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Stepping In: My Experience of Embodied Power Through the Relational-Cultural Framework

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Abstract This qualitative embodied artistic inquiry self-study explored how I used my embodied power in an ethical and intentional way as a dance/movement therapist and illustrated how I experienced my embodied power as informed by relational-cultural theory and racial identity development theory. This led to an exploration of my racial identity as a White, second-year dance/movement therapy and counseling graduate student, who also identifies with other dominate cultural groups. Data were collected through five authentic movement sessions with a trained authentic movement practitioner. Data analysis took the form of creative synthesis through embodied writing passages following each authentic movement session. Results included a journey of self-compassion through a growing movement repertoire, which developed into three themes: self-acceptance, ownership of the past, and choice. Implications demonstrated the importance of therapists exploring theoretical frameworks that align with or challenge one's worldview, and continuously engaging in introspective exploration of one's racial identity.

Keywords Power · Embodied power · Relational-cultural theory · Dance/movement therapy · Racial identity development

Introduction

There is no community in existence immune to the effects of power (Foucault, 1994). Historically, there was one concept of power—power-over—which is the use of power for domination and personal gain (Fay, 2011). As this concept of power is

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utilized by the dominant class, race, gender, or person(s) of higher socioeconomic status, oppression is produced and those oppressing continue to benefit (Benjamin, 2007; Fay, 2011). However, with the growing prevalence of socially and culturally inclusive social science practices such as relational-cultural theory (RCT) in counseling psychology (Jordan, 2010; Miller, 1976), anti-oppressive social justice theories in counseling (Benjamin, 2007; Collins, 2000; Fay, 2011), multicultural counseling theory (Sue, Ivey, & Pederson, 1996), trauma-informed counseling and LGBTQI competent counseling (Whetten, Reif, Whetten, & Murphy-McMillan, 2008), Feminist theory (Lather, 1991), and others, the conceptualization of power in social sciences has begun to shift.

Two new concepts of power have come into anti-oppressive therapeutic practice: power-with, and power-within (Fay, 2011). Power-with fosters solidarity through mutuality and dialogue, while power-within supports individualism and actualizing one's potential within themselves (Fay, 2011). With these changing concepts of power, researchers in the social sciences began to view power in a different light. For this study, power refers to a personal force that may be accessed and enhanced through mutual relationship with others, which moves individuals towards collaborative growth and empowerment, and enables them to create change (Ivey, D'Andrea, & Ivey, 2012; Schubert, 2005). This concept of power, existing through and within relations and systems, becomes embedded in one's identity and is expressed through actions and behaviors (Caldwell, 2016; Foucault, 1994).

As the definitions of power have begun to include more mutuality, the concept of power relations and privilege have become common points of focus in social sciences. Privilege refers to an immunity or special right granted to a specific group of people, that is assumed, normalized, and unchallenged (Brown, 1999; Dubois, 1992; Evans & Foster, 2000; Gushue & Constantine, 2007; Haggerty, 2009; Helms, 1990; Hickey & Austin, 2009; Hughey, 2010; Leuwerke, 2005; McDermott & Samson, 2005). Researchers have illustrated the detrimental effects of racism and an unjust use of power within the therapeutic relationship (Benjamin, 2007; Brown, 1999; Chang, 2009; Collins, 2000; Jacobs, 2014; Stuart, 2012; Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992).

Counseling psychology is rooted in White culture, and many traditional counseling techniques have been shown to be widely ineffective when used with non-white clientele (Sue et al., 1992). This is due to the concept of cultural deprivation, present in the White cultural roots of counseling psychology that disregards the responsibility of White individuals' racist beliefs, and "blames culture for its minority problem" (Sue et al., 1992, p. 479). Jacobs (2014) noted that when clinicians ignore one's race and privilege within the therapeutic relationship, they may not see the client with the same level of humanness and empathy, leading to diminished presence within the therapeutic relationship. Further, the colorblindness, or overall lack of awareness of the effects of one's skin color on themselves and others, that is common among White counselors continually generates racism as it endorses the non-existence of race (Brown, 1999).

As a result of the growing body of literature revealing the crippling effects of an unjust use of power within the therapeutic relationship, it has become best practice for clinicians to observe and be aware of the racial and cultural power differentials

occurring within the relationship. Engaging in anti-oppressive practice necessitates that clinicians observe and understand where they exist in the matrix of domination (Collins, 2000), their own power and privilege as it relates to others, and decide intentionally how to use these elements (Benjamin, 2007).

When aware of my innate privileges as a White, female-identified woman from a middle class family in the Chicago suburbs, I often feel shame and pressure to utilize these elements for the better, accompanied by thoughts, such as *do I really deserve this house, this car, these loving parents, this access to an education?* I then doubt my ability to connect with others who have different social and cultural identifiers than me, and I fear their perceptions of my values.

During my undergraduate studies, I engaged in a privilege walk, an experiential commonly utilized in collegiate level social justice classes and diversity seminars, aimed at increasing one's awareness of one's privilege. As the teacher read questions like "if your parents have remained married, take a step forward," and "if your family uses food stamps, take a step back," I noticed myself advancing further forward than many of my classmates. I felt my face growing redder, and I did not want to look back at my classmates while shame crept into my heart. Years later, as I entered graduate school, my cohort was asked to participate in this same experiential. I felt my stomach drop as I remembered my first experience of this, and my thoughts turned to apprehension of what would follow. Yet again I was amongst the few individuals that finished furthest forward at the conclusion of the questionnaire, but this time I turned around to face my classmates. I saw tears streaming down cheeks, eyes averted downward. My friends and classmates began to share their own experiences of injustice and mistreatment. I was filled with thoughts of *but I would never do those things, I would never consider myself above someone else*. I found myself growing increasingly resentful towards the use of power and privilege purely for domination or personal gain. I was angry at the racism and blatant disrespect for human beings that I was hearing about from my peers who had experienced it, and I was furious at potentially being viewed as part of it due to my position in various dominant cultural groups. I began questioning my values and morals, and wondering whether I was unknowingly perpetuating this misuse of power and privilege. I came to a place of wanting to explore what it meant for me to be White, and to be a clinician from a number of dominant cultural groups. Entering in to the field of dance/movement therapy as a young professional, it felt necessary that this study be an embodied exploration. Embodiment refers to "attending 'with' and attending 'to' the body" (Csordas, 1993, p. 138), or an intersubjective understanding through lived-body experiencing (Gendlin, 1962; Hervey, 2007). Thus, embodied power was viewed in this study as the felt-experience of my personal power (ability to create change) (Ivey et al., 2012; Meekums, 2006; Schubert, 2005).

