

## **Revisiting Theories in Dance in context with Art, Embodiment, Social Cohesion**

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### **Abstract**

The study of dance through the lens of embodiment and culture is a fascinating and complex field of research. This research topic stems from my interest in the Kathak dance form and my experience as a dancer. This exploration of culture through dance is a multifaceted process involving a holistic approach to understanding the relationship between cultural norms and movement. It is a valuable form of expression and a powerful way to understand how culture is sustained and communicated across generations. By examining the various intersections between culture and dance, we can gain insight into how the two interact and inform each other. The research is conducted in the city of London, with an ethnographic approach to the data collection. This study outlines the research questions, the rationale for the choice of the research field, the method, and the choice of dance style. This analysis serves as the foundation for the research and provides the context for exploring the embodied practices of Kathak dance.

### **Introduction**

Dance is a form of social manifestation. By analyzing various aspects of Dance, it is easy to understand the different characteristics of a society. Dance is a specialized form of body movement that represents human culture. Dance is a specialized art movement. (Pusnik, 2010). In an ancient Sanskrit text about the codification of Indian performing Dance, Dance is defined as "a combination of not only the movements of the body but also of the hands and facial expressions accompanied by music" (Pai, 2020). For a long time, humans established a connection between Dance and the representation of their society. Dance has remained a source of representing social needs, yearning, transformation, beliefs, and religions. In the present time, Dance has still been a form of cultural representation (Medina et al., 2008). Bodily movements have a long and old history. Body movements have been used for communication since the dawn of humanity. In ancient times, humans made unique corporal

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movements on harvest, fertilization, happiness, and fun. Later, they made dance a tool of connection between God and humans. In this way, a religious element is attached to dance. At first, Dance was an emotional overflowing of thoughts and disorderly display of fears, affection, ire, and refusal, without any other particular organization. Later, it took the form of a magical charm, rite, ceremony, popular celebration, and finally, merely fun. Now it has come to a stage of theatrical artistic Dance (Medina et al., 2008). In dance history, the first known dancer was from the French court, Louis IV. Pierre de Beauchamps a person who first codified the Dance and established the first dancing school (Medina et al., 2008). A significant interest in dance anthropology was expressed in the 1960s and 1970s when scholars such as Adrienne Kaeppler, Joan Kaelinohomoku, Anya Royce, Judith Hanna, and Drid Williams began to emphasize not only the social functions but also the forms and structures of Dance in society (Reed 1998). Viewing both Dance and body as socially constructed entities, these scholars reformulated Dance as a 'culturally constructed movement system' (Clark-Deces, 2011) to understand the 'lived body,' 'processes,' 'functions,' and 'symbolic systems.' Influenced by Boasian cultural relativism, the ethno science of the 1960s, and the ideas of competence and performance derived from the theories of Saussure and Chomsky (Kaeppler, 1991), anthropologists and human movements produced ethnographic dance studies based on ethno scientific structuralism (Kaeppler, 1967; 1978), semiotics theory (Williams, 1981), and psychobiological dance theories (Hanna, 1979) and all these viewed dances as a "system of communication." Although Dance has been explored in anthropology, its understanding from the sociological perspective still lacks investigation (Helen, 1995). Today, there is a need to reassert this nonverbal interest to the extent that the difference between dancers and dance thinkers disappears. Suppose any sociology of Dance is to flourish and have relevance today. In that case, it is vital to stress the connection between sociological theory and practice and sociologists' practice and social application of Dance (Brinson, 1980). Dance emanates the difference between verbal and non-verbal communication and communicators; therefore, it becomes a fundamental task of a sociologist to examine non-verbal communication in our society. According to Peter Brinson, the sociology of Dance merely acquires a defender of the nonverbal communicators, asked to explain themselves verbally as modern education leaves no choice but words. Hence, it is evident that the subject of Dance still needs to find its place in sociology. The interpretation of dance experience, its beauty, and its meanings as a non-verbal dialogue- between dancers, between dancers and teachers, between dancers and audience makes Dance interesting,

