verbal, embodied level. When she was in school studying Dance Movement Therapy, Sophie's cohort consisted of a culturally diverse group of students, among which there was a fellow Brazilian student and a Chinese student. Customary to DMT is the practice of mirroring, an embodied movement exploration between two (or more) individuals, where one endeavour to mirror the quality, effort, essence and structure of the other's movement. Sophie observes the intriguing nuances that arise when two individuals, one from a Brazilian and one from a Chinese cultural background, mirror one another. In this instance, the Brazilian student's turn to initiate movement and the Chinese student's turn to mirror.

> … I said let's do the mirroring, let's mirror each other, and then you can imagine the Brazilian with the Chinese; they mirror each other. And then I said, "how you feel?" to the Chinese [student]. And then she said, "OH, it's too much movement! There's a chaos! There's a stress!" And the other [the Brazilian student] said, "Oh, I was happy, I was express[ing] myself"…. Sometimes they say something, but the body movement is completely different than what they say… I saw her [the Chinese student] body open. I saw she was dance with her friend, with the Brazilian. They move a lot, I saw her body open, I saw she was smiling. But when she take to the word, she said, "Oh, it was a stress!". And then she said, because she is not allowed

> to, she was never taught how to be open and to make big, it was always small, follow.

It is palpable through Sophie's story that individuals move in ways representative not only of their health or their individual personality traits but also their culture. While Sophie did not describe the specifics of the two individuals' movement qualities, her narrative indicates that their movement styles and rhythmic cultural patterns were distinct and interpreted in the context of their respective lived experiences (Caldwell, 2013; Nichols, 2019). In this scenario, culture was expressed and interpreted on a non-verbal level, and each individual's movement was situated within their socio-cultural background. This unconscious influence of the Chinese student's 'psychophysical habitus' (Chang 2016) determined how she interpreted her partner's movement - all that is unconsciously associated with the quality, effort, and style of body movement is a component of one's 'psychophysical habitus' (Caldwell, 2013; Chang, 2006; Chang 2015).

While the Brazilian student offered seemingly 'big' movements, eliciting feelings of joy and expressiveness, the Chinese student's 'psychophysical habitus' (Chang 2016) and nervous system, one that is familiar with smallness and following rules, felt scared, stressed, chaotic on a deep embodied level (Chang, 2015; Menakem, 2017; Porges, Dana, & Gray, 2018). The Chinese student's reference to smallness and following rules makes sense in the East Asian cultural context, where individual expression and emotional self-disclosure are foreign concepts and thereby challenging tasks (Kim et al., 2008; Ko, 2020;). This exploration intends not to attach any moral value to moving small and following rules but to underline how our cultural 'ways of being' manifest on an embodied level. Further, how they influence our non-verbal interpretation of others and how others perceive us is crucial to comprehend within DMT. For instance, what unconscious connotations may we possess about an individual's relationship to space, touch, eye contact, strength, effort, and facial expressions? (Kawano & Chang, 2019). At play here may be several culturally influenced factors: unfamiliarity with creativity, fear of movement in the absence of structure, and the primacy of containment over self-

expression (Kim & Sherman, 2007; Ko, 2020). Again, all factors are to be considered in the DMT context, yet not these interviewees' minds are covered adequately in DMT education.

In summary, the stories disentangled within this section substantially speak to two sub-questions outlined in Chapter One of this study, the first being: "How do non-traditional students confront day-to-day challenges posed by their foreign identity in DMT praxis?" and "How do embodied practices interact with cultural narratives?". Overarchingly, participants encounter cultural differences, and then what? What are their day-to-day experiences? Participants encounter these discrepancies in varying intensities and aspects of their lives. In some cases, participants are afforded several freedoms in their 'new lives, revealing a side of themselves they were perhaps unacquainted with. A coexistence of feelings of overwhelm, isolation, and powerlessness with independence and autonomy is most apparent. The cultural discrepancies also manifest in training and education, particularly in personal therapy, placement environments, classroom, and social lives. Each of these contexts evokes a nuanced aspect of the non-traditional student experience. Cultural incongruities are a significant impediment to feeling heard and seen in the therapy room and seeking social support. Language barriers, accent nuances, embodied 'ways of being', and relational expectations are instrumental. Participants work with diverse individuals in the placement or classroom setting, which are spaces of intercultural movement encounters, and highlight the friction between their lived experiences and learned experiences. Specifically, learned experiences, which are typically white-anglo normative, stand at stark odds with their lived 'ways of being' regarding personal space, relational norms, movement styles and interpretations, and self-expression. Perceived inferiority, self-doubt, confusion, dissonance, and a lack of belongingness ensue.

Within this study, I am left pondering: When dance and dance movement therapy is regarded as 'universally healing', why are paramount nuances of identity and culture dusted under the rug? There appears to be unintended room to reinforce oppressive,

hegemonic narratives. Such narratives deem certain 'ways of being' as normative and superior to others and may subtly and inevitably coerce trainees to conform to their embodied, racial, and gendered selves (Kawano & Chang, 2019). Dance forms such as ballet and modern dance dominate the pedagogy and practice of DMT, rendering how we observe and learn to use dance/movement as healing, as therapeutic, and how we utilise it with our peers or clients, and most importantly, with ourselves, inherently ethnocentric. Ergo, if DMT unconsciously and biasedly perpetuates a certain 'psychophysical habitus' (Chang, 2016) of movement and a very specific repertoire of embodiments delineate DMT, how are individuals across cultural and ethnic backgrounds to feel resonant with its pedagogy and practice? How is a privilege, verbally and non-verbally, enacted through the body? Further, if the psychology-based frameworks upholding DMT are primarily western-oriented, how can DMT's *psychophysical habitus* be truly multicultural? Then, what sort of education may equip an emerging DMT to offer liberatory, multicultural services? How can DMT be taught and practised across cultures, ethnicities and racial differences? (Cantrick et al., 2018; Chang, 2015; Chang, 2016; Johnson, 2015; Kawano & Chang, 2019; Schultz, 2018; White, 2019).

