

# Hair as a Resource for Women's Empowerment in Dance/Movement Therapy

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Published online: 27 May 2016  
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**Abstract** This article highlights the emotional and symbolic importance of women's hair, and the significance of concentrating on hair within dance/movement therapy (DMT). The way we relate to our hair is affected both by its appearance and by our own self-image. Our hair may be associated not only with youth, beauty, sexuality, spirituality, and strength, but also with immorality or being uncouth. The topics discussed herein originally arose in a course, "My body and I," which this author taught at the Kibbutzim College of Education as part of the program training for dance/movement therapists. Focusing on hair during movement explorations brought back childhood memories for many students. The importance of understanding deeper underlying meanings associated with hair is stressed along with the processes through which DMT may ameliorate the feelings evoked. This article also emphasizes that DMT may enable a change in the way we relate to our hair, our body image, and to our self.

**Keywords** Body and self · Dance/movement therapy · Hair · Processing past experiences · Women's empowerment

## Introduction

Dance is a powerful means of expression, facilitating the experience of such diverse emotions as sadness, anger, and happiness. It is a multi-sensory experience involving all body parts, contributing to a complete sense of self, attained through an emotional release and sense of letting go. Dance anthropologist Judith Hanna explained that "dance is a live moving body in four dimensions" (Hanna, 2014, p.

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xix) and is considered “a language of physical exercise that sparks new brain cells (neurogenesis)” (Hanna, 2015). She further stated that “dancing makes some neurons nimble so that they readily wire into the neural network” (Hanna, 2015), and that “[d]ance ... promotes the growth, maintenance, and plasticity of neurons necessary for learning and memory ... and is a means to help us improve mood” (Hanna, 2015). One interesting example of learning in dance comes through the phenomenon of mirror neurons. Watching movement activates areas of the brain similar to those stimulated during actual dance movements (Gallese, 2008); thus, observation can contribute to learning dance, and the sparking of mirror neurons may have a role in empathy and social learning (Hanna, 2014).

Dance/movement therapy (DMT) evolved from the belief that the body, the mind, and the spirit are interconnected; that dance contributes to the emotional as well as the physical wellbeing of the individual; and that dancing in the presence of an empathetic therapist intensifies the positive effects (ADTA, 2016). All body parts are involved in dance, but the importance of hair in DMT, both in the expression of an individual's identity and as a body part integral to dance/movements, may have been overlooked.

## Social, Cultural, and Psychological Significance of Hair

Hair has played a role in the arts throughout the ages—from Medusa's snakes in Greek mythology through the 1948 film, “The Boy with Green Hair,” and the 1960s musical, “Hair,” with the appearance of hair being highly symbolic in each case. Depictions of flowing, beautiful hair indicate sexual fertility and creativity (Kapacinskas & Robert, 1992). For example, Cadogan Cowper painted many women with flowing hair, including Rapunzel in her tower, while Degas and Titian both painted women combing their Titian-colored hair. Freud dealt with negative associations of hair loss, referring to dreams of baldness and haircuts mainly as symbolic representations of castration (Freud, 1913).

A significant literature has examined attitudes to hair throughout the ages in different cultures, relating to anthropological, social, and psychological aspects. In ancient Egypt both head and facial hair (including beards) served as a code for social status, gender, and age. In the Judeo-Christian scriptures, hair is mostly depicted in terms of man's life as an individual and is associated with the special status of monks or the individual in mourning (Galpaz-Feller, 2004, 2006).

Leach's classic paper (1958) addressed the symbolism communicated by the treatment of head hair across different cultures with its abundance or absence often a symbolic marker of social or spiritual power. He suggested that short or gathered hair may represent castration or repressed sexuality. Hallpike (1969) further suggested that short hair among men is a sign of social conformity.

Synott (1987) deemed hair not only part of ethnography, but of immense physical and symbolic theoretical significance, and maintained that a strong affinity exists between the physical body and the social persona in terms of gender and ideology. He further claimed that hair was and remains a political declaration, and as such is not only a political symbol, but is in itself political (Synott, 1987). In his review,

Synott also deals with the general social significance of hair, the differences between the sexes, with women identifying with their hair more than men, and with contemporary changes in this regard in North America and Britain. For women, hair may affect both inner wellbeing and behavior, with feelings of insecurity and rejection sometimes being transferred onto the hair.

