A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF BODY INCLUSIVITY AND EXPERIENCES IN DANCE: EXAMINING DANCE LEADERS' APPROACHES TO CREATING SPACES FOR CURVY, FAT, PLUS-SIZE, AND THICK DANCERS AND UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCES OF DANCERS

by

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ABSTRACT

A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF BODY INCLUSIVITY AND EXPERIENCES IN DANCE: EXAMINING DANCE LEADERS' APPROACHES TO CREATING SPACES FOR CURVY, FAT, PLUS-SIZE, AND THICK DANCERS AND UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCES OF DANCERS

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Under the Supervision of Christy Greenleaf, Ph.D.

Dance is an activity that is strongly associated with thinness. The idea that women who participate in dance should be thin is reinforced by dance leaders, peers, parents, and the media. The pressure placed on women to be thin has been identified as a contributor to negative experiences, such as aspects relating to negative body image (e.g., body dissatisfaction) and disordered eating behaviors. The focus on thinness may also (un)intentionally exclude and discourage curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick women, as seen in the experiences of popular culture dance icons Misty Copeland and Lizzo. However, emerging literature indicates that participation in dance can cultivate positive experiences of embodiment (e.g., body appreciation, expression and experience of desire, and body comfort). The findings of experiences of positive embodiment may be attributed to the fact that certain forms of dance (e.g., pole and belly) have been identified as more accepting of diverse body shapes and sizes. Despite the findings and potential implications, two gaps in the literature remain relevant to body inclusion and body-related experiences. First, literature has yet to explore if and how dance leaders are actively working to create inclusive spaces for curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick women. Second, the literature has not fully explored the experiences of curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick women who participate in dance. Thus, this dissertation aims to address these gaps.

Study one explored how dance leaders create body-inclusive spaces. Seven dancer leaders who self-reported that they primarily serve curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick women participated in the study. Five participated in both the initial and follow-up interviews, which were used as a form of member checking and the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the strategies to create body inclusivity. Four themes were developed using content analysis: awareness and intentional use of language, representation of diverse body shapes and sizes, community inside and outside the dance space, and personal commitment to creating spaces with and for curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick folks. The study's findings demonstrate that creating body-inclusive spaces entails awareness, mindfulness, intentionality, and a genuine desire to include individuals with marginalized identities. Thus, the strategies reflected in the findings should not be interpreted as a checklist but as examples of approaches to creating body-inclusive spaces.

The second study explored positive body-related experiences of dancers who identify as curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick. Nine women who identified as curvy, fat, plus-size, and/or thick participated in the initial interview, seven of whom also participated in a follow-up interview that was used as a form of member checking to ensure their voices were accurately portrayed and understood. The data was analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. My understanding of the participants' shared experiences resulted in the development of three themes: embracing the body, connecting with the body, and resisting and rebelling against societal expectations. The themes of the study align with the positive experiences of embodiment identified by Piran (2017). Results from the study indicate that dancers experience positive embodiment in dance settings. Future research is needed to understand further body-related experiences of curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick dancers and the influence of multiple marginalized identities on body-related and dance experiences.

The dissertation aimed to add to the literature on body inclusivity and experiences in dance spaces. Based on the first study's findings, it is evident that dance leaders are actively and genuinely working to create body-inclusive spaces with and for curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick dancers. The results of the second study indicate that curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick dancers experience positive embodiment in dance spaces.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Beauty standards are socially constructed, informed by dominant discourses of beauty and health, and vary based on gender, culture, time, and space (Lorber & Martin, 2013; Van Amsterdam, 2013). In Western society, thinness has been a dominant characteristic of beauty for women (Hesse-Biber, 2007). However, the emphasis on a thin physique did not always exist. Strings (2019) provided a detailed, historical account of how beauty ideals have changed throughout the Western world. Strings (2019) traced the changes in societal body ideals from the Renaissance period, when well-rounded and proportionate bodies were viewed as ideal, to the rise of thinness as a marker for beauty and exceptionalism, particularly in the United States in the 19th century. The changes in body ideals from full- to slender figures did not occur on their own; rather, it is intertwined with issues of race, ethnicity, gender, and morality (Strings, 2019). Using historical records, paintings, newspapers, and other artifacts, Strings (2019) demonstrated how the rise in the preference for thinness was and continues to be inherently tied to racist and sexist powers within the larger Western society. Through the historical overview, Strings (2019) showed how "phobia about fatness and the preference for thinness have not, principally or historically, been about health. Instead, they have been one way the body has been used to craft and legitimate race, sex, and class hierarchies." (Strings, 2019, p. 6). These hierarchies further perpetuate racist, sexist, and sizeist practices, resulting in the continued exclusion, discrimination, and oppression experienced by members of marginalized communities.

Though Strings (2019) discussed the connection of body shape to racism and sexism within the context of the greater Western society, these practices manifest within specific spaces such as dance (Robinson, 2021). Despite the influence of Black culture and Blackness on American ballet, ballet is a genre of dance that has excluded and marginalized Black women

(Robinson, 2021). George Balanchine, an influential choreographer of American ballet in the 1930s, is identified as a key figure who profited off the appropriation of Black culture and created a strict image that worked to exclude Black women from ballet (Robinson, 2021). Kerr-Berry (2018, p. 143) asserted, "This hierarchy persists today because it is still defined by White dancing bodies, or as white property, and evolved into a very lean body aesthetic in the United States." Literature has shown that the exclusion and discrimination of Black women and emphasis on thinness within ballet continue today (Atencio & Wright, 2009; Dixon Gottschild, 2003; Kerr-Berry, 2018; Mattingly et al., 2023). Though we know these racist and sexist practices exist in ballet, little is known about whether these practices are as prevalent in other dance genres and women's experiences of exclusion and discrimination based on body shape and size in dance.

The portrayal of women in movies (e.g., *Step Up* and *Footloose*) and television shows (e.g., *So You Think You Can Dance* and *Dancing with the Stars*) relating to dance may inadvertently reflect the exclusion of Black, Indigenous, and women of color in other dance styles. Furthermore, the representation of dancers in the media reinforces a thin body aesthetic for women. Though the experiences of dancers with diverse body shapes and sizes have yet to be fully explored in literature, the experiences shared by popular culture icons in the media shed light on the discrimination and exclusion of curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick women. Misty Copeland, the first African American principal dancer with the American Ballet Theatre, shared experiences related to her body, race, and ethnicity in ballet with various news and magazine outlets. Copeland acknowledged her body was different from other dancers as she described, "I might not have the stereotypical 'black body,' but I definitely am more curvy and have a more athletic build from most ballet dancers" (Carroll, 2011). Copeland recalled critics questioning her

body “for being too ‘bulky’ and ‘busty’” (Kim, 2022). Copeland continued in another interview, “I have a body that a lot of white dancers have and there’s white ballerinas that are principal dancers that have larger chests than me and bigger muscles and broader shoulders and they are not told they don’t belong” (Harlow & Paul, 2018). For Copeland, being told that she did not have the “right body” did not only refer to her body shape and size but also her racial and ethnic background (Harlow & Paul, 2018). Additionally, Copeland was aware that clothing was a barrier to participating in dance for curvy women, as most professional dance wear is made for petite women with small busts (Caroll, 2011). Copeland reported that plus-size women have told her they do not want to enter ballet or gym spaces because they feel unattractive or clothes do not flatter them. Overall, these experiences and reflections reinforce the emphasis on body shape and size and its potential negative consequences.

Lizzo, a pop-culture musician, flutist, and dancer, has also been vocal about her experiences as a Black woman who self-identifies as fat (Miller & Platenburg, 2021b). As a prominent figure in popular culture with multiple marginalized identities, Lizzo has publicly experienced racism, sexism, and sizeism. She has openly discussed her experiences on social media platforms and used her platform to advocate for causes relating to racism, sexism, and fat-shaming (Miller & Platenburg, 2021a). Lizzo has specifically used her platform to increase the representation of curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick women in dance. Lizzo developed the Amazon Original series *Lizzo’s Watch Out for the Big Grrrls* in response to the inability of dance agencies to provide curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick dancers (Lizzo, 2022). Throughout the show, the contestants shared experiences of feeling like they do not belong in dance spaces and how the intersection of marginalized identities (e.g., gender identity, race and ethnicity, and body shape and size) influenced their experiences with their body and dance (Lizzo et al., 2022).

Copeland's, Lizzo's, and the contestant's experiences highlight the intersection of multiple marginalized identities. Kimberlé Crenshaw first used the concept of intersectionality to highlight the simultaneous gender and race discrimination experienced by Black women in the legal system (Crenshaw, 1989). As explained by Van Amsterdam (2013, p. 1-2), Crenshaw (1989) asserted that "gender and race should not be studied as separate mechanisms of power but as intersecting ones which co-produce exclusion and marginalization." Black feminist scholars such as Patricia Hill Collins (2000) further argued that intersectionality reinforces the matrix of domination. According to Collins (2000, p. 299), the matrix of domination refers to "the overall organization of hierarchical power relations for any society. Any specific matrix of domination has (1) a particular arrangement of intersecting systems of oppression, e.g., race, social class, gender, sexuality, citizenship status, ethnicity, and age; and (2) a particular organization of its domains of power, e.g., structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal." Thus, these systems of power result in the oppression, exclusion, and discrimination of individuals with marginalized identities.

The experiences of Copeland, Lizzo, and the contestants of *Lizzo's Watch Out for the Big Grrrls* go beyond gender, race, and ethnicity and layers the intersection of body shape and size. Furthermore, the experiences presented in the media suggest curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick women may be (un)intentionally excluded or discouraged from participating in dance. Influenced by their experiences, Copeland and Lizzo have utilized their platforms to promote greater representation of individuals with marginalized identities in dance. Copeland created the Be Bold Program, which "aims to make ballet accessible, affordable and fun, especially for children of color" (*The Misty Copeland Foundation*, 2022) and was set to launch a dance-wear line for curvy women (Carroll, 2011). As for Lizzo, she created a show to increase the representation of women

with marginalized identities and bring forward the dance and body-related experiences of curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick dancers.

While the experiences of dancers with diverse body shapes and sizes have yet to be fully explored in research, women have reported experiencing weight stigma in other physical activities (PA) settings (Myre et al., 2020; Pickett & Cunningham, 2018; Sniezek, 2021). The experiences of weight stigma have contributed to women feeling unwelcomed and excluded from PA spaces. Furthermore, experiences of weight stigma are positively associated with body dissatisfaction (Vartanian & Novak, 2011). Concerning dance specifically, there is evidence that suggests the association between dance and thinness can negatively impact women's lived experiences with their bodies (e.g., body dissatisfaction and disordered eating behaviors) (Langdon, 2012; Reel et al., 2005; Robbeson et al., 2015; Schluger, 2010). However, there is also growing evidence that suggests dance can cultivate positive experiences with the body (i.e., positive embodiment and positive body image) (Dimler et al., 2017; Greenleaf & Hauff, 2019; Holland, 2010; Moe, 2012; Nicholas et al., 2018). Though evidence suggests that dance can negatively and positively impact women's lived experiences with their bodies, there is a limitation with samples represented in the current literature. Specifically, recent studies have not reported information about body shape and size or have primarily included women categorized as "healthy weight" according to the body mass index (BMI). Thus, the body-related experiences of curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick dancers remain understudied.

Purpose of the Dissertation

Overall, two gaps in the literature remain. First, little is known about the strategies institutions (e.g., dance companies and agencies) and leaders (e.g., directors and instructors) are currently implementing to create inclusive dance spaces with and for curvy, fat, plus-size, and

thick women. Secondly, to current knowledge, the lived experiences of women who identify as curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick and engage in dance recreationally or professionally have yet to be discussed in academic literature. Therefore, this dissertation aims to: A) explore approaches dance leaders use to create body-inclusive dance environments and B) understand the lived body-related experiences of women who participate in dance and identify as curvy, fat, plus-size, and/or thick. To accomplish these aims, I will conduct two studies:

Study 1: The purpose of this qualitative study is to identify the strategies dance leaders (e.g., dance directors and instructors) use to create body-inclusive dance spaces.

Study 2: This qualitative study explores the body-related experiences of women who identify as curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick and engage in dance.

In the next chapter, I will provide an overview of the literature relating to the experiences of curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick women who engage in various forms of PA, approaches to create body-inclusive spaces and the experiences of dancers presented in the literature to help set the foundation of this study.

Chapter II: Literature Review

A brief synopsis of the literature on the weight stigma will first be presented to set the premise for understanding the need for body-inclusive spaces. Next, I will provide an overview of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks to combat weight stigma and create body-inclusive PA spaces and the potential positive outcomes of participating in body-inclusive PA spaces. Lastly, the chapter will review the literature about the body-related experiences of dancers and the factors that contribute to these experiences.

Though health literature has used the BMI classifications (e.g., overweight and obese) as body shape and size descriptors, I am intentional about using curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick to describe body shape and size. The decision to use curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick was based on several reasons. First, I understand the racial and gender bias of the BMI and the problematic use of the classifications (Byrne, 2020; Cunningham, 2019; Jackson et al., 2009; Nuttall, 2015). Thus, I decided to move away from using the classifications to describe body shape and size and instead use curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick. The decision to include fat was based on the reclamation of fat. The reclamation of fat is to move away from medicalized language, reject the thin ideal, and disassociate from embarrassment, shame, and disgust (Dickins et al., 2011). However, I am aware of the derogatory underpinning of fat and understand that fat is not universally used or accepted by all. Thick, curvy, and plus-size have also been used in literature as alternative descriptors of body shape and size (Capodilupo & Kim, 2014; Schooler et al., 2012). While the interpretation of thick, curvy, and plus-size may vary, they commonly refer to bodies that may go against the thin ideal prevalent in Western society. Thus, I will use curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick as descriptive terms throughout the dissertation to be mindful and inclusive of how women may describe their body shape and size.

Weight-Related Discrimination and Stigma

Scholars have referred to weight-related discrimination as the last form of socially acceptable discrimination (Andreyeva et al., 2008; Puhl et al., 2008). Curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick folks experience weight-related discrimination and stigma in various settings such as work, healthcare, and education (Puhl & Heuer, 2009; Spahlholz et al., 2016). Weight stigma refers to negative attitudes and beliefs related to weight and the resulting prejudice, rejection, and discrimination of individuals based on their body shape and size (Sattler et al., 2018; Spahlholz et al., 2016). Though weight-related discrimination and stigma have been explored in literature, there is a limited understanding of experiences of weight stigma among individuals with multiple intersectional marginalized identities (e.g., race and ethnicity, gender identity, sexuality).

Findings related to weight-related discrimination and racial and ethnic background have shown mixed results. For example, the findings from Himmelstein et al. (2017) suggested experiences of weight stigma occurred equally throughout all racial groups. In contrast, Puhl et al. (2008) found that weight discrimination was most prevalent among women and men of color, with the greatest prevalence among Black women and men. Additionally, among a racially diverse sample, Pearl et al. (2017) found that race and weight-based discrimination were reported as the most common and repeated forms of discrimination. While the influence of the intersection between body shape and size and race and ethnicity remains understudied as it relates to experiences of weight stigma and discrimination, it is important to acknowledge the historical tie between body shape and size and racism within the United States (Montgomery, n.d.; Strings, 2019). The connection between fatphobia and racism is important to acknowledge and understand, as the relationship demonstrates that identities do not exist in a vacuum.

Furthermore, the connection further influences sexist practices and body-related experiences and ideals.

Concerning gender identity and experiences of weight stigma, evidence has shown a greater prevalence of these experiences among women than men (Fikkan & Rothblum, 2012; Puhl et al., 2008; Spahlholz et al., 2016). The greater prevalence of weight stigma among women may, in part, be due to the fact that women generally experience more pressure to conform to dominant body ideals than men (Puhl et al., 2008; Van Amsterdam, 2013). The idea of thinness as the ideal in the United States can be traced back to the 19th century (Strings, 2019). Since then, thinness has remained a dominant characteristic of the ideal body for women. For example, today, the current expectation for women is to have a thin yet moderately toned body (Gillen & Markey, 2016). However, it is important to recognize this ideal is not always consistent with the body ideals in various cultures. For instance, women who identified as African American or Black reported a thick, curvy body (e.g., shapely hips and a full backside) as the ideal body (Capodilupo & Kim, 2014). Another example is in Hispanic/Latino/x culture, thickness (e.g., curvy yet slender body, big hips, and round bottoms) is the ideal body for women (Schooler et al., 2012). While ideals may vary, the thin yet moderately toned body is the dominant ideal perpetuated in Western media. Thus, women are praised when they meet society's ideals but scrutinized when they do not meet the standard (Lorber & Martin, 2013). As a result, women are encouraged to engage in PA and exercise (e.g., aerobics and light weight lifting) to achieve the ideal body (McGannon et al., 2011). Though society promotes PA as a way for women to conform their bodies to society's standard, curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick women report experiences of weight stigma in PA settings and subsequent negative physical (e.g., avoiding

engagement in PA) and psychological (e.g., body image) outcomes as a result of overall weight stigma experiences.

Women's Experiences of Weight Stigma in Physical Activity Spaces

Weight stigma within PA spaces remains an under-recognized social justice, diversity, and inclusivity issue (Cardinal et al., 2014). Curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick women reported experiencing weight stigma in PA and exercise spaces (e.g., gyms, yoga, and running settings) (Myre et al., 2020; Pickett & Cunningham, 2018; Sniezek, 2021). Women identified direct (e.g., comments and treatment) and indirect (e.g., lack of modifications for exercises and extended race time) experiences of weight stigma (Myre et al., 2020; Pickett & Cunningham, 2018; Sniezek, 2021). Women also noted the lack of available exercise clothing options and weight-centered messages in fitness settings as stigmatizing experiences (Myre et al., 2020; Sniezek, 2021). The experiences of weight stigma contributed to women feeling unwelcomed and excluded from PA (Myre et al., 2020; Pickett & Cunningham, 2018).

Experiences of weight stigma have also been associated with motivation to avoid PA and components of body image. In samples primarily composed of women, weight stigma experiences throughout life were associated with higher motivation to avoid exercise and greater body dissatisfaction (Vartanian & Novak, 2011; Vartanian & Shaprow, 2008). In an in-depth exploration of the impact of weight stigma on participation in PA and body image, curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick participants reported weight stigma experiences and the fear of experiencing stigma as reasons why they discontinued participation or avoided exercise settings (Thedinga et al., 2021). Additionally, in another study where the participants were primarily women who participated in or led yoga sessions, participants described various instances where they experienced weight stigma in PA settings. Examples of weight stigma experiences included

being singled out, receiving more attention in class, and unsolicited advice. Participants noted they internalized societal beliefs about the body and, thus, reported having conflicts with their bodies, such as feeling not good enough, struggling with eating disorders, and lacking body awareness (Pickett & Cunningham, 2018).

While the experiences of women who identify as curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick in dance settings remain understudied, previous findings demonstrate an overall need to create inclusive PA environments for individuals with diverse body shapes and sizes (Rukavina, 2022). In recognition of weight stigma's adverse effects on physical and psychological health, two models have emerged in the literature to create body-inclusive spaces.

Approaches to Combat Weight Stigma and Promote Body Weight Inclusivity in Physical Activity Spaces

A multilevel approach and conceptual model of body weight inclusive PA spaces aim to combat weight stigma and can be applied to create body inclusivity in fitness environments (Cook et al., 2014; Pickett & Cunningham, 2017b). While the two frameworks are distinct, similar methods to create body-inclusive environments are suggested in both models. The following sections describe a multilevel approach and the conceptual model of body weight inclusive PA spaces and address how the models supplement each other.

A Multilevel Approach

Cook et al. (2014) proposed a multilevel approach to reduce weight stigma and improve health outcomes. Cook et al.'s (2014) multilevel approach has three levels – intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural. Cook et al. (2014) asserted there is potential for bidirectional influence within and between each level (see Figure 1). The *intrapersonal level* focuses on "individuals and the intrapersonal dynamics that affect people's experiences with the

environment" (Cook et al., 2014, p. 101). Strategies to develop body inclusivity at the intrapersonal level aim to change how individuals think, feel, and behave (Cook et al., 2014). Based on previous literature, Zuest et al. (2022) identified developing fitness professionals' attitudes, knowledge, and skills as strategies at the intrapersonal level. Several ways for fitness professionals to develop attitudes, knowledge, and skills were shared, such as learning the history of the BMI and its associated consequences (i.e., knowledge), providing modified movement options (i.e., skills), and reflecting on personal assumptions about weight and health (i.e., attitudes) (Alberga & Russell-Mayhew, 2016; Cameron, 2015; Souza & Ebbeck, 2018).

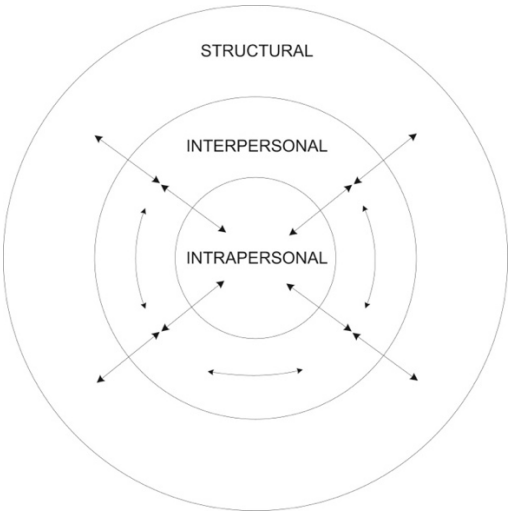

Figure 1

A multilevel system with arrows depicting the possibility for bidirectional influences within and between system levels (Cook et al., 2014, p. 102).

The *interpersonal level* highlights individual interactions (i.e., dyadic and groups). At the interpersonal level, body-inclusive strategies focus on the interactions between individuals in social settings, such as those who are a member of a stigmatized group and those who are not (Cook et al., 2014). Zuest et al. (2022) noted that inclusive language, creating a caring environment, promoting multidimensional health, and providing diverse programming are a few

strategies fitness professionals can implement at the interpersonal level. Inclusive language in practice is being mindful of problematic or stigmatizing language, such as terms used for the BMI (e.g., overweight and obese), and instead using neutral terms (e.g., fat) (Cooper Stoll & Thoune, 2020; Pickett & Cunningham, 2017b). Additionally, offering diverse programming entails providing an array of enjoyable and pleasurable activities (Souza & Ebbeck, 2018)

Lastly, the *structural level* of the multilevel approach "focuses on social forces and institutions" (Cook et al., 2014, p. 102). Strategies at the structural level aim to challenge and change cultural norms on body weight, shape, and size (Cook et al., 2014). Zuest et al. (2022) identified increasing representation of diverse bodies, adjusting physical spaces and equipment, enacting policies, and making cultural and leadership commitments to inclusion as strategies at the structural level that promote body inclusivity. For example, adjusting physical spaces and equipment entails ensuring the space between equipment accommodates curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick bodies (Souza & Ebbeck, 2018). Fitness leaders can also demonstrate cultural and leadership commitment by engaging in outreach efforts to diverse communities (Rich & Mansfield, 2019). Though the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural strategies are presented separately based on level, Cook et al. (2014) argued that the strategies within and between each level affect each other. Implementing inclusive strategies from each level can reduce weight stigma and improve health.

Conceptual Model of Body Weight Inclusive Physical Activity Spaces

According to the conceptual model of body weight inclusive PA spaces, hereafter referred to as Pickett and Cunningham's model (2017b), there are six elements to create body weight inclusive PA spaces. Moving beyond identifying body weight inclusive elements, Pickett and Cunningham's model (2017b) also illustrates that body weight inclusive elements will

enhance commitment to participate in PA and, thus, increase psychological and physical well-being. Additionally, Pickett and Cunningham's model (2017b) suggest that intersecting marginalized identities (e.g., gender identity, race, ethnicity, and body shape and size) can influence the relationship between body weight inclusivity and commitment to PA (see Figure 2). The following sections will describe each part of the model.

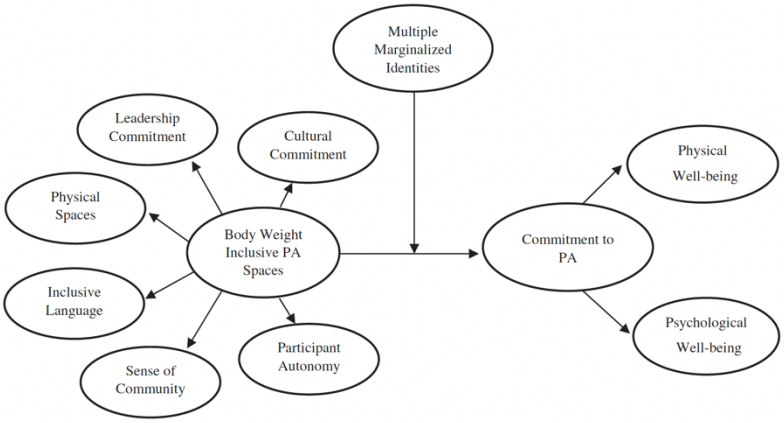

Figure 2

Conceptual Model of Body Weight Inclusive Physical Activity (PA) Spaces (Pickett & Cunningham, 2017b).

Elements of Body Weight Inclusive PA Spaces

The six elements of body weight inclusivity identified in Pickett and Cunningham's (2017b) model are a) cultural commitment to inclusion, b) leadership commitment to inclusion, c) physical spaces, d) inclusive language, e) sense of community, and f) participant autonomy. *Cultural commitment* goes beyond accessibility and acknowledges the uniqueness and value of every individual. Pickett and Cunningham (2017b) recommended that fitness and wellness organizations ensure that all participants are provided for and valued in the space to demonstrate cultural commitment to body weight inclusivity.