5.3 The Flavours of Oppression

Throughout the interviewees' stories, they articulated several flavours of discrimination. Meaning-making of participants' implicit and explicit experiences of oppression and how they profoundly moulded their educational experiences continue this discussion. In this section, Trisha, Sheena and Sophie's anecdotes encompass situations of oppression in placement scenarios, in the personal therapy space, and within the classroom. I begin by discussing how Trisha navigated the impacts of a micro-aggression at a placement site and the complexities surrounding seeking support for the same. Sheena's story follows, and I discuss how the discrimination and unsafety she felt in her personal therapy space lent to a cascade of obstacles in her educational trajectory, highlighting the utter cultural blindness ubiquitous in psychology tertiary education. This

subsection closes with Sophie's brief account, explicating the insidious challenges of being a non-English speaker and the ensuing stereotyping and discrimination.

This section opens with an investigation of Trisha's anecdote recounting a racial micro-aggression at her placement site:

> I guess if we're talking about like relating to a client who's from a different ethnicity, like I think somebody once told me "oh, which land have you come from?"… Um, like it was such an awkward, weird moment, then again, how do you relate to, uh, how do you respond to this question? Like one… you want to be sensitive, but you don't stoop down to that level. Two, you're also in mind that that person has a certain diagnosis, the person [is] also at a different age and yeah, like you're trying to be the rational one out there.

At her placement site, Trisha was a Dance Movement Therapy trainee for a group of elderly clients in their 70s, most struggling with some form of cognitive difficulty or terminal diagnosis. One of these clients asked Trisha, "which land have you come from?" Irrespective of the client's age and cognitive decline, she felt shocked and speechless. Trisha felt "awkward" and "weird". She did not know what to say, how to act in response to this racial micro-aggression. Trisha found herself in an environment where she was a trainee/student responsible for a group of individuals, an environment with potential for future employment, which meant she hoped to prove herself and put her best foot forward. She represented herself and her University at this organisation and worked under the supervision of a site manager. Despite the undeniable hurt, frustration, and shock, she was compelled to manoeuvre her way through the situation rationally. On a somatic level, her body felt 'othered', the remark from the client communicating that she is an outsider who belongs elsewhere. This somatic stress stood at odds with the rational processes wandering through Trisha's mind; as the therapist in the room, Trisha believed she bore certain responsibilities and that she had to be the 'bigger person' in the room (Gray, 2018; Johnson, 2009; Neblett & Roberts, 2013; Schultz; 2018; Sue et al., 2007).

An internal dissonance is apparent in Trisha's narrative. I conjecture that she grappled with the desire to stand up for herself and acknowledge the inappropriateness of the client's remark. However, her desire contended against the contextual realities of the situation, her client's age, generational background, diagnosis, their ability to comprehend her perspective, and ultimately, the best course of action considering the complex relationship between herself, the client, the organisation, and the University:

> There's still many components, complexity, too many layers to deal with. And I guess you have to prioritise what's most important at that point… It's just about like weighing to see what scale it is, but of course, every situation is different. Like it depends on the magnitude of what was said to you.. and how you will respond to it. And if you're capable to like put that down and walk past it, but if it's affecting your work or hindering your work or your own self-esteem, then I think that um, is a bigger problem out there.

Trisha's subsequent response brings to light the intersection of complexities non-traditional students face in discriminatory scenarios, negotiating institutional procedures and hierarchy, organisational norms and rules, and one's personal feelings. The subjectivity and complexity considered, Trisha addressed the scenario with her supervisor at the placement site and let the situation rest. She too remarked, "I was quite taken aback with that comment, but I did not find it overpowering". Later, Trisha shared how it is primarily her lived experience as a woman of colour and not her training/education that has equipped her to navigate such situations with fortitude. This aspect of her experience will unravel in a subsequent sub-section of this discussion.

The above anecdote comprises the extent of information Trisha willingly shared about her experience on this day. As a woman of colour and an emerging therapist whom myself has faced several racial micro-aggressions during my training and education, I wonder how seemingly fleeting moments such as these aggregately influence one's sense of agency, self-esteem and leadership. In the moment you gather yourself, you do what you can to do your job. However, non-traditional students like Trisha and myself frequently find ourselves at these crossroads: how much can I tolerate? How much

should I tolerate? How do I offer therapeutic intervention when I feel oppressed? Do I have to?

Concerning the above, Trisha did not feel she had to accept the comment. She felt like she had the choice to step down and walk away if she wanted to, but she chose to prioritise what was important at that moment for her and maintain group harmony. Further, what is the aftermath of the situation? How do we process and make sense of these scenarios? Are DMT trainees afforded the safe spaces and support to recuperate and nourish while doing this work? How and with whom do we address these aspects of our education? (Chang, 2016; Kawano & Chang, 2019; Nichols, 2019; Sue et al., 2007).

Next, we are led down the path of Sheena's story. Here lies an anecdote about Sheena's relationship with her therapist during her study. We discussed her ability to access suitable mental health resources that she needed to combat feelings of being overwhelmed, otherness, isolation, discrimination, and depression.