Weitz (2001) emphasized the social and political significance of female hair, seeing it as a resource available to women. Weitz (2004) quotes one interviewee as stating that a “bad hair day often turns into a bad day altogether” (p. 676). Such bad-hair days are often associated with rainy days when on top of the mood being depressed on dreary grey days, all efforts of straightening or styling hair may be undone by the rain. A good hairstyle may lift our mood and our body image, with the way we relate to hair demonstrating the interaction and inseparability of body and mind—a central axiom in the work of dance/movement therapists, which will be addressed below.

Most people have internalized the idea that there is a difference in desirability between different types of hair (Tannhauser-Kedar, 1977). Many works have addressed the social, psychological, and cultural implications of hair and beauty for women across different cultures (Bell, 2007; Craig, 2006; Hirschman, 2002; Jha, 2016). Wolf (2013) maintains that as women have gained increased social power and prominence, they are increasingly expected to adhere to rigid standards of physical beauty. Craig’s (2006) examination of women’s journals supports an increasing emphasis on physical beauty, reporting that in the nineteenth century young women were less focused on outer beauty, but that throughout the twentieth century increased marketing pressure had resulted in more critical assessment of every aspect of physical appearance. She protests against a singular beauty standard enforced by the male gaze. These types of beauty standards, including the use of accepted hairstyling, have particular implications for African–American women at home and abroad (Chapman, 2007).

Bell (2007) presented a comprehensive account of the literature addressing the significance of hair in black women’s lives. While the cultural and political background was presented in relation to a particular legal case, there are wider economic and political implications, since black women have faced numerous dilemmas relating to the natural or styled appearance of their hair (Jha, 2016). Patton (2006) discusses the salience of the effects of beauty, body image, and hair, challenging the hegemonic white standards of beauty for American women in general and African–American women in particular.

Thompson (2008) further explains that while most women can relate to agonizing over how to wear their hair, there are certain issues that are experienced differently in particular communities including the African–American community. While living in Africa, black women’s hairstyles had indicated social or marital status, or they were associated with religion, wealth or rank in a community. However, once slavery took the women to America, hair color and texture had completely different implications. As black women’s natural hair still is associated with the stigmas of slavery, various techniques and accessories have been developed to change its

appearance. These chemical and physical treatments take their toll on the women's health. Thompson (2008) opines that these treatments continue to be predicated on the belief that nappy, kinky, Afro hair is wrong, and long, straight, (i.e. white and Asian) hair is right. Patton (2006) further examines how differences in body image, skin color, and hair haunt the existence and psychology of black women. Brewington (2013) recounts that black women have been altering the natural textures of their hair since 1808 in order to fit dominant European standards, believing that their societal value in this world is solely based on appearance.

Both Brewington (2013) and Owens Patton (2006) quote Caldwell (1991) who wrote:

I want to know my hair again, the way I knew it before I knew that my hair is me, before I lost the right to me, before I knew that the burden of beauty—or lack of it—for an entire race of people could be tied up with my hair and me. Before I knew that my hair could be wrong—the wrong color, the wrong texture, the wrong amount of curl or straight. Before hot combs and thick grease and smelly—burning lye, all guaranteed to transform me, to silken the coarse, resistant wool that represents me. I want to know once more the time before I denatured, denuded, denigrated, and denied my hair and me. (p. 365)

Hallpike (1969) claimed that in many societies hairiness is associated with animal-like characteristics, representing untamed nature before the process of socialization, giving the biblical examples of men described as hairy, such as Esau, who was a hunter, and Samson, who had great physical strength. In many societies, women in particular, are expected to remove bodily hairs and make sure that head hair is tied back or covered in order to repress these associations with our animal derivation. In these societies, braided hair reflects modesty and restraint in young girls. Sociological and anthropological studies show that changes are made to hair at such major rites of passage<sup>1</sup> as engagement, marriage, and during mourning. For example, Yemenite Jewish women used to braid into plaits the hair of women before their marriage, loosening these gradually during the seven days before the “Henna” ceremony (engagement), with the bride's hair thus being curled in a ritual dance (Pardess, 1995).

In the marriage ceremonies of traditional Libyan Jewish women, they fan their long hair backwards, loosening their braids opposite a bowl of water, which serves as a charm against the evil eye. The ritual of braiding and unravelling the braided hair is based on the belief that the devil may tie up the young couples reproductive organs causing them to become infertile.