Ensuring participants are valued begins from the top with organizational leaders and managers. Thus, *leadership commitment* highlights the critical role of leaders in creating body weight inclusive PA environments. Individuals in leadership positions can demonstrate their commitment to inclusivity by modeling inclusive behavior, incorporating inclusive policies, and having a staff with diverse body shapes. *Physical space* refers to the design and layout of the PA environment. Pickett and Cunningham (2017b) noted that inclusive spaces should have adaptive equipment available for individuals with diverse body shapes and sizes and minimize the number of mirrors and materials focusing on weight or weight loss.

Inclusive language reflects being mindful of the terminology used within PA spaces. Pickett and Cunningham (2017b) specifically advised using weight-neutral language, for example, avoiding terms such as overweight as it implies there is a standard weight (Pickett & Cunningham, 2017b). A *sense of community* refers to an individual's sense of belonging within the space. Staff members should encourage and build community between staff and participants and among participants themselves. Lastly, *participant autonomy* suggests individuals need to be interested in PA and have an active role within the PA space. For example, participants should be involved in creating PA spaces and have a voice in how organizations operate (Pickett & Cunningham, 2017b). Pickett and Cunningham's model (2017b) suggests that collectively the six elements of inclusivity will positively influence an individual's commitment level to participate in PA and result in experiencing psychological and physical benefits.

Benefits of Participating in Body Weight Inclusive PA Spaces

Pickett and Cunningham (2017b) utilized the Psychological Continuum Model (PCM) to base their argument that participation in body weight inclusive PA spaces will lead to a greater commitment to PA. The PCM suggests four stages of commitment to PA: awareness, attraction,

attachment, and allegiance (Beaton et al., 2009; Funk & James, 2001). Individuals first become aware of PA opportunities in which they are not currently involved and seek out information. Individuals are then attracted to PA and begin participating (Beaton et al., 2009). At the attraction stage, perceived barriers (e.g., feeling unwelcomed) may influence an individual's continued engagement in PA (Beaton et al., 2009; Pickett & Cunningham, 2017a). In the third stage, attachment, individuals continuously participate in PA despite barriers. Lastly, allegiance is when the activity becomes a part of everyday life (Beaton et al., 2009). Though it is ideal for individuals to progress through the stages, it is possible to remain in a stage or regress (Beaton & Funk, 2009).

Pickett and Cunningham (2017b) proposed hostile PA environments may contribute to individuals with larger bodies remaining in the awareness and attraction phases. Therefore, Pickett and Cunningham (2017b) argued feeling welcomed and perceiving the space to be inclusive to all body shapes and sizes in the first two stages can influence whether curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick individuals progress to the latter stages (e.g., attachment and allegiance). Moving into the attachment and allegiance stages will result in a higher commitment to PA engagement. While the relationship between inclusive PA spaces and commitment to PA may appear linear, Pickett and Cunningham's model (2017b) suggests the intersection of multiple marginalized identities (e.g., gender identity, race and ethnicity, and class) moderate the relationship between body weight inclusivity and commitment to PA.

Intersectionality was first used to highlight the simultaneous gender and race discrimination experienced by Black women (Crenshaw, 1989). Crenshaw (1989) argued gender and race are intertwined and, thus, should not be studied separately. The intersection of identities speaks to the power systems in society and the intersecting oppressions related to gender identity

and race. Though the intersection of gender identity and race was first highlighted by Crenshaw (1989), scholars have since used the concept of intersectionality with multiple marginalized identities (e.g., body shape and size, class, sexuality, etc.).

The intersection of identities impacts participation in PA in different ways. The experiences shared by LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, etc.) folks highlighted the complexity of experiences of individuals with intersecting marginalized identities (e.g., race and ethnicity and [dis]ability) in PA that reflect existing oppressions in the larger society (Herrick & Duncan, 2018). While explaining the influence of multiple marginalized identities, Pickett and Cunningham (2017b) reflected on previous findings of women of color with low socioeconomic status having lower participation in PA than white women. While these are examples of the intersection of multiple marginalized identities, they do not reflect all of the ways identities can intersect. Thus, Pickett and Cunningham (2017b) argued that marginalized identities could influence the relationship between body-inclusive PA spaces and commitment to PA.

Lastly, Pickett and Cunningham (2017b) suggested that commitment to participate in PA leads to individuals experiencing psychological and physical benefits, as demonstrated in their model. The assertation is grounded in the well-documented relationship between engagement in PA and physical and psychological well-being in the literature (Paluska & Schwenk, 2000; Warburton et al., 2006). Pickett and Cunningham (2017b) discussed the psychological benefits of PA participation, such as reducing anxiety and depression. However, other psychological benefits, such as positive body-related experiences, must be considered. As demonstrated by emerging evidence, sports, exercise, and PA (e.g., yoga and dance) can impact experiences of positive body image and positive embodiment (Dimler et al., 2017; Holland, 2010; Homan & Tylka, 2014; Mahlo & Tiggemann, 2016; Piran & Neumark-Sztainer, 2020; Tiggemann et al.,

2014). Though research on embodiment and positive body image and their relation to PA is limited, these psychological components may optimize overall psychological well-being (Munroe, 2022; Tylka, 2018).

Positive Body Image

Contrary to the initial assumption, negative and positive body image are not opposites. Thus, negative body image does not equate to the absence of positive body image and vice versa (Tylka, 2018). Wood-Barcalow et al. (2010) constructed the definition of positive body image from the qualitative findings from a sample of US college women. Positive body image is defined as:

> "An overarching love and respect for the body that allows individuals to (a) appreciate the unique beauty of their body and the functions that it performs for them; (b) accept and even admire their body, including those aspects that are inconsistent with idealized images; (c) feel beautiful, comfortable, confident, and happy with their body, which is often reflected as an outer radiance, or a "glow;" (d) emphasize their body's assets rather than dwell on their imperfections; (e) have a mindful connection with their body's needs; and (f) interpret incoming information in a body-protective manner whereby most positive information is internalized and most negative information is rejected or reframed" (Wood-Barcalow et al., 2010, p. 112).

From the definition, six components of positive body image were further defined (Tylka, 2018). Body appreciation is the most assessed component of positive body image. Body appreciation reflects acceptance of the body, respect for the body, positive views of the body, and the rejection of the notion that there is a single standard of beauty (Avalos et al., 2005). Body acceptance and love entail being comfortable in one's body, accepting the body's unique

features, and loving the body (Tylka, 2018). A broad conceptualization of beauty refers to perceiving diverse appearances, looks, and body shapes and sizes as beautiful. Furthermore, a broad conceptualization of beauty reflects the belief that beauty radiates from inner features such as generosity (Tylka, 2018).

Adaptive body investment involves engaging in actions that reflect care for the body. Individuals can demonstrate care for their bodies by engaging in joyful PA, being well-rested, and eating food that will energize the body (Tylka, 2018). Another component of positive body image is inner positivity influencing outer demeanor. This component reflects the interaction between general feelings, feelings about the body, and the expression of these feelings (Tylka, 2018). Lastly, protective filtering entails rejecting societal messages that may negatively impact an individual's feelings about their body. Though the components of positive body image are presented separately, they are interdependent (Tylka, 2018).

Positive Experiences of Embodiment

There are various definitions of embodiment; however, for this dissertation, the description of embodiment provided in the Developmental Theory of Embodiment (DTE) will be utilized. Embodiment "refers concurrently to the breadth of lived experiences as one engages with his/her body in the world, and to the shaping of the experience by cultural forces" Piran (2017, p. 2). The definition of embodiment is grounded in the philosophical work of Merleau-Ponty (1962) and the work of Foucault (1979). The emphasis on lived experiences is influenced by Merleau-Ponty (1962), who asserted the mind, and the body cannot be separated. Furthermore, the body actively experiences the world. Foucault's (1979) assertion that the body is a site of social power and control, a claim adopted by feminist theorists, helps understand how cultural forces influence experiences of embodiment.

According to the DTE, experiences of embodiment lie on a continuum from negative to positive (Piran, 2017). This dissertation will highlight experiences of positive embodiment. Piran (2017) identified five dimensions of positive embodiment: (1) body connection and comfort, (2) agency and functionality, (3) experience and expression of desire, (4) attuned self-care, and (5) inhabiting the body as a subjective site. The conceptualization of each dimension is as follows:

Dimension 1- Body Connection and Comfort reflects positive feelings associated with the body, such as comfort, connection, pride, and appreciation (Piran, 2017; Piran and Neumark-Sztainer, 2020)

Dimension 2- Agency and Functionality describes interacting with the world with a sense of agency. Agency can be experienced through physical functionality (e.g., participation in sports and exercise) or by using one's voice to express oneself (Piran, 2017).

Dimension 3- Experience and Expression of Desire reflects the ability to experience desires (e.g., appetite and sexuality) comfortably and openly and to express those desires in a self-care and attuned manner (Piran, 2017).

Dimension 4- Attuned Self-Care describes the awareness of and response to internal body cues (e.g., bodily, emotional, and relational) as the body engages with the external world and practicing self-care when needs are recognized (Piran, 2017).

Dimension 5- Inhabiting the Body as a Subjective Site is demonstrated through resistance and protest of the pressure to meet normative standards (Piran, 2017).

Though presented as separate, the five dimensions occur concurrently (Tylka & Piran, 2019).

There are clear theoretical overlaps between positive embodiment and positive body image components. For instance, Piran and Neumark-Sztainer (2020) acknowledge body connection and comfort (e.g., positive embodiment) and body appreciation (e.g., positive body

image) are similar in that both encompass an appreciation for the body. Thus, Tylka and Piran (2019) asserted that embodiment is the overarching construct that incorporates positive and negative body image. As such, I will use positive embodiment as the overarching concept.

Summary of Approaches

The multilevel approach (Cook et al., 2014) and Pickett and Cunningham's (2017a) model have a similar goal to combat weight stigma and promote body weight inclusivity in PA spaces. The multilevel approach identifies strategies of body weight inclusivity at three broad levels – intrapersonal (e.g., developing skills and attitudes), interpersonal (e.g., adopting inclusive language and offering diverse programming), and structural (e.g., adjusting physical spaces and equipment and enacting policies) (Cook et al., 2014). In comparison, Pickett and Cunningham's (2017a) model identifies six specific inclusivity elements – cultural commitment, leadership commitment, inclusive language, sense of community, physical spaces, and participant autonomy. Pickett and Cunningham's (2017a) model goes further as it suggests the presence of all six elements identified will lead to increased commitment to participate in PA and, thus, result in psychological benefits, such as experiences of positive embodiment and positive body image.

The two models highlight strategies that help create body-weight PA spaces. The general levels of the multilevel approach leave room for the opportunity to identify more than six inclusive strategies. In contrast, Pickett and Cunningham's model (2017a) emphasizes six specific elements that can be categorized within each level of the multilevel approach (Cook et al., 2014). For example, Zuest et al. (2022), inclusive language can be categorized at the interpersonal level, and cultural and leadership commitment to inclusive can be categorized at the structural level of the multilevel approach. Though a distinct model, emerging evidence

provides initial support for inclusive strategies presented using the multilevel approach and the conceptual model of body weight inclusivity in PA and exercise settings.

Current Empirical Support for Body Inclusivity in Physical Activity Spaces

There is a recent growth of literature that has examined elements of inclusivity within PA and exercise spaces. Strategies implemented by fitness leaders have been explored, and perceptions of body inclusivity from the perspective of PA participants and exercisers and the impact of perceived inclusivity. The following sections will highlight and discuss the findings from previous literature.

Implementation of Body Weight Inclusive Strategies by Fitness Leaders

Using Pickett and Cunningham's model (2017b), Pickett and Cunningham (2017a) explored how and to what extent yoga instructors utilized the elements of body weight inclusivity. Yoga instructors recognized the importance of having diverse body shapes and sizes in the classes and setting the standards to celebrate diverse bodies, reflecting a cultural commitment to inclusion (Pickett & Cunningham, 2017a). The instructors also acknowledged their role as leaders in fostering inclusion. Instructors were intentional about being authentic and modeling behaviors that demonstrated leadership commitment to inclusion (Pickett & Cunningham, 2017a). Some instructors were also mindful of the physical space and mentioned removing mirrors. However, most instructors felt the other elements might be more significant than physical spaces in fostering inclusion (Pickett & Cunningham, 2017a). Instructors also reported moving away from language that reinforces dichotomous hierarchies (e.g., beginner and advanced) to remove stigma (Pickett & Cunningham, 2017a). The instructors also mentioned the conscious use of inclusive language during class and on marketing materials to make their inclusive aims known. To build a sense of community within the yoga spaces, instructors took

the initiative to introduce themselves to new members to ensure they felt welcome in the space and encouraged social interaction among participants (Pickett & Cunningham, 2017a).

Outside of the elements identified in Pickett and Cunningham's model (2017a), yoga instructors identified social justice advocacy and focus on health as essential components of creating inclusive spaces. Acts of social justice advocacy included offering classes at discounted prices and scholarships for individuals who cannot afford the courses at full price. Instructors also intentionally shifted the focus from weight loss to health (Pickett & Cunningham, 2017b)., Though these strategies are not represented in Pickett and Cunningham's model (2017b), the strategies fit within the multilevel approach that Cook et al. (2014) presented. As Zuest et al. (2022) identified, the focus on health is a strategy at the interpersonal level, and social justice advocacy work is a structural level strategy.

Grounded in Cook et al.'s (2014) multilevel approach, a study was conducted that focused on exploring perceptions of body inclusivity by university recreation center (URC) leaders, strategizes used by URC leaders to enhance body inclusivity, and their plans to create inclusive spaces (Zuest et al., 2021). Participants perceived their URCs as inclusive for folks with all body shapes and sizes, including curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick bodies. URC leaders identified current strategies used to promote inclusion at the intrapersonal level (e.g., education), interpersonal level (e.g., caring climate and inclusive language), and structural level (e.g., representation and policies) (Zuest et al., 2021). When asked about plans to enhance inclusivity further, URC leaders identified approaches they plan on taking at the intrapersonal level (e.g., education), interpersonal level (e.g., multidimensional health and inclusive language), and structural level (e.g., physical spaces and equipment and outreach and marketing) (Zuest et al.,

2021). The results of this study demonstrate approaches to inclusivity occur and need to occur from all levels of Cook et al.'s (2014).

The strategies of inclusivity identified by PA and exercise participants and fitness leaders (e.g., URC leaders) support strategies within Cook et al.'s (2014) multilevel approach and Pickett and Cunningham's model (2017b). The evidence indicates elements of inclusivity are present within PA and exercise spaces, whether these strategies are implemented intentionally or unintentionally. However, empirical support on how body weight inclusivity contributes to psychological benefits in general, as suggested by Pickett and Cunningham's model (2017b), has yet to be extensively explored and specifically explored in dance spaces.

Participants' Perceptions of Body Weight Inclusivity in PA and Impact

The perceptions of inclusivity were explored among women with curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick bodies who participated in PA spaces they perceived to be as size-inclusive or non-weight stigmatizing (e.g., dance, running groups, and kickboxing) (Myre et al., 2022). Myre et al. (2022) categorized women's responses within the individual, interpersonal, organizational, and community levels using an ecological framework. At the individual level, women shared how their views on weight, health, and PA had changed over time. Women reported that they began to view themselves as healthy and perceive PA as a form of self-care rather than punishment. As a result of participating in a size-inclusive, feelings of self-worth and belonging increased for the participants (Myre et al., 2022). At the interpersonal level, women reported weight-neutral language used by instructors and trainers and engaging with other participants as components of inclusivity— these aspects enhanced their social well-being (Myre et al., 2022). Within the organizational level, women described feeling welcomed within PA spaces and did not experience ridicule within PA spaces. Feeling welcomed within the space was partly due to

leaders not tolerating exclusion. Thus, the PA spaces were perceived to be accessible and safe for individuals with various body weights, shapes, and sizes (Myre et al., 2022). Lastly, women challenged dominant societal ideals about health and physical activity at the community level.

The ecological model Myre et al. (2022) used to describe the results is similar to Cook et al.'s (2014) multilevel approach. The approaches differ as the ecological model identifies organizational and community as different levels, whereas Cook et al. (2014) identified a broader level, the structural level. Despite the differences in levels, women's perceptions of inclusivity reflect the strategies presented by Zuest et al. (2022). The perceptions of body weight inclusivity also resemble the strategies identified in Pickett and Cunningham's model (2017b)— for example, a sense of community and leadership commitment as components of inclusivity. Lastly, the evidence demonstrates participating in inclusive spaces has positive psychological outcomes.

Summary of Empirical Support for Body Inclusivity in Physical Activity Spaces

The current literature demonstrates leaders in PA (i.e., yoga and URC leaders) are implementing strategies to body inclusive (Pickett & Cunningham, 2017a; Zuest et al., 2021). The strategies presented in the literature fit within Pickett and Cunningham's (2017b) and Cook et al.'s (2014) multilevel approach. Furthermore, evidence indicates that women who engage in PA recognize body-inclusive strategies within the PA environment and that these strategies have a positive impact. However, research is needed to explore body-inclusive practices in dance and the experiences of women who participate in spaces that celebrate diverse body shapes and sizes.

Body-related Experiences of Dancers and Contributors Factors

Scholarly literature has identified negative and positive body-related experiences among women who participate in dance. Negative experiences related to the body have been identified among women who participate in an array of dance styles. Dancers who engaged in various

styles of dance, for example, ballet, African, tap, and jazz, reported experiencing a high drive for thinness, components of negative body image (e.g., body dissatisfaction and self-objectification), and disordered eating behaviors (Cardoso et al., 2017; Ravaldi et al., 2006; Ringham et al., 2006; Robbeson et al., 2015; Tiggemann & Slater, 2001). Dancers (e.g., flamenco, ballet, and contemporary) reported mirrors, uniforms, teachers, and peers as some factors that contributed to experiences of body dissatisfaction (Dantas et al., 2018). Modern dancers identified the presence of mirrors, costumes, and performance advantages as a few sources contributing to feelings of pressure to lose weight (Reel et al., 2005). The negative body experiences reported by dancers may also be due in part because dance is an activity that emphasizes aesthetics (Davison et al., 2002; Slater & Tiggemann, 2011). While participation in dance can influence negative experiences with the body, emerging literature demonstrates dance can cultivate positive experiences of embodiment.

Body appreciation has been the most common positive body-related experience assessed among dancers. Body appreciation has been examined between and within dance groups (Swami & Harris, 2012) and between dancers and non-dancers (Langdon & Petracca, 2010; Pellizzer et al., 2016; Swami & Tovée, 2009; Tiggemann et al., 2014). Findings from studies that compared dancers (i.e., belly, pole, modern, and street) to non-dancers have shown that those who participate in dance score higher on body appreciation (Langdon & Petracca, 2010; Pellizzer et al., 2016; Swami & Tovée, 2009; Tiggemann et al., 2014). Additionally, recreational pole dancers scored higher on embodiment than non-dancers (Pellizzer et al., 2016). The differences between those that participate in dance may indicate participation in dance may foster positive body-related experiences.

Differences in body appreciation were also identified between dancers who engaged in ballet and contemporary dance genres (Swami & Harris, 2012). When comparing body appreciation between dance styles, contemporary dancers scored significantly higher than ballet dancers. There was also a significant interaction between the style and level of dance. Compared to advanced ballet dancers, beginner ballet dancers had higher levels of appreciation. However, the opposite was found among contemporary dancers, with results demonstrating lower body appreciation among beginner contemporary dancers than advanced contemporary dancers. The influence of dance style and level on body appreciation seen in Swami and Harris (2012) may reflect different experiences and expectations for certain dance styles. For instance, ballet is a dance style that emphasizes thinness which may result in more negative body-related experiences than positive ones. Whereas Goldstein (2003) described contemporary dance as a style that allowed individuals to explore emotions and bodily experiences. Thus, as suggested by Swami and Harris (2012), participating in contemporary dance may enhance feelings of acceptance and favorable opinions toward the body.

Qualitative research further indicated that participating in dance could cultivate positive embodiment. Women participating in pole and belly dancing reported various experiences of positive embodiment (Dimler et al., 2017; Holland, 2010; Moe, 2012; Nicholas et al., 2018). Pole dancers indicated that dancing contributed to experiences such as body acceptance, expressing and experiencing sexuality and sensuality, and enhanced self-confidence (Dimler et al., 2017; Holland, 2010; Nicholas et al., 2018). Belly dancers also reported experiencing a (re)connection with their bodies, femininity, sexuality, and sensuality and embracing and accepting their bodies' appearance and physicality (Moe, 2012). For belly and pole dancers,

participating in these dance forms instilled a sense of empowerment (Dimler et al., 2017; Holland, 2010; Moe, 2012).

The study by Nicholas et al. (2018) aimed to identify motives for females participating in pole dancing. Along with identifying aspects of positive embodiment (i.e., body acceptance and self-confidence), women reported community, sense of support, and autonomy as contributing factors for continued participation (Nicholas et al., 2018). Pole dancers in Dimler et al. (2017) also identified community, exposure to diverse body shapes and sizes, and instructors contributed to positive experiences of embodiment. Though these aspects were not specifically spoken about in relation to body inclusivity, findings reflect components of body inclusivity referenced in Pickett and Cunningham's model (2017b) and identified by Zuest et al. (2022). However, whether dance leaders intentionally implemented strategies that would create a generally inclusive environment remains unclear.

Gaps in the Literature

After reviewing the literature, two gaps remain. First, it remains unclear if and how dance leaders intentionally create body-inclusive spaces. Second, the lived experiences of women who identify as curvy, fat, plus-size, and/or thick and participate in dance spaces they perceive to be inclusive. Thus, the studies presented in this dissertation take the initial steps to address these gaps in the literature.

Chapter III: "If You Are Really Trying to Build Inclusivity, You Just Have to Live It": Creating Dance Spaces with and for Curvy, Fat, Plus-Size, and Thick Folks

Body ideals are socially constructed and based on dominant health and beauty discourses (Van Amsterdam, 2013). Body attributes relating to body shape and size, race and ethnicity, gender, (dis)ability, etc., and the intersection of these identities are used to legitimize bodily hierarchies and ideals (Strings, 2019; Van Amsterdam, 2013). For women, body ideals have changed over time. A Venus-like, full-figure body was once viewed as the standard of beauty and then transitioned to where thinness was, and continues to be, a dominant characteristic of the ideal body, particularly in the United States (Strings, 2019). As documented by Strings (2019), the rise of the preference for thinness did not exist on its own but is intertwined with race, ethnicity, and gender. In their historical overview, Strings (2019) draws on various sources (e.g., paintings, newspapers, and historical records) to demonstrate how the preference for thinness is tied to racist and sexist power systems prevalent within the larger Western society.

The power systems within the larger Western society have manifested in societal institutions such as Western and European concert forms of dance (i.e., ballet and modern) (Golden, 2018; Kerr-Berry, 2018). Previous literature has highlighted the racist and sexist practices, particularly within ballet spaces, have resulted in the exclusion, discrimination, and oppression of Black women (Atencio & Wright, 2009; Dixon Gottschild, 2003; Kerr-Berry, 2018; Mattingly et al., 2023). These experiences have also been documented in mainstream media. For example, Misty Copeland, the first Black woman to be named principal dancer at the American Ballet Theater, has candidly spoken about her experiences with racism, sexism, and sizeism with news outlets. Copeland reflected, "I have a body that a lot of white dancers have and there's white ballerinas that are principal dancers that have larger chests than me and bigger

muscles and broader shoulders and they are not told they don't belong" (Harlow & Paul, 2018). Despite white counterparts having similar body types, Copeland was told, "I wasn't right for the company. I wasn't right for ballet. My skin was too dark. I was too muscular. My bust was too big" (Dugan Ramirez, 2015). Copeland recognized the comments not only referenced her body shape and size but covertly referred to her racial and ethnic background.

Copeland's experiences highlight the intersection of multiple marginalized identities. Crenshaw (1989) first used intersectionality to describe the discrimination experienced by Black women based on gender and race. Crenshaw asserted gender and race could not be studied as separate sources of power but as intersecting identities that result in exclusion and marginalization (Crenshaw, 1989; Van Amsterdam, 2013). Intersectionality also speaks to the systemic power hierarchies and intersecting oppressions relating to gender and race within our society. The experiences of Copeland highlight the racist, sexist, and sizest practices that can result in the exclusion, discrimination, and oppression of women with marginalized identities in dance.

Though academic literature has yet to fully explore the (un)intentional exclusion of women with multiple marginalized identities beyond ballet, Western media suggests these practices exist in other dance styles (e.g., hip-hop, ballroom, and contemporary). Dance movies (e.g., *Step Up* and *Footloose*) and television shows (e.g., *Dancing with the Stars* and *So You Think You Can Dance*) frequently feature dancers that appear to be white, thin yet toned, and able-bodied. Furthermore, Lizzo, a pop-culture musician (i.e., rapper, singer, and flutist) and dancer who self-identifies as fat has also used her social media platform to speak about social and political issues relating to her identities (e.g., racism, sexism, and fat-shaming) (Miller & Platenburg, 2021). Lizzo specifically called attention to the lack of representation of curvy, fat,

plus-size, and thick women in dance (Lizzo, 2022). In response to the inability of dance agencies to provide her curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick dancers, she created the Amazon Original series *Lizzo's Watch Out for the Big Grrrls* (Lizzo et al., 2022).[1] *Lizzo's Watch Out for the Big Grrrls* chronicles Lizzo's search for curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick dancers to join her on tour as part of the Big Grrrls dance team. The contestants shared body-related experiences throughout the series, such as weight stigma, body shaming, and fatphobia. One contestant spoke about when a video of her dancing was posted on social media and used to body shame (Lizzo et al., 2022). Even Lizzo reported experiencing weight stigma through direct comments (e.g., "I don't know how you did that, I'm tired just lookin' at you"). Additionally, the contestants addressed how the intersection of body shape, size, gender identity, and race and ethnicity impacted their experiences with their bodies in and outside of dance. Although no formal analysis of the media has been completed, the lack of diversity represented in dance-related movies and shows may imply sizeist practices exist within dance, which may result in the (un)intentional exclusion of women who identify as curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick.