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valuable, and an area that needs to be seen primarily in social sciences, especially sociology. Therefore, the significance of non-verbal communication in society, what is communicated without words, and how society looks at the Dance is what sociologists must learn to measure and understand (Brinson, 1980). Brinson argues that given the uniqueness of Dance, sociological research must be distinct, fitting the essence of Dance while investigating and integrating dance research into sociological discourse. The sociology of Dance is not sociology alone, nor does it correspond, in its communicative aspect, specifically to the analysis of linguistics. However, this is an enticing link between individual artists, anthropologists, and semioticians. The non-verbal dialogue offered through Dance and its movement differs from what sociology has to contribute to linguistics. Therefore, by embracing Dance of all kinds and the role of art in general, sociology has the potential to evolve its discipline, examining not only how Dance influences society but also how society looks at Dance, globally-community Dance, professional Dance, National Dance, the Dance of the children, of everyone, everywhere. Cancienne and Snowber (2003) argued that dance, choreography compellingly, and everyday movement provides a system of meaningful body movements that can communicate meaningful expressions of knowledge. Blumenfeld-Jones defines Dance as a unique art of motion that allows new dimensions of a phenomenon to become available, the art of attending to motion as meaning in and of itself, not outside itself (Blumenfeld-Jones, 1995). He adds that the dancer/choreographer focuses on the different motion meanings as organized in time, space, and form (Blumenfeld-Jones, 1995). Blumenfeld-Jones (2008) claim that a dancer reflects on the body not merely as a topic of inquiry and gaze but also as a mode of inquiry operating from inside the body. In dance terms, he defined "inside the body" as: "the person functions from the interior workings of the bodily material to understand both the movement being performed and the meaning of the movement within the context of the" topic "of the dance" (p. 176). He acknowledges that Dance could only be well represented in some kinds of research; however, the idea, topic, or abstract symbolic narrative signified by Dance can be considered a meaningful action and treated as text. The rise and fall of the body movement in a space dominated by form and motion represent the concept. The audience is one with the dance text to the degree that they can interpret the movements of the dancing bodies. Fraser (2008), interestingly, observed that while research results are mainly communicated through academic journals and conferences, Dance is accessible to everyone. Perhaps more significant is the reality that individual observations are not usually used to record study findings (Fraser, 2008). Like Boydell (2011), some researchers recognized

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Dance as a powerful tool to communicate subjective experiences. As characterized in her research on early psychosis, she formulated a team consisting of researchers and artists, and dance as a tool for representing data, to create an opportunity for people to be aware of psychosis in a creative manner, and to provoke the general assumptions individuals hold about mental health issues and psychosis.

## **Dance in the Context of Art**

The field of education was the first to embrace research in the arts. In the 1970s, educational scholars started utilizing art critics' and artists' traditions to execute educational research (e.g., Eisner, 1976; Vallance, 1977). Arts research has evolved over the last decade, and many disciplines currently use arts to understand various phenomena. Exposure of educational studies to aesthetics and creative methods of educational study, education arts work in the 1990s has grown to involve narrative writing, autobiography, Dance and movement, theatre, visual arts, painting, literature, poetry, photography, and several others (Sinner, Leggo, Irwin, Gouzouasis & Grauer, 2006). Art can be defined as a complex phenomenon with several definitions; each underlines some specialty of culture in its most general sense, creative production by human beings with an aesthetic value. Art is created to stimulate the human senses, mind, and spirit. Art acts as an incentive for human creativity. The output of an artwork is usually measured by the amount of stimulation it generates. The effects it has on individuals, the number of individuals who may respond to it, the degree to which they appreciate it, and the effect or power or influence it has or has had in the past all add to a 'degree of art.' The arts have played a significant part in our development. Dance has been a channel to represent emotions, empathy, and storytelling through the art of Kathak (Indian Classical Dance), its impact as an art form became transparent, acknowledging the power to captivate the spectators in an artistic experience. The movement consistently enables one to reconcile with themselves, convey feelings, and build a sense in one's life. For centuries, art has been valued and understood as one of the most potent means of expression and communication (Wikstrom, 2000). The arts have been accepted, praised, and acknowledged as a significant influence on most societies (Fraser & Sayah, 2011). The definition of the arts is an existing grey area with no concrete definition. Many individuals from diverse settings, traditions, and scholarly fields have various interpretations of what comprises the arts. According to the Oxford Dictionary, arts are referred to as "the different divisions of artistic expressions, such as drawing, poetry, literature and dance" ("Oxford Dictionaries," n.d.). The contemporary body of literature using arts in research argues that some of the qualities linked with aesthetic