> So, the first thing was that finding a therapist. So in my two years there, I wasn't able to find a therapist. Like I did find a therapist, but then I had to just make the compromises. Like I was just literally completing my number of hours, which I was required to complete and having therapists who weren't able to understand my culture… So I don't think like they were able to understand the nuance of all of that, and as training therapists, like that becomes an important holding for us, which really contains us, which really helps us remain sane. So I do not have that space. And on that as well, like I remember, I used to look at the faces of the therapist like the photographs and I used to, you know, like look for the brown face or like someone whose name would be Indian. Like not knowing if they're actually from India or not, like, would just look for that.

She further elucidated:

> In the aspect of individual therapy, I think I felt the direct impact of like those oppressive forces on me, and my therapist were actually very racist as well. Like they were clear-cut racist that, you know, like Indians are not emotionally intelligent…

As is customary in most counselling or mental-health-based graduate degrees, Sheena was required to complete a certain number of personal therapy hours for her program. A foreigner in the UK, Sheena described the arduous process of finding a trusting therapist with whom she felt safe and comfortable. She raises several significant avenues for discussion, the first being her failure to find an appropriate therapist. For Sheena, a suitable therapist would have been someone with the capacity to understand her culture. An Indian woman, Sheena's identity is deeply connected with the nuances of her culture – self-expression, emotional disclosure, hierarchical relationships in society, respect for elders, and collective harmony, among others, as described in the previous section. She sought at least some of these attributes in a therapist (Boas, 2013; Carducci, 2012; Chang, 2016; Dosamantes-Beaudry, 1997). During the present research interview, she affectively describes scrolling through web pages, looking for a singular brown face or Indian name among lists of therapists, only to be disillusioned. A desire for representation, seeing herself in others, and being truly seen and understood was tangible in Sheena's words, tone, and facial expressions (Nickerson, Helms & Terrell, 1994).

Perhaps, the sense of unspoken comfort and belonging may have bolstered Sheena to confront her challenges and pursue her goals even in the face of adversity. The lack of people who looked like her, understood her culture, or generally resonated with her life experience, as a person of colour was a substantial impediment (Awais & Yali, 2013; Kawano & Chang, 2019). As mentioned at the beginning of the discussion chapter, Sheena fell into a depressive episode during the latter half of her first year, which later manifested somatically as physical sickness. During her second year, she took a suspension to return home to India to nourish and rejuvenate herself. To that, Sheena said, "I feel it had a lot to do with the lack of access to the resources as well". Sheena's mistrust and hesitation to seek help from a white counsellor are unsurprising and commonplace (Nickerson, Helms & Terrell, 1994; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Moreover, her institution mandated her to seek therapy specifically from a Jungian psychoanalyst, an

aspect of her experience that will follow in an ensuing theme. However, as Sheena described, this therapist was a "clear cut racist". Sheena recounted an incident where her therapist referred to Indian people as emotionally unintelligent. This blatantly and explicitly racist incident rendered the space anything but therapeutic. With a tone of exasperation, Sheena stated, "I don't know what on earth gave her that right". In the absence of faculty or therapist role models, Sheena felt isolated and discouraged in seeking, accessing, and gaining support, compounding the acculturative stress (Hammond & Young, 1993; Slade, 2013; Yeh & Inose, 2003). She acknowledged and yearned for the provision of a "holding" and "containing" safe therapeutic space. Having had similar experiences, I understand her fear and hesitation to seek social support. Inevitably her inability to access adequate mental health support and resources and a subsequent dissonance with the curriculum led to physical, mental and emotional illness alongside a temporary suspension from her education and a cascade of financial stressors (Kim et al., 2008; Slade, 2013).

Themes of feeling othered and isolated remain resonant as this section of the discussion chapter progresses to Sophie's story. Following is a brief account of Sophie's personal experiences in the classroom environment:

> I was not the one, the big choice because, uh, she (refers to self in third person) not so great in writing or, you know, kind of be that she don't speak so well… it starts nobody near me… I was a little bit, the one put away, or the [one who] works alone.

Sophie's tertiary courses of study integrated much practical, interpersonal work among peers. In-class tasks involved students forming small groups within themselves to work through exercises and tasks. For Sophie, these moments accompanied anticipation, fear and isolation. While her classmates scurried around the room looking for their ideal partner, she frequently found herself left behind to either work alone or added to an existing group as a third. Sophie specifically expressed that her peers probably perceived her as lacking intelligence and, thereby, the ability to meaningfully contribute to group tasks owing to her struggles with the English language (Lee, 2013; Yeh & Inose, 2003).

Unconscious stereotyping and discrimination may explain the assumptions about her competency stemming from her language proficiency, accent, and academic writing skills (Chang, 2015; Goodman & Gorski, 2015; Kawano & Chang, 2019; Lee, 2013; Sue et al., 2007). Sophie's mental health and academic success were adversely impacted due to the subsequent social isolation.

The above discussion answers the sub-question, "How has Dance Movement Therapy as a field been complicit in favouring traditional/white-anglo dominant norms?". It points to a tertiary education in DMT that falls short of providing an inclusive, safe space for all learners. Participants' experiences in the educational space include microaggressions, instances of explicit racism, and social exclusion. Beyond the microaggression, Trisha felt lost and struggled to negotiate her position among the various power structures surrounding her – the University, the placement organisation, and her client. I wonder if organisational procedures exist to support students through challenging experiences during their training. If not, a lack of consideration of non-traditional students' needs is apparent. Sheena's story mirrors a desire for representation in university-mandated mental health support and the lack of the same. Additionally, acts of explicit racism in the personal therapy space indicate the need for vigilance, for systems in place that acknowledge how the needs of the non-traditional student may differ from those of traditional students. Sophie's experiences of social exclusion, on account of her language capabilities, reflect stereotyping and marginalisation behaviours in the classroom. In response, I question how the institution can proactively engender inclusion and safety for non-traditional students. The interviewees' comments reveal that a dominant western paradigm was explicit and implicit within the curriculum and the daily pedagogy.