The inequities experienced by individuals with marginalized identities (e.g., body shape and size and race and ethnicity) are social justice issues. Social justice refers to all individuals having equitable access and opportunity to engage and reach their full potential (Nutter et al., 2016; Russell-Mayhew & Grace, 2016). While dance literature has yet to extensively explore social justice issues relating to body shape and size, dance education and pedagogy literature have been instrumental in identifying socially just strategies (e.g., fostering a sense of belonging

[1] I am intentional about using curvy, fat, plus-size, and/or thick rather than the weight classifications (e.g., overweight and obese) provided by the body mass index (BMI). Cunningham (2019) argue the classifications of the BMI infer there is "normal" weight status all individuals should meet. To avoid the assumption of a "normal" weight and to recognize the recent reclaiming of fat and the use of additional terms individuals use to describe their bodies, I use curvy, fat, plus-size, and/or thick (Capodilupo & Kim, 2014; Schooler, et al., 2012; Williams, 2020).

and providing modified options without lessening expectations) dance leaders (e.g., teachers) use to create inclusive dance environments for individuals with (dis)abilities (e.g., physical and cognitive) and diverse cultural backgrounds (Dinold & Zitomer, 2015; Fortin et al., 2021; Mortimer, 2021; Zitomer, 2017). Additionally, prominent figures like Copeland and Lizzo are using their platforms to address social injustices experienced by marginalized communities. Copeland launched the Be Bold Program in 2022. The program aims to "make ballet more accessible, affordable, and fun, especially for children of color," and create a sense of belonging (*The Misty Copeland Foundation*, 2022). *Lizzo's Watch Out for the Big Grrrls* (Lizzo et al., 2022) demonstrated Lizzo's resistance to societal body shape and size expectations. The combined efforts of Copeland and Lizzo are helping to deconstruct the idea dancers need to be white, thin, and small-busted (Barr & Oliver, 2016).

Social justice efforts to create body-inclusive dance-specific spaces for women, and folks in general, have not been fully explored in literature. However, two models have proposed approaches to creating body-inclusive spaces: Cook and colleague's (2014) multilevel approach and Pickett and Cunningham's (2017b) conceptual model of body weight inclusive physical activity (PA) spaces. Cook et al. (2014) suggested creating body-inclusive spaces occurs within and between three levels: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural. Cook et al.'s (2014) multilevel approach was applied to fitness spaces by Zuest et al. (2022). The intrapersonal level focuses on how individuals think, feel, and behave; strategies in this level include developing knowledge (e.g., understanding of social determinants of health) and skills (e.g., providing modified movement options) (Cook et al., 2014; Zuest et al., 2022). The interpersonal level highlights the "power of social situations." Strategies at the interpersonal level focus on interactions between fitness professionals and exercisers, specifically those who are members of

marginalized communities (Cook et al., 2014; Zuest et al., 2022). Lastly, the structural level focuses on current policies and practices at the institutional level. Strategies at the structural level include increasing the representation of diverse body shapes and sizes and cultural and leadership commitment to body inclusivity (Cook et al., 2014; Zuest et al., 2022). The levels in Cook et al.'s (2014) multilevel approach are broad, leaving room for flexibility and allowing multiple strategies to be identified within each level. In contrast, Pickett and Cunningham (2017b) identified six specific elements of body inclusivity in the conceptual model of body weight inclusive PA spaces.

The six elements of body weight inclusivity are cultural commitment to inclusion, leadership commitment to inclusion, physical spaces, inclusive language, a sense of community, and participant autonomy (Pickett & Cunningham, 2017b). There is evident overlap between the strategies of body-inclusivity identified by Zuest et al. (2014) using a multilevel approach and Pickett and Cunningham's (2017b) conceptual model of body weight inclusive PA spaces. The elements identified by Pickett and Cunningham (2017b) are similar to those identified by Zuest et al. (2014) and can be placed within the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural levels. However, Pickett and Cunningham (2017b) go beyond identifying inclusive elements by suggesting body weight inclusivity will increase an individual's commitment to engage in PA and, thus, increase psychological and physical well-being. The conceptual model of body weight inclusive PA spaces notes that marginalized identities (e.g., gender and body weight, shape, and size) can influence the relationship between body weight inclusivity and commitment to PA.

The models presented by Pickett and Cunningham (2017b) and Cook et al. (2014) highlight the critical role fitness professionals and leaders have in creating inclusive and socially just PA spaces. Both frameworks demonstrate that various strategies can be adopted and applied

directly by fitness professionals and leaders. Though the strategies used by dancer leaders to promote body inclusivity have yet to be explored, evidence suggests that fitness leaders (i.e., directors, assistant directors, and yoga instructors) are implementing strategies to create inclusive PA and exercise spaces. The findings from fitness leaders demonstrate support for strategies associated with the multilevel approach and conceptual model of body weight inclusive PA spaces. Zuest et al. (2021) explored strategies university recreational (UREC) center leaders (i.e., directors and assistant directors) use to promote body inclusivity. The strategies reported by UREC leaders were categorized within the intrapersonal (e.g., education), interpersonal (e.g., inclusive language and diverse programming), and structural (e.g., cultural/leadership commitment and representation) levels. Yoga instructors mentioned similar approaches; however, Pickett and Cunningham (2017a) connected the strategies to the elements presented in the first half of the conceptual model of body weight inclusive PA spaces (Pickett & Cunningham, 2017b). Yoga instructors reported utilizing the six elements of body weight inclusivity to various extents, with some strategies viewed as more important than others (Pickett & Cunningham, 2017b, 2017a). In addition to the six elements, yoga instructors identified social justice advocacy (e.g., discounted classes) and focus on health as essential components needed to create inclusive spaces (Pickett & Cunningham, 2017a). The strategies reported by UREC leaders and yoga instructors reflect strategies at each level of the multilevel approach and provide initial support for the six elements presented in the conceptual model of body weight inclusive PA spaces.

Although research has yet to explore body-inclusive strategies used in dance spaces from the standpoint of dance leaders (e.g., directors, instructors, and coaches), women who participate in dance reported aspects of body inclusivity. Dancers (i.e., belly and pole fitness dancers)

reported involvement in dance positively influenced body-related experiences (e.g., positive body image) (Dimler et al., 2017; Moe, 2012; Nicholas et al., 2018). Factors contributing to positive body-related experiences in dance spaces were community, leaders focusing on skill, and participant autonomy. While these align with body-inclusive strategies identified by Zuest et al. (2014) and Pickett and Cunningham (2017b), it remains unclear whether these were intentional actions by dance leaders to create body-inclusive spaces.

The role of fitness professionals and leaders in creating body-inclusive PA spaces is essential, as reflected in the multilevel approach and conceptual model of body weight inclusive PA spaces (Cook et al., 2014; Pickett & Cunningham, 2017b). Furthermore, there is evidence that fitness professionals and leaders (i.e., [assistant] directors and yoga instructors) are actively implementing and considering future strategies to apply in PA spaces to create body-inclusive spaces. With respect to dance, emerging evidence indicates body-inclusive practices exist within dance spaces and begins to highlight the role of dance leaders. Given the (un)intentional discrimination and exclusion of curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick women in dance presented in the media and the critical role of fitness professionals and leaders in creating body-inclusive spaces, exploring how dance leaders approach developing body-inclusive spaces is of particular interest and importance. Thus, the present study aimed to understand the current approaches dance leaders are implementing to create body-inclusive space for women who identify as curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick.

Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity Statement

Before moving forward, I must acknowledge and reflect on my positionality as I am aware that my identities and the intersection of my identities have influenced the research process (e.g., the development of research questions and data analysis). I am a woman of color

who has continuously participated in sports, PA, and exercise. I view my body as curvy, which I define as having a waist smaller than the bust and hips. However, I acknowledge that curvy is an alternative term for fat, plus-size, and thick. Thus, though I perceive myself as curvy, others or society may not perceive me as curvy.

Through my experiences in sports, PA, and exercise and educational studies, which have focused on the psychosocial aspects of body image among marginalized populations, I have observed and learned how women might experience and view their bodies. I have witnessed and read literature about women struggling to meet the body ideals imposed by society while simultaneously striving to meet the body ideals needed for their respective sport(s), women who embrace their bodies regardless of their shape and size, and women who have experienced discrimination or bias due to their body shape and size. Though I have not experienced discrimination based on my body shape and size, my involvement in sports, PA, and exercise and my position as a doctoral student within the field of kinesiology have made me aware of critical issues relating to inclusivity within sports, PA, and exercise spaces. My experiences with sports, PA, and exercise and my educational background have shaped my commitment to creating inclusive spaces with and for individuals with marginalized identities.

Though my experience with dance is limited to a 1-year class I took in high school, I began to ask questions about creating inclusive dance spaces with and for individuals who identify as curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick as I actively followed a body-inclusive dance team. I became aware of this dance team through my network. As my lack of experience with dance positions me as an outsider, I turned to dance leaders who are actively working to create inclusive spaces with and for curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick women for their expertise in hopes that our collaborative efforts will ignite change and increase diversity, equity, and inclusion. I am

aware my positionality and personal experiences have influenced the questions I have developed, the methodology and methods used to answer these questions, and how I present the findings (Hesse-Biber, 2014). Throughout the process, I continuously engaged in reflexivity, as England (1994, p. 244) defined as a "self-critical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious analytic scrutiny of the self as a researcher" to ensure the voices and perspectives of the participants are highlighted.

Methods and Materials

Study Design

The current qualitative study is situated within the critical paradigm. The critical interpretative framework suggests that power relations in society influence reality and that there are multiple and subjective realities (Brown & Dueñas, 2020). From the critical interpretive lens, knowledge is subjective, socially constructed, and influenced by social structures, freedom and oppression, power, and control (Brown & Dueñas, 2020; Creswell & Poth, 2018). As I approached the study within the critical paradigm, I needed to engage in reflexive practices throughout the process to "understand what biases [I] bring to [the] research project, and what specific power and privilege [I] might impose onto [my] research" (Hesse-Biber, 2014, p. 201).

Sampling and Participants

Participants were recruited through purposive sampling, a technique that requires setting specific criteria individuals must meet to participate in the study. Setting key criteria helped ensure individuals who participated in the study could provide rich insight into the research question the study aims to explore (Ritchie et al., 2014; Tolley et al., 2016). To be eligible to participate, the participants had to: 1) be 18 years and older, 2) actively hold a leadership position (e.g., dance director, instructor, and/or coach), and 3) primarily serve women who

identify as curvy, fat, plus-size, and/or thick. Individuals were excluded if they had less than one year of leadership experience (e.g., dance director, instructor, coach, etc.). The decision to exclude dance leaders with less than one year of leadership experience was to ensure the participants were familiar with working with individuals with diverse body shapes and sizes.

After obtaining approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (see Appendix A), I (PI) sent an introduction message and recruitment flyer to dance leaders via email or social media (see Appendices B and C). Eight dance leaders from urban and metropolitan areas within the United States completed the demographics questionnaire and initial interview; however, one participant withdrew from the study after the first interview ($N = 7$). The final sample size was determined based on the purpose of the study (Patton 2002), which was to understand how dance leaders created inclusive spaces for women who identify as curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick. As suggested by Sim et al. (2018), the decision to end data collection was based on the ability to create concrete themes. Additionally, previous studies that have explored inclusivity relating to body shape and size and (dis)ability have also used similar sample sizes (i.e., 4 and 9) (Pickett & Cunningham, 2017b; Zitomer, 2017).

Of the seven participants, five self-selected their pseudonyms. Two participants were assigned pseudonyms as they did not provide a pseudonym they wished to use. The participant pseudonyms are as follows: Kora (*she/her*), Michelle (*she/her*), Stormy Louise (*she/her*), Stephanie (*she/her*), Casey (*she/her*), Diana (*she/they*), and Jennifer (*she/her*). One participant self-identified as non-binary, and six self-identified as women. Three participants self-identified as Black or African American, non-Hispanic, Latino/a/x, or Spanish; three as white, non-Hispanic, Latino/a/x, or Spanish; and one as white with a Middle Eastern background, non-Hispanic, Latino/a/x, or Spanish. Participants held various leadership positions (e.g., instructor

and [co-]director), ranged in years of experience, and were involved with various dance styles (e.g., pole dancing, aerial, and pop-fusion) (see Table 1). The dance leaders were all involved with plus-size (curvy, fat, or thick) exclusive and/or body-inclusive dance spaces. While all participants identified as primarily serving women, some dance leaders shared in the interview that they also served folks with intersecting marginalized relating to gender identity and sexuality (e.g., transgender women, non-binary, and queer folks) and (dis)ability.

All seven dance leaders self-identified as curvy, fat, plus-size, and/or thick—the interpretation of curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick varied. For example, when describing curvy, fat, plus-size, and/or thick, Stephanie shared, "I have a non-traditional aerial body, wear plus size clothes, and experience some prejudice from medical professionals. I would identify as 'small fat,' as I experience less marginalization than others." Whereas Kora described curvy, fat, plus-size, and/or thick as "Big bodies that take up space, command attention, that jiggle and move, that are luscious, ample, voluminous, expansive AND are equally as beautiful, attractive, strong, valid, capable, & deserving as any other body."

Procedure

Before this study, I talked with three dance directors who served women who identified as curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick. One individual is someone who I connected with through my network, and the other two leaders I found through an online search. The conversations focused on learning about their dance teams, organizations, and groups and gauging whether individuals would be interested in participating in a future study. During these conversations, each shared their experiences in dance and reasons for creating their team or organization (see Appendix D). The conversations helped inform the present study.

Upon expressing interest in participating, the dance leaders provided informed consent and completed a demographics questionnaire, which served as a tool to indicate participant eligibility (see Appendix E). At the end of the survey, the participants were asked to list their availability for the first interview. The participants were then contacted to schedule the first interview and were sent the informed consent form to review. The interviews occurred virtually via Microsoft Teams (n = 4), Zoom (n = 1), and over the phone (n = 2) and lasted between 1-to-2 hours. All interviews were recorded using the record functions on Microsoft Teams or Zoom and with a recording device (i.e., Philips VoiceTracer). Recording the interviews ensured the participants' responses were captured verbatim.

At the time of the interview, I first reviewed the consent form with the participants and obtained verbal consent. The interviews were semi-structured and guided by an interview guide (see Appendix F). The interview guide was informed by the conversations with the three previously noted dance leaders, Cook and colleagues (2014) multilevel approach, and the conceptual model of body weight inclusive PA spaces (Pickett & Cunningham, 2017b). Questions regarding inclusive strategies were developed to be broad so that I did not lead participants to responses but direct enough for participants to speak on inclusive practices they implement. For example, participants were asked, "What steps do you take to ensure curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick women feel welcomed and included in the dance space?" Follow-up questions and probes were also asked so that participants could provide more information about how they create inclusive spaces. At the end of the first interview, participants were informed that I would share a copy of the transcripts and summary of the interview before the second meeting.

Five of the seven dance leaders engaged in a follow-up interview. The second interview served two purposes. First, as a form of member checking and second, as an opportunity to gather clarifying and additional information. As part of the member checking process, each participant was provided the transcript of their first interview and a summary of the interview I created (Burke, 2019; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Participants were asked to review the summary and transcript before the second meeting to ensure their voices were accurately presented (Birt et al., 2016; Doyle, 2007). Before and during the second interview, participants addressed any misrepresentations, provided points of clarification, expanded on information they originally provided, and addressed new points not discussed during the first conversation. An interview guide, which contained questions that would help enhance my understanding and interpretation of the information from the first conversation helped guide the interview (e.g., Can give an example of [insert strategy]?) (see Appendix G). To recognize participants' time, energy, work, and contribution to research, they each received an electronic $50 Amazon Gift Card.

Data Analysis

Interviews were either transcribed through Microsoft Teams or manually by me. To ensure the accuracy of the transcripts, I listened to each participant's interview and reviewed the transcripts. During this review, I made changes as necessary so that the transcripts accurately reflected the interview. The transcripts of interviews were then uploaded to the qualitative software ATLAS.ti, a qualitative software that helped organize and analyze the data.

Qualitative content analysis was used to analyze the data. The first step of qualitative content analysis was to become familiar with the data; therefore, I reviewed the recorded interviews and transcripts several times. (Drisko & Maschi, 2016). I then engaged in inductive open coding. The use of inductive coding ensured the dance leaders' views and voices were

prioritized over my ideas (Drisko & Maschi, 2016). Open coding entailed identifying relevant categories of information. The open coding process included grouping categories based on commonalities which resulted in the development of subcategories (Sebastian, 2019). Next, I engaged in axial coding, which refers to "connecting the subcategories and rebuilding the concepts within them into larger and more focused categories" (Sebastian, 2019, p.5). I moved fluidly between open and axial coding before moving on to the final step of theme development. Theme development occurred when major categories were defined (Drisko & Maschi, 2016).

Trustworthiness

Three approaches were used to establish trustworthiness: audit trail, reflexivity, and member checking (Burke, 2019; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Throughout the process, I kept a detailed description of the procedures and decisions that I made throughout the research process (i.e., the audit trail). Additionally, I engaged in reflexivity, a continual process of personal reflection and examination of how my positionality influences the research process. A standard practice used to engage in reflexivity is reflexive journaling, where I considered questions such as "How do my values, attitudes, and beliefs enter into the research process?" and "How does my own agenda shape what I ask and what I find?" (Hesse-Biber, 2014, p. 202). As previously described, member checking involved providing each participant with a copy of their first interview and a summary to ensure accuracy (Burke, 2019; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). These approaches were used to help ensure the findings were derived from the participants' voices (Burke, 2019).

Results

Throughout the interviews, each dance leader described how they approached creating body-inclusive and/or plus-size (curvy, fat, or thick) exclusive dance spaces with and for curvy,

fat, plus-size, and thick folks. As described by Diana, body-inclusive spaces are spaces that welcome all bodies, no matter gender or size. Whereas plus-size exclusive spaces, as described by Kora, center plus-size bodies and, according to Diana, are spaces exclusively for plus-size folks. The themes presented in this study reflect the intentional efforts of dance leaders to create dance spaces with and for curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick individuals. The themes highlight dance leaders' awareness and intentional use of language, the importance of representing diverse body shapes and sizes, community, and personal commitment to inclusivity.

"Being aware of the words that are used"– Stormy Louise: Awareness and Intentional Use of Language

The dance leaders demonstrated awareness and intentional use of language when discussing body shape, size, and movement. When discussing words used to describe body shape and size, Diana reflected on their perspective and the thoughtfulness behind the decision to use plus-size to describe the exclusive space provided at the studio where she instructs classes. Diana shared, "So, the thing is, I don't love the term *plus-size* because *plus-size* does not refer to a person. It refers to the size of clothing you wear. It's a clothing marker; it doesn't actually mean anything about your body." Expanding on her perspective, Diana said they would have felt comfortable using *fat* because, from their perspective, *fat* described "the types of bodies that we are welcoming into the [plus-size exclusive] program." However, deciding which descriptor to use involved a larger discussion with other individuals and leaders associated with the studio. Diana noted those involved in the decision-making progress also considered using *larger* but decided not to move forward with the term "because *larger* could also mean tall people, right? Like *larger* than what?" Reflecting on the various terms that could have been used to describe body shape and size, Diana shared:

> It's really tricky when you have this association with *fat* as a bad word for a lot of people, and I think even we wanted to make sure that people who were not fully into the fat acceptance movement would still come and consider taking our classes while also trying to create the exclusive space that we wanted. So, we wanted to make it clear who is welcome to be here without using the word *fat*.

After thoughtful consideration, *plus-size* was the agreed-upon term as it was, according to Diana, a neutral descriptor that invited individuals no matter where they might be on their fat acceptance journey.

Stephanie also spoke about the use of *plus-size*, specifically how *plus-size* was being defined within the space. As plus-size exclusive classes were offered at the dance space Stephanie was associated with, the studio recognized "we just need better criteria that was not just about random manufacturers and how they choose to put their clothing together" to help participants determine whether plus-size exclusives classes were for them. Stephanie noted she was not a part of the decision-making process but that, ultimately, the studio developed prompts relating to lived experiences of discrimination and bias for students to consider when deciding whether plus-size exclusive classes were for them rather than using a specific clothing size as the determining factor. These conversation points demonstrated awareness and intentional use of how body shape and size were described and defined within dance spaces.

Dance leaders like Kora and Stormy Louise also demonstrated mindfulness and intentionality with the language, specifically language used to cue movements (i.e., modification, variation, and option). Kora suggested that instructors use *variation* instead of *modification*:

> *Modification* I think there's an assumption that there is like one right way to do a movement, or a correct way or a fuller way, and then *modifying* it is like making a change to it that might insinuate that it is less than, so a less full version of the movement. And *variation* has a little bit more of an implication that there's multiple different *variations* of the movement that are all right and good and full.

Kora asserted that when using the term *modification* to describe a movement, it may imply that the movement is less than and that there is only one correct way to do a movement. Whereas, from

Kora's perspective, *variation* suggests multiple versions of a movement exist, all of which are good. Stormy Louise expanded on this by suggesting the use of *optional* as a cue for movement rather than *modification* or *variation*:

> And so, we look at *modification*, and we look at *variation*, and they all signal that because you can't do, you do this and signaling that in a way often with the fitness industry in our society makes it less than. In fact, many people will say, "If you can't do the full expression, you can *modify*, or you can do a *variation*," where, you know, they've deemed the full expression what the ideal is; this is what you should be doing, but you're not, so you have to do these other things. And so, the use of the word *option* has less of a sort of hierarchical, uh, sort of feeling behind it because if everything is an *option*, then you get to choose whichever one you want, so there's no saying, "Well, this is a full expression. This is not the full expression." It's like, this is one *option*, and, you know, maybe if you Google this particular movement, this is what you'll see. But there, that's not the only way you can do this particular movement. So, framing all of the different ways you could do that movement as equal by calling them options opens up that space for people to choose what works for them.

According to Stormy Louise, both modification and variation implied a hierarchy of movements, where movements in their full expression were at the top of the hierarchy. Stormy Louise, therefore, encouraged the use of *option* as it suggests all movements are equal and allows individuals to choose the best movement for themselves. Stormy Louise recognized the terminology can make a difference between making individuals feel bad or good in dance spaces. Therefore, by being intentional with cueing movements, Stormy Louise hoped students felt safe and empowered:

> And so, um, even though I share that I'll offer a lot of different *options* that you can choose from, sometimes none of those options feel comfortable or feel sustainable for you. And if that's the case, you know, we can, we'll come up with something else and like the, the possibilities are endless, but it, I very much always share you, you are not the problem. Your body is not the problem. Your body is just fine. It's the movement that's the problem.

Stormy Louise demonstrated her commitment to having students feel safe and empowered by providing options, reinforcing that their body is not the problem, and working with students to find movements that work for them.

Along similar lines, Michelle demonstrated awareness about language when speaking about the body and movement, "We also talked about language and how you can speak about size, um, and specifically, you know, my biggest thing is trying to talk about size in physics, um, because physics are they, they play a part in everything." Michelle approached human movement from a physics standpoint. She recognized the physics of movement is different between slender and plus-size folks. Thus, like Stormy Louise, Michelle moved away from language that implied the shape and size of the body was the problem. The awareness and intentional use of language reflected a key aspect of creating spaces with and for curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick individuals.

"Seeing any kind of inclusion in a space leads to more inclusion in a space" – Kora: Representation of Diverse Body Shapes and Sizes

Dance leaders emphasized that, as stated by Kora, "Seeing any kind of inclusion in a space leads to more inclusion in a space." The potential impact the representation of diverse identities in marketing materials and among individuals in leadership positions could have on perceptions of inclusion was addressed by dance leaders. Concerning marketing and promotional material, Kora noted:

> I like to think of it like, first, how do people interact with the dance studio before they even get there, before they're in the building, they're seeing the website, they're seeing the Instagram, and so diversity and images and the people that are in those images, I mean, it needs to reflect who's really at the studio. Um, but it's, it's also important for people to be able to see themselves like, "Ohh, okay, I belong here."

Kora asserted that a sense of belonging can develop when individuals see themselves reflected in marketing and promotional materials. Recognizing the importance of diverse individuals in promotional materials, Kora "invited people in fat and plus-size bodies to come participate and, um, I had a fat photographer who also volunteered" to do a photoshoot. The published images

emphasized that curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick folks were genuinely invited into the dance space.

On the other hand, Michelle recognized how marketing materials might deter and accidentally exclude students with diverse body shapes and sizes. Michelle asserted that if the studios' social media feed only contains a single body type, "it's going to be almost impossible to genuinely get diverse bodies hyped and excited and to feel safe in your space." Michelle identified logos, those specific to pole dancing, as potential sources of accidental exclusion. She recalled that in many of the pole dancing logos she had seen, the logos had used a silhouette of a dancer and that the silhouette typically depicts a very slender dancer. Michelle recognized marketing materials may have unintentional consequences:

> So even though that studio might really, genuinely want, wanna rock with diversity, they're accidentally giving off the image of, like, here's the ideal, here's the standard. And if you don't fit the standard, then it's, it's hard for the studio, it's hard to convince me otherwise.

The use of slender figures in marketing materials (e.g., logos) can accidentally perpetuate that there is an ideal body. Along similar lines, Michelle also noted clothing could be a source of accidental exclusion as she anecdotally shared:

> If you say, Michelle, we'd love to have you, but then if I walk in and you only have a small, medium, large and I wear at least a 2X, then that's not, I don't hold it against the studio, but I do notice when I'm excluded, even if it's by accident.

Therefore, Michelle would ideally want to see clothing sizes that range from a four or 5X to double extra small. Kora and Michelle highlighted the importance of making curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick folks feel welcomed and included before individuals physically enter the dance spaces. However, the representation of diverse individuals continues within the dance space.