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media act as a catalyst for self-expression, emotions, feelings, and thoughts, which can be helpful in the research process. According to Jones (2006), integrating art forms into the research process formulates a constructive alternative of representation that encourages communication and shares storytelling due to an induced emotional outlook. This is important, as it "engages audiences beyond the rational and analytical surface of conventional publications to capture the spectrum of human needs" (Lapum, Ruttonsha, Church, Yua, & David, 2011, p.102). Therefore, using arts, such as poetry, film and theatre, Dance, and music, serves as a helpful tool when investigating sensitive research topics and delivering findings that are not easily articulated in words (Fraser & Sayah, 2011), inspiring people to connect with research on a personal and emotional level (Boydell, Gladstone, Volpe, Allemang, & Stasiulis, 2012). After looking into what art is, let us shift to dance as a form of performing art. Dance can provide a unique experience for an artist and also for the audience. Even with the conscious process of choreographing, practicing, performing, and observing, dancers may unknowingly perceive from the society and culture they live in and pass to the audience that they are dancing in front of different kinds of knowledge not be expressed in words. There are more than twenty-five separate senses with independent nerves in the body of a human being, and Dance could involve a broader spectrum of senses than most other forms of artistic activity. Although emotions are conveyed in many types of art by their visual or sound representation, there is a direct expression in Dance. There are a few different ways of seeing Dance: physical, cultural, social, economic, political, and even psychological. However, dance as a communicative activity emphasizes other dance motives and behavior. Dance is a physical instrument or symbol for feeling, even though it is sometimes a more effective medium than verbal language for revealing needs and desires. The dance medium often comes into play when there needs to be a more verbal expression. Through communication, individuals learn a culture – the values, beliefs, attitudes, and behavior a group shares. Nevertheless, humans do not communicate by words alone. Non-verbal behavior, including Dance, pairs with the calculus of meaning (Hanna, 1987:3~5). The 'Hearing Voices' dance was presented to various groups, including scholars, teachers, support agencies, parents, decision leaders, dance choreographers, and the general public. Audience dialogue and engagement were triggered by observing audience responses, regulated post-performance audience discussions, feedback from the audience through post-it notes, and researcher field notes. Analysis of this data suggested that Dance is an effective way to disseminate empirical research findings and increase awareness and understanding of the studied phenomena. Dance also emphasizes the importance

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of artistic qualities and the reflexive impact of the performance. The research team in this study claimed that dance performance enabled them to discuss their work's physical, emotional, and visual dimensions, which are sometimes invisible in conventional academics. Another advantage of Dance is its ability to create an embodied experience, explored further in this paper. To sum up, Boydell (2011) viewed embodiment as an "insightful and multidimensional means of linking body, movement, and force as embodied rhythms of how it is possible to present, to live, to experience, to express and to understand individuals from many viewpoints and in particular contexts" (Boydell, 2011, p.14). He linked the relevance of embodiment to dance by suggesting that knowledge had to do with lived experiences, based on the traditional phenomenological notion of the "lived body" and "lived experiences," as it can explore information physically, mentally, and emotionally. Various studies have also recorded the practice of using Dance to disseminate research results. For example, Markula (2006) documented her dance performances to represent and disseminate feminist research. Through her experiences as a solo contemporary dance performer and choreographer, she recorded this process by implementing the feminist agenda of representing a positive feminine identity. Another example of the use of Dance as dissemination research results can be observed in the investigation of aging, ancestry, and perfection by Liz Lerman's Dance Exchange troupe, exploring the repercussions of knowledge of the human genome through its Dance, *Ferocious Genome* (Jasny & Zahn, 2011). In addition to the examples mentioned above, social issues have also been examined through the implementation of Dance. *The Ghosts of Violence*, performed by the New Atlantic Ballet Theatre in 2011, depicts stories of spousal abuse transformed into the non-verbal language of Dance. The artistic director Igor Dobrovolskiy mentioned that "the arts can make a difference and contribute to social change" (Citron, 2011).