Hindu women cover their hair after marriage. Religiously observant or ultra-orthodox Jewish women give up their long hair, or at least cover it, when they get married. This is to demonstrate that they have undertaken the obligations of married life, accepting social norms including the suppression of their sensuality (Bilu, 2006).

<sup>1</sup> For black women hair straightening represented a rite of passage, see Bilu, 2006.

## Hair in Dance/Movement Therapy

Understanding the essence, complexity, and cultural associations of hair enables the therapist to understand the unique nature of the person in front of them, and therefore to normalize, universalize, and categorize different phenomena within the appropriate cultural contexts. Pardess (1995) a well-known Israeli dance/movement therapist, tells the story of ‘E’ who took part in a treatment group:

During one of the sessions ‘E’ joined a circle of women moving, and gyrated, following her head as if in a trance ... Her long hair was hanging down backwards wrapped in brightly colored cloths. She mumbled words in Arabic and shook her head in an accelerating rhythm, faster and faster. ‘E’s dance and rhythmic movement fascinated the other women in the group. The dance was cathartic for her and for the group who were able to make a normative association with behaviour that they at first had considered possibly psychotic and objectionable. Without recognizing and understanding cultural and social codes the therapist may interpret normal ritualistic behaviour as something not understandable, bizarre or pathological. (Pardess, 2000, p. 22)

However, in modern times, many aspects of hair have personal and emotional significance as well as cultural or societal symbolism. In clinical work, we therefore emphasize personal opinions and differences of opinion, however slight they may be, about each person’s own hair. Women have different and changing feelings about their hair; they may be happy with it one day and frustrated by it on another day. They may also possibly experience conflicting emotions simultaneously.

## Experiences with DMT Students

My personal interest in hair in DMT started when a student<sup>2</sup> in an introductory DMT course brought in a selection of wigs to one session. The women in the group were excited about the opportunity to try on the various wigs of different lengths, colors, and styles. I noticed that the students’ movements changed when they tried on the wigs and walked round the room. There was a heightened intensity of awareness of their own movements, with different qualities and nuances entering their range of gestures and postures. This was appreciable in their deportment, with movements flowing from the head down through the rest of their bodies. In the discussions that followed, students recounted significant childhood memories related to their hair. From that point on, I included hair as a significant body part in movement classes. The following text is divided into several themes, each of which includes examples of students’ comments about their hair, collected from several classes of the course “My Body and I,” which I taught.

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<sup>2</sup> Today Dr Penina Galpaz-Feller who has published various papers on the biblical significance of hair.

## Hair Styles and Length

There is social and spiritual significance to hair lengths and styles, including whether long hair is pulled back or left loose. Leach's research (1958) found a connection between long hair and sexuality, opining that short or gathered hair represents castration or repressed sexuality. In some cultures, female hair is associated with wantonness and primitivism. In Judaism, the long unruly hair of Lilith symbolized her licentiousness and lust, as contrasted with the more modest figure of Eve. Gathering hair expresses organization and tidiness, restraint and control over our bodies and our impulses. Loose hair is associated with a sense of freedom, sensuality and creativity.

According to Von Franz (1996), messy hair in a dream may indicate things we are unaware of, while combed styled hair may represent the return of order and awareness. This idea was also expressed in Amichai's poem (Amichai, 2004, p. 6).

A precise woman with a short haircut brings order  
To my thoughts and my dresser drawers ...

The demand to tie back and flatten hair may express deeper processes, which are widespread in western societies, of becoming detached from our physical resources. These processes involve people "becoming removed from the body's needs and denying the essential nature of movement, feelings and .... Our motor movements have thus been limited, our urges strangled and we block the internal creative flow of our emotions and their motor expressions" (Shachar-Levy, 2001, p. 392).

One very religiously observant student who chooses to cover herself because of her faith said, "In my dreams my hair is always long and loose," and she explained the sense of freedom and release she associated with her memories of having loose hair. Some students felt that their long hair expressed their femininity, making them more beautiful, adorning them. Many felt that their hair was their main recognizable feature. A student who watched her classmates in a session devoted to folk dancing emphasized these points, "I saw all of the femininity and sexuality in the lesson: The freer their hair, the stronger the expression of their femininity. On the other hand women's femininity can be blocked through their hair."