The dance leaders also discussed diversity within the staff and those in leadership positions, as reflected by Kora:

> Then when you get into the dance studio, so also who you're seeing, who's greeting you, diversity in the staff, all types of diversity, you know? Um, I think like seeing any kind of inclusion in a space leads to more inclusion in a space.

Michelle reinforced that diversity starts at the top with leadership. However, she recognized the representation of individuals with marginalized identities extended beyond body shape and size and included "sexual orientation or gender representation or ability, or you name it." From Michelle's perspective, the studios with diverse leaders were the most successful because having diverse leaders resulted in a greater diversity of instructors and students. Stephanie witnessed the impact of having diverse instructors:

> We've had the new aerial instructors who come on board are, um, larger than I am, much more like visibly plus-size. Um, and I think that has helped people to, like, be able to look in and say, "Ohh, the instructor has a body like mine," and get people actually in the door.

Recognizing the importance of a diverse leadership team, Diana urged individuals that want to create inclusive spaces to "find fat instructors. Find non-traditional bodies." She also recommended that individuals in leadership positions seek out dance leaders who hold workshops if they cannot hire full- or part-time instructors:

> If you don't have the talent pool, if you can't hire from that, find somebody who is a fat person and invite them in for a workshop. . . If you look, you can find somebody and say, like, find a big name and say, "Hey, do you do workshops? We'll pay for you to come in either train our instructors or open workshops for students." That gives, the more, um, respect and honor you can give to the people in the fat community who are already doing these things. The more believable you are. If you're only tokenizing fat bodies and doing this like fake kind of inclusion and not actually setting fat people up to be respected like, um, sources of knowledge that, that will be very evident, to somebody coming in, in a, in a larger body.

However, they warned against hiring instructors as a performative act of inclusivity, tokenizing fat bodies, and fake inclusion. They asserted that inclusivity went beyond simply hiring instructors with non-traditional bodies and entailed giving instructors equal treatment, credit,

credence, and opportunity as thin instructors. Diana also reinforced that individuals in leadership positions need to be genuine in their actions to create inclusive dance spaces.

"We are community first, and like dance studio second" – Stephanie: Community Inside and Outside of Dance Space

The dance leaders acknowledged the dance spaces were not simply spaces where individuals came to engage in dance but where they sought and gained a deeper community. Dance leaders shared ways they set the foundation for community, such as taking the initiative to introduce themselves to participants, doing class introductions, and encouraging students to engage with each other, as Kora shared:

> But I, I like to go around and chat with people and introduce myself before class. I always chat with people after class. Sometimes I overtly invite people to come talk to me. Um, I will remind people in class that we're not just like showing up to class and dancing in a vacuum that we're here together. In between songs, I'll say, "Hey, chat amongst yourselves. Meet someone, find out someone's name." Um, and they do, do that. And then sometimes it's hard to get everyone to stop talking so we can keep dancing. But I love it.

Stormy Louise also started classes with introductions and allowed students, if they wanted, to share how they felt so that she could hold space for them. Beyond the initial introductions and getting to know individuals within the space, dance leaders hoped that genuine friendships formed among students. Casey stated, "I, I would hope that beyond dance like it's about, we're established in dance, but I want to be beyond that when we were establishing these friendships. Because these are lifelong friendships." To foster long-lasting friendships, dance leaders encouraged student interaction in class and provided opportunities to connect outside the dance space.

Kora would invite individuals in her class to social gatherings afterward. Through these additional gatherings, Kora witnessed students become best friends and plan other activities and

outings (e.g., move nights and clothing swaps). Casey also shared, "I think gathering together outside of dance is critical in getting to know each other are." Thus, she would ensure the team came together at least once a month outside of dance. Casey viewed these gatherings as a time when the team could "work things out, make plans, make accommodations, make sure everybody's good and their personal lives, and in the teams, we make sure everybody's good." She found these gatherings important to creating a cohesive team and a lifetime sisterhood. Jennifer echoed sisterhood, "Sisterhood again, like just being able to meet people that can help you with things in life, um, whether it's your business or your personal life." Casey and Jennifer emphasized that the community formed within the teams extended beyond dance and seeped into members' personal and professional lives.

When speaking about community, Stephanie discussed how the dance space she is associated with demonstrated their commitment to the community that they serve.

> We are community first and like dance studio second. . . But, so this part of it is making sure that every single choice we make is rooted in our values. Um, when that comes to, you know, we still have far more COVID precautions and a lot of places around us, we might be lifting our mass mandate over the summer, but we've maintained it through now, and we have a vax requirement too because that's important for people who are high risk and for people with disabilities, um, anyone who's immunocompromised being able to come to our space and dance someplace where there are more precautions. We know we are probably losing customers by continuing to have that, um, but it has been a conscious choice that where we were in our community, in the pandemic, this was the thing we needed to do to protect our community.

Stephanie emphasized that the choices made by the studio were made with community members in mind. Despite the possible repercussions (e.g., loss of business) of maintaining COVID precautions, the studio continued to have these in place to protect the community, which exhibited their genuine care for the community. For the dance leaders, the community extended passed initial introductions and the walls of the dance space and consisted of forming sincere connections and social groups and demonstrating care for the greater community.

"If you are really trying to build inclusivity, you just have to live it" – Diana: Personal Commitment to Creating Spaces with and for Curvy, Fat, Plus-Size, and Thick Folks

The personal commitment of the dance leaders to creating spaces with and for curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick folks was evident. Participants demonstrated their commitments in several ways: continuously seeking educational workshops, training, and certifications, leading workshops and trainings that addressed topics relating to inclusivity, and intentionally creating plus-size (fat, curvy, and thick) exclusive dance space.

Dance leaders actively sought out workshops, training, and certifications. Michelle sought educational opportunities, resulting in many certifications specifically for pole instructors and individuals within the fitness industry. She highlighted how she has benefited from different trainings and the importance of teachers obtaining and remaining current with education and certifications:

> Make sure that they're [teachers] up to date with fitness certifications and education, um, because a lot of like the practical methods I use with pole dancing and like how to spot students, how to break moves down, um, they kind of go against a lot of traditional pole dancing rules. Um, but as long as students are staying safe, then we're okay. But if you don't know how to keep the students safe in the first place, then it's going to be difficult for you to look at rules and challenge them. So that's also a big thing that we do.

As noted by Michelle, obtaining knowledge from trainings and certifications is useful in understanding how the body moves in general. Furthermore, the certifications and education she has received have helped her better understand how to keep students safe by knowing the fundamental rules and how to provide options as needed. Diana and Stormy Louise also described instances when they participated in training and workshops that, based on my interpretation and understanding, were not required as part of their positions. Rather, they participated in outside workshops and training because of their desire to learn. Stormy Louise shared that her continued quest for knowledge stemmed from her "desire to want to know more

and how to do better" and "help others kind of level up." Participating in trainings and workshops and obtaining certifications showed dance leaders' commitment to continuously learning how to better serve curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick folks.

Beyond attending workshops and trainings and obtaining certifications, dance leaders also conducted educational workshops and trainings. The dance leaders developed the workshops and trainings because they recognized the need, want, and importance of individuals in leadership positions to understand the needs and how to better serve curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick folks within dance spaces. For example, Kora, with the support of the owner, conducted a staff training session. The training was developed as a response to a potential client who was interested in participating in classes that were not weight-focused. Kora shared:

> One of the things that I have also done is I put together a training for the entire dance studio. So, I had, I can't remember how many now, but I had 30-something staff show up for two different trainings on anti-fat bias and eating disorder awareness or . . .harm reduction, um, because I think it's really important that everyone that works there knows.

For Kora, the training reflected the studio's commitment to fighting anti-fat bias and creating a safer place for individuals with diverse body shapes and sizes. The content provided in the training developed by Kora demonstrates just some of the topics discussed across the different workshops and trainings provided by other dance leaders. Diana, Michelle, Stephanie, and Stormy Louise were also involved in trainings and educational workshops to various extents and incorporated additional topics such as understanding issues relating to social justice (e.g., marginalization and oppression), identifying worries individuals with marginalized identities might have when entering dance spaces, language, and how to approach difficult conversations. The format of the trainings and workshops varied; for instance, trainings and workshops consisted of lectures, videos, discussions, scenario role-playing, and hands-on experience working with folks with diverse body shapes and sizes. The workshops and trainings were

informed by lived experiences of the dance leaders and various resources gathered from personal searches and previous trainings.

Though these workshops centered on creating and sustaining inclusive spaces for folks who identify as curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick, dance leaders acknowledged the intersection of multiple marginalized identities. Leaders like Michelle pointed out that her workshops that primarily focus on body inclusivity could be applied when working with individuals with various marginalized identities:

> I tried to be as inclusive as I can when I speak, but what I do when I, I might have done this with you as well, is I'll say, you know, I'm speaking primarily about plus size bodies because that's what I know the most about, but it could, but almost everything that I say is applicable to other marginalized identities as well.

Stormy Louise also noted that a segment in her training was developed based on considering aspects that could be difficult for any individual with a marginalized identity when entering a dance space. Additionally, Kora urged that when creating inclusive spaces to "always keep our eyes on the most marginalized bodies. . . like not forgetting about the folks that still, still aren't being included or aren't showing up." Thus, inclusivity expanded beyond body shape and size for the dance leaders and included multiple marginalized identities (e.g., gender, ability, race, and ethnicity).

Participants also recognized the lack of space for women who identify as curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick to engage in dance. As Casey noted:

> I knew from experience and from, you know, just overall looking around, just when I was first doing my research, when you look for dance teams or dance groups, just Google it. You just Google it, and what you see is 0 representation, representation of, of fat and curvy, plus-size women.

Dance leaders were also aware of the difficulties and worries that curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick folks experience when entering dance spaces, as demonstrated by Stephanie, who reported, "I

was also very aware about, like how hard it might be for people to come access to fitness space, um, especially one [aerial dance spaces] that already starts at such like a thin body type." Thus, dance leaders demonstrated their commitment to serving curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick individuals by creating plus-size (curvy, fat, and thick) exclusive spaces. Jennifer wanted to create a plus-size exclusive team so members "don't have to care about how we look, what we wear, and our size." Whereas for Diana, they wanted to create this space because it was and is something she wanted and needed. Though the reasons for creating these spaces varied, it was important for the dance leaders, as shared by Stephanie, "To create a safer environment. Um, where people don't have to worry about coming in and being bombarded with microaggressions." Furthermore, Kora viewed her plus-size exclusive classes as:

> I think it's an entry point. It's, it feels like an even safer space for folks to show up and feel comfortable, um, and then my hope is always that then they'll feel comfortable coming to the other classes of the dance studio. And then there will be more diversity of bodies in each class. And then more people will feel comfortable, and then it just goes from there.

Kora saw the space as a potential stepping-stone for students to explore other dance classes offered at the studio. The intentional inclusion of curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick individuals did not stop at plus-size exclusive spaces. Rather, they demonstrated their commitment to overall body-inclusive environments using similar strategies detailed in the previous themes.

Diana argued that building inclusive spaces required leaders be genuine, as they stated:

> If you really are trying to build inclusivity, you just have to live it. You have to, you have to be genuine about it, you have to want people to be there, which means you have to set people up for success.

Their words stressed that leaders must have a genuine and personal commitment to creating inclusive spaces. Diana lived out their commitment to creating inclusive spaces with and for curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick dancers by advocating for changes in the curriculum. Before becoming an instructor, Diana was a student taking plus-size exclusive aerial classes. However,

no one had ever leveled out of the plus-size exclusive class when she started. Thus, she began to question the requirements for leveling. Based on the requirements previously in place, Diana vocalized "that you [the studio] [were] keeping fat people out of your classes forever. If this is your policy." Diana challenged the studio to reconsider whether the requirements were in place were safety reasons or if they were in place simply because of tradition. After demonstrating her skills and the geometrical and physics issues with some of the requirements, it led to the studio rewriting the curriculum. As part of their own experiences, Diana created a path for curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick folks so that they could succeed.

My interpretation of dance leaders' approaches to creating dance spaces with and for curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick folks is that creating inclusive dance spaces entails awareness, mindfulness, intentionality, and a genuine desire to include individuals with marginalized identities. Awareness, mindfulness, intentionality, and a genuine desire are reflected within each theme presented in the current study.

Discussion

The study aimed to explore strategies dance leaders are currently implementing to make inclusive spaces with and for curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick women. To my knowledge, this study is the first to explore how dance leaders are actively working to create body-inclusive spaces for women with diverse body shapes and sizes. The themes identified in this highlight awareness and intentional use of language, the importance of representing diverse body shapes and sizes, community, and personal commitment to inclusivity. The results from this study fit within Cook et al.'s (2014) multilevel approach and the conceptual model of body weight inclusive PA spaces (Pickett & Cunningham, 2017b).

The themes presented in the current study can be placed within and between the three levels (i.e., intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural) of Cook et al.'s (2014) multilevel approach. As Zuest et al. (2022) suggested, awareness and intentional use of language can be categorized as a strategy within the interpersonal level. However, it can also be placed within the structural levels as inclusive language goes beyond being used within classes and should be used throughout the facility and how it operates. As reflected by Diana and Stephanie, who noted the intentional and mindful use of language used to describe the population they aim to serve at their respective studio. The awareness and intentional use of language also align with the inclusive language element from the conceptual model of body weight inclusive PA spaces, which emphasizes avoiding language that creates dichotomies and hierarchies (Pickett & Cunningham, 2017b).

The representation of diverse body shapes and sizes fits into interpersonal and structural levels of the multilevel approach (Cook et al., 2014). The interpersonal level targets group interactions, represented by Kora as she used her position as a leader and intentionally put together a photo shoot for and with individuals with fat and plus-size bodies and published the photos. Additionally, the representation of diverse body shapes falls within the structural level, as Zuest et al. (2022) noted, as the representation of diverse body shapes in marketing materials, clothing, and leadership positions requires action at the studio level, not just at an individual level. When interpreting the results from the lens of the conceptual model of body weight inclusive PA spaces, the representation of curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick bodies falls within the cultural and leadership commitment as both elements focus on approaches that ensure participants feel welcomed and included within the spaces (Pickett and Cunningham, 2017b).

Community inside and outside the dance space fits primarily within the interpersonal level of Cook et al.'s (2014) multilevel approach, as the dance leaders actively tried to connect with students and encouraged interaction among participants in and outside the dance space. However, it could be argued that this can also go into the structural level as it should not be the responsibility of only one instructor but the responsibility of the studio to establish a sense of community and demonstrate care for the community. Using the conceptual model of body weight inclusive PA spaces, there is a clear connection with the sense of community element. Pickett and Cunningham (2017b) draw attention to the importance of individuals feeling a sense of belonging and developing strong connections with members and leaders within the space.

Lastly, personal commitment to creating spaces falls within all three levels of Cook et al.'s multilevel approach. Participants, such as Michelle, Diana, and Stormy Louise, sought educational and training opportunities, reflecting the intrapersonal level that aims to improve knowledge, skills, and attitudes toward curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick folks. Providing educational and training opportunities fits within the interpersonal level as the dance leaders would often have volunteers come into the training session to give the individuals present real-life experience working with individuals with diverse body shapes and sizes. Additionally, providing education and training opportunities falls into the structural level as the studios supported the various training opportunities offered by the participants and plus-size exclusive classes. For example, some studios have incorporated these trainings into new instructor trainings, and studios have regularly scheduled plus-size exclusive programming. Personal commitment to creating spaces within and for curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick folks aligns with the leadership commitment element of the conceptual model of body weight inclusive PA spaces

(Pickett & Cunningham, 2017b) as this element highlights the importance of leaders demonstrating and modeling their commitment to inclusivity through various means.

As demonstrated by the experiences of Copeland, Lizzo, and the contestants on *Lizzo's Watch Out for the Big Grrrls,* the intersection of multiple marginalized identities can influence dance and body-related experiences. The intersection of marginalized identities was also highlighted as an important component that may influence the relationship between body inclusivity and commitment in the conceptual model of body weight inclusive PA spaces (Pickett and Cunningham, 2017b). The dance leaders who participated in the study were aware of intersectional marginalized identities and acknowledged that creating inclusive spaces went beyond thinking about body shape and size. Dance leaders' awareness emphasizes the importance of considering intersecting identities when creating inclusive spaces, as reflected in the conceptual model of body weight inclusive PA spaces (Pickett & Cunningham, 2017b).

The results from the study support Cook et al.'s (2014) multilevel approach as strategies shared by the dance leaders applied within and between all three levels and directly align with four of the six elements identified in the conceptual model of body weight inclusive PA spaces: inclusive language, sense of community, and cultural and leadership elements of the conceptual body of body weight inclusive PA spaces (Pickett & Cunningham, 2017b) While the major themes presented in the study align with Cook et al.'s (2014) multilevel approach and the conceptual model of body weight inclusive PA spaces, as noted above, the overarching themes reported in this study do not reflect an all-inclusive list of strategies shared by dance leaders who participated. For example, dance leaders addressed body-inclusive approaches relating to physical space (e.g., equipment and the presence of mirrors), participant autonomy, and trauma awareness. Though these were not highlighted as an overarching theme in the present study, it

does not imply these strategies were less important or were not implemented. The dance leaders did begin to address these components within our conversations.

The present study shows that dance leaders are actively working to create spaces with and for curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick folks. The approaches taken by the dance leaders who participated in the study create inclusive spaces and, on a larger and broader scale, create socially just dance spaces. Through their intentional and genuine efforts, dance leaders are providing equitable and accessible opportunities for curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick folks to engage in dance and recognizing and reducing potential perceived barriers that may inhibit individuals from reaching their full potential (Nutter et al., 2016; Russell-Mayhew & Grace, 2016).

Practical Implications

The present finding can be helpful for dance leaders. Dancer leaders should view the findings as examples of strategies that can be adopted to create socially just spaces for folks with diverse body shapes and sizes. However, the results should not be interpreted as an all-encompassing checklist of body-inclusive strategies. McCarty et al. (2022) warned against viewing inclusive approaches as items to check off a list. Thus, I emphasize that the results presented in this study should not be viewed as a mere checklist for dance leaders to create inclusive spaces for and with curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick folks. In addition, I stress that integrating these strategies does not guarantee a truly inclusive dance space. Rather, as highlighted by McCarty et al. (2022), all individuals must be personally committed to social justice and constantly work through their journey to successfully create and sustain inclusive spaces. The findings from the present study provide support for McCarty et al.'s (2022) point as dance leaders involved verbally reinforced the need for and demonstrated their own awareness, intentionality, and mindfulness when creating inclusive dance space. Therefore, dance leaders

must be personally invested and committed to truly creating and sustaining socially just and inclusive spaces.

Limitations and Future Directions

The types of dance styles represented may be perceived as a limitation of the study, as dance leaders were primarily involved with a limited number of styles. While I recognize this as a limitation of the current study, it may also reflect the general lack of inclusivity of individuals with diverse body shapes and sizes in dance and specifically in traditional styles of dance such as ballet and modern that have traditionally emphasized thinness. The limited number of dance styles represented may also suggest sizest practices continue to dance, which results in the discrimination and exclusion of curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick. Future studies should explore whether and how dance leaders, specifically those involved with traditional dance forms, are actively working toward creating body-inclusive spaces.

Another limitation of this study is that it primarily focused on inclusivity relating to body shape and size. While the initial research question focused on how dance leaders create inclusive spaces for curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick women, participants noted that the spaces they work in spaces that aim to serve individuals with multiple marginalized identities relating to gender identity, race and ethnicity, and body shape and size. Recognizing multiple marginalized identities, Michelle noted how the approaches she suggests could be applied to members of various marginalized communities. Additionally, Kora urged leaders to remember those not represented within the dance spaces and continue to think about how to get those folks involved. Future studies should explore how dance leaders create inclusive spaces with and for individuals with intersecting marginalized identities. Considering the intersection of multiple marginalized identities is a critical line of research to pursue as, according to the conceptual model of body

weight inclusive PA spaces, multiple marginalized identities can impact the relationship between body inclusive and adherence to PA, which in turn influences physical and psychological well-being (Pickett & Cunningham, 2017b). Future research can also help us understand how inclusive practices impact less or more effective for individuals with multiple marginalized identities.

The current study presents body-inclusive strategies from the perspective of dance leaders. Future research should explore curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick dancers' perceptions of body inclusivity and aspects they feel will make dance spaces body-inclusive. By obtaining students' points of view, dance leaders can directly identify the wants and needs of the population they aim to serve. Lastly, we must consider the dance leaders' shared positionality of body shape and size identity. Though the meanings varied, the dance leaders who participated in the study identified as curvy, fat, plus-size, and/or thick. Given the participants' shared body shape and size positionality, we must be cognizant of the identity taxation that comes with social justice work (Hirshfield & Joseph, 2012). Thus, future research should explore the tolls of identity taxation. Additionally, whether allies are supporting folks who are members of the marginalized community currently doing the work and, if so, how, and if not, why, should be explored in the future. Future research should also explore if and how non-members of the curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick communities are advocating for and creating body-inclusive dance spaces and how their approaches might differ from leaders who members of the curvy, fat, plus-size, or thick community.

Conclusion

The present study took the initial steps to explore how dance leaders create socially just and inclusive spaces with and for curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick individuals. The themes reflect

approaches Kora, Michelle, Stormy Louise, Casey, Stephanie, Diana, and Jennifer took to create body-inclusive spaces with and for curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick individuals. Their active efforts demonstrated awareness and mindfulness and stemmed from an intentional and genuine desire to create body-inclusive spaces while considering multiple marginalized identities. The themes represented should not be interpreted as a checklist of approaches for inclusivity, as the themes do not encompass all the approaches shared to create inclusivity, nor does implementing these strategies guarantee genuine inclusivity. Thus, as asserted by Diana, to truly create inclusive spaces, "You just have to live it."

Table 1

Dance Leader Demographic Information

Name	Leadership Position	Age	Gender Identity	Race and Ethnicity	Years of Experience	Primary Style of Dance
Kora (*she/her*)	Instructor	37	Woman	White with Middle Eastern background; Not of Hispanic, Latino/a/x, or Spanish origin	20-years off-and-on	Pop fusion
Michelle (*she/her*)	Instructor	38	Woman	Black or African American; Not of Hispanic, Latino/a/x, or Spanish origin	12 years	Pole dancing
Stormy Louise (*she/her*)	Instructor and Co-Director	42	Woman	White; Not of Hispanic, Latino/a/x, or Spanish origin	8 years	Pole dancing
Stephanie [b] (*she/her*)	Instructor	35	Woman	White; Not of Hispanic, Latino/a/x, or Spanish origin	5 years	Aerial
Casey [a,b] (*she/her*)	Director	42	Woman	Black or African American; Not of Hispanic, Latino/a/x, or Spanish origin	7 years	Variety (e.g., burlesque and hip-hop)
Diana (*she/they*)	Instructor	37	Non-binary	White; Not of Hispanic, Latino/a/x, or Spanish origin	2.5 years	Aerial

Jennifer [a,b] (*she/her*)	Director and Choreographer	38	Woman	Black or African American; Not of Hispanic, Latino/a/x, or Spanish origin	5 years	Hip-hop

[a] Reflects an assigned pseudonym.
[b] Reflects participants who did not participate in the follow-up interview.

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Chapter IV: Experiences of Embodiment among Curvy, Fat, Plus-Size, and Thick Dancers

Dance is an activity that can cultivate and enhance negative and positive experiences with the body among women. Findings among women and girls who participate in dance (e.g., ballet, African, and tap) show higher levels of negative body image (e.g., body dissatisfaction) and disordered eating behaviors compared to non-dancers (Anshel, 2004; Ravaldi et al., 2006; Robbeson et al., 2015; Tiggemann & Slater, 2001). Dancers may experience greater body dissatisfaction than non-dancers due to the added pressure and expectation to be thin. Women and girls who participated in various dance styles (e.g., flamenco, ballet, Spanish dance, and modern) reported mirrors, uniforms/costumes, teachers, and peers as sources of pressure to lose weight and factors that contributed to body dissatisfaction (Dantas et al., 2018; Reel et al., 2005). Pressure to be thin may come from the media. Western media have presented dance as a unidimensional activity with a singular body ideal. Though a formal review of the representation of dancers in the media has yet to be conducted in dance-related shows (e.g., *Dancing with the Stars* and *So You Think You Can Dance*) and movies (e.g., *Step Up* and *Black Swan*), dancers in the show reinforce the thin-ideal as the women featured in these movies and shows are predominately thin. Due to the expectation of dancers to be thin, curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick women may be met with resistance and (un)intentionally discriminated and (un)intentionally excluded or discouraged from participating in dance.

To current knowledge, the experiences of curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick dancers have yet to be explored in literature. However, we see instances when curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick dancers are met with resistance in popular culture. Misty Copeland, the first Black principal dancer of the American Ballet Theater, though having a similar body shape and size to fellow ballerinas, was told she did not have the "right" body for a professional ballerina (Harlow &

Paul, 2018). Copeland recognized the comments were not only referencing her body shape and size but contained underlying messages that she did not belong in ballet because of the color of her skin (Harlow & Paul, 2018). Copeland's experiences suggest that the preference for thin, white bodies continues in ballet (Kerr-Berry, 2018). Lizzo, a renowned singer, rapper, dancer, and flautist who identifies as fat, has also been vocal about her experiences with fatphobia and body shaming (Bowenbank, 2022). She is also aware of the underrepresentation of curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick women in dance. Lizzo recalled recognizing the need for curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick dancers while holding auditions for dancers. Lizzo shared, "I was like, I need dancers. We had an audition and it was all these girls, and they were beautiful dancers and beautiful people, but they just didn't look like me" (Sheer, 2022). As a result of the lack of representation, Lizzo took it upon herself to seek curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick dancers.