5.4 Beyond the Individual, to the Collective

This subsection opens with three short accounts as Trisha and Sheena outline the deficiency of multicultural content and social justice dialogue in their respective

curriculums. Delving deeper, the discussion examines Sheena and Sophie's stories, deconstructing aspects of the DMT curriculum that felt distinctly incompatible with their lived experiences. We navigate to the opposite end of the spectrum, where Maeve and Jana talk about their treasured relationships with faculty members and peers and aspects of their educational journey that truly augmented their sense of belonging and personal growth. Finally, the section closes with several truncated accounts articulating participants' mutual desire for more safety and mutual responsibility within their training and pedagogical spaces.

This chapter earlier unpacked Trisha's anecdote divulging a racial micro-aggression at one of her placement sites. In this section, we heed her perception of the educational institution's role in intervention:

> I don't think my education has prepared me at all, like higher education specifically. I think whatever this is, is all based on like life experiences. And that is what has generally taught you how to manage these complex situations and how to navigate something.

Further reflecting, she states:

> Because no one talks about things like racism in class, even like everyone will say like, oh my gosh, like, you cannot do this, but no one is talking about examples of what to do, what does.. Like this is a micro-aggression? Or what could they look like? Or how subtle…

In Trisha's first account, "these complex situations" and "something" refers to the racial micro-aggression extensively discussed in section 5.3. She relayed that her lived experience as a woman of colour enabled her to gracefully navigate the situation in that moment of shock, freezing, and disconcertion. Her narrative expressed dissatisfaction and frustration as she admitted, "I don't think my education has prepared me at all, like higher education specifically". Leaving no room for nebulousness, she reflected on the absence of race and culture-related dialogues in her classroom environment. The dearth of critical conversation surrounding socio-political identities alludes to the pervasive

idea of 'dance as a universal language' in the field of Dance Movement Therapy. It perpetuates the idea that there is nothing to discuss because dance and movement must be the same for all (Chang, 2015; Stock, 2001). This cultural blindness lent to Trisha feeling unseen and unheard in the absence of a safe space to engage with her experiences. The one-size-fits-all view disregards the nuances that intersectional bodies bring to the table, unconsciously perpetuating the hegemonic status of American and Eurocentric lived experiences as normal. Further, the Eurocentric norms embedded in creative arts therapies education in the west only compound the dismissal of anything, anyone who is 'other' (Carmichael, 2012; Hadley, 2013; Kawano & Chang, 2019; Kumagai & Lypson, 2009; Nichols, 2019; Vera & Speight, 2003).

Sheena mirrors the discontent and exasperation stemming from a lack of acknowledgement of non-traditional identities in her DMT course curriculum:

> I feel like that was such a minimum, that's something which I can also facilitate now. It should have been like more in-depth and at that time every one's eyes were big and I think that's not a good thing. Like everyone's eyes shouldn't be big on these conversations. Like it should be something which is like normal to talk about and it should be the minimum knowledge that therapists should have.

"I feel like that was such a minimum". Here Sheena recounted a classroom lecture where her professor encouraged a vague discussion about significant global historical events and their societal impact. This discussion was the only formal acknowledgement of racial/cultural factors and non-traditional identities during her course. To Sheena, it was extremely trivial, the bare minimum. "At that time, everyone's eyes were big," says she, conveying the discomfort and fragility most of her white classmates experienced in the face of seemingly contentious conversations. Although well-intended, Sheena's learning experience, as stated within the anecdotes, reflected a fairly colonised, myopic view of the world. This version of cultural competency education hopes to check the boxes without critically examining how our social identities lie at the crux of our lived experiences.

Social-justice-oriented conversations should be normalised and "should be the minimum knowledge that therapists should have", proactively evading the oppression of non-traditional students as well as their future clients. Questioning the assumed normalcy of current practice in the Creative Arts Therapies is indispensable to enabling a socially just DMT field (Cantrick et al., 2018; Carmichael, 2012; Chang, 2015; Hadley, 2013; Vaillancourt, 2012; Wittig & Davis, 2012).

A safe, shared space for lived experiences to surface, particularly non-traditional students' experiences, as well as active efforts on behalf of educational institutions to: model emancipatory lectures, acknowledge the stark difference in the lived realities of non-traditional students, and design a curriculum encouraging critical consciousness seems pressing. Such efforts may enable emerging therapists to unpack the complex web of their intersecting social identities and lend to more equitable mental health pedagogy and care (Chang, 2015; Goodman & Gorski, 2015; Gipson, 2015; Hadley, 2013; Kawano & Chang, 2019; Kumagai & Lypson, 2009).

The following discussion explores the present research participants' relationships with the content in their curriculum, primarily addressing aspects of the curriculum they felt incongruent with and detached from:

> In a small body posture, like I'm just imagining in the case of working with Indian women who are homemakers and like how sometimes, um, the way we are occupying our body is so similar… Like it's a thing of a group, like my mom, my Mami, my Chachi, how they using their body in buses, it's like almost similar. And if someone pathologises that, that you know these women are not confident like that might be a very non-nuanced way to look at it. Like it might just be the fact that they are protecting themselves from the threat of the male gaze or male attack. So yeah, like was just thinking from that perspective, and it is something which a white person will never be aware about, about India like why women are occupying lesser space while walking or why are women always looking here and there while walking.