In the world of classical dance, where sexuality is repressed, hair is always pulled tightly back; in modern dance loose hair forms part of the movement. One student explained how the requirement to always keep her hair pulled tightly back as a dancer had met her own need for continuous control over her outward appearance. Another student remembered that her hair always had to be pulled tightly back because "straggling loose curling strands had been insufferable" to her. They both tied back their hair because of an inner need for organization and control. Yet another student felt that if she let her hair loose, she would "become a different person, not the well behaved, serious hard working introvert with plaits, but a wild and undisciplined girl." Her words gave voice to the dialogue between the child and expectations from her, associated with social norms.

## Hair as a Focus for Family Relationships

Hair is very important during childhood and adolescence (Patton, 2006). Sometimes young children may cut off a curl or cut their fringe out of curiosity or as a result of the beginning of a sense of self-awareness and discovery. These actions express a sense of “I can design my own self” or may be experiments in gaining autonomy and a sense of their power over the physical self.

During the teen years, cutting hair short may be a declaration of independence, with adolescents’ head shaving being a form of rebellion; a demand to be accepted for who and what they are. One student said: “I enjoyed irritating my mother by getting my hair cut short. It was my way of telling her that I wasn’t what she wanted me to be.”

Hair and hairstyles can be a source of conflict and pain between mothers and daughters, or a source of closeness between them (Friedman, 2011). One student I taught revealed the conflicts that had surrounded caring for her hair during her childhood:

There were [never-ending] battles with my mother, I hated it when she washed and combed my hair, it hurt so much, it was a real nightmare for both of us each and every time, especially when I didn’t keep quiet and fought with her.

Sometimes the way hair issues are dealt with may reveal mother–daughter relationship difficulties in their earliest stages. One student, who had beautiful well-groomed hair, told us that her mother had said that being pregnant with her daughter had made her lose all the beauty of her hair.

Students in the DMT training class remembered sharp responses from their parents when they rebelled and got short haircuts. Daughters were told that they were not beautiful or feminine enough with short hair. Other parents found long hair too difficult to look after or thought it expressed sexuality too overtly. Criticism may have involved unconscious maternal jealousy towards daughters, or been derived from the inability of parents either to come to terms with their daughter’s sexuality or to accept her as an independent person. One of the students summarized her experiences in the wake of her father’s negative comments about her hair when she said: “Rejection of part of your body, by a parent, may cause the child to reject certain parts of self, erotic, feminine aspects of the body associated with sensuality.”

Painful childhood memories may affect the way women parent their children. One student wrote the following lines:

Miriam’s braids are made of steel  
With a white ribbon girding them.  
...  
Danger—be careful! You may get hurt!  
My braids are the braids of song  
Curling and flowing, soft and long

She had suffered from tightly pulled braids and grew up into a mother who took special care when plaiting her daughter’s hair.

In the Brothers' Grimm fairy tale, the stepmother who wanted to kill Snow White dressed up as a kindly old woman offering to comb Snow White's hair. Bettelheim (1976) claimed that it was Snow White's unconscious desire for the sexual attractiveness brought on by beautiful looking hair that led her to risk accepting the stranger's offer. However, she may also have longed for a mother's touch and the special intimacy created when a mother brushes her daughter's hair, as in the next memory: "When my mother died, my aunt brushed my hair for ages. She didn't need to say anything." The memory makes one moment of embracing warmth everlasting; a spiritual closeness is expressed by physical closeness, gentle care given by an older woman who knows that sometimes it is not words that count.

Allowing someone to comb your hair is a sign of love, trust, and intimacy, while taking the time to comb someone's hair is a sign of cradling, embracing, and calming (Gheerbrant & Chevalier, 1996). There is something paradoxical about hair. While on the one hand it is exposed and visible to the eye, it is also very intimate, and not everyone has the right to touch it (Feuer, 2006). Difficulties with physical intimacy or physical warmth may be expressed as repulsion from contact with one's hair, while stroking a person's head may also emblemize patronage.

### Haircuts: By Choice or Otherwise

Even when we freely decide to get our hair cut, the experience in front of the mirror can be traumatic. Students talked about wanting to get their hair cut, but being nervous about making a change. One student said that she admired women with cropped hair and that she would like to shave her head but did not dare do so:

When I was young I had long hair, which I always tied back in a bun, which made me look serious, like a librarian or a ballet dancer. I often used to look across the classroom towards a girl with short hair enthralled by her beauty. Then, one day I decided to have my hair cut and immediately started smiling and feeling light-hearted.