Lizzo created *Lizzo's Watch Out for the Big Grrrls,* a dance show where women competed to be a part of her dance team. The show gave women with marginalized identities (e.g., body shape and size, gender identity, sexuality, etc.) the platform to share their experiences with dance and their bodies (Lizzo, 2022). The contestants reflected on their negative body experiences (e.g., fat-shaming and disordered eating behaviors), specifically related to dance. The experiences of Copeland, Lizzo, and the show's contestants reflect larger systems of oppression, such as sizeism, sexism, and racism. The examples in popular culture are presented as evidence to demonstrate how curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick women have been underrepresented in dance and how their experiences with their bodies as dancers have been understudied in academic literature.

On the other hand, there is evidence that participation in dance can cultivate positive experiences of embodiment (Dimler et al., 2017; Greenleaf & Hauff, 2019; Holland, 2010; Moe,

2012; Nicholas et al., 2018). As defined in the developmental theory of embodiment (DTE), embodiment "refers concurrently to the breadth of lived experiences as one engages with his/her body in the world and to the shaping of these experiences by cultural forces" (Piran, 2017, p. 2). Embodiment ranges from positive to negative, with experiences of embodiment occurring simultaneously. Positive embodiment consists of five dimensions: 1) body connection and comfort, 2) agency and functionality, 3) experience and expression of desire (e.g., sexual), 4) attuned self-care, and 5) inhabiting the body as a subjective site (Piran, 2017). It is important to note that the dimensions presented in the DTE overlap with components of positive body image. For instance, as noted by Piran & Neumark-Sztainer (2020), there is an overlap between body appreciation and body connection and comfort as both encompass appreciation for the body. As experiences of embodiment lay on a continuum from positive experiences of embodiment, Tylka and Piran (2019) asserted embodiment is an overarching construct that includes positive and negative body image. Therefore, this study will use experiences of positive embodiment as the overarching construct.

Differences in body appreciation between dancers (i.e., belly, pole, street, and modern dancing) and non-dancers have been identified. Findings show that compared to non-dancers, dancers had higher levels of body appreciation (Langdon & Petracca, 2010; Pellizzer et al., 2016; Swami & Tovée, 2009; Tiggemann et al., 2014). These findings may suggest dance can cultivate positive experiences. Pellizzer et al. (2016) argued women who engage in these forms of dance may experience body appreciation because these styles are more accepting of diverse body shapes and sizes than traditional styles such as ballet. The findings in quantitative research provide support that participation in belly and pole dancing fosters positive experiences of embodiment.

During interviews with pole fitness and belly dancers, women reported positive body-related experiences reflecting the five embodiment dimensions. For example, dancers experienced an increase in body acceptance and appreciation, a growth or reconnection with sexuality and sensuality, and a (re)connection with the body (Dimler et al., 2017; Holland, 2010; Moe, 2012; Nicholas et al., 2018). The accumulation of positive body experiences resulted in heightened self-confidence and empowerment among dancers (Dimler et al., 2017; Holland, 2010; Moe, 2012; Nicholas et al., 2018). Pole and belly dancers reported several factors that contributed to these experiences, such as the presence of women with various body weights, shapes, and sizes, a sense of community, and being in a non-judgmental space (Dimler et al., 2017; Holland, 2010; Moe, 2012). Additionally, for pole dancers, the positive experiences with their bodies and support, community, and agency were identified as motivating factors for continued participation in pole dancing (Nicholas et al., 2018). Together, the findings from the qualitative studies cultivate positive experiences of embodiment.

While evidence suggests participating in dance contributes to experiences of positive embodiment, there is a major limitation with the sample populations in previous research. The samples in past literature have either consisted primarily of women who are classified as healthy weight according to the body mass index (BMI), or information on the participants' body shape and size was not reported. The information about the body-related experiences of curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick dancers is limited to what has been presented in popular culture media and remains understudied in academic literature. Therefore, this study aims to address the literature gap by bringing to light the voices and experiences of a subpopulation of dancers that have been underrepresented in research. As emerging evidence indicates participation in dance can foster

positive body-related experiences, the current study aims to specifically explore the positive body experiences from the standpoint of dancers who identify as curvy, fat, and plus-size.

Pilot Study

Before conducting the study for the dissertation, I conducted a pilot study to help inform the proposed study. Pilot studies are useful for developing study purpose, design, feasibility, and researcher development. By conducting a pilot study, I was to determine whether the interview questions were straightforward and led participants to provide in-depth responses about lived experiences with the body as it relates to dance and perceptions of body inclusivity (Hesse-Biber, 2017; Tolley et al., 2016). Additionally, the pilot study allowed me to practice conducting interviews, developing follow-up questions and probes, and analyzing the data.

Study Design

The pilot study was approached using the constructivist paradigm as the purpose of the present case study was to understand body-related experiences and experiences of inclusivity among women who self-identified as curvy, fat, plus-size, and/or thick. According to the constructivist paradigm, knowledge is subjective and socially constructed (Brown & Dueñas, 2020; Chilisa & Kawulich, 2012). As knowledge is subjective, it is important for me as the researcher to recognize and acknowledge my positionalities, biases, and values that may interfere with the neutrality and presentation of the results (Chilisa & Kawulich, 2012).

Positionality and Reflexivity

I am a woman with one year of high school dance experience. However, I have participated in various sports and forms of PA. From my involvement in sports and PA and experiences outside of sports and PA spaces, I know that body ideals may vary from sport to sport and from society. I describe my body as curvy, which I interpret as having a waist smaller

than the hips and the bust. While I have not experienced exclusion or discrimination based on my body shape and size, through my experiences in sports and PA and my educational background and research interests, I am aware that women may be (un)intentionally excluded or discouraged from participating in sports and PA because of the shape and size of their bodies. While this is not an extensive list of my various positionalities, it is important to address these specific aspects as they influenced the research process, from the concept of the research study to the presentation of results.

Two students in a master's program in California assisted with data analysis. The first research assistant self-identified as a Latina/x woman. She described her body as curvy, which she interpreted as having thick hips and glutes. She also had ten years of experience with Ballet Foklorico. The second research assistant self-identified as a white woman and described her body as athletic, which she interpreted as muscular yet toned. She also had two years of experience in high school. We highlighted and reflected on positionalities regarding body shape and dance because they are relevant to the pilot study. However, we acknowledge other aspects of our positionality (e.g., race and ethnicity) also influenced data analysis. In recognizing the various intersections of identities, we reflected on how our status as insiders and outsiders fluctuated throughout the data analysis process. Together we engaged in reflexivity throughout data analysis. Reflexivity took the form of having open discussions about how our positionalities influenced our interpretation of the data.

Procedures

Participant recruitment began after obtaining approval from the Institutional Review Board at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (IRB; see Appendix H). To recruit participants, I contacted dancers directly, and a dance team director for women of all body shapes and sizes

assisted with participant recruitment by sharing the study with her network. Individuals needed to be 18 years or older, identify as a woman and participate in dance to partake in the study. The study consisted of a demographic questionnaire, a 1-to-2-hour interview, and journaling exercises to be completed post-interview (see Appendix H). Before completing the demographic interview, participants provided informed consent. Participants also provided verbal consent before the interviews began. Each interview lasted about one hour. The interviews were semi-structured, and I used an interview guide to direct the interviews (see Appendix H). The questions were grounded in the following theoretical and conceptual frameworks: the developmental theory of embodiment, positive body image, and the conceptual model of body weight inclusivity. The questions aimed to explore how dance influenced body experiences (e.g., "Please describe how you feel about your body while dancing") and perceptions of inclusivity within dance spaces (e.g., "What aspects contribute to the dance space being body weight inclusive?").

After the interview, participants were asked to complete four journaling exercises. Two journaling exercises were to be completed at least an hour before dancing, and two journaling exercises at least an hour after dancing. The journal prompts focused on body image (e.g., "How do you currently feel about your body?"), experiences of embodiment (e.g., "Did you feel a sense of connection and comfort with your body during the dance session?"), and elements of body weight inclusivity (e.g., "What aspects of the physical and social environment did you perceive to be body weight inclusive?"; see Appendix H). The journaling exercises allowed the participants to share and reflect on their experiences with their bodies and perceptions of body weight inclusivity. Each participant received a virtual $40 Visa Gift Card for their contribution to

research and as an acknowledgment of their time and willingness to share their experiences with me.

Participants

Two women, referred to by the pseudonyms Natasha and Reagan, participated in the study. Natasha is a 30-year-old Salvadoran woman who described her body as curvy. According to Natasha, curvy refers to having a non-traditional dancer's body that leans on the heavier side according to society's standards. She has 20 years of dance experience, with the highest level of dance being participation in non-competitive dance exhibitions. At the time of the interview, Natasha participated in a Latin fusion, body weight inclusive dance; however, she was lessening her involvement with the team to focus on obtaining a higher education degree. Reagan is a 31-year-old West Indian-Haitian woman. When asked to describe her body, Reagan focused on how she felt and perceived her body rather than giving a physical description,

> I don't wanna say like a work of art in terms of like, oh, it's the David, I don't mean it like that. But I will say the way I see my body now is, I just see nothing but love for it. I care for it more now.

She reported having six years of dance experience, with the highest level of dance being a performance dance team which she participated in for one season. When the interview occurred, Reagan's involvement in dance consisted of attending Latin dance socials.

Data Analysis

I transcribed the interviews verbatim. After transcribing the interviews, I shared the transcripts with the two graduate students. Thematic analysis (TA) was used to analyze the data (Braun et al., 2016). Thematic analysis was selected as the method to analyze the data as it is an approach for identifying patterns and interpreting their meaning (Braun et al., 2016). According to Braun et al. (2016), TA consists of six phases: familiarization, coding, theme development, theme refinement, theme naming, and write-up. We each independently engaged in phases one

and two (i.e., familiarization and coding). We reviewed the transcripts multiple times and took informal notes to become familiar with the data. In the coding phases, we identified and labeled all information presented in the data. The transcripts were coded several times before moving on to phase three, theme development (Braun et al., 2016).

As a group, we engaged in phases 3-5. We clustered our codes in the theme development phase (i.e., phase three) to create higher-level patterns. To visualize the codes, we shared the codes we independently developed and began the clustering process. We used an Excel sheet to map the relationships between codes and potential themes (Braun et al., 2016). In the theme refinement phase, phase four, we assessed whether the themes captured the experiences shared by the participants and addressed the research questions. We fluidly moved between phases three and four; we discussed whether the codes fit the clusters we created and how they contributed to the theme. Once we finalized the themes, we developed names and definitions that captured the "essence" of the themes (Braun et al., 2016). Lastly, the results were written up and reported below. Though the six phases are presented linearly, Braun et al. (2016) argue that to engage in TA well, researchers actively engage in the process and move back and forth between phases. It is also encouraged to engage in reflexive practices.

As for the journal exercises, only one participant submitted their responses to me. Thus, I independently reviewed the responses from the journal entries submitted. The information provided in the journal exercises supplemented the data from the interviews.

Results

Based on our interpretation of Reagan and Natasha's perceptions and lived experiences shared in the interviews, we developed three themes, which all centered on the body in some manner. The themes perceived body expectations for dancers, positive body-related experiences,

and perceptions of body weight inclusivity entail negative and positive components related to body perceptions and experiences.

Perceived Body Expectations for Dancers

Natasha and Reagan shared their perceived body expectations for dancers. Reagan reported, ". . .at first I did have an image when I came into the dance scene that, they're slender or they're like, so super fit and, just like these tall women." Natasha also noted height (i.e., tall) and body build (i.e., thin) when describing the ideal characteristic for dancers. Additionally, from Natasha's perspective, dancers typically had blonde or brunette hair. Natasha frequently spoke about her body in contrast to the body ideal for dancers. For example, "I don't have that body or like, I'm not tall, or you know, I have a belly like I eat tortillas." Natasha shared that the media, specifically movies related to cheerleading, influenced her perceived body expectations for dancers. Reagan and Natasha's perceptions of what does and does not constitute the ideal body for dancers suggest that thinness remains the dominant ideal.

Perceived Body Weight Inclusivity

In alignment with Pickett and Cunningham's model (2017), Natasha and Regan identified a sense of community and leadership commitment elements of body weight inclusivity. Regan felt a sense of community and shared that having a community provided her with a sense of safety within the social dance spaces. Natasha reported a sense of community and described the dance space as a safe place where curvy women can engage in dance, "My community, we know that this dance space is a safe space for curvy women." Natasha perceived the space as free of jealousy and a space where women were not competing against each other. Instead, women engaged in healthy relationships and healing in the dance space. "Community healing, I think it's important that groups of adult women really learn to, like, engage in healthy friendship and just

community because we are all too often like pinned against each other, like, um, this is not a space to feel the need to be jealous." From the response of Natasha and Reagan, an established sense of community contributes to positive outcomes such as healthy relationships, feeling safe, and healing.

Natasha discussed how the dance director, referred to by the pseudonym Rosie, created body weight inclusivity within the dance space. According to Natasha, Rosie understood the needs of her participants. Rosie demonstrated her knowledge of participants' needs by intentionally purchasing clothing materials for her dance clothing line. Natasha shared, "She [Rosie] knows the struggles of curvy women, you know, like things are too sheer, you know, we need things that really stretch." Along similar lines, Rosie also intentionally avoided selecting dark colors for the team's costumes, as she felt dark shades hid the body curves of dancers. Instead, she chose bright costumes to highlight the dancers' curvy bodies.

Natasha also reported that Rosie frequently challenged the participants, as she revealed:

> My director [Rosie] kinda has it set up, these really great numbers, and like, you know, most choreography go no more than two and half minutes because really, that's a long time, you know, that's a lot of 8 counts. She will push us to go to three minutes, or she will make a routine that is about three minutes or a little over, and so for me, it's like your goal is to do as much of the routine as possible. Like, you know, I have to train myself to be able to accomplish these whole three minutes, you know, and that's the challenge.

The challenging dance routines given by Rosie demonstrate that she did not lower expectations for her dancers based on body weight, shape, and size. The examples shared by Natasha reflect Rosie's commitment as a leader to creating a body weight inclusive space.

Natasha and Reagan perceived the Latin dance spaces they participated in as inclusive to individuals with various body weights, shapes, and sizes. However, Reagan shared inclusivity happened to a certain extent. From Reagan's perspective, "If you're known as a good dancer,

then size doesn't count, but I guess size does come into play if no one knows you." Regan explained that in social dance settings, you form a partnership with another individual in the space. Whether individuals are asked to dance may depend on their status within the community. Individuals who are perceived as curvy, fat, plus-size, or thick and are well-established are approached by others to dance, but individuals who are perceived as curvy, fat, plus-size, or thick and are not well-known do not have the same experience.

Positive Body-Related Experiences

Natasha and Reagan shared that participation in dance fostered aspects of positive body image (i.e., body appreciation) and positive experiences of embodiment (e.g., body connection and inhabiting the body as a subjective site). Natasha and Reagan reported feeling appreciative of their bodies and what they can do (i.e., body appreciation) because of dancing dance. As Natasha elaborated:

> You know, my body just does what it does, and, I'm just, I'm appreciative of it, because, and it's like I've been working hard, you know, like all the pandemic, I challenged myself to like become a better twerker essentially and like I did and I can twerk pretty well, you know, and it's just like now it's like 'Oh, push yourself to move your body this way, like isolate different body part' you know, so you just start kinda like, "What can my body do?"

Natasha demonstrated body appreciation but also provided insight into how engaging in dance, specifically twerking, helped her focus on what her body can do and challenged her body to execute different movements.

Natasha and Reagan described experiences of positive embodiment. Body connection was an aspect of positive embodiment that Reagan and Natasha reported. Reagan reported, "And I do feel a lot more deeply connected and rooted in my body, in my soul, and I'm very in tune in how I wanna feel and the energy." Natasha also felt participating in dance allowed her to connect with her body and, at times, reconnect. She described connection with her body as being mindful

of the body and responding to its needs, which also aligns with the attuned self-care component of embodiment. Reagan also described the experience of inhabiting the body as a subjective site:

> If there's a guy that I'm dancing with and I feel like he is getting, I don't allow him to get touchy with me, so I'll end it because, you know, I don't want you to use my body to satisfy whatever you needs you got going on, so, I think, I think in that term too, I, I'm protecting, you know, yeah, I'm protecting myself and my body from people that just wanna, that just wanna use it.

Reagan actively removed herself from situations where she did not feel comfortable and resisted being objectified by other individuals within the space.

Journaling Exercises

Reagan was the only participant to complete the journaling exercises. Reagan's reflections before and after participating in dance reiterated the experiences she shared in the interviews. For example, when reflecting on whether she felt a sense of connection and comfort with her body while dancing, Reagan shared:

> Yes I felt my emotional, physical, and mental aligned once I was in a good number of dances. When I feel I lose myself in the dance, I know I'm connected. Lose myself meaning stop counting with beats and just follow my lead.

Reagan also reinforced that there were contingencies on inclusivity with the space. As she reported:

> The dance scene to me appears inclusive or, more specifically, body weight inclusive only when you are established. I see a variety of different shapes and sizes enjoying themselves or having a good time, but it was mainly the ones that were either known or had years of experience under their belts. Those that didn't stayed in the back dancing with friends or just observing either due to their dance level or their comfortability.

Natasha's and Reagan's perceptions and experiences within the dance provide evidence that participation in dance contributes to experiences of positive embodiment and body image. The dance settings they engage in may contribute to the differences in perceptions of inclusivity. For instance, Natasha participates in a non-competitive performance dance team known to be

inclusive to women of all body weights, shapes, and sizes. Reagan participates in social dance, which requires partnership with another participating member. However, overall, Reagan and Natasha perceived Latin dance spaces to be more inclusive than other dance spaces.

Based on the results of the pilot study and feedback from Natasha and Reagan, several changes were made before conducting the current study. First, changes were made to the purpose of the study to focus more on body-related experiences. Secondly, questions in the interview guide were revised, added, and reordered. Additionally, I decided not to utilize journaling exercises due to the response rate and timeliness of the submission from the participant. The findings from the pilot study will not be included in the final write-up of the results.

Methodology and Methods for Present Study

Study Design

The present study is informed by feminist standpoint theory. At the center of feminist standpoint theory is the assertation that knowledge is grounded in the lived, material, and embodied experiences of individuals who share similar social locations (e.g., gender, race, and body type) (Hartsock, 1983; Intemann, 2010). Hartsock (1983) asserted knowledge is developed through women's lived experiences. While Hartsock (1983) recognized experiences among women might differ based on the intersection of multiple identities (e.g., race and ethnicity and sexual orientation), the differences were set aside to highlight women's shared experiences. However, Hartsock (1983) acknowledged when the differences are set aside, the experiences of women with intersecting identities are silenced. In recognizing the intersection of identities shapes lived experiences, Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) coined the term intersectionality.

Intersectionality refers to the interaction between various identities that shape experiences (Crenshaw, 1991). Crenshaw first discussed intersectionality when addressing the experiences of

Black women. According to Crenshaw (1991, p.1244), “the intersection of racism and sexism factors into Black women’s lives in ways that cannot be captured wholly by looking at the race or gender dimensions of those experiences separately.” When speaking to the experiences of Black women, (Collins, 1986, 1990) acknowledged common experiences of struggle and oppression (e.g., racism and sexism). Based on the shared experiences among Black women, Collins (1986) asserted Black women possess a unique standpoint. However, Collins (1990, p. 23) asserted, “Diversity among Black women produced concrete experiences that in turn shape various reactions to core themes.” Collins (1990) acknowledged that social class, sexual orientation, age, and ethnicity shape diverse experiences. Collins (1990) upheld that standpoint moves beyond personal experiences and focuses on shared group experiences.

In summation, “feminist standpoint theory offers an intersectional analysis of gender, race, ethnicity, class, and other structural aspects of social life without privileging one dimension or adopting an additive formulation (e.g., gender plus race)” (Naples & Gurr, 2014, p. 25). While the work of Black feminist theorists has highlighted the intersection between gender (i.e., women) and race (i.e., Black or African American), there are a multitude of identities and the multiple ways identities intersect. Variations such as fat, lesbian, and Chicana standpoint have emerged (Bernal, 1998; Cooper Stoll & Thoune, 2020; Krane, 2001). While this study highlights the intersection between gender identity (i.e., women) and body weight, shape, and size (i.e., curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick), I recognize the participants’ lived experiences cannot be fully understood when identities are separated.

As knowledge is created from inhabiting particular standpoints, feminist standpoint theory also emphasizes the importance of researchers considering their positionality as it relates to the research process. A critical claim of feminist standpoint is that “feminist objectivity means

quite simply situated knowledges" (Haraway, 1988, p. 581). Feminist objectivity challenges the notion that researchers have an objective, neutral, and "value-free" perspective (Intemann, 2010). Thus, feminist objectivity calls for me to identify my positionality (e.g., positions related to gender, race, ethnicity, and body shape, etc.) and be critical of how my positionality influences the research process and production of knowledge (England, 1994; Naples & Gurr, 2014).

Positionality and Reflexivity

I am a Latina/x woman who views my body as curvy and has not experienced judgment or exclusion due to the shape and size of my body. Thus, I must critically reflect on how my position has given me certain privileges and influences my research. I view my body as curvy, which I interpret as having a waist smaller than the hips and busts. However, I do not associate my body with being fat, plus-size, or thick. As an individual who does not identify as fat, I would be remiss not to acknowledge how using fat to describe body shape and size may perpetuate negative and derogatory connotations historically associated with the term (Webb et al., 2019). I acknowledge the harmful effects of the use of the word fat. Still, I also recognize the recent reclaiming of fat by individuals and organizations (e.g., National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance) to promote fat acceptance and end weight-based discrimination (McPhail & Orsini, 2021; Williams, 2020). I recognize that all may not identify as fat and that individuals may instead identify and describe their bodies as curvy, plus-size, or thick (Capodilupo, 2015; Schooler et al., 2012). Thus, throughout the research process, I intentionally use curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick to encompass a range of ways women identify and describe their bodies. I also recognize my body shape and size position me as an outsider. Thus, I view the women who participated in the study as the experts.

Though my body shape and size are pertinent to this study, I understand the intersection of my identities relating to gender identity and race and ethnicity will also influence the research process (Hesse-Biber, 2014). As a woman, I receive messages about the body (i.e., thinness) through the media. However, I recognize that these messages may have impacted my experiences with my body differently. I am also aware the ideal body for women presented in the media does not rigidly align with the body ideal (e.g., curves) I have been exposed to in Latina/x culture. The messages I have received from the media and my Latina/x background have influenced the forms of PA and exercise I engage in, my perceptions of body weight inclusivity in these spaces, and my experiences with my body.

Last but certainly not least, it is critical that I reflect on my position as a Ph.D. student and my educational background as they have influenced the research process. Through my journey as a graduate school, I have focused on the lived body-related experiences of individuals with marginalized identities. However, by no means am I fully knowledgeable of the body experiences of all marginalized identities. My knowledge and study area do not expand to all marginalized identities, so it influenced the study's purpose and participant eligibility criteria. These decisions were made as I recognized my limitations and in a conscious effort not to cause harm or misrepresent the lived experiences of potential participants. In future research, I plan on collaborating with other professionals whose areas of study expand beyond mine so that more diverse voices can be included and represented in research.

The relevance and importance of aspects of my positionality fluctuated throughout the research process (e.g., developing research questions, data collection, analysis, and interpretation). Thus, reflexivity was critical throughout the process (Hesse-Biber, 2014). Reflexivity is a continual examination of how my positionality influences the research and

reflection on personal biases that may affect the information produced (Hesse-Biber, 2014). As a method of engaging in reflexivity, I will keep a reflexive journal throughout the research process. I recorded my thoughts, perspectives, and experiences and reflected on my positionality and personal biases.

Recruitment Strategy and Participants

Purposive sampling, also referred to as criterion-based sampling, was utilized to recruit participants (Ritchie et al., 2014). Purposive sampling provided the ability to seek participants who can meaningfully contribute to the experiences being explored in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Ritchie et al., 2014). To participate in the study, individuals must have: identified as a cis-woman, be 18 years of age or older, identify as curvy, fat, plus-size, and/or thick (e.g., wearing a US pants size of 14 or larger), and participate in a dance team, organization, or group that celebrates curvy, fat, plus-size, and/or thick women. Folks with marginalized gender identities (e.g., transwomen, non-binary, queer, gender non-conforming, etc.) were not included in the study. The decision was made because I did not want to cause harm or misrepresent their experiences, as my knowledge of the lived experiences of individuals with marginalized identities is limited. Participants were also excluded if they had a current or previous diagnosis of disordered eating because a diagnosis can impact how women experience their bodies and is beyond the scope of this study and because I do not have a clinical or counseling background. Lastly, pregnant women and women who gave birth within the past year were also excluded, as pregnancy and post-partum come with unique body experiences.

The experiences of nine women are presented in the results. Each participant was allowed to select their pseudonyms. Of the nine participants, 6 selected their pseudonyms, Ann, Bea, Blue, Makenzie, Sylvia, and Vanessa, and pseudonyms were assigned to three participants,

Ashley, Jackie, and Nicole. All participants identified as curvy, fat, plus-size, and/or thick (i.e., ranging in 14-32 in pant sizes). Each participant was asked to provide their pronouns during the interview. During the study, the dancers participated in recreational dance settings (e.g., teams and classes) in various urban and suburban areas. The participants ranged in age, history of dance experience, primary styles of dance (e.g., pole, contemporary, and hip-hop), and experiences with their bodies. A brief description of demographic information and pertinent information related to the purpose of the study is described below and summarized in Table 2.

Ann (35 years; she/her; ten plus years of dance experience) had a brief experience with dance in high school. She did not fully immerse herself in dance until she was an adult, starting with belly dancing to now engaging mainly in pole dancing. Ann shared that in high school, "I [Ann] don't, I didn't identify as plus-size at that point." Currently, Ann identified as curvy, fat, plus-size, and/or thick, which she described as "I am larger than most people I see in media/around me."