In discussing the Laban Bartenieff Movement System (LBMS) technique, a primary observation and assessment tool in Dance/Movement Therapy, Sheena proposed a culture-specific example to understand the embodied behaviours of Indian women through the lens of LMA. Women like her, Mami (maternal aunt) and Chachi (paternal aunt), often occupied a limited kinesphere and a "small body posture" while utilising public transport. Bearing premature inferences, a Laban-oriented lens may suggest that the women in Sheena's example embody a lack of confidence or power. Laban's Eurocentric history and 'psychophysical habitus' (Chang, 2016) render it incapable of considering the cultural nuances inherent in the way people move through the world (Carmichael, 2012; Chang, 2006; Chang, 2015; Desmond, 1997; Dickson, 2016; Kawano & Chang, 2019; Nichols, 2019;).

An individual from an individualistic western culture may conventionally portray confidence through an unrestrained physical occupation of space, direct eye contact, or bold self-expressiveness. Whereas in India, much of the hierarchical relational power structures are rooted in the patriarchy than in western cultures. For instance, even the familial joint family structure operates with the oldest man as the patriarch. In this context, an empowered, powerful woman may be personified rather differently than the western normative visual of a strong independent woman. For reasons unique to India's cultural nuances, such as women's perceived need for self-protection, religious/cultural beliefs about modesty, and the culturally assigned role of the individual in their larger social context, Indian women embody movement styles, habits and postures that are not characteristically associated with western constructs of independence (Carmichael, 2012; Chang, 2015; Cole, 2008; Desmond, 1997; Kim & Sherman, 2007; Ko, 2020; Nichols, 2019; Sajnani & Nadeau, 2006).

Sophie's parallel reflection on the origins of Laban's systems provides further insights into its perceived incongruence and subjective value:

> For me, it was very important to study Laban, to understand his vision, his way to see… but in real life… he was connected to different people. It was a lot of

> European and ballet look, the class, and this time people that did ballet, come on! It was white, rich people because, uh, you know, it wasn't poor, black, dark [people]. That was not accepted anyway. They need to be skinny… Yeah, it's another reality. So, but this is good to have this as a background. It's good to know, but… we live in another reality and we have different, completely different body shapes and way in the culture and way to, to move!

Like the other interviewees, Sophie found immense value in learning the LBMS system as a foundational basis for her DMT practice, though she rarely calls upon its utility. As Sophie articulated, the system originates in an era of overt racial oppression and white supremacy. Rudolph Laban's communities were European, skinny, generally wealthy, white folk. Ergo, Laban was not exposed to any other cultural group's embodied lived experiences and 'psychophysical habitus' (Chang 2016). A system built in an ethnocentric context is inherently cross-culturally deficient (Carmichael, 2012; Chang, 2015; Desmond, 1997; Dickson, 2016; Nichols, 2019; Talwar, 2004). We do "live in another reality" and reside in diverse body shapes and cultures. Dance or movement or simply the way people exist in their bodies is sociologically, historically, and geographically specific; the biased stance of LBMS means that it fails to encompass the variety in movement and embodied experiences of people of diverse cultures (Kawano & Chang, 2019).

Beyond LBMS, there exist some not-so-latent oppressive practices in DMT pedagogy as found when weaving through Sheena's story,

> When these courses they design, like who should be your therapist, they should be aware of the fact, or at least they should talk about the fact what's the demography of the therapist in that area. So how many brown Jungian analysts do we have? How many black Jungian analysts do we have and when you're making it compulsory for me to go to a Jungian analyst, how you're again, putting me in an oppressive structure… so that should really be acknowledged.
>
> Now I would have kept it as a condition that I should be allowed to seek therapy from a therapist in India in an online format. I would have totally requested that and putting this condition as well, that you need to find a Jungian analyst is not very culturally appropriate.

Sheena's graduate program required her to seek therapy from a Jungian psychoanalyst, owing to the fact that much of her course was founded upon principles of Jungian psychology. Jungian Psychology, founded by Carl Jung, is a school of thought with roots in western psychology. The exclusively Eurocentric focus of the course material also translated to the therapy space. By mandating Sheena to see a Jungian psychoanalyst, they were, as Sheena stated, "putting her in an oppressive structure". Rooted in values and ideologies of the global north, a Jungian psychoanalytical perspective may be incongruent with a non-traditional student's lived experience and the lens through which they interpret their experience.

Support aside, a pernicious outcome could be the therapist's inability to make sense of Sheena's problems and experience, which is precisely how she felt. Moreover, this detriment extends beyond the micro level, where in Sheena pays heed to the fact that systemically, the likelihood of encountering persons of colour who have had the privilege and access to seek training in Jungian psychotherapy is sparse. It is an apparent call to action that cultural competency efforts need to be addressed and implemented on micro and macro levels so as to comprehensively tackle individual and systemic oppression (Cantrick et al., 2018; Chang, 2016; Caldwell, 2013; Nichols, 2019; Speight & Vera, 2004).

Meanwhile, Maeve's experiences of racial/cultural challenges in the classroom environment differed relative to the previous stories. In her Introductory Dance Therapy course, her professors actively created the space for critical dialogue and encouraged students to bring their questions and curiosities to the table. Despite the fear of speaking up, as articulated in section 5.2, Maeve participated in analytical discussions, attempting to connect the in-class theory back to her own culture, and proactively making sense of her culture in the context of traditional dance therapy literature.

> Our professors are really welcoming, like, yeah. They just feel like it's more like they're learning from the foreign students as well... And then I don't feel that shutdown, like people what to shut me down. No. Actually [they] give me a space

> to really speak… then I try my best to speak and they empower my voice as well. They helped me find my voice as well.

