

Embodiment as Self-Care in Activist Movements

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Embodied experience can be achieved through acknowledging our unique physical experience, mindfulness, and self-acceptance. Embodied practice may include meditation, yoga, and dance among other physical experiences that celebrate mind-body connection. Embodied practice creates the potential for a unifying perspective and it can inspire new ways for activists to participate in community outreach, sisterhood, and self-care.

My research examined dance practice as the medium for embodied practice.

Embodied movement is conducive for promoting physical group meet ups, such as dance groups or yoga, which can allow people to reconnect with their physical selves in a community setting. This provides a low-pressure social environment that is appealing to those who may not have been ready to join a more traditional activist meet up. Meditating, yoga, and dance continue to be popular activities, especially for the millennial generation. For example, pairing embodied practice (such as a meditation session) with an intentional feminist discussion could reach a wider audience than a feminist discussion meet up alone. Embodiment may benefit current social movements with its benefits on stress reduction and well-being. Embodied movement has a unique benefit that is unprecedented in traditional social movement organizing. It naturally counters the burnout that many social activists experience over the course of committing to social change movements.



Figure 1. Photo by geralt. Used under CCO.

Highlights

Embodied practice invites people to become informed by their bodies, attuned to their physical needs and experiences, and accepting of their natural selves.

Embodied practice promotes a sense of sisterhood and community.

Embodied practice reconnects women with a sense of autonomy and ownership over their bodies.

Embodied practice promotes overall well-being and can be used to support self-care.

Methods and Results

The scope of my research focused on millennial generation women who qualified as trained dancers. I conducted a qualitative study that included the analysis of ten prompt-response journals of female dancers between the ages of 25-31. The results of the study indicated that embodied practices helped reconnect these dancers' sense of identity and self with their physical bodies. My research findings support previous research suggesting that embodiment promotes overall well-being for women.

What Does This Mean For?

Research and Evaluation— My study indicated that embodied practice increased confidence, a sense of autonomy, and a bonded sisterhood between women who practice together. Future research should continue to examine how our physical selves are influencing and reacting to our ever-changing contexts.

Social Action— Embodied practice, usually filled with exhilarating exercise, is fun and easily shared in group settings. Social activists carry the heavy weight of issues that often take generations to resolve. This kind of lifelong commitment begs for strategies that promote self-care and fun along the way. Social activism needs to continue pulling out of the theoretical world into the tangible, physical world to allow it to be truly accessible to all people.

People Working in Settings Similar to Yours— Embodied practices can and should be used in settings that call for open dialogues. This perspective can be used to supplement other forms of communication, self-expression, and understanding.

HOW DID A COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY PERSPECTIVE INFORM YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE ISSUES, RESULTS, AND IMPLICATIONS?

The community psychology perspective oriented my research to the applicability of how my findings can support community-level wellness and development. Rather than focusing on how embodiment impacts the individual alone, my research showed how community interactions, social support, and peer role modeling impacted the participant's sense of her womanhood.

The embodiment construct insists that every person is attuned to their unique, personalized perspective in their own bodies. This awareness of our physical differences and how they intersect with our contexts promotes the celebration of our diversities by acknowledging their importance.

For more information:

Unpublished Research available through the Penn State Harrisburg Library under Thesis/Dissertation, Espenshade 2017, or by contacting me directly at kme5346@psu.edu

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