Ashley (she/her; 30 years of age; approximately 22 years of dance experience) first engaged in tiny-tot ballet classes and then started cheerleading in grade school. In middle school, she also began participating in dance and was involved in competitive dance and cheerleading. She did not engage in dance competitively in college, but she remained involved in dance by taking different classes such as Zumba, ballet, and barre. She discontinued dancing for some time but continued engaging in different forms of PA. Currently, she primarily participates in contemporary dance. Overall, Ashley described her experiences with dance as positive. Ashley shared that in high school, "I wasn't necess-, I wasn't skinny, but I wasn't, like, plus-size." She currently identifies as curvy, fat, plus-size, and/or thick, which she described as "Literally it means I have large amounts of Adiposity."

Bea (she/her; 41 years of age; 10 years of dance experience) was first exposed to dance in high school. However, she stopped participating during her final year. Bea re-entered dance as an adult and has been extensively involved in pole dancing. Bea is also a pole instructor. When reflecting on her body in high school, she shared:

> I'm under 5 foot 3. Umm, so I wasn't overweight. I was a bit curvaceous for a 17-year-old girl. But, you know, I wore, I think, you know, at most, I wore like a size 7. So I, I wasn't fat or overweight, really, by any means.

Now, Bea identifies as curvy, fat, plus-size, and/or thick, which she described as "To be above the 'average' sizing."

Blue (she/her; 6 years of dance experience) shared that she grew up dancing around the house with her mom but did not participate in classes until high school. She continued to participate in dance in college, where she obtained a minor in dance and was a member of a dance team associated with the university. Blue shared it was through the dance classes she took for the dance minor that she began to embrace herself. Due to various life events, Blue stopped dancing but now engages in Latin fusion dance. Blue identifies described as curvy, fat, plus-size, and/or thick, which she described as "being big and beautiful."

Jackie (she/her; 39 years of age; 12+ years of dance experience) was exposed to various dance styles (e.g., ballet, hip-hop, and jazz) as an adolescent. However, she fell away from dancing and did not return to dancing until she was 29 when she began participating in pole dancing. She has since become a pole instructor. Jackie recalled, "I was always the biggest girl in class, for sure. Umm, I shot up tall kind of early. Umm, I'm only 5'7", so I'm not by any means tall, tall. I'm average height." She currently identifies as curvy, fat, plus-size, and/or thick, which she interpreted as, "I am a human with extra skin and adipose tissue. I am larger in the eyes of society than I ought to be."

Makenzie (she/her; 24 years of dance experience) has been involved in dance since she was a child, from attending ballet school to participating in belly dancing and Lindy hop, to now participating in pole dancing. She noted that her body shape has changed as she shared, "I wanna say, like 2016, I was like super underweight. I was not curvy. I was not plus size. I wasn't even mid-size. I was like size 10 at the biggest." Whereas, now she identified as curvy, fat, plus-size, and/or thick, which to her means "to carry extra weight around, and not fit into 'standard size' clothing (i.e., 0-14)."

Nicole (she/her; 35 years of age; 22 years of experience) first participated in dance in high school. After taking a high school dance course, Nicole began attending a dance studio where she was exposed to various dance genres such as jazz, ballet, modern, West African, and Broadway. She continued to dance by taking college dance courses as extracurricular activities. Today, Nicole engages in hip-hop class and is a member of a hip-hop dance team, though the team has not been recently active due to various reasons. Currently, Nicole identified as curvy, fat, plus-size, and/or thick, which she interpreted as, "Being fat means larger than the ranges list on the BMI vs Height Charts. Being curvy doesnt necessarily mean fat, it just mean you dont have the generic ideal body shape for someone of a certain size."

Sylvia (she/her; 45 years of age; 15 years of dance experience) shared that she participated in dance in high school and college but did not receive technical training until she became a ballroom instructor. To date, Sylvia is a ballroom instructor and participates primarily in Latin fusion dance. She shared, "When I was a teenager in high school, like because I've always been curvier, um, even when I was thin, I've just always had, like, been very shapely." Sylvia currently identified as curvy, fat, plus-size, and/or thick, which she described as, "to have some meat on our bones, curvy and gorgeous and comfy in our skin."

Vanessa (she/her; 15 years of dance experience) started engaging in contemporary dance as a child but then took a year off because she "felt like I shouldn't be there because none of the other kids looked like me, and it was very distressing for me." After the year off, Vanessa began to dance again because her friends started dancing, but then became personally invested in dance. As a teen, she competed in dance competitions. Vanessa took another year off as she started college but re-entered dance by taking college dance courses offered through the university. She took different dance classes but found the West African dance class to be the most pivotal because "it was the first dance class I'd taken that's more like about your body and not like performing." Vanessa continued to dance until she graduated but then discontinued due to health. She reported now that she participates in contemporary dance. Vanessa described being larger as a kid and teenager. She currently identified as curvy, fat, plus-size, and/or thick, which she interpreted as "To be physically larger than what society deems a 'healthy weight.'"

The final sample size was determined by the potential to provide a rich, complex understanding of the purpose of this study (Braun & Clarke, 2021b; Sim et al., 2018). Consistent with reflexive thematic analysis, I made an "in-situ decision about the final sample size" (Braun & Clarke, 2021a, p.211). The final sample size was decided during data collection as I continuously reviewed the data quality (Braun and Clarke, 2021a). As recommended by Braun and Clarke (2021a, p. 211), the decision was "shaped by the adequacy (richness, complexity) of the data for addressing the research question." A similar sample size (i.e., $N = 7$) when exploring positive body image among women who participated in pole dancing (Dimler et al., 2017).

Procedure

After obtaining approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (see Appendix I), participants were recruited through social media and

with the assistance of dance leaders (e.g., directors, instructors, etc.). Dancers who were recruited via social media (e.g., Instagram) received a message which included an introduction of myself (PI), information about the study, and the recruitment flyer (see Appendices J and K). The flyer was also shared by dance leaders who offered their assistance with recruitment.

After providing informed consent, participants completed a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix L). The demographic questionnaire served as an eligibility screening tool for the participation inclusion and exclusion criteria. Individuals were asked to list their availability for a 1- to 2-hour virtual interview using the Microsoft Teams platform. Eligible participants were contacted and scheduled for an interview and provided a copy of the informed consent form to review. Before the interview began, I reviewed the consent form with the participants and obtained verbal consent. The interviews were semi-structured and guided by an interview guide (see Appendix M). The developmental theory of embodiment and the conceptual model of body weight inclusive PA spaces informed the interview guide. Based on the pilot study and feedback from the women who engaged in the pilot study, I modified the main questions and incorporated follow-up questions and probes. The questions were modified to be more participant-friendly and direct and to minimalize the use of theoretical language. For example, "What components within the dance space have contributed to you feeling appreciative, comfortable, connected, attuned with your body?" was rephrased to "What components within the dance space contribute to how you feel about your body?" The question, "In what ways does dance allow you to express yourself?" was also rephrased to "In what ways does dance allow you to express your sexuality?" I rephrased this question based on feedback from Natasha, who asked for clarification during her interview. I also added questions to better understand perceptions of body

ideals in different contexts (e.g., societal and dance) and how body experiences in the dance space translate outside the dance environment.

After concluding the interview, I informed the participants of the next steps, which included reviewing the transcript of their interview as well as a summary of the interview before our second meeting (Birt et al., 2016; Doyle, 2007). The purpose of receiving these items was for the participants to review them to ensure their voices were accurately reflected, as well as an opportunity for participants to provide clarification or additional information. This process is called member checking (Birt et al., 2016; Doyle, 2007). The follow-up interview also allowed me to ask participants to expand on their responses to provide more depth and a better understanding (see Appendix N). Of the nine participants, seven participated in the follow-up interviews. To recognize participants' time, energy, contribution, and willingness to share their experiences, they received a $50 Amazon virtual gift card.

Data Analysis

I reviewed the interview transcripts generated by Microsoft Teams to ensure the interviews were transcribed verbatim. While reviewing the transcribed data, I made corrections as needed. The transcripts were then imported into ATLAS.ti, a qualitative data analysis software that provides tools to organize and analyze the data. Data analysis was guided by reflexive thematic analysis (TA) (Braun et al., 2019; Braun & Clarke, 2019). Reflexive TA is an analytic approach that identifies patterns within a data set and "emphasizes the importance of the researcher's subjectivity as an analytic resource, and their reflexive engagement with theory, data and interpretation" (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p. 3). The aims of reflexive TA are consistent with major tenets of feminist standpoint. Both reflexive TA and feminist standpoint epistemology

recognize knowledge is situated and challenge the idea that, as the researcher, I have an objective perspective. Thus, I engaged in reflexivity (Braun & Clarke, 2021a).

Reflexive TA is described as a six-phase process: 1) familiarization with the data, 2) coding, 3) generation of initial themes, 4) development and review of the themes, 5) refining, defining, and naming themes, and 6) manuscript write up (Braun et al., 2019). I listened to the interviews and reviewed the transcripts multiple times to become familiar with the data. As I became familiar with the data, I took initial notes of concepts that stood out in each interview. Braun et al. (2019) identified the immersion process with the data as a critical phase and urged researchers to engage in reflexivity (e.g., reflecting on how I respond to the data). The coding phase was more detailed and systematic because it required me to identify codes throughout the entire dataset. While the developmental theory of embodiment and conceptual model of body weight inclusive PA spaces informed the study, it was not the intent to analyze the data strictly through these lenses. However, I recognize that the theoretical assumptions influenced data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021a). Thus, I inductively coded the data. I interpret inductive as "in the sense of analysis 'grounded in' the data" (Braun & Clarke, 2021b, p. 4). The codes assisted me in organizing the data and identifying patterns (Braun et al., 2019).

Constructing initial themes builds upon the previous phases and is where I developed and gave meaning to themes. Thematic mapping was used to generate themes; thematic mapping is a visual process of identifying potential themes and subthemes. Using the thematic map as a visual demonstration, I observed how the themes fit together and determined whether themes needed to be further developed (Braun et al., 2019). Braun et al. (2019) asserted the dataset and my subjectivity will influence the construction of themes. Thus, I engaged in reflexive journaling to

consider how my positionality and experiences with my body influenced the initial themes generated (Hesse-Biber, 2014). I then reviewed the generated themes.

The fifth phase, revising and defining themes, entailed reviewing and developing definitions for themes. In this phase, I created clear descriptions of the themes and ensured the data fully reflected the data. While the process for reflexive TA may be perceived as a linear process, Braun and Clarke (2019, 2021) asserted the process is not intended to be followed rigidly. Instead, I moved fluidly between the phases while continuously engaging in reflexivity.

Establishing Rigor

A critical component of conducting qualitative research is establishing trustworthiness. Trustworthiness refers to the criteria used to judge the quality and outcomes of qualitative research. I used reflexivity, member checking, and an "inquiry audit" to establish rigor for this study. Reflexivity and member checking will be used as described above. An "inquiry audit" is a detailed and concrete description of the research process (e.g., developing questions, conducting interviews, etc.) and any decisions made during the process (Burke, 2019). I kept a detailed log of the research process and any decisions made relating to the research.

Results

During the conversations with the dancers, the participants shared their dance journey, from when they first engaged to their current participation in dance. The dancers also provided insight into their experiences and perceptions of their bodies throughout their lifetimes. As seen in Table 2, dance backgrounds and experiences with and perceptions of the body varied from person to person. As the study was informed by a feminist standpoint epistemological lens, the lived body-related presented in this study reflect my understanding of the unique and shared standpoint of women who identify as curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick. Three themes were

identified from the experiences shared by the dancers: embracing the body, connecting with the body, and resisting and rebelling against societal expectations.

Embracing the Body

Throughout the interviews, the dancers spoke about embracing the body and identified dance as contributing factor. I developed the embracing the body theme to describe a multifaceted experience that included loving, appreciating, celebrating, and being comfortable with the body. The components of embracing the body did not always exist independently and, at times, overlapped.

Makenzie shared that through participating in pole dancing that she realized she needed to embrace her body as it is:

> And it was in that, like, that pole 3 class that I got to a point where I was like, you know what? I'm, I'm really f-ing strong. Like if I weighed the same amount as you did, I would be able to invert myself, but I am, I've got 100 pounds on you, so I have to build up my strength to be able to do anything. Like, I have to be twice as strong to go half as far. And then I went, you know what? If I don't start respecting myself and loving myself and looking at what I can do good, like no one else is going to, so I have to be that person. And that's where I started, I think, really stepping up for myself and really embracing this bigger body that I hadn't grown up with and being like this is how it is.

When Makenzie was in the dance space, she realized she needed to start loving the body for what it could do and embracing her body at its current shape and size. As Makenzie embraced the functionality of her body, she began recognizing her strength and discovering there were things that her body could do now that she could not do before. Thus, Makenzie celebrated her body for what it could do. Makenzie celebrated what her body can do and reported that her pole community (e.g., peers and instructors) also celebrated what her body could do. Beyond loving and celebrating her body for its strength and functionality, Makenzie shared that participating in pole dance cultivated a love for her appearance:

> It [pole dancing] made me love myself for what I could do, but it also made me love myself for how it looked because pole is, like, inherently sexy, and there's something really powerful about having your weekly, like, sexy time that's just for you, where you get to put on, like, a sexy little outfit and have a little sexy little dance.

As Makenzie embraced her body, she appeared comfortable moving away from shapewear. She resisted the idea that she could not wear clothing because it was too tight or because it showed her belly.

Embracing the body also entailed appreciating the body, as demonstrated by Blue, who addressed appreciation for her body when describing what it meant to embrace herself:

> What is embracing myself? I think, yeah, it's appreciating my body and honestly, just, just embracing who I am. What, what's brought me here? What's gotten me this far? As in obstacles. What have I overcome and all of that? It's just really embracing everything that I am and honoring my body for that, for, for being able to bring me this far. And just, yeah, with my insecurities, it was really hard for me to be feminine, to be sensual, to touch my body, not in a sexual way, but just to just be able to touch myself, you know, and so embracing my entire body is just being able to, to be able to dance and move in a way that I can just feel and be with myself, yeah.

Blue's description of embracing the body entails appreciating what her body can do and becoming comfortable with her femininity and sensuality. She contributed dance exercises as a factor contributed to her becoming comfortable with herself because it encouraged sensual movement. Blue also identified her current dance space as a contributing factor to her embracing herself "as a feminine woman and as a plus size dancer, um, and then also it's helped me embrace just myself overall." For Blue, embracing the body also went beyond appreciating what the body can do but acknowledging the obstacles she has faced and honoring the body for getting her to where she is now.

Appreciating and celebrating her body for what it could do and becoming more comfortable was also noted by Sylvia, as she shared:

> Body positivity and, honestly, just like giving gratitude to your body. Like, I had two kids, and I'm soft and doughy in places, and it's like it's, but that's okay. Like, I wanna

> be able to celebrate that and feel like if I like something and I feel comfortable in it, then I can wear it, and I don't need to be ashamed about this body that allows me to dance. That allows me to be flexible. That allows me to do splits and, you know, leaps and all of this stuff like I should celebrate that and not hide that.

Though specifically describing body positivity, Sylvia's description entails components of embracing the body. By embracing her body, Sylvia recognized she did not need to be ashamed about her body or hide it. Instead, she wanted to celebrate all the movements her body allowed her to do.

Bea reported experiencing comfort with her body but spoke about comfort as she described the meaning of sexy. For Bea, sexy meant:

> Feeling comfortable, feeling, feeling able to be in my space and be in my skin and not being afraid to move a certain way, or like touch across my body or move my head or just, just not being afraid and not and knowing that I'm, I'm good, and I'm comfortable and I can move and do in the way that my body wants to and that that, you know, gives me the freedom to feel sexy.

Bea's interpretation of sexy entails becoming comfortable in her skin and overlaps with experiencing agency and freedom to move her body in the way that her body desires. Though Bea experienced comfort with her body, she was clear that the experience of comfort was not an automatic experience for her but rather one that took conscious effort:

> And so, it's, it's a conscious, it's a conscious thing for me. It's not just something I automatically feel. I have to wake up and say, okay, today I'm not going to hate my body. Today I'm not going to feel like crap about myself. And so, it's, it's more I think the mental like, like making the, the mental decision to say I'm going to be comfortable in my body. It's kind of like it starts there and moves down, and I'm like, okay, I'm comfortable in that.

In this excerpt, Bea acknowledged experiencing comfort with her body required active and intentional effort. Bea continued to share that are days when embracing the body is not easy, which may imply that these experiences lay on a continuum and can easily change. Participants such as Blue, Jackie, and Vanessa also reported experiencing negative moments when they are critical of themselves, view their bodies as better or worse on some days, or experience self-

doubt due to comments made by others on social media. Thus, while participating in dance can contribute to dancers embracing their bodies, it is important to acknowledge these are not permanent experiences and that outside factors can also impact experiences with the body.

Connecting with the Body

Participants reported feeling connected with their bodies. For Jackie, by participating in pole dance, she developed a stronger mind-body connection. When describing feeling connected with her body, Jackie shared, "I'm connected to my body, meaning like my mind-body connection. So, if I think something, my body might actually do it. Umm, it's more prone to do it, let's put it that way." Jackie provided an example of the mind-body connection that occurs when she demonstrates movements found on social media by her students. She explained:

> Umm, taking, a lot of students bring me Instagram videos all the time, and they're like, hey, can you break down this move for me? I want to learn it. And I've actually gotten really good at that over time because I can see where their body patterns are going. So, I can tell their mind-body connection at the same time that I'm learning my mind-body connection.

Beyond the mind-body connection, Jackie also reported liquid motion (i.e., a form of movement) helped made her feel more internally attached to her body:

> Like I can almost because of the connections that liquid motion brings between your mind and your body. You feel a connection to your limbs. You feel a connection to your muscles. You're starting to understand more about how your body functions, and that wasn't something that I was really aware of before liquid because prior to that, not a lot of people were focused on musculature and activating certain muscles to complete a movement like shoulders down and together. Yeah. Okay, shoulders down. Shoulders together. Cool, I can do that. But the musculature that's attached to that and you're using more back muscles to then pull into something that makes a lot more sense, but nobody was relating pull your shoulders down and back to your back muscles are now going to get a workout. Umm, and liquid motion made that connection, umm, but it's also about how your body feels when you're doing something like liquid motion.

Engaging in liquid motion enhanced a feeling of physical connection with her body. The physical connection Jackie spoke about allowed her to become more aware of muscle

movements and how her body felt. As a result of having body awareness, Jackie understood how to perform movements and prevent injury.

As noted by Jackie feeling connected to the body entailed being aware of how the body moves and feels. Body awareness was also demonstrated by Vanessa, who shared that engaging in dance made her feel more in tune with her body. Vanessa described being in tune with her body as:

> Um, just more aware, more aware of my body. I feel like when I don't dance, umm, I kind of feel disconnected from my body, like my head and my body feel like two separate entities. But when I dance, it kind of reconnects that relationship, and I'm more aware of what my body is doing throughout the day, like, like, oh am I shaking my leg while I'm at work or like, um, what am I doing with my hands? So more aware in that sense.

In contrast, Vanessa reported feeling disconnected from her body when not dancing. She described feeling disconnected with her body as "I'm not really paying attention to how different parts of my body feel. I'm not really paying attention to what hurts, what aches, when needs to move, what feels really good." Whereas, when she is aware of her body, Vanessa actively interprets signals about how her body is feeling.

Ann also spoke about body awareness as being aware of what movements work and do not work for her body. She reported, "I won't do anything that will hurt me like I'm like, I'll, I'll do what's best for me. Like, I don't really care about stroking anyone else's ego, and like, that's kind of what I wanted to do." In this conversation segment, Ann referenced when instructors were either under-assuming her or providing instruction that was wrong for her body type, thus putting her in an unsafe situation. Thus, she exuded agency when working with instructors who insisted she complete a move as they had demonstrated. In these instances, Ann would:

> I always try to explain of like I do not feel safe here; this is what I'm doing to feel safe. Do you spot anything that can cause an injury? Cause you're just going with aesthetics, I'm going with like safety at this point. So, I always try to, like get them that way of like, why take me out of something that feels safe?

While there were instances when Ann asserted herself with instructors, she also shared an example of an instructor who figuratively permitted students to have agency. She shared that the instructor would give them a mark to hit but encouraged students to do whatever they needed to get there. This approach gave Ann the agency and freedom to do what she needed and create her movements. Body awareness and agency were also reported by Bea and Blue, who both were aware of what their bodies could and could not do. They reported listening to their bodies and vocalizing how their bodies were feeling and what they needed to dance leaders.

Resisting and Rebelling Against Societal Expectations

Participants acknowledged certain body expectations for dancers and greater societal expectations regarding the body. Makenzie noted that media relating to dance (i.e., televisions and movies) perpetuated an athletic idea for dancers:

> You have shows like *Dance Moms* or whatever. You have a lot of these, umm, like movies like the *High School Musical* and *Step Up* and, you know, stuff like that where, you know, especially today, like a lot of the adults today watched all these movies growing up, and we saw the athletic body type the dancer body . . .that's the other one, dance competition shows they are either partner dance competition shows, and partner dancing again is, tends to be more geared towards smaller figures, or the people who do well in dance competitions are people who can do aerials and flips.

Makenzie acknowledged aerials and flips are difficult, "let alone if you've got an extra 100 pounds kicking around." However, Sylvia mentioned Lizzo's dance competition show, *Lizzo's Watch Out for the Big Grrrls*, as a show that has shifted body expectations for dancers. Makenzie recognized Lizzo's show as the first to explicitly feature and highlight curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick dancers.

Nicole also addressed greater societal representations of curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick folks in the media. She shared that the media perpetuated certain messages:

> Umm, this kind of goes back to what I said before was with the media. It's just the whole stigma around plus-size people, in general, that, you know, either we're lazy, or we're overeating or like, you know, we can't do much because of our weight . . . every day in

> the media, they always tell you, okay, this is how this is how you're either supposed to look, or this is how you can lose weight or whenever. And this is one of my pet peeves when I watch a news segment, and they're talking about like, obesity and then kind of zoom in on like a like a big person walking down the street, I like, it, no one wants to be put on blast. And what a negative light. It's like a negative light.

Though Nicole identified the media as a source that perpetuated stigmatizing messages, Sylvia recognized that even when curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick individuals are presented in the media, fatphobic responses are still elicited:

> Like, I just saw a thing on Instagram, um, about a Gatorade ad, and there's this curvy woman doing yoga. And, that people are like, this is not healthy. And what are you doing, and why are you putting women like this? It's not healthy. . . You know, the, the commercials that have large people should be about diabetes medications, and that was one of the comments, that's like, this shouldn't be a Gatorade ad, it should be an ad for diabetes medication, and that's all that like the fatphobia is so rampant.

With strong messaging about body standards, participants saw and used dance and components relating to dance as a form of rebellion and resistance against dominant body ideals and greater societal practices of fatphobia, weight stigma, and discrimination of curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick folks.

Resistance and rebellion against dominant societal expectations took several forms. Engaging in joyful movement with "people like me who don't necessarily fit the like, this aesthetic of liking super white and skinny and blonde or whatever" served as an act of rebellion and protest for Vanessa. According to Vanessa, engaging in joyful movement rebelled against:

> This standard that society has about how women should look and how women should act and this kind of unspoken, umm, this unspoken expectation that if you aren't actively trying to be smaller or look a certain way that you're never going to be happy. And so, by being in a fat body, by being with other people in fat bodies and just experiencing joy and experiencing love for our own bodies, our bodies that don't fit the societal expectation, feels like a form of protest.

Engaging in dance with other fat folks reminded Vanessa that she does not have to look a certain way to be happy. The expert from Vanessa also hints at the intersection between gender identity (i.e., woman) and body shape and size, as she acknowledged that there are certain societal

expectations for women concerning the body. This expert highlights the unique and shared position of curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick women. Nicole shared a similar view of dance being used as a form of rebellion and resistance. Nicole asserted that simply being a member of a dance team where the main goal is to get "people of all sizes to get up and dance no matter what. . . is a statement on its own." From Nicole's standpoint, the seemingly simple act of being a member of an organization that encourages people of all body shapes and sizes to dance is an act of combatting the idea that dancers must have a certain appearance aesthetic.

Loving the body was not only related to embracing the body but, as noted above by Vanessa, a form of rebellion and protest. Makenzie spoke about how she used dance as a form of rebellion to demonstrate love for her body. She reflected on a performance inspired by a quote she had seen, "in like a women's, in gender studies class about like in a world or in a society that profits off yourself doubt like loving yourself as an act of rebellion." Thus, she created a performance that told the story of her unapologetically loving herself and showcased "all the cool things I can do." Ann also shared she created a that had the underlying message of resisting preconceived notions as she shared, "Especially like being in a plus-size like show, like you said, like I'm sure there is, like, preconceived notions that people have. I don't listen to them. I don't want anyone else to feel trapped by them." The use of performance by Makenzie and Ann to demonstrate love for the body and resistance against preconceived notions went against dominant discourses that allude to or suggest that curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick women must dislike their bodies.

For Ashley, rebellion and resistance occurred through self-expression. She spoke about how taking up space was a form of self-expression. Ashley shared that outside of the dance

space, she tried to make herself smaller and tried “not get in people's way or like to be perceived as rude or be perceived as like a nuisance.” In contrast, when Ashely is in the dance space:

> It’s like I’m here to take up space, and like, this is a space for me. And I’m gonna, when I do this dance moves, were supposed to take a couple of steps to the left. I'm gonna take these huge steps to the left and huge steps to the right, and I'm going to have my chair there and I'm going to open my arms as wide as it possibly can . . . And so, it's sort of just like expressing like I don't, it’s almost, I don't want to say it’s like political, but it’s almost just like, uhh, like shedding any sort of social grace, or like walking on eggshells and just like being as big as you can, being as loud as you can. Not, not necessarily verbally, but just like physically letting loose.