## **Dance in the Context of the Embodiment**

The section discusses the importance of embodied practice as a methodology for the cultural study of Dance. The multiple approaches to embodiment listed are justified because the cultural significance of body movement in Dance can be interpreted in various ways, such as an expression of culture, universal evidence, social value structures, meaning, and thought per se. An epistemological justification can be derived through the methodological shift to embodied practice by suggesting a unique way of understanding Dance and its movements as a cultural phenomenon. Barbara Browning's work explores the cultural aspects of human movement and their understanding through bodily practice. In the last decade, much has been done on

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culturally focused dance research on the importance of embodied practice as a methodology for the cultural study of Dance. Barbara Browning, a Cultural studies scholar, explores the cultural aspects of human movement and their understanding through bodily practice, as she states in her award-winning volume, *Samba*: "For a time, while I lived in Brazil, I stopped writing. I learned to dance. I also learned to pray and to fight – two things I had never felt called upon to do. I did them with my body. I began to think with my body. That is possible and, in the case of Brazilian Dance, necessary. (1995: xxii)" Cynthia Novack's work argues that culture is embodied, and movement constitutes an ever present reality in which we continuously participate. In an ethnographic history, "Sharing the Dance," Cynthia Novack's considerations of the embodiment can be seen like that as Browning's, with a universal outlook and cultural understanding. Novack argues: "Culture is embodied.... Movement constitutes an ever-present reality in which we continuously participate. We perform the movement, invent it, interpret it, and reinterpret it on conscious and unconscious levels. In these actions, we participate in and reinforce culture and create it. (1990: 8)" Most recently, Deirdre Sklar (2000), a dance ethnologist and performance researcher, described a transition towards embodied action as one of two "trajectories" that differentiate modern, culturally-focused human activity work from older, mainstream 20th-century approaches. Briefly, a systematic change or conceptual shift from an emphasis on "objective" research towards an embodied engagement characterizes the leading practice in Dance's contextual and cross-cultural analysis. However, what is called the "cultural" of the movement at stake differs from study to study and is formulated in several ways. Body movement in Dance may be interpreted as an expression of culture, universal evidence, social value structures, meaning, and thought per se. An epistemological justification can be derived through the methodological shift to embodied practice by suggesting a unique way of understanding Dance and its movements as a cultural phenomenon. How and in what way has this shift evolved, and whether it has gained momentum in the sociological understanding of Dance? Therefore, Deirdre Sklar's work describes a transition towards embodied action as one of two "trajectories" that differentiate modern, culturally-focused human activity work from older, mainstream 20th century approaches. In the text *The Andaman Islanders* (1948), Brown interprets the movement in terms of its cultural significance as follows: "Yet, the Dance, even the simple Dance of the Andamans, does make, in the dancer himself, partly by the effect of rhythm, partly by the effect of the harmonious and balanced tension of the muscles, a direct appeal to that motor sense to which the contemplation of beautiful forms and