Relational-Cultural Theory

Throughout this study, I remained grounded in and informed by relational-cultural theory (RCT). The RCT framework focuses not on diagnostic labeling, but on contextualizing one's self "within a broader context, one that moves [one] out of a

position of shame, defectiveness, and isolation toward genuine authenticity and connection with others" (Duffey & Somody, 2011, p. 225). I wanted to explore these feelings of shame and self-doubt that I was experiencing, and a theoretical framework that allowed space for these feelings felt most appropriate. In this study, I was consciously moving away from understanding power as power-over to exploring the concepts of power-with and power-within. These concepts align with the relational-cultural counseling theory of power within relationship: the foundational belief that internal power is activated through healthy, positive relationships with others, ultimately leading to growth and fulfilment (Miller, 1976). I theorized that only through understanding my own power and privilege could I navigate and foster therapeutic relationships for the empowerment and growth of clients.

RCT was originally developed by scholars who sought to gain greater understanding of relational interactions among women (Jordan, 2009; Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991; Miller, 1976, 1986), and has since been shown to be an effective theoretical framework for men and diverse clients (Lenz, Speciale, & Aguilar, 2012; Morray & Liang, 2005; Sparks, 2004; Tantillo & Sanftner, 2003). The RCT framework highlights that power differentials between individuals or groups, particularly "harmful abuses of power, and inequities in gender and cultural experiences, health, and socioeconomic status" (Miller, 1976, p. 229) can ultimately create dissonance within relationship, and prevent one from being one's authentic self (Duffey & Somody, 2011). Researchers and theorists argue that therapy which revolves around the core principles of RCT (relational authenticity, perceived mutuality, relational connection/disconnection, and relational empowerment) yield greater instances of empowerment and liberating relational development through enhanced authenticity (East & Roll, 2015; Haskins & Appling, 2015; Lenz, 2016; Miller, 1976; Oakley et al., 2013; Singh & Moss, 2015). In these authentic relationships, power exists as an equal, effective force for change, versus a power-over struggle (Miller, 1976).

Dance/movement therapists have utilized RCT in their work as well, lacing together the major concepts of RCT with those of dance/movement therapy. Combs (2005) revealed that nonverbal communication utilized in DMT can elicit healthy levels of vulnerability, which is recognized in RCT as a core principle of growth-fostering relationships. In a qualitative case study, MacLaren (2016) utilized concepts of physical and nonverbal connection and mutuality through movement, which led to greater levels of relational authenticity and a shift in relational images for both the participants and the researcher. By utilizing the concepts of RCT, dance/movement therapists have shown the efficacy of relational-DMT (Combs, 2005; MacLaren, 2016; Puloka, 2016; Valenzuela, 2014).

Culture Within Dance/Movement Therapy

Growing from Western dance traditions, and utilizing Rudolf Laban's Movement Analysis Taxonomy (LMA), which is based around European movement patterns, the field of DMT is most predominantly situated within White culture (Chang, 2009; Evan, 1991; Manning, 1993; Schoop, 1974; Schweiters, 1993; Stuart, 2012). Culture

refers to the influences of one's upbringing, which influence one's personal identity, including the power and privilege one holds and has been subjected to (Chang, 2009; Dosamantes-Beaudry, 1997; Hervey & Stuart, 2012; Smith, 2008). Researchers recognize that movement is culturally dependent, and one's views and perceptions of movement are influenced by their cultural experiences (Caldwell & Johnson, 2012; Chang, 2009; Dosamantes-Beaudry, 1997; Hervey & Stuart, 2012; Smith, 2008). This supports the necessity for dance/movement therapists to remain aware of and sensitive to their own experiences of their embodied culture (Caldwell & Johnson, 2012; Smith, 2008), as well as the embodied culture of their clients—a requirement set forth by the ADTA Code of Ethics (American Dance Therapy Association, 2015).

The embodiment of power is scarcely discussed in current literature on embodiment or dance/movement therapy. Caldwell (2013) discussed the topic of embodied power and privilege as it relates to movement assessment, and noted that dance/movement therapists may unconsciously enact oppression and prejudice if they observe movement solely through the lens of pathology and personality derived from various power driven structures (Caldwell, 2013). Orientation to culture, professional tendencies, and diverse lived experiences impact what is seen when one observes movement (Chang, 2009), and when a client of a marginalized cultural group is being observed by a clinician of a dominant cultural group, the client may move in a way that embodies the perceived power and privilege dynamics of the relationship, versus their personality constructs (Caldwell, 2013). If there are unconscious feelings of discomfort for the clinician in regards to the cultural differences that are physically enacted by the client, the client's movements may be inaccurately labeled as "dysfunctional, restricted, or problematic" (Caldwell, 2013, p. 184).

Caldwell (2013) suggested that dance/movement therapists broaden their understanding of somatic countertransference, defined as the physical and emotional response elicited in the therapist in response to a client (Ross, 2000), to include issues of unexamined privilege. To minimize the possibility of re-enacting oppression within the therapeutic relationship, it is necessary for the clinician who is observing clients to recognize that clients move in a way that expresses their race, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability, and power dynamics, and to consistently engage in active self-reflection to recognize one's own biases and projections (Caldwell, 2013). Chang (2009) stated that in order for the field of dance/movement therapy to continue integrating the body and mind, increased awareness of the role of social context for the dance/movement therapist is required. The dance/movement therapist must consistently be working to increase "self-knowledge about, and intimacy with, their own sociocultural identity" (Chang, 2009, p. 300) to expand their ability to "respond to social conditions and knowingly embody cultural factors" (Chang, 2009, p. 300). Chang (2009) recognized that this is not a skill often taught or practiced in sufficient depth within DMT education and training, necessitating that the emerging dance/movement therapist spend time outside of the training institution exploring this deeply personal content.

Power and privilege are elements that often go unrecognized to the individual that wields them (Hickey & Austin, 2009; McDermott & Samson, 2005; Stuart,

2012), whether due to racial color-blindness, or an unwillingness to recognize these elements as part of one's identity (Stuart, 2012). Stuart (2012) highlighted this in a phenomenological study of five individuals (N=5) aimed to explore what it means to be a White dance/movement therapist. The results demonstrated a shift from complete unawareness of one's White racial identity, to a heightened awareness of the prevalence of power dynamics and privilege in their work as White therapists (Stuart, 2012). In addition, the experience known as White guilt began to emerge as a theme in Stuart's work (2012). White guilt refers to "a collective mindset, feeling, or behavior associated with being racially White" (Stuart, 2012, p. 9), and often results in racially White people averting responsibility for racist acts due to a sense that they had no role in constituting the superiority of Whiteness (Haggerty, 2009; Stuart, 2012).

