Madeline Despres-Chen

Housatonic, MA
Dance, Psychology
Thesis Advisor: Wendy Shifrin

The Physical and Psychological Benefits of Dance Movement Therapy

Movement is instinctual and we do it every day, yet it is my belief that people are generally quite disconnected from their bodies, both emotionally and psychologically. A famous quote of Martha Graham's, told to her by her doctor father is, "…the body does not lie," and from my own personal experience I find this passage to be true. How we feel both physically and psychologically can be seen in the way we carry ourselves. Whether one's shoulders are hunched or one's posture is low and dragging, these various behaviors and movement patterns are often symptoms of physical and psychological states. Through a dance therapy context one can learn and correct unhealthy movement patterns as well as learn about one's emotional states.

For my thesis I would like to do research on DMT (dance movement therapy), focusing mainly on the history of the field and what dance therapy actually entails. Furthermore, I will be undergoing the process personally with a local registered and licensed dance therapist. In doing so, I will be able to compare and contrast my research with my own experience of dance therapy.

I would also like to compliment my experience of dance as therapy with dance as technique. My passion for dancing has inspired me to incorporate the art of dance into my thesis along with the study of its use in therapy. Thus, throughout the semester I will be supplementing what dance courses I have already taken, or am currently taking at Simon's Rock, by attending regular ballet classes at both the Pulse and the Cantarella School of Dance, in Pittsfield.