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movements makes only an indirect appeal. In other words, the dancer feels within himself the harmonious action of balanced and directed forces, which, in contemplating a beautiful form, we feel as though it were in the object. Hence such dancing as that of the Andaman Islanders may be looked upon as an early step in the training of the aesthetic sense, and to recognize all that the Dance means, we must make allowance for the fact that the mental state of the dancer is closely related to the mental state that we call aesthetic enjoyment. (ibid.: 250– 1)." Further, he adds a functionalist interpretation of the movement: "As the dancer loses himself in the Dance, as he becomes absorbed in the unified community, he reaches a state of elation in which he feels filled with energy or force beyond his normal state and finds himself able to perform prodigies of exertion. This state of intoxication, as it may be called, is accompanied by a pleasant stimulation of the self-regarding sentiment so that the dancer feels a great increase in his force and value. At the same time, finding himself in complete and ecstatic harmony with all the fellow members of his community experiences a great increase in his feelings of amity and attachment towards them. In this way, the Dance produces a condition in which the unity, harmony, and concord of the community are at a maximum, and every member intensely feels them. To produce this condition, I maintain that is the primary social function of the Dance. The Dance allows the direct action of the community upon the individual, and we have seen that it exercises in the individual those sentiments by which social harmony is maintained. (ibid.: 252)." Radcliffe-Brown's explanation is insightful as he formulates an observational approach while analyzing movement that identifies the mental and physical characteristics of the participants, which is produced in and through dance movement. However, the understanding of the minds and bodies of the dancers, in his observations, remains abstract, as it focuses more on the felt experiences rather than their visual form. Words sometimes define ideas too carefully, but the visually perceived movement can have many meanings and must have many meanings. Dance has only a small capacity to tell things clearly, without any space for uncertainty. A simple gesture, such as raising the arms from a centered position, can evoke various meanings: joyful prayer, goddess offering a bounty, acceptance of burdens, a plea for universal understanding, or complex and indefinable feelings. Dance is, in its essence, something narrative. Not that all dances tell a story — but all dances are in sequence; they move from one stage to another. As a result, the processes by which they unfold reveal mythical and archetypal narrative structures. Whether the Dance is a story or a series of impressions, the experience of the Dance is essentially a journey. There is a connection between the dancer and her/his audience. This kind of interaction needs no

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words but depiction through movements. Dance used as a form to spread cultural diversity has a significant impact on social interaction, i.e., the dancers' everyday life and establishing an intercultural dialogue between them and their audience. 30 There is a need to explain how Dance is learned, organized, performed, and interpreted by audiences of the society in which it was produced or embraced. Therefore, there is still a need to advance the 'embodiment' understanding to produce an awareness of the movement to integrate the self with self and self with others. Furthermore, it is crucial to comprehend the revelation and integration of culture (s) through dance practices. Culture in movement is interpreted as combining universal dissociates- temporal, spatial, corporeal, and spiritual. To link culture and movements, we must first answer this question: Is dance a part of the culture?

### **Dance, Solidarity, and Social Cohesion: Perspectives from the Work of Durkheim**

The use of dance as a form of social cohesion has been extensively researched within the sociological literature, with many authors using Durkheim's theory of social solidarity. In his book, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Durkheim (1912) argued that dance was an essential form of social solidarity. He suggested that when people were dancing together, they were engaging in a kind of collective effervescence, a process of collective energy and enthusiasm that created a sense of solidarity and connectedness among the dancers. This idea has been developed and extended in more recent sociological literature. For example, Pini (2008) argued that dance could bring people together and create a sense of social cohesion. He argued that by participating in dance, people could connect, create a shared sense of identity, and foster feelings of solidarity. Similarly, Bulley (2009) argued that dance could be used to express shared values and beliefs and to create a sense of group identity and solidarity. In addition to the literature on the use of dance as a form of social cohesion, there is also a body of literature examining how Durkheim's theory of social solidarity has been used in this context. For example, Smillie and Lindholm (2013) argued that Durkheim's theory could be used to explain how dance can foster a sense of solidarity among participants. They argued that when people dance together, they engage in collective effervescence that creates a shared sense of identity and belonging. Similarly, Danna (2016) argued that Durkheim's theory could be used to explain how dance can create a sense of social cohesion. He argued that when people are dancing together, they engage in the form of collective effervescence that creates a shared sense of identity and solidarity.