Jacobs (2014) further described the feelings of White guilt and shame as they apply to any White clinician, noting that trusting oneself enough to engage authentically in relationship with another—when experiencing White guilt and shame—may prove challenging. Jacobs (2014) hypothesized that this guilt and shame are not feelings to conceal, but are rather fundamentally important to achieve a sense of mutuality within relationship. What is important is not to eliminate guilt and shame, but to allow oneself to explore these feelings outside of the therapeutic relationship through workshops, personal therapy, and supervision (Jacobs, 2014). The shame being referred to is "not the toxic shame with which clinicians are so familiar, but the existential shame which reminds us that we are all more alike, vulnerable and fallible, than different" (Jacobs, 2014, p. 304). Jacobs (2014) argued that when an individual of the dominate race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic class is willing to be changed through the process of relationship with another, then the power balances present will shift for both.

Identity Development

Ronnestad and Skovholt (2003), two leaders in counselor identity development theory, recognized the process of becoming a counselor as progression through six phases, beginning with (1) lay helper, moving through (2) beginning student, (3) advanced student, (4) novice professional, (5) experienced professional, and arriving at (6) the senior professional phase. Ronnestad and Skovholt (2003) stated that "continuous reflection is a prerequisite for optimal learning and professional development at all levels of experience" (p. 29).

For some individuals belonging to majority racial groups, the counselor identity development process may initiate engagement with racial identity development (Hardiman, 1982; Helms, 1995; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003). In agreement with the counselor identity development theme that continuous internal reflection is necessary (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003), racial identity development theorists ascertained that the development of a positive racial identity is an important task for everyone (Hardiman, 1982; Helms, 1995), and Chang (2009) posited that "systems of structured racial identity development believe that racial identity is a key component of an individual's positive self-image" (p. 308).

Researchers have noted that the body is central to both social construction of difference, as well as identity development (Butler, 1993; Caldwell, 2016; Caldwell & Johnson, 2012). The body is constantly engaging in sensorimotor experiences, from the womb until death, and interacting with the environment, storing implicit body memories (Caldwell, 2016). As the body grows and re-enacts these implicit memories, further solidifying them into physical habits and movement patterns, the body identity is formed, and becomes the basis for the explicit experiences and memories that will follow (Caldwell, 2016). Caldwell (2016) stated that cognitive identity is constructed within one's body identity, and includes reinforced verbal narratives that may or may not be congruent with body narratives. Butler (1993) believed that construction of identity occurs through a process of repeated acts and gestures, which suggests that these gestures create our identity as we grow. These identities are fluid and ever-changing, and are subject to influence and change by oneself, the various groups one belongs to, and those in power (Cohen & Weiss, 2003).

Clare (2001) furthered the topic of identity involving the body, and noted that when analyzing systems of oppression, the body is often forgotten or overlooked, with little attention given to how these phenomena live within the human body. To begin bridging this gap in identity development theory, Clare (2001) stated that "we must not forget that our bodies are still part of the equation, that paired with the external forces of oppression are the incredibly internal, body-centered experiences of who we are and how we live with oppression" (pp. 360–361). As dance/movement therapists interact with their clients, they inherently assume a position of power given their role as therapist (Caldwell & Johnson, 2012). It is because of this that attention must be paid to the experience of the unavoidable power differential for both the client, as well as the therapist, so as not to overlook or underestimate this experience, and unknowingly re-enact systems of oppression (Caldwell & Johnson, 2012).

Conclusions

RCT theorists, identity development theorists, and dance/movement therapists highlight the importance of understanding one's power and privilege, as these phenomena become embedded in one's identity, and influence how one functions in relationship (Caldwell, 2013, 2016; Caldwell & Johnson, 2012; Chang, 2009; Hardiman, 1982; Helms, 1995; Jordan, 2010; Miller, 1976; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003; Stuart, 2012). Systems of oppression can be re-enacted within the therapeutic relationship when clinicians are unaware of and inattentive to their own embodied power (Caldwell, 2013, 2016; Caldwell & Johnson, 2012, Chang, 2009). This may also lead to feelings of shame and guilt for the clinician, which prevent the clinician from engaging authentically with clients (Jacobs, 2014; Stuart, 2012). This study aimed to illustrate how the often stigma-laced experience of embodied power, as informed by privilege and culture, may be consciously utilized to facilitate authenticity and change within the therapeutic movement relationship. The primary research question for this study was how can I use my embodied power ethically and intentionally as a dance/movement therapist? Secondary questions included how do

I experience my embodied power, and how does RCT inform how I experience my embodied power?

Methods

Methodology

Embodied artistic inquiry is a qualitative research methodology through which researchers use creativity and arts-based methods of data collection and analysis to explore and describe research questions or wonderings (Hervey, 2000). A fundamental principle of this methodology is that art-making is a valid, systematic, and diligent means of collecting and analyzing data (Hervey, 2000); therefore, approaching this project through the embodied artistic inquiry methodology felt the most appropriate. Embodied artistic inquiry consists of six basic phases: (a) inception, when one's curiosity sparks an interest in the research; (b) perception, when one immerses oneself in collecting the data; (c) inner dialogue, when data analysis begins; (d) illumination, when new ideas and awareness arise from the previous stage of inner dialogue; (e) expression/formation, when this information is synthesized and shared with others; and (f) outer dialogue, when one processes the data with the aforementioned collaborators (Hervey, 2000). Although the phases of embodied artistic inquiry can be executed linearly, in this study, the latter four phases reoccurred cyclically throughout data collection and analysis so that I could allow my movements to be influenced by themes derived during previous movement sessions. Utilizing embodied artistic inquiry necessitates that the researcher examine their own movement aesthetics (Hervey, 2000). Aesthetic refers to "the discriminating appreciation of qualities reflected in form" (p. 93), or one's preferences for seeing and making art (Hervey, 2000). This often brings about an examination of one's body knowledge/body prejudice (BK/BP) (Hervey, 2000; Moore & Yamamoto, 2012). Body knowledge refers to how one understands and makes sense of movement based on their cultural and social experiences, whereas BP refers to the connotation (positive or negative) one gives to movement they observe (Moore & Yamamoto, 2012).