Ashley rebelled against the idea that curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick people should make themselves smaller by taking up as much space as she desired within the dance space. Ashely also rebelled against fatphobia and weight discrimination by expressing herself through clothing and outfit selections for dance. Ashely shared:

> Like when I work out, I don't like wearing a lot of clothes, you know? So, I will go in like a sports bra and like a cute little skirt and, like, and you're barefoot and that's, and put my hair and pigtails. Like I wear like, and the thing is, when you look at dancers, they wear funky outfits at dance class, right? Like, it’s always these, like, leotards and skirts and, and like, weird colorful leggings. And so, it’s really fun that I get to, but like in your normal life, like when fat folks dress like that, it’s like scandalous because I'm showing skin or whatever. But in this studio, it's like I show it really scantily clad and my cute little outfits. And it’s just like, that's another way that I'm expressing myself, you know, like my fashion taste, and it sort of just like an F-U to fatphobic people and weight discrimination.

Dance was a mechanism of resistance and rebellion against societal expectations. In these dance spaces, women were combat against greater societal systems of oppression such as bodyism and sexism.

My interpretation of the experiences shared by the dancers is that they embraced and connected with their bodies and resisted and rebelled against societal expectations in dance settings. The results of the study indicate curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick women who engage in recreational dance have positive experiences with their bodies within dance spaces. However, it

was noted that body experiences can and do fluctuate in time. Thus, the findings reflect positive body-related experiences shared at a particular moment in time when exploring positive experiences with the body.

Discussion

This study contributes to the body of literature by bringing forward the voices of dancers who have been underrepresented in research. The study aimed to explore the positive body-related experiences of curvy, fat, plus, and thick women who engage in dance spaces they perceive to be body-inclusive. Three themes were identified from the experiences shared by the women who participated in the study: embracing the body, connecting with the body, and resisting and rebelling against societal expectations. The positive experiences relating body reflect the five dimensions of experiences of positive embodiment identified in the DTE (Piran, 2017). The five dimensions of positive embodiment are 1) body connection and comfort, 2) agency and functionality, 3) experience and expression of desire, 4) attuned self-care, and 5) inhabiting the body as a subjective site (Piran, 2017). Though presented as five separate dimensions, Tylka & Piran (2019) asserted that the experiences of embodiment occur simultaneously. Though the name of the themes does not reflect all five dimensions of positive embodiment, the simultaneous occurrence of the dimensions of positive embodiment is evident in the findings.

The theme embracing the body consisted of components such as loving, appreciating, celebrating, and being comfortable with the body. The theme reflects the body connection and comfort dimension, which Piran (2019) described as feeling a sense of comfort and other positive experiences. Piran & Neumark-Sztainer (2020) referenced body appreciation and functionality appreciation as other positive experiences, consistent with the current findings. As

seen within the experiences shared by the participants, experiences of body connection and comfort did not exist alone. Experiences of agency and functionality and experience and expression of desire were also evident as participants spoke about embracing their bodies. Makenzie and Bea's experiences reflected the expression and experience of desire dimension as they spoke about feelings of being sexy and engaging in sexy movements. Bea shared in her description of what sexy meant, be stated how she moves in the way she wants her body to move, which gives her the freedom to feel sexy. The experience shared by Bea also reflected agency and functionality, which (Piran, 2019) described as acting with agency through functionality.

The theme connecting with the body also strongly aligns with the body connection and comfort dimension of positive embodiment, which highlights positive feelings of connectedness. Dancers described various ideas of connectedness, such as mind-body connection, physical connection with the body, and awareness of the body. Experiences of attuned self-care and agency and functionality dimensions were also indicated by participants when speaking about body awareness. For example, Blue knew her body's limitations and, thus, expressed to the dance director that she would take a break between performances. Though Blue loved performing, she actively responded to how her body felt and decided to take a break between performances to get herself back on track, reflecting attuned self-care. Agency and functionality can also relate to Blue's example as she took the initiative to care for herself and voiced her decision to take a break with the team director.

Resisting and rebelling against societal expectations aligns with the dimension inhabiting the body as a subjective site. Piran (2016) noted that inhabiting the body as a subjective site took the form of protesting and resisting "normative expectations." For the dancers in the current

study, engaging in dance demonstrated resistance and rebellion against dominant body standards and the ideas that curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick women do not love themselves, and women should not take up space. The experiences shared within this theme also overlap with the body connection and comfort and agency and functionality dimensions of positive embodiment. An overlap with body connection and comfort appears as the participants demonstrated love for themselves as an act of rebellion and resistance. Lastly, agency and functionality occurred alongside rebelling and resisting societal standards as participants demonstrated agency through movement, taking up space, and expression through clothing.

The major themes presented in this study reflect my understanding of the shared body-related experiences of curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick dancers. The themes align with the experiences of positive embodiment described by Piran (2017) and demonstrate the overlapping occurrences of the dimensions. The results provide initial evidence that indicates curvy, fat, thick, plus-size dancers experience positive embodiment, which is consistent with previous literature that has shown dancers experience components of positive body image (e.g., body appreciation) and embodiment (Dimler et al., 2017; Holland, 2010; Moe, 2012; Nicholas et al., 2018). Extending beyond experiences of positive embodiment, dancers who participated in the study also began to highlight how experiences of embodiment fluctuate over time, providing further support for the developmental theory of embodiment (Piran, 2017).

Popular culture icons like Copeland and Lizzo have utilized their platforms to address and challenge dominant societal discourses relating to ideal body characteristics for dancers. For example, the show Lizzo's Watch Out for the Big Grrrls actively challenges the singular body ideal presented in other dance-related movies and shows and challenges discourses around movement and ability. The present study adds to current knowledge and literature as the

participants shared powerful experiences of how dance has been used as a form of resistance and rebellion against dominant discourses relating to the body. Furthermore, the evidence suggests there are supportive dance spaces where curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick dancers can actively challenge the dominant ideals.

While the findings support previous literature that suggests dancers experience positive body-related experiences, this study contributes to the extant literature as it highlights the experiences from the standpoint of curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick women. The shared lived experiences of women who identify as curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick contributed to the development of knowledge and brought forth the voices of those that have been underrepresented.

Limitations and Future Directions

A limitation of the study is that it did not capture women's experiences across all dance genres (e.g., ballet, modern, jazz, etc.) and levels (e.g., college and professional levels). This limitation was due in part to constraints relating to time and funding. While this may be perceived as a limitation, it is important to consider that the small number of genres represented might reflect the different foci within each style. For example, performative dance styles like ballet focus heavily on aesthetics and beauty. In comparison, contemporary and street dance styles focus on self-and creative expression (Langdon, 2012). It may be possible that the heavy focus on aesthetics and beauty and emphasis on thinness in ballet, curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick may deter women from entering performative dance spaces or that women with diverse body shapes and sizes may be (un)intentionally excluded. Whereas dance styles such as contemporary might be more accepting of diverse body shapes and sizes as the focus shifts away from appearance. Thus, future research is needed to explore the experiences of curvy, fat, plus-size,

and thick dancers throughout all dance styles and to understand factors that influence individuals to participate in specific dance forms.

Another limitation is that the current study highlighted the intersection between gender identity (i.e., cis-women) and body shape and size (i.e., curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick) related to body experiences and dance. While the intersection of multiple marginalized identities, specifically the intersection with race and ethnicity, was not deeply explored, it does not imply these identities do not influence experiences. Thus, future research is needed to explicitly explore how the intersection between gender identity, body shape and size, and race and ethnicity influences experiences with the body. Beyond race and ethnicity, the intersection of multiple marginalized identities relating to gender (e.g., transgender women, gender non-conforming, non-binary), ability (e.g., physical, intellectual, visible, and hidden), age, etc., were not explored. Thus, future research should explore the experiences of folks with a range of intersecting marginalized identities as it impacts individuals' experiences with their bodies and dance.

This study took the initial step to explore the experiences of curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick dancers. Thus, there are various opportunities for future directions. Future research should also identify potential similarities and differences between curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick women who engage in dance spaces that they perceive to or explicitly celebrate body shape and size diversity. As noted by a participant, the level of inclusivity within the dance space might have influenced her experiences with her body. Along similar lines of inclusivity, future research should explore similarities and differences in body-related experiences among dancers who participate in body-inclusive classes (i.e., inclusive of all bodies) and plus-size exclusive (i.e., exclusively for curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick folks).

As noted for the current participants, the experiences with their bodies with dance varied, which should be considered when interpreting the results. Due to the participants' various experiences, I could not definitively determine whether current participation in dance *cultivated* positive experiences of embodiment for the first time or if current participation in dance *enhanced* these experiences. Thus, future research might create stricter inclusion and exclusion criteria to better understand these varying experiences. Lastly, future research should further explore the fluctuation of negative and positive experiences of embodiment and the factors that influence these experiences.

Conclusion

The findings presented in the study reflect my understanding of the shared positive experiences of embodiment of Ann, Ashley, Bea, Blue, Jackie, Makenzie, Nicole, Sylvia, and Vanessa. The three themes, embracing the body, connecting with the body, and resisting and rebelling against societal expectations reflect the experiences of positive embodiment. This study is important as it suggests curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick women experience positive embodiment within dance spaces. Though this study, to knowledge, was the first to specifically bring forward the voices and experiences of curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick dancers, it is evident that continued research is needed to explore the body-related experiences of curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick dancers and the factors that contribute to experiences

Table 2

Demographic Information and Pertinent Information Related to the Purpose of Study

Pseudonym	Age	Race and Ethnicity	Total Years of Dance Experience	Current Primary Dance Style	Pertinent Information Related to the Purpose of Study
Ann (*she/her*)	35	Preferred not to respond; Hispanic, Latino/a/x, or Spanish (i.e., Irish and Filipino)	10+ years	Pole dancing	• Has not always perceived body as curvy, fat, plus-size, or thick • Brief dance experience in high school but fully immersed herself in dance as an adult
Ashley (*she/her*)[a, b]	30	White; Hispanic, Latino/a/x, or Spanish (i.e., Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano)	~22 years	Contemporary	• Has not always perceived body as curvy, fat, plus-size, or thick • Participated in dance throughout life • Described overall experiences with dance as positive
Bea (*she/her*)	41	White; Not of Hispanic, Latina/o/x, or Spanish origin	10 Years	Pole dancing	• Has not always perceived body as curvy, fat, plus-size, or thick • Participated in dance in high school but discontinued the last year • Re-entered dance as an adult • Currently a pole instructor

Blue (*she/her*)	Did not report	Preferred not to respond; Hispanic, Latino/a/x, or Spanish (i.e., Guatemalan)	6 years	Latin fusion	• Participated in dance in high school and college • Positive body-related experiences in college through the dance department • Returned to dance to embrace herself again after taking a break from dance due to life events
Jackie (*she/her*)[a]	39	White; Not of Hispanic, Latina/o/x, or Spanish origin	12+ years	Pole dancing	• Recalled being the biggest girl in dance class as an adolescent • Re-entered dance as an adult after discontinuing participation in middle school • Currently a pole instructor
Makenzie (*she/her*)[b]	Did not report	White; Not of Hispanic, Latina/o/x, or Spanish origin	24 years	Pole dancing	• Has not always perceived body as curvy, fat, plus-size, or thick • Participated in dance throughout life
Nicole (*she/her*)[a]	35	Black or African American; Not of Hispanic, Latina/o/x, or Spanish origin	22 years	Hip-hop	• Participated in dance throughout life
Sylvia (*she/her*)	45	Indigenous Person of America; Hispanic, Latino/a/x, or Spanish (i.e., Mexican,	15 years	Latin fusion	• Body shape has fluctuated throughout life • Participated in dance in high school and college

		Mexican American, Chicano)			• Currently a ballroom instructor
Vanessa (*she/her*)	Did not report	Asian and White; Not of Hispanic, Latina/o/x, or Spanish origin	15 years	Contemporary	• Reported growing up as a teen with a larger body • Participated in dance throughout life • Positive body-related experience in West African dance course in college • Complex journey with body

[a] Reflects an assigned pseudonym.
[b] Participants who did not participate in follow-up interviews.

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Chapter V: General Discussion

The purpose of the dissertation was to explore topics related to body inclusivity and experiences in dance that have been understudied. Study one sought to explore strategies that dance leaders implement to create inclusive spaces for curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick women. Study two aimed to understand the body-related experiences of curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick women who participate in dance. Using qualitative methods and methodologies, I discovered intentional and genuine efforts by dance leaders to create body-inclusive dance spaces and understand how curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick women experience their bodies in dance spaces. Though separate studies were conducted, they fill gaps in the literature as they each bring attention to topics that have been underrepresented in research and can be used be inform future research.

Dance, specifically ballet, is a form of activity traditionally linked to thinness. The emphasis on thinness is rooted in larger systems of oppression, such as sexism and racism (Atencio & Wright, 2009; Kerr-Berry, 2018; Robinson, 2021). Specifically, within ballet, the emphasis on thinness has led to the exclusion of Black women. Though not yet explored in literature, the representation of women in dance-related television shows and movies gives reasons to believe that a (un)intentional result of the emphasis on and portrayal of thinness in the media is the exclusion of women who identify as fat, curvy, plus-size, and thick. The (un)intentional exclusion of curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick dancers was widely addressed by popular culture icon Lizzo, who publicly shared her frustration with the lack of representation of curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick dancers and, thus, took action to make a change.

A need for body-inclusive spaces is evident through Lizzo and the experiences shared by the contestants on the show. Furthermore, the dance leaders who participated in this study

recognized and understood the importance of creating inclusive spaces with and for curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick folks. For Kora, she specifically saw plus-size exclusive spaces as important:

> Because people, very understandably, are nervous about showing up in fitness spaces and dance movement spaces. They don't know, and, you know, how they're gonna feel even if it's an empowering space, um, it could open up old wounds of a trauma that they've experienced in a similar space.

Thus, creating a space exclusively for folks who identify as curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick might put individuals at ease as they know the class will be full of people who look like them. Kora also viewed spaces exclusively for curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick dancers as possible entry points for people to become comfortable and hoped it would eventually lead to them to explore other body-inclusive classes offered in the studio. Furthermore, participants like Diana recognized the importance of creating these spaces based on her personal experiences and, thus, aimed to create inclusive spaces so that other folks did not have to go through similar experiences.

The themes developed for study one were consistent with elements of inclusivity presented in Pickett & Cunningham's (2017) conceptual model of body weight inclusive PA spaces and the inclusive strategies identified by Zuest et al. (2022) using a multilevel approach (Cook et al., 2014). Beyond supporting body-inclusive conceptual and theoretical frameworks, the present study adds to the current body of literature as the findings highlight leaders' intentional and genuine want to create inclusive spaces. Evident in the findings and the overall conversations with each dance leader, it was clear that there was intent, genuineness, and mindfulness behind every approach. With each example of how the dance leaders created spaces with and for curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick folks, they provided the intent and reasoning for the approach. Thus, these were not performative actions that resulted in fake inclusion. The dancer leaders' intentionality, mindfulness, and genuineness are critical to highlight because it

reinforces that leaders must be personally committed to creating and sustaining inclusive spaces and that inclusive approaches are not mere things you check off on a list (McCarty et al., 2022).

Dance leaders hoped participating in inclusive spaces would have a meaningful and positive impact on the folks in their classes. For example, Stormy Louise hoped that:

> I hope that they not only feel it is not lip service, but something that they can actually like integrate and, and feel in themselves at, you know, the cellular level that you are enough. Whatever it is that you do, it's enough. And usually, that kind is, is coupled with your, the, the body, the brain, the everything that you bring with you right now is enough to do exactly what you need to do, and however you're doing it is exactly right. It doesn't need to be anything but.

Other hopes of the instructors were that participants experienced a sense of strength, pride about something related to the body, confidence, and embodiment after participating in their class. The aspects that dance leaders hoped students would walk away with reflect the latter half of the conceptual model of body weight inclusive PA spaces as it indicates participating in body-inclusive spaces will contribute to adherence to the activity and, thus, enhance psychological (and physical) well-being.

The potential of positive outcomes by participating in body-inclusive dance spaces, as suggested by Pickett and Cunningham (2017) and hoped for by the dance leaders, informed the second study. The second study explored the positive body-related experiences of curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick dancers, specifically those who participated in dance spaces they perceived to celebrate diverse body shapes and sizes. The results illustrated positive experiences such as embracing the body, connecting with the body, and resisting and rebelling against societal expectations. These themes reflect the dimensions of positive embodiment identified by Piran (2017). However, while participants reported positive experiences of embodiment, it remained unclear whether the simple act of engaging in dance contributed to these experiences or specifically engaging in spaces that celebrate women with diverse body shapes and sizes

influenced these experiences. Though it cannot be definitively concluded that the experiences of positive embodiment were a direct or indirect result of participating in a body-inclusive space, the experiences reported by curvy, fat, plus-size, and curvy dancers indicate that participating in dance can foster or enhance positive body-related experiences.

Future directions

The present dissertation took the initial steps to explore body inclusivity and experiences in dance spaces concerning curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick women. Thus, while evidence provides initial insights into these topics, there are still many questions that are left unanswered. Future research is needed to explore whether dance leaders are taking body-inclusive approaches in various instructional settings (e.g., professional, college, competitive, etc.) and, if they are, what kinds of inclusive practices are being implemented within the space. Additionally, research should further explore how those actively creating body-inclusive dance spaces can be supported. An in-depth exploration how the intersection of multiple marginalized identities impacts body-related experiences is strongly needed. Lastly, future research should explore the direct or indirect impact of participating in body-inclusive dance spaces.

Conclusion

Little is known about body-inclusivity within dance spaces and the experiences of curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick dancers. What is known has primarily stemmed from what has been presented in the media and research that did not report the inclusion of women with diverse body shapes and sizes. However, the present study demonstrates that there is a clear need for body-inclusive dance spaces and that there are dance leaders actively working toward creating spaces with and for curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick folks. Secondly, the dissertation shows that curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick women experience positive embodiment within dance spaces. It is my

hope that these studies will generate more research questions and research studies that aim bring forward the voices, knowledge, and experiences of those who have been underrepresented in research.

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Appendix A: Institutional Review Board Approval Letter Study 1

UNIVERSITY of WISCONSIN
UWMILWAUKEE

Institutional Review Board

uwm.edu/irb
irbinfo@uwm.edu
414-662-3544

Date: January 5, 2023

To: Christy Greenleaf
Dept: Kinesiology
CC: Alexandra Rodriguez - Co-Investigator, Christy Greenleaf - Faculty Advisor

IRB #: 23.140
Title: Exploring Dance Leaders' Approaches to Creating Body Weight Inclusive Environments

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Institutional Review Board has granted your protocol Exempt Status under Category 2 as governed by 45 CFR 46.104(d).

This exemption determination is valid for three years and will expire on **January 4, 2026**. Before the expiration date, you will receive an email explaining how to either keep the study open or close it. If the study is completed before the expiration date, you may notify the IRB by sending an email to irbinfo@uwm.edu.

Any proposed changes to the protocol must be reviewed by the IRB before implementation, unless the change is specifically necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects.

It is your responsibility to:

- promptly report unanticipated problems to the IRB
- maintain proper documentation of study records
- ensure that all study staff receive appropriate training as outlined in the protocol
- adhere to the policies and guidelines set forth by the IRB, UWM, and the UW System, and to all applicable state and federal laws

Contact the IRB office if you have any further questions. Thank you for your cooperation and best wishes for a successful project.

Appendix B: **Recruitment Message to Dance Leaders**

Hello, INSERT NAME:

My name is Alexandra Rodriguez, and I am a Ph.D. student at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Currently, I am working on my dissertation which aims to explore strategies directors and instructors use to create and sustain body weight inclusive dance spaces for women who identify as fat, curvy, plus-size, and/or thick.

I am contacting you directly because provide the opportunity for women with diverse body shapes and size to engage in dance. Thus, I wondered if you would be interested in participating in my current study. Participation will consist of completing a demographic questionnaire, engaging in a 1-to-2-hour interview with me, and participating in a follow-up to review and discuss the findings. During the interview you will be asked about your experiences with dance and to provide insight on how you create a body weight inclusive dance environment. To recognize your time and contribution to research you will receive a **$50 Amazon Gift Card**.

Included in this message, I have included a flyer that provides an overview of the study and eligibility requirements. If you are interested and eligible or would like to speak more about my current study, please contact me at rodri679@uwm.edu or (562) 489-6097 or my advisor, Dr. Christy Greenleaf at cgreenl@uwm.edu

Kindly,
Alexandra

Appendix C: Recruitment Flyer for Dance Leaders

UNIVERSITY OF
WISCONSIN-MILWAUKEE

DANCE DIRECTORS, INSTRUCTORS, AND/OR COACHES NEEDED FOR A RESEARCH STUDY

STUDY DESCRIPTION:

The study aims to explore how dance directors, instructors, and/or coaches create body weight inclusive dance environments for women who identify as curvy, fat, plus-size, and/or thick

WHAT WILL I DO?

- Complete a demographic questionnaire
- Participate in a two (2) virtual interviews lasting 1- to 2-hours each

Participants will receive a $50 Amazon Gift Card for completing the survey and interviews

PARTICIPANT ELIGIBILITY

- 18 years of age or older
- Actively hold a position as a dance director, instructor, and/or coach
- At least 1 year of experience as a dance director or instructor
- Primarily serve women who identify as curvy, fat, plus-size, and/or thick

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN PARTICIPATING OR HAVE ANY QUESTIONS, PLEASE CONTACT ALEXANDRA RODRIGUEZ AT [EMAIL ADDRESS] OR SCAN THE QR CODE

QR CODE

Appendix D: **Notes from Initial Conversation with Dance Directors**

1. Rosie (pseudonym)
    a. Minored in dance at undergraduate institution.
    b. Did not pursue ballet/ball room dancing because of body type.
    c. Acknowledged stigma of dancers related to body weight, shape, and size.
    d. Recognized there is an ideal body for dancers.
    e. Went through a period when they did not engage in dance.
    f. History of participating with different dance groups.
    g. Auditioned for different dance television shows.
        i. Experienced negative and positive feedback from judges.
    h. Created own body inclusive dance company .
        i. Women engage in a variety of dance styles.
        ii. Focus on appreciating the body.
        iii. Focus on functionality and movement.
    i. Created own clothing line with sizes up to 4XL

2. Angel (pseudonym)
    a. Auditioned for television show.
    b. Recognized the need for dance team for curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick individuals.
    c. Created own dance team for curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick individuals.
    d. Recognized size does not equate to health; because you are bigger does not mean you are unhealthy

3. Melissa (pseudonym)
    a. Participated in dance in high school and explored dance in college.
    b. Recognized need to create team for curvy, fat, plus-size, and thick individuals.
    c. Created the team as an outlet for grief and creativity.
    d. Focused on positive body image.

Appendix E: Demographics Questionnaire for Dance Leaders

1. Are you currently a director of a dance team, company, or organization?

    A. Yes
    B. No

        i. **If you are a dance director,** please share the name of your team, company, or organization:

        ii. How long have you been the director? (Please list in years):

2. Are you currently a dance instructor and/or coach (e.g., lead classes, practices, or sessions at a dance company, studio, or facility)?

    A. Yes
    B. No

        i. **If you are a dance instructor and/or coach,** please share the name of the company, studio, or facility where you instruct classes:

        ii. How long have you been a dance instructor? (Please list in years):

3. Is your position as a dance director and/or instructor your full-time or part-time job?
    A. Full-time
    B. Part-time

4. Please share the other jobs or positions you hold aside from dance director or instructor:

5. Do you or your dance team/company/organization primarily serve women who identify as curvy, fat, or plus-size?
    A. Yes
    B. No

        i. **If not,** how would you describe the primary audience you or your dance/team/company/organization serves?

6. What is the **primary dance style** used within the dance space or during dance sessions or practices?

    A. Ballet
    B. Belly Dancing
    C. Contemporary
    D. Jazz
    E. Latin/Latin Fusion

F. Hip-Hop
G. Pole Dancing
H. Tap
I. Not Listed (please specify):

7. Please list any other styles of dance participants engage in when taking a class with you or your company, team, or organization:

8. Please list the years of dance experience you have:

9. Describe the highest level of dance training you have had:

10. Please provide your age:

11. How do you describe yourself?
    A. Woman
    B. Transgender Woman
    C. Man
    D. Transgender Man
    E. Genderqueer
    F. Non-binary
    G. I prefer to describe myself as:
    H. I prefer not to respond

12. Do you identify as curvy, fat, or plus-size?
    A. Yes
    B. No

        i. **If yes**, what does curvy, fat, or plus-size mean to you?

        ii. **If not,** how would you describe your body type to someone who has not met you?

13. Are you of Hispanic, Latino/a/x, or Spanish origin?
    A. No, not of Hispanic, Latino/a/x, or Spanish origin
    B. Yes, Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano/a/x
    C. Yes, Puerto Rican
    D. Yes, Cuban
    E. Yes, another Hispanic, Latino/a/x, or Spanish origin (please specify):

14. Please select all race(s) that apply:
    A. Asian
    B. Black or African American
    C. Indigenous Person of America
    D. Indigenous Person of Canada

E. Indigenous Polynesian Person of the Hawaiian Islands or Pacific Islander
F. White
G. I prefer to describe myself as:
H. I prefer not to respond

15. Please select the level of education that best applies to you:
    A. Some high school, no diploma
    B. High school graduate, diploma or the equivalent (e.g., GED)
    C. Some college credit, no degree
    D. Trade/technical/vocational training
    E. Associate's Degree
    F. Bachelor's Degree
    G. Master's Degree
    H. Professional Degree
    I. Doctorate Degree
    J. I prefer not to respond

The following steps of the study will consist of an interview. During the interview, you will be asked questions about: A) your motivation to become a dance director and/or instructor, B) strategies you use create a body weight inclusive dance space, and C) the perceived impact the space has on participants.

