



# The potential of dance: Reducing fashion consumption through movement therapy

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## ABSTRACT

Fashion is one of the elements contributing to human phenomena such as self-concept, social interaction, and cross-cultural communication. Despite the significance of this reality however the link between the consumption of fashion and its lack of sustainability in relation to natural resources is one of ongoing concern. To investigate how large-scale changes in consumption can be encouraged, this paper explores the theoretical potential of dance as a replacement for the emotive person-product relationship related to the fast rate of fashion consumption, an exchange that would not disable essential functions such as expressive self-concept, social interaction, and cross-cultural communication.

By refocusing the means of self-expression from material products to gestures and movement, dance and dance/movement therapy can help individuals resist the impulsive and compulsive consumption promoted by the fashion industry. This study identifies a potential for dance and dance movement therapy to reduce an individual's dependence on material goods for self-expression. Further research is needed to develop and evaluate practical implementation of place, scale, and longevity. In addition, research methods need to be developed to evaluate the effectiveness of different dance methods.

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## 1. Fashion's two faces

Fashion has many negatives and many positives, and since one of its most troubling hallmarks is over-consumption in fashion consumer culture, the challenge then is to divert or replace the negative while still enabling the positive aspects associated with fashion's socio-cultural functions.

From a socio-psychological perspective, clothing and other possessions are central to the interactive process between environment and self in developing individual identity (Flugel, 1976; Rochberg-Halton, 1984; Belk, 1988) and building self-esteem (Allport, 1937). In this process fashion objects provide an environment in which the self is constituted by being continuously reflected (Rochberg-Halton, 1984). Here fashion performs the simultaneous social functions of distinguishing oneself from others as well as providing connection to others in both simple and complex ways (Simmel, 1905; Giddens, 1991). From a linguistic perspective, fashion has thus been classified as a medium (Barthes, 1983) through associating symbols with cultural categories and also as a function by constructing new cultural categories and new

meanings (McCracken, 1986).

Fashion is also associated with negative sustainable relationships to natural and cultural resources (Dobers and Strannegard, 2005; Li et al., 2014; Boström and Micheletti, 2016). For example, while identity construction through objects is linked to building self-esteem, appearance-related self-esteem is often seen as an indicator of deeper insecurities and lack of self-confidence connected to anxiety and depression (Arnold, 2001; Clark and Miller, 2002; Conseur et al., 2008; Claes et al., 2016). Research also shows links between neuroticism and materialism as well as fashion interest and compulsive buying behavior (Park and Burns, 2005; Johnson and Attmann, 2009). While fashion consumption functions as a reparative effort in a disrupted self/self-object bond, it can also result in an experience of emptiness and loss of social connectedness (Krueger, 1988; Pieters, 2013). Politically, fashion not only powerfully embodies the wearers' economic and political freedom but also embodies the lack of freedom through political control and dictated dress codes (Paulicelli, 2002). Economically, health and safety issues in factories, forced labor, child labor, low minimum wages, anti-union policies, and related problems are pressing issues (Emmelhainz and Adams, 1999; Freise and Seuring, 2015) due to the fast globalization of trade during the past decades, (Gereffi, 1999; Laudal, 2010), a doubled clothing production

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between 2000 and 2014 (Cobbing and Vicaire, 2016), and the waste of a considerable amount of raw material (Niinimäki and Hassi, 2011; Haas et al., 2015).

In consideration of such critical issues, a great deal of attention has been paid to various production aspects. Increasingly however more studies on sustainable approaches to fashion have focused on consumer aspects (Niinimäki, 2010; Spangenberg et al., 2010; Bray et al., 2011; Joy et al., 2012). In this paper I will continue to focus on the consumption aspects of fashion by exploring the theoretical potential of the hypothesis: *Dance has the promise of reducing the negative aspects promoted by fashion consumer culture while still enabling the positive aspects associated with fashion's socio-cultural functions.*

*dance → increased self control/decreased depression → decreasing consumption of clothes*

Motivated by findings in compulsive consumption behavior, where the challenge is no longer argued to be the conceptualization of general approaches (Darrat et al., 2016), and intervention theory (Argyris, 1970) this paper explores the theoretical potential of dance and dance movement therapy as a practical remedy for overriding the dependence on fashion-conditioned consumer goods while still acknowledging the significance of fashion as a central cultural function. In addition, research also suggests that the reduction of impulsive and compulsive buying tendencies may be related to the acquisition of new consumer skills that strengthen a consumer's self-control (Hoch and Loewenstein, 1991; Baumeister, 2002; Vohs and Faber, 2007; Achtziger et al., 2015; Lades, 2014). The particular reason for exploring dance then is based on its fundamental similarities with fashion in terms of its psychosocial expressive functions and body movements and gestures as central functions in emotional and cognitive processes (Wallbott, 1998; Brown et al., 2006; Shikanai, 2013). The method for exploring this hypothesis is to synthesize findings from consumer culture and dance/dance movement therapy and to offer theoretical understandings into shared fundamental conditions in order to demonstrate an alternative approach for reducing consumption of material goods in self-fashioning practices.