Participants, Setting, and Timeline

I was the sole researcher and participant for this study. At the time of the study, I was a 24 year old, White, middle class, Midwestern, female-identified, second-year graduate student studying dance/movement therapy and counseling. Entering into this study, I recognized that engaging in this study was a use of power in and of itself, as safely examining one's embodied power is not a universal opportunity.

I also employed a research consultant in this study to fulfill the fifth and sixth phases of an embodied artistic inquiry, during which the data collected are synthesized with collaborators and shared with an outside audience. A research consultant differs from a participant, as this role serves to engage in active discussion regarding the themes that arise from data collection and analysis, rather

than collect data themselves. My research consultant was a White, female, Board Certified Dance/Movement Therapist (BC-DMT) who was trained in Janet Adler's Authentic Movement style, which is grounded in Zen Buddhism, attachment/psychodynamic psychology, and movement (Adler, 2015). I chose this particular individual as my research consultant because we had a previously established relationship, which made me feel comfortable to explore deeply personal material with her, and allowed her to challenge what may be my biases as they arose in exploration. To distinguish this previously existing relationship from that of a research consultant, it was established that if either of us felt a personal or professional boundary were crossed, data collection would be paused and we would determine how to ethically and morally proceed with the study.

The settings for this study included the research consultant's private therapy office and my home. Data collection took place in my research consultant's private therapy office, while data analysis took place in my home, a private, safe space conducive to authentic, personal exploration. The study spanned six weeks. During the first five weeks, data were collected in the beginning of the week and analyzed at the end of the week. The final week consisted of a closing session with the research consultant.

Data Collection

Data collection occurred during five authentic movement sessions, with the research consultant engaging as a witness. In the practice of authentic movement, the witness is expected to manage their own projections, in order to hold a safe space for any content to arise for the mover, while the mover follows the natural impulses of the body, and becomes a more conscious witness of self and other (Adler, 2015). I chose to utilize authentic movement for this study as it is rooted in the relationship between witness and mover, and mirrors fundamental concepts of RCT. As the witness holds their own projections, and recognizes which content is coming from the mover and which is from the witness, past relationships and worldviews are constantly in effect (Adler, 2015). The relationship between witness and mover grows throughout this practice and strengthens one's presence and authenticity within relationship, similar to the RCT concept of relational authenticity—one's capacity to bring one's whole self into relationship, without fear of judgement or shame, with sensitivity to how one's actions may impact others (Adler, 2015; Jordan, 2010; Lenz, 2016).

During these sessions, I took a few minutes to prepare myself mentally and physically for exploration. This preparation generally took the form of deep breathing and stretching. Once I felt prepared to explore, I moved for 15–25 min (perception). Honoring the creative process, which is integral to any embodied artistic inquiry (Hervey, 2000), I allowed the material and process to unfold naturally and organically and did not pre-plan specific concepts for my movement sessions. The first movement session was informed, generally, by the research questions, with each subsequent session influenced and informed by the previous sessions.

Movement was followed by a few minutes to reflect on the movement experience through open journaling (inner dialogue). During this open journaling time, I wrote down any sensations, movements, images, feelings, and thoughts (SMIFT) that I recalled from the movement. This method of organization, originally SIFT (sensations, images, feelings, thoughts) originated from Siegel and Bryson (2011) as a method to increase awareness of the body/mind connection in the present moment. Movement was added to the model by dance/movement therapist, Susan Imus, to bring focus to the moving body as part of the reflective process (S. Imus, personal communication, 2015). Post journaling, I reserved 25 min for witnessing and debriefing with my research consultant (outer dialogue). During this time, I described chronologically my experience of the movement, in present tense, as if it were happening at that moment. My research consultant then completed the same process, speaking to her inner experiences as she watched the movements (outer dialogue). All of her descriptions were phrased as "I see a mover doing [describe movements], and within me I feel [describe sensations]." After we had both shared, we compared and contrasted our experiences, discussing similarities or discrepancies (illumination). The themes and patterns that became the results of this study arose from these movement sessions through discussion and witnessing as well as the post-movement journaling.

Data Analysis

The weekend following each movement session, I engaged in creative synthesis through embodied writing passages to analyze the data (inner dialogue). Creative synthesis involves the researcher "tapping into imaginative and contemplative sources of knowledge" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 50) to allow essences and themes to come forward through an arts-based expression (Moustakas, 1990). Embodied writing is a form of qualitative data collection or analysis that "reveal[s] the lived experience of the body by portraying in words the finely textured experience of the body, and evoking sympathetic resonance in readers" (Anderson, 2001, p. 1). My embodied writing passages were organized through SMIFT, to mirror my post-movement journaling. Each writing included four paragraphs and contained all of the elements of SMIFT, in order, in each paragraph. Prior to engaging in this writing, I prepared myself mentally and physically in the same way I had during the previous movement session, through deep breathing and stretching, to facilitate a deeper body/mind connection. I read the open journaling notes I had taken during the session, inviting the material back into my consciousness. Then, I engaged in embodied writing for a total of 25 min. When 25 min had passed, I finished writing and put my computer away, and allowed myself time to recuperate in whatever way felt needed in the moment, which included laying on the floor engaging in deep breathing, or taking a short walk outside. The following day I reread the passage and altered anything that was necessary to truly illustrate my embodied experience from the movement session.

After I had completed each embodied writing, I sent my writing via email to my research consultant to review for validation (expression/formation). At the beginning of the next data collection session, we began by discussing my research

consultant's reactions to the writing, in the form of open dialogue (outer dialogue). My research consultant and I had a sixth wrap-up session, during which no data were collected, to review and debrief from the process (outer dialogue). During this session, we sat in a different room than where we had collected movement data. The structure of this final session was very open, as we dialogued back and forth conversationally. During this time we discussed my research questions and made connections between the results, the questions, and the RCT and DMT literature (illumination).

Results and Discussion

After each movement session, I engaged in creative synthesis through embodied writing to codify and analyze my experience of the movement session. From engaging in creative synthesis, three themes arose: self-acceptance, ownership, and choice.