16. Please list your **name** and **email address** we can use to contact you to schedule the interview.

17. Please list your availability for the **three weeks** for a 1–2-hour interview.

Appendix F: Interview Guide for Dance Leaders

Building Rapport

1. Please tell me about yourself and your history with dance.

Dance director

Motivation to Creating the Group or Team

2. Why did you create this dance team, group, and organization?
    a. How have your experiences influenced your decision to create this dance group, team, and/or organization?
3. How did you come to select the name for the group/team?
    a. Why did you incorporate words relating to body shape and size (e.g., curvy)?

Mission and Purpose of the Group

4. What is the mission or the purpose of the dance group/team?
    a. How do you uphold the mission?
    b. How does the team/organization/group uphold the mission?

Dance Instructor

Motivation to Become a Dance Instructor and/or Coach

5. Why did you want to become a dance instructor/coach?
    a. How have your experiences influenced your decision to be a dance instructor/coach that serves women who identify as curvy, fat, plus-size, and/or thick?

Body Ideals

Societal ideals

6. How would you describe the ideal body for women portrayed in society?

a. How are these body ideals communicated?
    i. What forms of media are used to communicate these ideals?
    ii. Who promotes these body ideals?
b. Do these body ideals align with your personal ideals and ideals for a dancer?
    i. If no, what are some specific differences?
    ii. If yes, what are some specific similarities?

7. What society are you thinking about as you respond to these items?
8. From your perspective, how do societal ideals impact who does and does not participate in dance?
9. How do societal ideals impact who you believe can and cannot participate in dance?
10. Do you agree with societal ideals?
    a. Why or why not?

Dance ideals

11. What are the body ideals expected for women who participate in dance?
    a. How are these body ideals communicated?
    b. Who or what has influenced your perception of the ideal body for dancers?
    c. Do these body ideals align with the ideals promoted by society and your personal ideals?
        i. If no, what are some specific differences?
        ii. If yes, what are some specific similarities?
12. From your perspective, how do dance ideals impact who does and does not participate in dance?
13. How do dance ideals impact who you believe can and cannot participate in dance?

14. Do you agree with the dance ideals?
    a. Why or why not?

Personal ideals

15. Describe your personal perception of the ideal body.
    a. Who influenced your description of the ideal body?
    b. What has influenced your description of the ideal body?
    c. How has your racial and ethnic background influenced your description of the ideal body?
    d. Do these body ideals align with the ideals promoted by society and ideals for a dancer?
        i. If no, what are some specific differences?
        ii. If yes, what are some specific similarities?
16. How do your personal ideals impact who you believe can and cannot participate in dance?
17. How would you describe your body to someone who has not seen you?
    a. How would you define curvy, fat, plus-size, and/or thick etc.?

Creating Inclusive Dance Spaces

18. Who is your primary audience?
    a. Do women need to identify as curvy, fat, plus-size, and/or thick to participate?
        i. If yes, explain why you decided to make the space only for women who identify as curvy, fat, plus size, and/or thick?
19. What does body weight inclusivity mean to you?

20. What steps do you take to ensure curvy, fat, and plus-size women feel welcomed and included in the dance space?
    a. What did you mean by (insert step[s] reported)?
    b. Can you provide an example of (insert step)?
21. Are there other ways you create body weight inclusivity within the dance space?
22. How did you learn about these strategies?
    a. Did you receive any training on how to create body weight inclusive dance spaces?
        i. If yes, what type of training did you receive?
        ii. If no, are you aware of any training available to you?
            1. Do you see training as necessary?
23. What type of training, if any, do you provide any training for your staff (e.g., other instructors) on how to promote body weight inclusivity?
    a. Explain the training you provide.
24. From the strategies you provided, are there any components you see as more important than others?
25. How do you determine whether these strategies successfully create body weight inclusivity?

Closing Questions

26. What do you hope women take away from your classes?
27. Why is this space important for curvy, fat, plus-size, and/or thick women?
28. From your perspective, what impact has participation in this dance space had on women?

29. What advice would you give to directors or instructors who want to create body inclusive dance spaces for women who identify as curvy, fat, plus-size, and/or thick?
30. To protect your identity, I will reference you using a pseudonym. Is there a pseudonym you would like me to use?

Appendix G: Follow-up Interview Guide for Dancer Leaders

1. How would you summarize the interview?
    a. What are differences between your summary of the interview and my summary?
    b. What are similarities between your summary of the interview and my summary?
2. Was there anything in the transcript that stood out to you?
    a. Why?
3. When you say [insert term or phrase], what are you actually doing?
    a. What did you mean by [insert response]?
    b. Can you provide an example of when [insert response]?
4. How do you define [insert term or phrase]?
5. What are key takeaways/main points addressed in your transcript?
6. Why is creating a dance space for women who identify as curvy, fat, plus-size, and/or thick important to you?
7. After participating in the study, what are key aspects you are taking away?
    a. How will you use these takeaways in the future?
8. Is there anything else you like to add or expand on?

Appendix H: Pilot Study Documentation and Materials

Institutional Review Board Approval from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Demographics Questionnaire, Interview Guide, Transcript 1, and Transcript 2

UNIVERSITY of WISCONSIN
UWMILWAUKEE

Institutional Review Board

uwm.edu/irb
irbinfo@uwm.edu
414-662-3544

Date: August 31, 2021

To: Christy Greenleaf
Dept: Kinesiology
CC: Alexandra Rodriguez - Co-Inv (Full Access w/Notify)

IRB #: 22.049
Title: Qualitative Exploration of Positive Body Image, Embodiment, and Body-Weight Inclusiveness Among Women Who Participate in Dance: A Pilot Study

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Institutional Review Board has granted your protocol Exempt Status under Category 2 as governed by 45 CFR 46.104(d).

This exemption determination is valid for three years and will expire on **August 30, 2024**. Before the expiration date, you will receive an email explaining how to either keep the study open or close it. If the study is completed before the expiration date, you may notify the IRB by sending an email to irbinfo@uwm.edu.

Any proposed changes to the protocol must be reviewed by the IRB before implementation, unless the change is specifically necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects.

It is your responsibility to:

- promptly report unanticipated problems to the IRB
- maintain proper documentation of study records
- ensure that all study staff receive appropriate training as outlined in the protocol
- adhere to the policies and guidelines set forth by the IRB, UWM, and the UW System, and to all applicable state and federal laws

Contact the IRB office if you have any further questions. Thank you for your cooperation and best wishes for a successful project.

Pilot Study Demographics Questionnaire

1. Age:

2. How do you describe yourself?
    1. Woman
    2. Man
    3. Transgender Woman
    4. Transgender Man
    5. Prefer to describe myself as:
    6. Prefer not to respond:

3. Please select all race(s) that apply:
    A. American Indian or Alaska Native
    B. Asian
    C. Black or African American
    D. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
    E. White
    F. Prefer to describe myself as:
    G. Prefer not to respond

4. Are you of Hispanic, Latina/o/x, or Spanish origin?
    A. No, not of Hispanic, Latina/o/x, or Spanish origin
    B. Yes, Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano
    C. Yes, Puerto Rican
    D. Yes, Cuban
    E. Yes, another Hispanic, Latina/o/x, or Spanish origin (please specify):

5. Generation status:
    A. First Generation: You were born outside of the United States
    B. Second Generation: You were born in the United States and at least one of your parents were born outside of the United States
    C. Third generation: You were born in the United States and both your parents born in the United States

6. Please select the level of education that best applies to you:
    A. Some high school, no diploma
    B. High school graduate, diploma or the equivalent (e.g., GED)
    C. Some college credit, no degree
    D. Trade/technical/vocational training
    E. Associates Degree
    F. Bachelor's Degree
    G. Master's Degree
    H. Professional Degree
    I. Doctorate Degree

7. Martial status:
    A. Single
    B. In a relationship
    C. Married
    D. Not listed, please specify:

8. Do you have children?
    A. No
    B. Yes

9. If yes, please list the age of each child?

10. How many years of dance experience do you have?

11. What is the highest level of dance you have performed?

Pilot Study Interview Guide

1. How long have you been participating in this dance group?
2. What, or who, influenced you to participate in this group?
3. Have you participated in other dance groups?
4. How would you describe your body?
5. How would you define the ideal body for a dancer?
6. How does your body compare?
7. How do you compare this dance group to others you have participated in?
8. How would you describe the environment/atmosphere of the group?
9. What aspects contribute to the dance space being body weight-inclusive?
10. Please describe how you feel about your body while dancing.
11. How has dance impacted the comfort and connection that you have with your body?
12. In what ways does dance allow you to express yourself?
13. How has participating in dance impacted the way you think and feel about your body?

Journaling Exercises

Dance Journal 1

Instructions: Please complete this journal exercise **prior** to the beginning of a dance session.

1. Please record today's date.

2. How do you **currently feel** about your **body**?

3. Do you currently feel **connected and comfortable** with your body?

    a. If yes, why?

    b. If not, why not?

4. What or who is **motivating you to participate** in the dance session?

Dance Journal 2

Instructions: Please complete this entry **within 1-2 hours** after participating in a dance session.

1. What style of dance did you engage in during this session?

2. Had you previously been exposed to this style of dance?
    a. **If yes,** how has your experience been with this style of dance?
    b. **If not**, what are your initial thoughts about the style of dance?

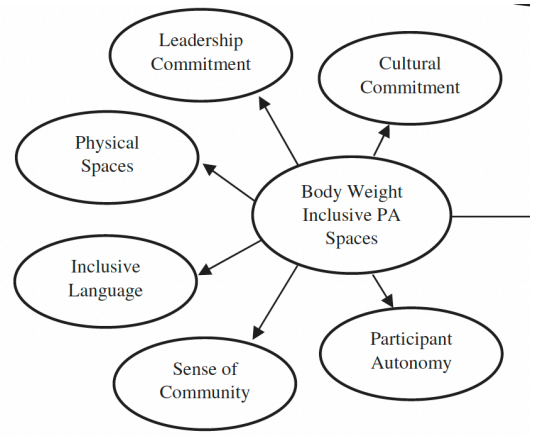
3. How did your **body feel *during*** the dance session?

4. Do you feel you **showed care and respect** to your body ***during*** the dance session?
    a. **If yes**, how?
    b. **If not**, why not?

5. Did you feel a sense of **connection and comfort** with your body ***during*** the dance session?
    a. **If yes**, explain.
    b. **If not**, what factors may have contributed to you feeling disconnected and uncomfortable with your body?

6. Do you feel this dance session allowed you to express yourself?
    a. **If yes**, describe the experiences of expressions that took place.
    b. **If no,** why not?

7. What aspects of the physical and social environment did you **perceive to be body weight inclusive**? Consider the aspects of a body weight inclusive physical activity spaces as seen below.



8. How do you **feel about your body *after*** participating in dance?

9. Do you plan are participating in another dance session?

    a. **If yes**, why?

    b. **If no,** why not?

10. Please write down any other thoughts or feelings that you have related to your body after participating.

Dance Journal 3

Instructions: Please complete this journal exercise **prior** to the beginning of a dance session.

1. Please record today's date.

2. How do you **currently feel** about your **body**?

3. Do you currently feel **connected and comfortable** with your body?

    a. If yes, why?

    b. If not, why not?

4. What or who is **motivating you to participate** in the dance session?

Dance Journal 4

Instructions: Please complete this entry **within 1-2 hours** after participating in a dance session.

1. What style of dance did you engage in during this session?

2. Had you previously been exposed to this style of dance?
    a. **If yes,** how has your experience been with this style of dance?
    b. **If not**, what are your initial thoughts about the style of dance?

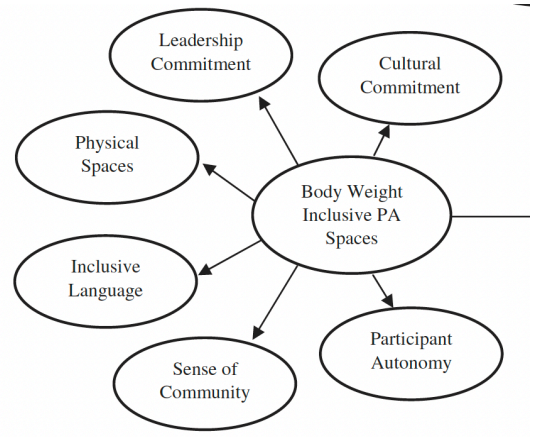
3. How did your **body feel *during*** the dance session?

4. Do you feel you **showed care and respect** to your body ***during*** the dance session?
    a. **If yes**, how?
    b. **If not**, why not?

5. Did you feel a sense of **connection and comfort** with your body ***during*** the dance session?
    a. **If yes**, explain.
    b. **If not**, what factors may have contributed to you feel disconnected and uncomfortable with your body?

6. Do you feel this dance session allowed you to express yourself?
    a. **If yes**, describe the experiences of expressions that took place.
    b. **If no,** why not?

7. What aspects of the physical and social environment did you **perceive to be body weight inclusive**? Consider the aspects of a body weight inclusive physical activity spaces as seen below.



8. How do you **feel about your body *after*** participating in dance?

9. Do you plan are participating in another dance session?

    a. **If yes**, why?

    b. **If no,** why not?

10. Please write down any other thoughts or feelings that you have related to your body after participating.

Appendix I: Institutional Review Board Approval Letter Study 2

UNIVERSITY of WISCONSIN
UWMILWAUKEE

Institutional Review Board

uwm.edu/irb
irbinfo@uwm.edu
414-662-3544

Date: December 23, 2022

To: Christy Greenleaf
Dept: Kinesiology
CC: Alexandra Rodriguez - Co-Investigator, Christy Greenleaf - Faculty Advisor

IRB #: 23.132
Title: Experiences of Body Weight Inclusivity, Embodiment, and Positive Body Image among Curvy, Fat, Plus Size, and/or Thick Dancers

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Institutional Review Board has granted your protocol Exempt Status under Category 2 as governed by 45 CFR 46.104(d).

This exemption determination is valid for three years and will expire on **December 22, 2025**. Before the expiration date, you will receive an email explaining how to either keep the study open or close it. If the study is completed before the expiration date, you may notify the IRB by sending an email to irbinfo@uwm.edu.

Any proposed changes to the protocol must be reviewed by the IRB before implementation, unless the change is specifically necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects.

It is your responsibility to:

- promptly report unanticipated problems to the IRB
- maintain proper documentation of study records
- ensure that all study staff receive appropriate training as outlined in the protocol
- adhere to the policies and guidelines set forth by the IRB, UWM, and the UW System, and to all applicable state and federal laws

Contact the IRB office if you have any further questions. Thank you for your cooperation and best wishes for a successful project.

Appendix J: Recruitment Message to Dancers

Hello, INSERT NAME:

My name is Alexandra Rodriguez, and I am a Ph.D. student at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Currently, I am working on my dissertation which aims to explore experiences of embodiment and body image and factors that contribute to positive body-related experiences among dancers who are 18 years or older, identify as a cisgender woman (i.e., individuals whose current gender identity is the same as the sex they were assigned at birth), and identify as curvy, fat, plus-size, and/or thick (e.g., wearing US size pants 14 or larger).

As you are a member of a dance team, group, or organization dedicated to providing dance training and opportunities for women who identify as curvy, fat, plus-size, and/or thick I wondered if you would be interested in sharing your experiences of body image, embodiment, and perceptions of body weight inclusivity with me in a 1-to-2-hour interview. In addition to the interview, you will be asked to complete a demographic questionnaire and participate in a follow-up discussion. To recognize your time and contribution to research you will receive a **$50 Amazon gift card** for completing the survey and interviews.

Included in this message, I have included a flyer that provides an overview of the study and eligibility requirements. If you are interested and eligible or would like to speak more about my current study, please contact me at rodri679@uwm.edu or (562) 489-6097 or my advisor, Dr. Christy Greenleaf at cgreenl@uwm.edu

Kindly,
Alexandra

Appendix K: Recruitment Flyer for Dancers

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

SEEKING CISGENDER WOMEN WHO IDENTIFY AS CURVY, FAT, PLUS-SIZE , AND/OR THICK AND PARTICIPATE IN DANCE TO SHARE EXPERIENCES

STUDY DESCRIPTION:

The present study seeks to: a) understand how participation in dance impacts experiences of embodiment and body image among cisgender women who identify as curvy, fat, plus-size, and/or thick and participate in dance and b) explore factors within the dance space that contribute to positive experiences of embodiment and positive body image.

WHAT WILL I DO AS A PARTICIPANT?

- Complete a demographic questionnaire
- Participate in two (2) virtual interviews lasting 1- to 2- hours each

Participants will receive a $50 Amazon Gift Card for completing the survey and interviews

Interested in participating or have questions?
Please contact Alexandra Rodriguez at [email address]
or scan the QR Code

QR CODE

PARTICIPANT ELGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

- Identify as a cisgender woman (individuals whose current gender identity is the same as the sex they were assigned at birth)
- 18 years of age or older
- Identify as curvy, fat, plus-size, and/or thick (e.g., wearing a US pants size of 14 or larger)
- Participate in a dance team, organization, or group that celebrates curvy, fat, plus-size, and/or thick women
- No current diagnosis or previous history of an eating disorder
- Not currently pregnant or have given birth within the past year

Appendix L: Demographics Questionnaire for Dancers

1. Age:

2. How do you describe yourself?
    A. Woman
    B. Transgender Woman
    C. Man
    D. Transgender Man
    E. Genderqueer
    F. Non-binary
    G. I prefer to describe myself as:
    H. I prefer not to respond

3. Are you of Hispanic, Latina/o/x, or Spanish origin?
    A. No, not of Hispanic, Latina/o/x, or Spanish origin
    B. Yes, Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano
    C. Yes, Puerto Rican
    D. Yes, Cuban
    E. Yes, another Hispanic, Latina/o/x, or Spanish origin (please specify):

4. Please select all race(s) that apply:
    A. Asian
    B. Black or African American
    C. Indigenous Person of America
    D. Indigenous Person of Canada
    E. Indigenous Polynesian Person of the Hawaiian Islands or Pacific Islander
    F. White
    G. I prefer to describe myself as:
    H. I prefer not to respond

5. Generation status:
    A. First Generation: You were born outside of the United States
    B. Second Generation: You were born in the United States and at least one of your parents were born outside of the United States
    C. Third-and-higher generation: You were born in the United States and both your parents were born in the United States

6. Do you identify as curvy, fat, plus-size, and/or thick?
    A. Yes
    B. No

7. What does it mean to be curvy, fat, plus-size, and/or thick?

8. Please list your pant size according to United States sizes:

9. Have you been currently OR previously diagnosed with an eating disorder?
    A. Yes
    B. No

10. Do you participate in a dance team, organization, or group that celebrates curvy, fat, plus-size, and/or thick women?
    A. Yes
    B. No

11. Please list the dance team, group, or organization to which you are currently a member or participant.

12. What is the **primary dance style** practiced or performed within your dance team or organization?

    A. Ballet
    B. Belly Dancing
    C. Contemporary
    D. Jazz
    E. Latin/Latin Fusion
    F. Hip-Hop
    G. Pole Dancing
    H. Tap
    I. Not Listed (please specify):

13. Please list any other styles of dance you engage in when during practices or performance with your dance team or organization:

14. How many years of dance experience do you have?

15. What is the highest level of dance you have performed?

16. Describe the highest level of dance training you have had:

17. Are you currently pregnant OR have you given birth within the past year?
    A. Yes
    B. No

18. Do you have children?
    A. Yes
    B. No

19. If yes, please list the age of each child?

20. Please select the level of education that best applies to you:
    A. Some high school, no diploma

B. High school graduate, diploma or the equivalent (e.g., GED)
C. Some college credit, no degree
D. Trade/technical/vocational training (please specify):
E. Associate's Degree
F. Bachelor's Degree
G. Master's Degree
H. Professional Degree
I. Doctorate Degree
J. I prefer not to respond

21. Please select the income bracket that best applies to you:
    A. Below $20,000
    B. $20,001-$30,000
    C. $30,001 - $40,000
    D. $40,001-$50,000
    E. $50,001- $60,000
    F. $60,001- $70,000
    G. $70,001- $80,000
    H. Above $80,001
    I. I prefer not to respond

22. Marital status:
    A. Single
    B. In a relationship
    C. Married
    D. Divorced
    E. Widowed
    F. Not listed, please specify:
    G. I prefer not to respond

The next steps of the study will consist of an interview. During the interview you will be asked questions related to: A) body image, B) body related experiences (e.g., connection with your body), and C) your perceptions of body weight inclusivity in the dance environment.

23. Please list your name and email address that we can contact you at to schedule the interview.

24. Please list your availability for the next two weeks for a 1–2-hour interview.

Appendix M: Interview Guide for Dancers

Building Rapport

1. Take me through your journey with dance:
    a. When did you start dancing?
    b. What type of training have you had?

Body Ideals

Societal ideals

2. How would you describe the ideal body for women portrayed in society?
    a. How are these body ideals communicated?
    b. What forms of media are used to communicate these ideals?
    c. Who promotes these body ideals?
3. What society are thinking about as your respond to these items?
4. Do these body ideals align with your personal ideals and ideals for a dancer?
    a. If no, what are some specific differences?
    b. If yes, what are some specific similarities?
5. How does your body compare to society's body ideals you described?

Dance ideals

6. What are the body ideals expected for women who participate in dance?
    a. How are these body ideals communicated?
    b. Who or what has influenced your perception of the ideal body for dancers?
    c. Do these body ideals align with the ideals promoted by society and your personal ideals?
        i. If no, what are some specific differences?

ii. If yes, what are some specific similarities?

d. How does your body compare to the dancer ideals you've described?

Personal ideals

7. Describe your personal perception of the ideal body.
    a. Who influenced your description of the ideal body?
    b. What has influenced your description of the ideal body?
    c. How has your racial and ethnic background influenced your description of the ideal body?
    d. Do these body ideals align with the ideals promoted by society and ideals for a dancer?
        i. If no, what are some specific differences?
        ii. If yes, what are some specific similarities?
    e. How does your body compare to your personal ideas of an ideal body?
8. How do the different body ideals impact how you feel about your body in social settings, dance settings, or work settings?
9. How would you describe your body to someone who has not seen you?
    a. How would you define curvy, fat, plus-size, and/or thick etc.?

Dance Group, Organization, or Team

10. How did you become aware of the dance group, organization, or team that you are a member of/participate in?
    a. Why did you join the dance group, organization, or team?
    b. Who encouraged you to participate in the dance, group, organization, or team?
11. How long have you been a member of the dance group, organization, or team?

a. Have you participated in other dance teams?

    i. How does this group compare to others you have participated in?

Embodiment and Positive Body Image

Dance Space

12. When you are in the dance space, how do you feel about your body?

    a. What do you mean by feeling comfort, appreciative, connected, etc.?

13. How do you feel about your body when you are dancing?

    a. What do you mean by feeling comfort, appreciative, connected, etc.?

14. What impact has participating in dance had on the way you view, think, and feel about your body?

    a. How has dance impacted your comfort and connection with your body?

    b. In what ways does dance allow you to express your sexuality?

    c. How has dance increased your appreciation for your body?

Outside of Dance Space

15. When you are outside of the dance space, how do you feel about your body?

    a. Please expand on what you mean by (un)/comfortable, (dis)/connected, appreciative, shameful, etc.

16. How do the feelings you have about your body in the dance space translate to other settings such as social settings or work settings?

Body Weight Inclusivity

17. What components within the dance space contribute to how you feel about your body?

    a. How does [insert component] negatively OR positively contribute to how you feel about your body?

a. Why does [insert component] contribute to how you feel about your body?

Potential components

b. Where do dance practices or sessions take place?
    i. Describe the physical space (e.g., presence of mirrors).
    ii. How does this influence how you feel about your body?
c. Who is present during practices and/or sessions?
    i. How does this influence how you feel about your body?
d. Describe a typical dance session and/or practice.
    i. What is the focus during dance practice and/or session?
e. Tell me more about the role of the dance instructor.
    i. How do they talk about their body?
    ii. How do they talk about your body?
    iii. How do they talk about the bodies of others?
    iv. What type of language do they use when referring to the body?
    v. How do the dance leaders make you feel included?
    vi. How do the dance leaders make others feel included?
    vii. How do the dance leaders create community?
    viii. How does this influence how you feel about your body?
f. As a participant, what are some of your roles and responsibilities?
    i. Do you feel you have a voice in how the group, organization, or team operates?
    ii. Give me an example of a time you felt your voice was heard within the dance space.

iii. How does this influence how you feel about your body?

18. What makes the dance team or group body inclusive to curvy, fat, plus-size, and/or thick women?

Closing Questions

19. Why would you encourage someone to participate in dance?
20. Is there anything else you would like to share?
21. To protect your identity, I will reference you using a pseudonym. Is there a pseudonym you would like me to use?

Appendix N: Follow-up Interview Guide for Dancers

1. How would you summarize the interview?
    a. What are differences between your summary of the interview and my summary?
    b. What are similarities between your summary of the interview and my summary?
2. Was there anything in the transcript that stood out to you?
    a. Why?
3. When you say [insert term or phrase], what does this mean?
    a. Can you provide an example of when [insert response]?
4. How do you define [insert term or phrase]?
5. In interpreted your response as [insert interpretation], do you agree with the interpretation?
    a. If no, can you help me understand what you meant by [insert term or phrase]?
6. What are key takeaways/main points addressed in your transcript?
    a. Can you identify in the transcript were these key takeaways/main points were addressed?
7. After participating in the study and reflecting on your experiences, would you encourage others to participate in dance?
    a. Why or why not?
8. Is there anything you would like to add or expand on?