## 2. Dance intervention

In general terms, dance may be explained as the balance, understanding, and coordination of the body; dance movement therapy then is the use of movement and dance for emotional, cognitive, social, behavioral, and physical conditions (Balgaonkar, 2010). Dance itself can be defined as “purposeful, intentionally rhythmical, and culturally patterned sequences of non-verbal body movements other than ordinary motor activities” that usually involves “sight, sound, touch, smell, and kinesthetic feeling” (Hanna, 1995: 323). More particularly, however, dance as a medium can express mood (Pollick et al., 2001), constitute a sense of self and individual personality (Koppensteiner and Grammer, 2010), and hold human groups together through coordinated rhythmic movement and the shared feelings it evokes (McNeill, 1995). Studies also show that subjectively felt affective states can be detected in spontaneous dance movements whereas relatively subtle experienced affective states are reflected in the ways people move (Saarikallio et al., 2013). As such, dance can influence self-concept, other central cultural meanings such as emancipative-oriented freedom of expression (self-expression values) (Inglehart

and Welzel, 2005), and one's sense of well-being (Kim and Sherman, 2007; Hajdu and Hajdu, 2016). In addition, dance and perhaps especially dance movement therapy may positively affect some of the moods and emotional conditions intimately linked to contemporary consumer society in which fashion is a key driver. Such conditions include (1) loss of control – related to impulsive shopping conditioned by marketing, loss of financial control mechanisms, and increased access through e-tailing (Roberts and Sepulveda, 1999; Neuner et al., 2005); (2) anxiety and depression – related to the gap between the promise of consumption's perfect pleasure and the disappointments of reality, resulting in addictive buying behavior where products function as feel-good medicines (Campbell, 1987; Pieters, 2013); and (3) negative body image and

low self-esteem – related to the normative culturally and industrial-determined pressures about appearance (Swami et al., 2010; Pompper, 2010).

## 3. Consumer culture and failed self-control

Failure of self-control is an important cause of impulsive purchasing; impulsive buying occurs in conditions where spontaneous desires to have a product emerge (Rook, 1987; Baumeister, 2002). Moreover impulse shopping is found to have a primary link to compulsive buying behavior (Sansone et al., 2013), which is defined as a cognitive and practical preoccupation with buying experienced as intrusive and uncontrollable, occurring repetitively or frequently, and with negative consequences (Faber, 2004). Compulsive buying often results in buying more than what one can afford or buying items that are not needed or shopping for longer periods of time than intended (McElroy et al., 1994; Williams and Grisham, 2011). This kind of buying is also used to compensate for other unmet needs and desires (Williams and Grisham, 2011). A clear connection has also been found between self-control, compulsive buying tendencies, and debt (Achtziger et al., 2015). In other words, impulsive and compulsive consumption is a compensation strategy for lack of self-control (Faber, 2004) as the buyer focuses on materialistic values as a means of gaining control and security.

In principle, self-control refers to efforts to override or alter one's instinctive and spontaneous response by interrupting undesired buying behaviors, temptations, and bad habits through self-discipline (Baumeister et al., 1994; Baumeister, 2002). This psychological function however is severely disabled by the strong emphasis on aesthetic immersion in postmodern consumer culture, the growing pressure of advertising, and the lifting of restrictions on borrowing money (Neuner et al., 2005; Economist, 2015). The result, as Fletcher (2015) concludes, is that consumerist fashion is locked into a cycle of self-justification, creating the very conditions by which it becomes both dominant and credible. Pieters (2013) describes this phenomenon as a “loneliness loop” that only works to make consumers more depressed and therefore more prone to emotional impulses to acquire more things to fill the experienced void. In relation to this seemingly vicious cycle, Hartston finds impulsive and compulsive buying “a prevalent problem involving hyperstimulation, sometimes unintentional and repeated over-indulgence despite negative consequences, deception, and self neglect” (2012:67). This understanding leads Hartston to suggest

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