From the beginning of this study, I knew I struggled with accepting myself as a White clinician, and the discomfort that I experienced because of my innate privileges. As I began engaging in the authentic movement sessions, I experienced times when self-acceptance, or lack there-of, arose: *Skin. White. All over. Is this all? All I will ever be? I can still cause harm just in being who I am. How can I ever apologize for that? How can that ever be okay?* I struggled with the uncomfortable feelings of accepting that I may unintentionally cause harm to another person, if my Whiteness were perceived as the embodiment of White culture or privilege. As I entered into this exploration through movement, I attended to those thoughts and feelings with compassion. I allowed myself to let go of the shame and fear that had become so enmeshed with my identity and reached an unfamiliar state of self-acceptance, evidenced by a greater sense of certainty and comfort in my body acknowledged through a movement theme of self-touch—*I place each hand on my body, breathe, move on to the next part. I never needed to change myself.* Due to my BK/BP around gentle self-touch, this theme felt loving and caring to me. My body became a place of home, and this movement theme was symbolic of returning home. I let go of my fear of the projections of others. I felt strength in my ability to return to this place of home and acceptance, and started to identify the disconnections—experiences often involving disappointment and feeling misunderstood that can interrupt the process of authentic engagement and presence within relationship (Jordan, 2010) —present in my experience of embodied power.

From this place of self-acceptance, the relational images—past experiences and relationships that color and influence how one perceives the world currently (Jordan, 2009; Miller, 1986) —that clouded my perception of myself as a White therapist, continued to affect me. Initially, I felt the familiar push away from the past, and the history of oppression that came long before me. I could accept myself, knowing that I had not caused intentional harm to another using my privilege to exert power over another person, but I could not accept the intense history of oppression and social injustice that was caused through an unjust use of power and privilege: *Screw you for making the world like this. Screw you for treating people like this.* I felt this

burning desire to fight, or change something. As I began to activate what I perceived as power in my body, influenced by my BK/BP, I pushed, hit, and pulled at the wood floor, and I became aware of how ineffective my movements were. They were powerful, yet ineffective, and without intention.

I began to sense my back space, and my scapula: *I reach both arms around behind me. I touch the small of my back, I circle my arms inward and outward in the area behind me. I engage my core and my scapula*. While exploring this space, I was flooded with thoughts of the past, and the history that came before me. As I shifted my movements, drawing momentum from this back space, and activating my movements from the scapula, I felt my inner witness become a more active presence in my movement. The presence of one's inner witness in authentic movement is indicative of increased embodied consciousness and "new ways of knowing" (Adler, 2015, p. 218), and as the presence of this inner witness strengthened I felt my intention and effectiveness increase. My movements were no longer a demonstration of power, but instead utilized sustainable strength, allowed for recuperation, and had intention: *This is my past, it's what's behind me. This is what makes the pushing purposeful. This is what gives me intention*. Rather than demonstrating my power, I could access it and channel it to allow my body to shift and mold to adapt to the environment, while still maintaining its shape, size, and color. I began to see that in shying away from the history, I was not allowing myself to explore the disconnections/connections in my life. The disconnections—feelings of shame, anger, and resentment—were so overpowering that I could hardly see the connections, the intention, or the purpose. Through self-acceptance, I found that I could own the past and the history that once revolted me and move forward with greater consciousness and action towards intentionally acting against oppression.

Amidst this journey, I found myself in a situation which felt unfamiliar, yet strangely enticing. At this point, I had engaged in movements that grew increasingly complex, and had expanded my movement repertoire. I was moving with both strength and lightness at a low spatial level, lightness at a higher spatial level, and was accessing all levels (from the ground upward to standing) easily. However, I became aware that I had yet to access the previously found strength at a standing level. My research consultant reflected this to me, and I felt myself revert back to previous feelings of guilt, fear, and apprehension. Scholars have examined the role of nonverbal communication as it relates to power dynamics, and have noted the two dimensions of power are vertical height and vertical position (Hall & Hall, 1977; Henley, 1977; Schubert, 2005). Schubert (2005) noted that in many mammalian species, including humans, physically being in a position above another can symbolize power and strength, the rule of nature being "the larger, the more dangerous" (p. 3). My BK/BP around strength at a high spatial level made me fearful of accessing this powerful vertical dimension. I was fearful of exerting too much power and possibly losing control—possibly becoming dangerous. The discomfort I felt in this movement was a manifestation of my aesthetic preference towards gentle movements, and my BK/BP around powerful movements at a high spatial level. I took time to breathe and engage in the movement ritual that had developed of claiming my body as home through self-touch. I placed each hand on my body and allowed myself to feel the acceptance and the ownership I had

previously experienced. Moving from this place, I began to carve my arms and legs through space with resistance and strength, unlocking what felt like the final, untouched area of my movement repertoire: *I carve my arms through the space with strength and resistance, grounding through my feet into the floor for stability. I yield and push through my legs and feet to shift my weight*. I began to recognize choice and options that I had previously been blind to: *In recognizing and accepting myself, I can move forward. I can carve with strength, I can float with grace, and I can yield with compassion*. I felt my aesthetic preference expanding as my previously established BK/BP and the negative connotation I had placed around strong movements at a high spatial level began to shift. Through the journey of self-acceptance and ownership of the past, I uncovered a wider range of movement potential. I discovered that I can exist in my body and utilize my embodied power in a multitude of ways.

Embodied Power Informed by RCT

As I remained grounded in the RCT framework during this study, I explored how this framework influenced my experience of embodied power. This journey as a whole can be compared to the RCT concept of relationship differentiation and elaboration, or an individual's willingness to explore relational images (Jordan, 2009; Miller, 1986). Before engaging in this study, I shied away from the feelings of shame and guilt, entangled with my racial and personal identity. I was unwilling to explore these feelings, for fear of what might be revealed. However, as my interest in this concept and my drive to explore my embodied power grew, my desire to explore my own relational images regarding power and privilege also increased. To further determine how the RCT framework influenced how I experienced embodied power, I have compared the themes of self-acceptance, ownership, and choice to three areas within RCT: relational authenticity, relational connection/disconnection, and relational empowerment.

When I started this study, I was rejecting myself and the historical oppression enacted by those also of White, middle to upper class identity. As I engaged in authentic movement and discovered a movement theme of self-touch, I experienced a vulnerability related to my racial identity: *Is this all? All I will ever be? Just White?* Beneath this layer of shame was an immense desire for self-acceptance, and to exist as my authentic self. This state of existence is known by RCT scholars as relational authenticity (Jordan, 2010). I craved this relational authenticity, which was missing in my life, and began to find it in the self-acceptance that came through movement.

I was unaware of how intense my desire for self-acceptance was at the beginning of this study, and the extent to which my perceptions of myself were colored by my relational images. These past relational images became current areas of disconnection. Jordan (2010) hypothesized that if individuals are willing to explore these disconnections, they may learn to grow from them, and transform them into areas of mutuality or connection (Jordan, 2010). As I explored these areas of disconnection (feelings of shame and fear) through movement, and took ownership of the past, I

was able to let go of these feelings, and begin to discover new ways of existing in my body, which were not clouded by shame.