I am drawn to the culture fostered within the learning space in Maeve's narrative. There lies criticality in the pedagogical relationship between the professor and the student. The seeming lack of hierarchy meant that Maeve's lived experiences were visible and valued by her peers and faculty. This safe, non-judgemental space seemed to profoundly impact Maeve's self-worth relative to her peers; here, she felt a sense of social support and belonging, could express herself and gain academic success. Most of all, Maeve felt empowered to access her personal voice as an emerging dance therapist and to express how certain things that may work seamlessly in the United States may require adaptations in Hong Kong (Boas, 2013; Chen, Kakkad & Balzano, 2008; Kawano & Chang, 2019; Ko, 2020; Vera & Speight, 2003). I gather that the advantages of having a classroom culture that actively promotes a platform to elevate the lived realities exceed beyond the individual level. To normalise the questioning of the normative may foster a collective consciousness sub-set that learns to think critically and pave a more socially just path forward. When encouraged to self-reflect and think critically, students harness the skill to deconstruct the conditioning in their worldview (Gipson, 2015; Goodman & Gorski, 2015; Hadley, 2013; Johnson, 2001; Kumagai & Lypson, 2009; Talwar, 2004).

Following is an instance of Trisha modelling critical thought:

> If the student has brought it to your notice, it has taken a lot for that student… to go through the different thought processes, like of course, self-doubt and questioning… and that should not be dismissed at any point of time because it prevents the student from coming back to you the next time… how is that relationship dealt with in the moment, especially during these triggering moments?

Trisha reflected on the faculty-student relationship from another angle. Following a previously articulated racial micro-aggression incident at her placement site, Trisha spent considerable time reflecting on how she navigated that process, logistically and emotionally. She noted the taxing emotional labour involved in voicing such a

contentious scenario. The fear of being dismissed or gaslit was legitimate. "How is that relationship dealt with at the moment?" was a valid concern on her behalf. In response, I continue to ask: What procedures do institutions have in place to ensure the safety of non-traditional students? What social support resources do institutions have in place to enable a trusting space? How racially diverse are the staff and student body, lending to representation and the consequent sense of belonging for non-traditional students? How may the curriculum proactive facilitate education on multicultural issues? And finally, what does the overall climate surrounding race and diversity look like? (Awais & Yali, 2013; Chang, 2016).

In the final sub-section of this discussion chapter, I aggregate a few participants' anecdotes from section 4.3.3, discussing a mutual desire among the interviewees for a safer, more critical spaces to address racial and multicultural issues.

> So something I would've really liked to just have that space to acknowledge that yes, we're all different in XYZ forms and having the opportunity to share like, how is yours different from it? – Trisha

> And that's where it needs to also be addressed within an educational setting of like… everyone may not come from a so-called privileged background.. So how do you still be sensitive to these things and not turn a blind eye when you're in the role of the therapist? - Trisha

> I think one thing would be, which would have definitely benefitted me was if there was a theoretical understanding in the group and among the professors about how our cultural context impacts. – Sheena

> So having to face these situations where for the minimum amount of analysis, I have to take responsibility for my own self. Instead if that responsibility was in the curriculum, then I would have eventually felt more supported. Then I wouldn't have gaslighted myself. - Sheena

> How can we bring the global perspective of Dance Movement Therapy? It's not just about America! – Maeve

From these narratives, I gather a common desire for designated liberatory spaces for the lived experiences of non-traditional students to surface and the embedment of racial and

multicultural education within the curriculum. Firstly, such measures may instil a sense of community and belonging for non-traditional students amidst the prevalent foreignness that ensconces their lived realities. This process also engenders a collective critical consciousness, not just benefitting non-traditional students but urging all to examine the way power dynamics sinuously move through our individual bodies and minds, theories, ideologies, and institutions (Bentley, 2003; Kumagai & Lypson, 2009; Kawano & Chang, 2019). What participants seek is training immersed in a critical pedagogy framework that affords:

- an awareness of lived experiences of the self and others
- an analysis of these experiences within the broader social context
- consequent accountability and action towards challenging the thoughts, ideologies, and practices that may be reinforcing oppression

"If the responsibility was in the curriculum, I would've felt more supported. Then I would not have gaslighted myself," admits Sheena. Often in situations where she feels the pressure to be the "spokesperson for her people" (Kumagai and Lypson, 2009; p. 784), Sheena fervently wished for the curriculum, through socially just multicultural education, to bear some of the load that non-traditional students frequently face (Kumagai and Lypson, 2009). It is clear that multiculturalism is either absent or superficially included within tertiary DMT pedagogy, research and practice. Participants desire that multiculturalism be embedded at the core so that the lives and realities of non-traditional students can cease to feel 'othered' and cease to warrant explanations. The discussion chapter has examined the data and revealed stereotyping, essentialising, pathologising, and oppressing of non-traditional students. Arguably a multicultural competency framework alongside the strategic representation and recruitment of faculty and students of colour is bound to ensure safety, education, and professional success (Awais & Yali, 2013; Chang, 2016; Gorski & Goodman, 2015; Hadley, 2013; Kawano & Chang, 2019). Chapter 6 concludes this study and further expands on the above recommendation.