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### *Social Cohesion*

Social cohesion can be related to social exclusion, social solidarity, and civic management. It is a "characteristic of the social unit; a macro-level concept that refers to the overall state of the social bond within any society, large, medium or small" (Toye, 2007). It is a discussion about strengthening the shared values, social relations, and everyday basis of relating to the world, adhering to a shared sense of identity, belonging, and trust among the members of the society (Jenson, 1998). Stanley's (2003) study defines social cohesion as the ongoing process of developing shared challenges, a community with shared values, and equal opportunity in societies based on the sense of trust, hope, and reciprocity among citizens. He further described socially cohesive societies as populations with sufficient social cohesion to sustain complex social relations (Stanley, 2003). Two political scientists, Dietlind Stolle and Allison Harrel (2014), recommend that social cohesion be defined as "cooperative relationships among the groups and individuals based on norms of reciprocity, equality, and mutual recognition." This picture the three dimensions of social cohesion that Schiefer and Van der Noll (2016) identify in their article as, Orientation towards the common good, sense of belonging, and social relation. They follow a tradition of viewing social cohesion as a characteristic of a gradual and collective phenomenon. Sociologists Edwards, Solomos, Goulbourne, and Cheong (2007, p.39) state that "in the dominant discourse, social cohesion is taken to mean a common national identity built through the development of the shared symbols, shared ceremonies, and shared values," which further focuses on the characteristic of a collective. Social scientist Berger-Schmitt Regina (2000) argues that social cohesion "represents a construct which focuses on the societal quantities such as the strength of social relations or the extent of inequalities and ties within the society." The author concludes that social cohesion helps achieve the two goals of society. The first goal is to reduce social exclusion and inequalities, and the second is to strengthen social interaction, ties, and relations. According to Forrest and Kearns (2000), for a society to be cohesive, "members must share common values and a common set of moral principles and the code of behavior" (Kearns & Forrest, 2000, p.997). By using common values, they support and classify mutual aims, objectives, and codes of behavior. They develop their relationships (Kearns & Forrest, 2000). Awde (2008) explains that the moral code of behavior and principles in society demonstrates the relations of the members of a society and contributes to building support among them. Awde (2008) claims that shared ethics, morals, and ideas bind society together, and these elements grow within the community and achieve the typical way of thinking.

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Hence the members of the community actively participate in achieving the collective goals. (Awde, 2008). Forrest and Kearns (2000) compare social cohesion to the principles of social solidarity. Social cohesion in a society resembles synchronized growth toward common social, economic, and environmental standards (Forrest & Kearns, 2000, p.999). Dance in a particular form of social interaction and embodied dancing movements are non verbal modes of communication. It is a powerful medium to express one's values, beliefs, culture, and thoughts. When studied through the lens of social cohesion, dance can be seen as an activity or practice that brings people together, allowing access for different backgrounds to enter the dance community and accommodating its members with all their differences. In this research, dance is used to identify the levels of social cohesion, the concept of self and others, and social unity produced in general (if any) among dancing bodies from various social backgrounds dancing the same dance.

### **Concluding Remarks**

In conclusion, this analysis provides valuable insights into the cultural transmission of dance practices and the role of embodiment in promoting cultural understanding and social cohesion. It highlights the importance of dance practices in promoting cultural awareness, identity, and personal growth. The research can be relevant not only to sociology and cultural studies but also to the education system. Overall, this analysis has significant implications for promoting cultural understanding and social cohesion, and its interpretations can be used to develop educational programs that incorporate dance practices as a means of embodied learning.

This paper highlights the importance of studying dance through the lens of Sociology to provide a unique perspective on social interaction and cultural expression. By studying dance, Sociologists can gain insights into how social norms and cultural values are transmitted and reinforced. Through the lens of dance, researchers can examine how individuals and groups express themselves, negotiate power dynamics, and create meaning through movement.

The studies on dance in Sociology significantly affect our understanding of culture, identity, and society. For example, studies on the role of dance in the formation of national identity have shown how dance can be used to reinforce and celebrate shared cultural heritage. On the other hand, research on dance as a form of resistance has revealed how marginalized communities have used dance to challenge dominant social norms and assert their cultural identities. Furthermore, the study of

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dance in academia helps to contribute to our understanding of how artistic practices and cultural traditions are transmitted across generations. It highlights the importance of dance as a form of cultural heritage that can connect individuals to their cultural roots and strengthen community bonds. In addition to its contributions to Sociology and academia, the study of dance has broader implications for cultural understanding. It can foster empathy and cross-cultural communication by providing a window into the cultural practices and values of different communities. It can also help us appreciate the diversity of human expression and recognize the universal human desire for creative expression and connection. The study of dance is a valuable and unique field that contributes to our understanding of culture, identity, and society. Its findings have important implications for the broader field of Sociology and cross-cultural understanding and appreciation.

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