Entering into this study my movement preferences included the use of lightness, direct space, and moving at a high spatial level. Throughout this journey my movement repertoire expanded to involve an increasingly strong use of weight—*I increase pressure, pushing hard against the floor. I begin to pull, scraping my palms across the floor back towards my body*—and indirect space—*I carve my arms and legs in every direction, moving through the space all around me.* As I broadened my movement repertoire, I began to recognize my body as home, and became increasingly confident in my abilities to relate to others—*I am here to accept. Whoever you are, you may be with me. Together, we will harness the energy, we will transform and redirect*. In recognizing these various options available to me of how I can use my body, I gained greater confidence and assurance in my abilities to relate to others. This reflects the concept of relational empowerment within the RCT framework, which is "the degree to which individuals trust themselves to be different from others, while also recognizing that growth is a possible outcome of conflict when authentic relating and creative action are present" (Lenz, 2016, p. 416).

By returning to my body as a place of home, and increasing my self-acceptance, I entered into a state of relational authenticity. I felt increasingly comfortable with bringing my whole self into relationship with others, primarily those I perceived to be of a different culture or race than me, and felt more present, evidenced by the feelings of shame and anger shifting to feelings of curiosity and empowerment. I experienced this shift in my body as well, beginning in a place of discomfort—*cold, knots in my stomach, pulse quickening*—arriving at a place of ease and strength—*warmth in my chest, grounding in my lower body.* From here, I felt safe to explore the areas of disconnection in my life, that were influenced by my relational images and embedded in my identity, and began to take ownership of this past. Finally, through recognizing the choice I had over how I utilized my body, I reached an increased state of relational empowerment, evidenced by carving movements that grew increasingly complex in my use of space and weight.

Racial Identity Development

The primary research question of how I use my embodied power ethically and intentionally as a dance/movement therapist can be answered by contextualizing my journey within the racial identity development model. This model notes the progression of identity development for White individuals through five phases, beginning in (1) pre-contact/pre-exposure, progressing through (2) conflict/disintegration, (3) pro-minority/anti-racism or (4) retreat into White culture, ending with (5) redefinition/integration (Hardiman, 1982; Helms, 1995). It was not until the conclusion of this study, after entering into the implicit material through movement, and further developing the themes that arose through embodied writing, that I realized I had undergone a transformation in my racial identity. Underlying the feelings of shame and guilt, and the desire to exist as my authentic self as a dance/movement therapist, was an unsteady relationship with who I was and my

racial identity. Tracing back to my youth, I grew up in a diverse town, went to schools where the population consisted of at least 50–60% African American and Hispanic students, and had close friends of various ethnicities, cultures, races, and socioeconomic statuses. Due to my immersion in diverse cultures growing up, and my position in several majority cultural groups that are widely recognized through media, I was not conscious of my Whiteness reflected in my BK/BP. I was hardly aware of being different, and never felt as though my Whiteness assured me any power or privilege over another human being.

This overall lack of awareness of self as a racial being is indicative of the pre-contact/pre-exposure phase of one's developing racial identity (Hardiman, 1982; Helms, 1995). Over the past several years, as my awareness of myself as a racial being heightened, I entered into the conflict/disintegration phase of my racial identity development. I believe that, while I lacked the vocabulary to identify this in the early phases of this study, this is where my journey began. In my initial embodied writing excerpt, I identified feelings such as *annoyed, ashamed, worried,* and *unsure*. These correlate with the feelings commonly recognized during the conflict/disintegration phase, which are confusion, guilt, anger, and depression (Hardiman, 1982; Helms, 1995). Although I was living so deeply in this phase of my racial identity development, I had not allowed myself to process these emotions, explicitly or implicitly.

As I recognized and experienced the feelings that arose in response to my embodied power, I first blamed myself: *I am limited in what I can do, in who I can reach, in how I can help. I can still cause harm just in being who I am. How can I ever apologize for that? How can that ever be okay?* As I turned this blame inward, I felt no alleviation of the feelings that were present, as the feelings of worry and shame shifted to become *uncomfortable, confined,* and *limited*. While I was in this process, I was unaware that I was longing to redefine for myself what it meant to be White. From here, I began to turn blame outward to the world, entering into what I now know as the pro-minority/anti-racism phase of racial identity development (Hardiman, 1982; Helms, 1995). My thoughts turned to *screw you for making the world like this. Screw you for treating people like this. I didn't cause this. I cannot apologize for who I am. I will not give up the place that is mine. I will not give up myself. I will just have to work harder. Work better.* Previous feelings of discomfort transformed to feeling disgusted and uneasy.

The pro-minority/anti-racism phase of racial identity development is identified by those of majority racial groups resisting racism, turning feelings of anger and resentment outward (Hardiman, 1982; Helms, 1995). Also during this phase these individuals attempt to identify with minority groups to alleviate the strong feelings of guilt and anger they have towards themselves. This identification arose during my embodied writings, as my thoughts became *with humility, I can enter into the world of mine, and through the door I find the world of ours. I will not squander, I will not overstep. Together, we will harness the energy, we will transform and redirect.* With these thoughts, an image arose for me of *the Japanese Aikido master harness[ing] the energy of the opponent. He redirects the energy to protect himself, while simultaneously protecting his attacker from injury. No one will be harmed.* My aesthetic preference towards collaborative movement and relationship are present in

this image. Identifying with these images and shifting my thoughts toward the pro-minority/anti-racism phase served to alleviate the feelings of guilt and shame, yet left me in a place where I felt inauthentic and superficial, as I knew I could still cause harm to another simply because of my inherent privileges.

This was the initial entrance into the redefinition/integration phase of my racial identity development. As I grappled with the various experiences I was having, I found myself feeling aware, uncertain, and excited. I began to experiment with different ways of moving my body, *carving with strength, floating with grace, yielding with compassion.* While expanding my movement repertoire, my thoughts shifted to *I want more of this…I want to experiment more and take bigger risks. I can always go back to my home, the place that is me.* Realizing how vast my movement potential could be was vital in my quest to discover how I may use my embodied power ethically and intentionally, as it allowed me to see the necessity in reconnecting with my body, broadening my movement preferences, and breaking away from the perceptions I previously had regarding myself as a White individual. Aligning with this phase of racial identity development, I was redefining what it meant for me to be White (Hardiman, 1982; Helms, 1995), and I could finally recognize my body as home. Through this redefinition, I felt as though I could lift the blanket of shame I had been living beneath, understanding that *I never needed to change myself. I am who I am, and I have what I have. In recognizing and accepting myself, I can move forward.* I no longer felt as though I had to hide and shy away from who I was, and began to recognize and acknowledge the past with openness and acceptance.