5.5 Integrating

In summary, emergent in this final piece of the discussion chapter are three notable findings that answer the sub-question How may experiences of non-traditional students have implications for the education, research, and practice of Dance/Movement Therapy? Trisha and Sheena's opening stories paid critical heed to the role of the educational institution in oppressive/discriminatory scenarios. Notably, they confronted the lack of critical social justice dialogue in the classroom. Next, stories of explicit racial/cultural incompatibility dissected the prevalence of western dominant movement and psychology frameworks taught in education and practice. Cultural dissonance was palpable in the incompatibility of LBMS to non-traditional students' lived realities and in cross-cultural therapy built upon western psychology models. The mindset to "step out of our normal frames of reference and see the world as someone else sees it" (Brookfield, 2005, as cited in Hadley, 2013, p. 375) is absent from DMT curricula in these experiences. The field of DMT, particularly DMT pedagogy, ought to question how it is complicit in furthering the dominant ideologies, lending to the unconscious, unexamined exclusion of non-traditional students. Ultimately, five components of DMT training, pedagogy and practice are pronounced: the desire for a sense of community and belonging (social support); the need for systemic, macro-level interventions that safeguard and elevate non-traditional students; the normalisation of critical social justice dialogue in the educational space; the requirement of safe, inclusive (metaphorical) spaces for non-traditional students; the immersion of *true* multicultural competency education into the nooks and crannies of Dance Movement Therapy pedagogy and practice. Sincerely honouring the experiences of non-traditional students is now paramount. "And when these experiences are shared with us, we need to believe them, to bear witness to them, and to be moved by them" (Hadley, 2013, p. 380).

6 Conclusion

There are times when I walk into classrooms overflowing with students who feel terribly wounded in their psyches (many of them see therapists), yet I do not think that they want therapy from me. They do want an education that is healing to the uninformed, unknowing spirit. They do want knowledge that is meaningful. They rightfully expect that my colleagues and I will not offer them information without addressing the connection between what they are learning and their overall life experiences (hooks, 1994, p. 19).

6.1 The Personal is Political is Professional

As I prepare to close this chapter, in its literal and metaphorical essence, I am called to revisit my personal anecdote from Chapter One, section 1.3. Although this story was not included as an auto narrative source of data, it forms the very foundation for the relationship-building, uplifting, and listening inherent in the research. The seedlings of this research sprouted on a fateful afternoon in my supervisor's office, where I lay bare my exasperation, hurt, and anger towards the saturation of racially challenging encounters in my DMT training in New Zealand. I vividly recall thinking: *Why is this okay? Is it just me? Do fellow students experience this?* I desired to look for other voices who might have had similar stories, exasperations, and dejections, and most of all, I desired comradery amidst encounters that felt alienating. Through this research, I sought connection.

The personal is political and avows the feminist agenda, communicating that "our personal lives [are] reflected in the politics and values of the culture and vice versa" (Sajnani, 2012, p. 187, as cited in Hadley, 2013). Echoing bell hooks' sentiment in the opening quote, it speaks to the myth of the objective mind – devoid of bias and experience; of the binary divide between public and private; and of mind, body and spirit as mutually exclusive entities. To further dominant narratives, we are conditioned

to keep veiled the political within the personal, no matter how glaring it may be. I further extend this agenda to say - the personal is political is professional.

My personal experiences and this research reveal the complex, irreversible knots between the personal, political and professional. Our political environments meticulously mould our seemingly isolated and personal lived experiences, ultimately determining how we show up, or what we may be subject to, in our professional roles. This research has aimed to unveil sites of privilege or oppression in the professional and the personal (Hadley, 2013). 'The personal is political is professional' will continue to thematically shine through this chapter as I traverse a summary of my core findings.

6.2 Findings, Summarised

Chapter Two, section 2.2 charted a trajectory for the review of literature, beginning at the individual, micro level and expanding to the societal, macro level as it investigates the body as an interactive, connected entity. Situating the body at the intersection of physiology, embodiment, oppression and trauma, culture, Dance Movement Therapy, critical pedagogy, and social justice, it starts with the personal and evolves into the political and professional. Chapter Five charts a similar trajectory to make meaning of the findings. We begin with section 5.1 Culture, Embodied, which responds to the first two sub-questions from Chapter 1: "How do non-traditional students confront day-to-day challenges posed by their foreign identity in DMT praxis?" and "How do embodied practices interact with cultural narratives?" Prominent in the participants' stories are conspicuous cultural discrepancies in all aspects of their graduate school experience, their classroom, placements, personal therapy, and social lives. Specifically, discrepancies in language, accents, relational norms, embodiment styles, emotional expression, and self-disclosure lend to feelings of isolation, powerlessness, and inferiority, but also autonomy and independence. Also evident is the lack of "connection between what they are learning and their overall life experiences" (hooks, 1994, p. 19).

The power of invisible, hegemonic forces gently begins to unveil in this section. (Boas, 2013; Cantrick et al., 2018; Carducci, 2012; Goodman et al., 2015; Gudykunst et al., 1996; Johnson, 2015; Kawano & Chang, 2019; Kim & Sherman, 2007; Ko, 2020; Lee, 2013; Pallaro, 1997; White, 2019; Yeh & Inose, 2003).

The unveiling continues as section 5.2 responds to the sub-question "How has Dance Movement Therapy as a field been complicit in favouring traditional/white-anglo dominant norms?" This section begins to transition towards a macro-level focus as participants' shine a light on the role of their respective educational institutions/curricula in their experience. Micro-aggressions, stereotyping, essentialising, and explicit racial encounters occupy this section and participants' relay feeling lost, overwhelmed, insignificant, unseen, and unheard. (Goodman et al., 2015). Where does one begin, then? It all begins with an acknowledgement that the needs and lived experiences of non-traditional students are markedly different than traditional students. Upon surpassing that hurdle, proactive recruitment and retention strategies to represent students and faculty of colour, including institutional procedures to safeguard their wellbeing and a curriculum with multiculturalism embedded at its very core, and ergo normalised, may be instrumental strategies, as is vocalised in participants' stories. (A., 2015; Awais & Yali, 2013; Cantrick et al., 2018; Chang, 2016; Goodman et al., 2015; Hadley, 2013; Hervey & Stuart, 2012; Jorden, 2021; Kawano & Chang, 2019; Menakem, 2017; Neblett & Roberts, 2013; Schultz, 2018; Sue et al., 2007).