My unsteady relationship with my racial identity when I embarked on this study, clouded by feelings of shame and guilt, indicated that I was existing in the conflict/disintegration stage of my racial identity development (Hardiman, 1982; Helms, 1995). As I explored these feelings, I felt this blanket of shame begin to lift, and my aesthetic preferences and BK/BP towards certain movement qualities broaden. Progressing into the pro-minority/anti-racism phase, and ultimately the redefinition/integration phase, I came to recognize my body as a place of home, and could approach the feelings of shame and guilt with compassion.

Limitations

As I illustrate my findings of how I used my embodied power in an ethical and intentional way as a dance/movement therapist, it is important to remain aware of and honest about the limitations of this study. By utilizing a self-study methodology, this project was essentially a one-sided conversation. I remained aware of and grounded in the RCT framework in order to incorporate relational aspects into this project, yet by exploring myself, a piece of the relationship was inherently unreachable. This was an intentional decision, as I felt it was necessary to attune to myself before exploring myself in relationship, yet this limited the extent to which I was able to explore other’s SMIFT experience as I explored my embodied power, or other’s SMIFT experience as they explored their own embodied power. Furthermore, this study spanned a total of five weeks, limiting the amount of content and themes which could arise. Achieving a fully developed racial identity was never the

intent of this study and could not be achieved in five weeks. Racial identity development may span years or decades for an individual, and is a spiral-shaped process that is recursive, not final (Hardiman, 1982; Helms, 1995), and the intent of this pilot study was to begin to increase my racial awareness and start to explore my culturally and racially informed embodied power and privilege. Finally, throughout this study I became aware that my sex/gender as a female is an element of my identity, and it may be difficult to separate the areas of my identity that are related to race/culture from those that are related to sex/gender, and the privileges that accrue from them. This study did not address gender identity development, or the intersectionality of one's various identifiers, which limited the applicability of the findings.

Clinical Application

This journey is applicable to any therapists who wish to increase their awareness of their embodied power—how they experience their ability to create change on a kinesthetic level—and how to use that power with regards to ethics, and with intention. Engaging in an exploration of one's embodied power may serve to increase awareness of and broaden their movement preferences, as well as increase awareness of one's relationship to themselves as a racial being. As dance/movement therapists continue to utilize RCT in their work with clients, it will be important for them to explore how this theoretical framework influences them within the therapeutic relationship. Finally, this study highlighted the importance of attending to one's racial identity, primarily for young clinicians from various cultural majority groups. For dance/movement therapists, working in a field rooted in White culture, headed by predominantly White clinicians (Chang, 2009; Evan, 1991; Manning, 1993; Schoop, 1974; Schweiters, 1993; Stuart, 2012), it is necessary to continue to explore one's own racial identity development, so as not to re-enact oppression in the therapeutic movement relationship. One must be open to engaging in ongoing, introspective exploration of their own power and privilege to understand how these elements may be utilized ethically and intentionally.

Future Research

As scholars continue to research the topic of embodied power and privilege, they might attempt a larger dance/movement therapy study, using authentic movement in a group setting and drawing participants/co-researchers from culturally diverse backgrounds to engage in racial identity development stages. Engaging in collaborative exploration of the stages of racial identity development, a larger group of researchers/participants could explore how these stages, and individual development through these stages, affect relationship. This may also allow clinicians to explore how the manifestation of embodied power within the therapeutic relationship is experienced.

Further research could include the codification of a training curriculum for those looking to increase their self-awareness of their embodied power and privilege. Joi Gresham developed a model titled *The Dance of the Ancestors* that involved

participants imagining and moving symbolically of their ancestors, and invited participants to engage in racial identity development through dance (Chang, 2009). Mirroring this model, methods to re-discover the body as home could be developed (in this case, self-touch was utilized), increase ownership of the past, and unlock a full movement repertoire utilizing choice. This could be a collaborative, open training, or could be transformed into a structured movement training.

Conclusions

I embarked on this research study to explore if and how I may use my embodied power in an ethical and intentional way as a dance/movement therapist, and how the RCT informs how I experience my embodied power. My aesthetics as a White clinician were expressed through my SMIFT experience, and my BK/BP, influenced by my culture and upbringing, was challenged and transformed throughout this journey. These aesthetics were monumental in leading me towards my results, as they formed and shaped the lens through which I viewed my identity, and my embodied power.

By exploring embodied power through authentic movement with a research consultant, I engaged in a journey of self-acceptance and ownership of history, ultimately arriving at a broader range of movement potential and options. Initiated by an intense desire to make peace with the shame and guilt I felt, gentle self-touch became a movement theme, which led me to re-discover my body as a place of home. Throughout this journey, I was able to transform my initial feelings of shame, guilt, and self-doubt into areas of strength that I can draw from and utilize as a clinician.

The RCT elements of relational authenticity, connection/disconnection, and relational empowerment revealed themselves throughout this journey as well. As I increased my self-acceptance, I came to a place of comfortability with my authentic self. The connections/disconnections present as I struggled to achieve ownership over the history of oppression and social injustice that precedes me ultimately pushed me to explore my feelings of guilt and shame, and use this history to give me increased intention. The relational empowerment felt when one can trust oneself to engage in relationships with people who are different from them developed as a result of this growing self-acceptance.

Reflecting on my journey, I realized that I had undergone a crucial transformation in my racial identity. Unaware of my Whiteness for the majority of my life thus far, I was unprepared for the intense feelings of guilt and shame that would emerge as I became further acquainted with my embodied power and privilege. Transitioning from conflict with my race, to putting immense blame on the world, to accessing a redefined embodied experience of what it meant to be White, I went through a journey of realigning with my body and recognizing my body as a place of home and safety.

For years I had rejected who I was and my various cultural identifiers, yet in order to truly utilize those identifiers, I had to make peace with them, and redefine how I existed as a White clinician. I had been flooded with guilt and shame, and to

achieve the self-trust necessary to authentically enter in to relationship with others, I had to expand my movement potential and recognize the choices that were available of how I existed in and utilized my body. I arrived at a state where I felt I could use my embodied power ethically and intentionally as a dance/movement therapist by remaining oriented in theoretical frameworks that aligned with my current worldview as a clinician and allowing myself to undergo a process of racial identity development. To continue using my embodied power ethically and intentionally, it will be necessary to continue exploring theoretical frameworks that align with my worldview, as well as ones that challenge my worldview. Exploring a variety of theoretical frameworks will help me to further understand how these frameworks influence my experience of embodied power and privilege. It will also be necessary to continue being a student of myself and my cultural/racial influences. This aligns with the final stage of racial identity development, which concludes that when individuals reach this stage, they are more open to acquiring new knowledge about themselves (Hardiman, 1982; Helms, 1995). This study has highlighted interventions that can be used to navigate and utilize embodied power and privilege whether one is an emerging or seasoned clinician.

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Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of interest The author states that the author has no conflict of interest.

Appendix 1: Definition of Terms

Aesthetics “The discriminating appreciation of qualities reflected in form” (Hervey, 2000, p. 93); one’s preferences of how they see and make art (Hervey, 2000).

Authenticity Authenticity is displayed within a relationship when each participant is able to accurately share her or his insights, emotions, and life experiences, (Jordan, 2010), and reflects an honest, intentional sharing of these insights, emotions, and life experiences to promote the growth and development of the individual and the relationship (Purgason, Janee, Cashwell, Jordan, & Reese, 2014).

Body-knowledge How one understands and make sense of movement based on their cultural and social experiences (Moore & Yamamoto, 2012).

Body-prejudice The connotation (positive or negative) one gives to movement they observe (Moore & Yamamoto, 2012).

Color blindness An outlook, often harnessed by White individuals, where race is minimized or ignored (Brown, 1999; Gushue & Constantine, 2007; Stuart, 2012).

Connections/disconnections Connection is an interaction that involves mutuality, emotional accessibility, and the five good things (see Appendix 1), while disconnection usually involves disappointment and feeling misunderstood (Jordan, 2010).

Culture The influences of individuals’ upbringings (nature and nurture) that influence their personal identity, including the power and privilege they both hold

and have been subjected to (Chang, 2009; Dosamantes-Beaudry, 1997; Hervey & Stuart, 2012; Smith, 2008).

Embodied "Attending 'with' and attending 'to' the body" (Csordas, 1993, p. 138); intersubjective understanding through lived-body experiencing (Gendlin, 1962; Hervey, 2007).

Embodied experience One's embodied experience is the kinesthetic lens through which one interprets and makes meaning of one's experiences (Meekums, 2006). All embodied experiences are informed and dependent upon one's culture (Meekums, 2006).

Embodied power For this study, embodied power is defined as one's felt-experience, on a kinesthetic level, of one's personal power (ability to create change), as informed by Schubert (2005), Ivey et al. (2012), Meekums (2006), and Miller (1986).

Ethical For this study, "ethical" is defined as abiding by the American Dance Therapy Association (ADTA) Code of Ethics (American Dance Therapy Association, 2015).

Five good things Outcomes of engagement in growth-fostering relationships: an increased sense of zest or energy; increased understanding of self/other/relationship; an overall improved sense of personal worth; an increased ability to be productive; and a desire for more connection (Jordan, 2010; Miller, 1976).

Identity "How we name and describe who we are to others" (Caldwell, 2016, p. 220).

Intentional For this study, "intentional" is defined as meaningful use for the sole purpose of therapeutic gains and personal growth for the client/therapeutic relationship between client and therapist, as informed by the ADTA Code of Ethics Sects. 1.1 (fundamental respect for the clients) and 1.4 (professional role boundaries) (American Dance Therapy Association, 2015).

Mutual empathy The experiences that occur when a listener shows that she or he has been affected by the experiences of the other (Ivey et al., 2012).

Perceived mutuality "The ability to maintain a sense of self, yet be open to the change experiences that emerge from relating to other," (Lenz, 2016, p. 416), which can lead to greater levels of trust and respect within relationship (Lenz, 2016).

Power For this study, power is defined as a personal force that may be accessed and enhanced through mutual relationship with others, which moves us towards collaborative growth and empowerment, and enables us to create change, as informed by Schubert (2005), Ivey et al., (2012), and Miller (1986).

Power-over The historical use of power for domination and personal gain (Fay, 2011). Social order is viewed as hierarchical; institutional processes are paternalistic; relationship is pedagogical; and interventions are corrective and punitive (Fay, 2011).

Power-with Anti-oppressive use of power (Fay, 2011). Social order is viewed as unjust; institutional processes are aimed towards solidarity; relationships are mutual and dialogic; and interventions take the form of advocacy and political action (Fay, 2011).

Power-within Modern use of power (Fay, 2011). Social order is viewed as egalitarian; institutional processes aim for individualism; relationships are neutral

and professionally distant; and interventions take the form of counseling and personal support (Fay, 2011).

Privilege An immunity or special right granted to a specific group of people, which is assumed, normalized, unchallenged (Brown, 1999; Dubois, 1992; Evans & Foster, 2000; Gushue & Constantine, 2007; Haggerty, 2009; Helms, 1990; Hickey & Austin, 2009; Hughey, 2010; Leuwerke, 2005; McDermott & Samson, 2005).

Relational-authenticity A conceptual dimension of growth fostering relationships according to the RCT framework (Lenz, 2016). "The capacity to bring one's real experience, feelings, and thoughts into relationship, with sensitivity and awareness to the possible impact on others of one's actions" (Jordan, 2010, p. 101).

Relational awareness For this study, "relational awareness" is defined as the conscious recognition of one's relational images, and the understanding that these images form the basis of one's current interactions and relationships with others, as informed by Ivey et al. (2012), Jordan (2010), and Purgason et al. (2014).

Relational-cultural theory (*RCT*) A therapeutic framework, born out of the feminist counseling and therapy movement, which includes key concepts such as mutual empathy, relational awareness, connections and disconnections, relational images, and authenticity (Ivey et al., 2012; Purgason et al., 2014).

Relational empowerment "The degree to which individuals trust themselves to be different from others, while also recognizing that growth is a possible outcome of conflict when authentic relating and creative action are present" (Lenz, 2016, p. 416).

Relational images The past experiences and relationships that color and influence how one perceives the world currently (Jordan, 2009; Miller, 1986).

Whiteness Denotes the attributes associated with being a racially White person (Brown, 1999; Dubois, 1992; Evans & Foster, 2000; Gushue & Constantine, 2007; Haggerty, 2009; Helms, 1990; Hickey & Austin, 2009; Hughey, 2010; Leuwerke, 2005; McDermott & Samson, 2005; Stuart, 2012).

White guilt "A collective mindset, feeling, or behavior associated with being racially White" (Stuart, 2012, p. 9), that often results in racially White people averting responsibility for racist acts due to sense that they had no role in constituting the superiority of Whiteness (Haggerty, 2009; Stuart, 2012).

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