The final subsection, 5.3, Beyond the Individual, to the Collective, emphasises the 'macro' as it answers the sub-question, "How may experiences of non-traditional students have implications for the education, research, and practice of Dance/Movement Therapy?" Participants describe feeling effaced and irrelevant as accounts of racial/cultural incompatibility within their DMT curriculum/education, including theoretical frameworks or institutional requirements, emerge.

The chapter *Decolonizing Traditional Pedagogies and Practices in Counselling and Psychology Education: A Move Towards Social Justice and Action* in Goodman & Gorski's (2015) book cements the key findings that have arisen through this research. Substantively, they elaborate on five areas deemed indispensable in the decolonising counselling and psychology fields: critical consciousness-oriented education; embedment of multiculturalism at the nucleus of counselling/psychology training; "voyeurism versus voice" (Goodman et al., 2015, p. 148); community-driven interventions; and finally a forthrightly political stance towards all pedagogy and practice (Goodman et al., 2015).

Interestingly, the findings of this research can be condensed into eerily similar categories: the normalisation of critical social justice dialogue in the educational space; the immersion of *true* multicultural competency education into the nooks and crannies of Dance Movement Therapy pedagogy and practice; the requirement of safe, inclusive (metaphorical) spaces for non-traditional students; the desire for a sense of community and belonging (social support); and the need for systemic, macro-level interventions that safeguard and elevate non-traditional students. It is vital to consider that my participant cohort consisted of five interviewees ranging across various ages; nevertheless, it is reassuring to see the data within the microcosm of DMT mirror that in the wider mental health sphere (Abrams & Moio, 2009; Chang, 2015; Cole, 2008; Elliot, 2021; Hadley, 2013; Jorden, 2021; Kawano & Chang, 2019; Kumagai & Lypson, 2008; Nolan, 2013; Sajnani, 2012; Speight & Vera, 2004; Talwar, 2015; Vaillancourt, 2003).

6.3 Limitations and Ruminations

As a criticalist, a researcher and a Bricoleur, I value reflecting upon the how I could have done this research further justice. The drawbacks of the current study pave the path for an already established and incontrovertible need for further research into the experiences of non-traditional individuals in DMT. I am not benighted by the vitality of

'intersectionality' in deconstructing the complex ramifications of oppression. Briefly teased in the introduction chapter, this concept intentionally did not perfuse the research study. Considering the limited time and resources at my disposal while pursuing a Master's degree during a global pandemic, it lay in my best interest to zoom in on one pertinent aspect of sociocultural identity. I reflect on Goodman et al.'s (2015) view on intersectionality, "Is it enough, anyway, to know a little bit about this or that identity group, paying no attention whatsoever, to intersectionality, or to religious, regional, economic, or other differences to religious, or regional, or economic or other differences within these enormous groups?" (p. 5). The essence of intersectionality lies in the serpentine interactions of an individual's various identities, some of which may bestow unearned privileges while others may dispense oppression. I acknowledge that within our complex realities as human beings, no singular identity exists in a vacuum; my focus on race and culture in this research does not intend to turn a blind eye toward intersectionality. I hope for future research to *intersectionally* confront the lived experiences of non-traditional individuals in DMT as a failure to do so disregards the critical social identity brackets that comprise an individual's lived, embodied experience (Goodman et al., 2015; Hamrick & Byma, 2017; Kawano & Chang, 2019). An insight into the experiences of non-traditional faculty, in addition to students, may enhance an intersectional lens. After all, "as therapists we are not dealing with just one part of a person's identity, but the entirety of their "subject-in-process" or their "community-in-the-making." And they are dealing with all aspects of ours. This is precisely why we need to be ever vigilant" (Hadley, 2013, p. 377).

I conclude with an aspect of this study still shrouded within the invisible veil. Owing to the constraints of a Masters's research project, this study failed to unpack a critical theme incipient in the data. Section 4.6 outlined a theme titled 'Voice & Agency', briefly reflecting on participants' apparition in the limelight. As a friend, colleague, researcher, and/or interviewer, I recall feeling stirred as I heard stories of their evolution, of arriving at a place where they owned their voice and narrative. The embodiment of agency was palpable across the screen. I believe this pillar of participants' experiences is potent enough to comprise a research project in and of itself. Further, there lies potential to

research how mind-body practices within DMT can themselves be instrumental in uprooting unconscious biases and engendering a socially just field (Elliot, 2021; Johnson, 2015). The 'coming of age' phase of an emerging therapist bears richness. Richness is enough to inspire and offer solidarity to other non-traditional voices in DMT and, most of all, lend non-traditional voices more and more seats at the table. We deserve a seat at the DMT table.

In honour of the contribution of Meg Chang's work to this study, I close this book, for now, with a vantage point whose presence at the table is consequential. When di-contextualised or subjected to a reductionist view, the word "people of colour" in this thesis' title can reignite the very oppression this study intrepidly confronts. "Merely thinking additively, of POC and DMT, brings to mind simplistic solutions such as "add water and stir", as if all that was needed was to mix in more "of them" to create an integrated field" (Chang, 2016, p. 275). "Add water and stir" is a convenient circumvention and a reiteration of white bodies as "unmarked" because they simply *are*, and POC bodies are "marked", auxiliary (White, 2019, p.3; Chang 2016, p. 275; Sue & Sue, 1999). A call to action for multiculturalism to be truly embedded and immersed within curriculums is betrothed to People of Colour being and feeling truly integrated within Dance Movement Therapy.

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