Another student recounted the experience of her first hair cut as a teenager. She cut off the long plait she had always worn, as she had decided to keep her hair loose:

I still remember how bad I felt at the end of that haircut, with all of my hair scattered on the floor of the salon, and with only a small part of it left on my head. I felt as though a limb had been cut off my body, as if I had been undressed and no longer had anything to hide behind.

Her description is reminiscent of *Self Portrait with Cropped Hair*, painted by Frida Kahlo in 1940 after her divorce from Diego Rivera. In the painting, she is sitting wearing a masculine looking suit, with her hair cropped short, and holding a pair of scissors, with her shorn tresses scattered around the floor (Kettenmann, 2008). The haircut is connected to a feeling of castration, to damaged femininity, self-harm, and a sense of loss and mourning.

Many women struggle with childhood memories of haircuts inflicted upon them. In her autobiographical novel, Aviya's Summer (1988), the well-known Israeli actress Gila Almagor, describes the traumatic memory of having her hair cut short:



To my horror I discovered that I was bald! My mother had simply cut off all my hair, showing no mercy! I was left with a face with no frame, an ugly face. I burst out crying and screamed at my mother: ‘Why did you do this to me?’ (Almagor, 1988, p. 20)

Short haircuts are difficult for young girls partly because their hair is one of the features most obviously associated with their gender identity. At an age when the ego has still not reached full strength, and a girl’s self-confidence is not fully developed, a young girl’s hair may be one of her most important resources.

Students remembered the feeling of not fitting in when they were young girls with short hair and said that they grew their hair long as adults in compensation. One said: “My short haircut made me look boyish. I wanted to have long hair like the rest of the girls in my class. I felt like a misfit in my family too.”

One of the girls talked about her inability to stand up to her parents: “I didn’t object to the short cropped hairdo. At that stage in my life I didn’t voice my opinions, and usually just went along with whatever my mother decided.” It is important to remember that children may become angry or develop a sense of guilt and shame for not having stood up for themselves or fought for what they thought was right.

Parents sometimes act as agents for the collective, deciding in favor of traditional social and cultural values that may clash with the values of the society where the children live. From the child’s point of view, these decisions represent insufficient sensitivity to their needs and individuality. Decisions may impact upon the child’s self-image in the long term if they are not properly worked through. It seems hard to compensate for the longing for long hair, lost in childhood.

The parents of one student decided to shave her head shortly before she started first grade. Many years went by before she was able to work through her emotions from that time. As a part of the DMT course she revisited her own personal story by looking at photo albums and talking to her parents. She discovered that their decision, which had such a strong impact on her life, had to be understood in a particular cultural and social context:

Where my parents had grown up every child had their head shaved for the first time when they reached their fifth birthday. Their hair was thin and brittle by then and they wanted their children to have healthy strong hair.

### **Dealing with the Ravages of Time**

It is not only our culture and society that affect the appearance of our hair; time also takes its toll. Greying, thinning hair expresses the loss of our female eroticism through time. Finding a grey hair is often one of the first signs that that we are growing older, and commonly serves as a public expression of our mortality. One mature student said: “The change in the way I view my own longevity is expressed through my hair.” Holland (2004) addresses the issue of how aging affects the notions of femininity amidst a prevailing discourse whereby lack of hair indicates a loss of femininity. In tune with the aging process, women of a particular age or generation may be expected to adhere to certain behaviors by, for instance, adopting

ostensibly suitable hair styles, or coloring their hair. Winterich (2007) interviewed women of different racial backgrounds and sexual orientations with regard to the assumption that women should dye their hair in an attempt to retain a youthful appearance. Her work suggested that dominant norms of age and femininity primarily influence white heterosexual women to dye their hair so as to appear younger. When women in the public eye dare to challenge these conventions, as when in 2010 Hillary Clinton grew her hair long, they may find themselves under intense media scrutiny. However, women who choose to wear their naturally-grey hair long may at one time be acknowledging both their age and their continued feelings of youth.

In “Shulamit’s Hair,” the Israeli poet Bracha Rosenfeld (1998) refers to the female eroticism that is lost with time:

And the curls on your head, twisting snakes, fall out and drop bunches at a time  
 And betray you.  
 And no man’s desire is awakened by you, Shulamit,  
 The ashes of your hair, Shulamit,<sup>3</sup>  
 The ashes of your love and the dust of your youth. (p. 6)

In spite of the many options available to us to obscure or delay the processes of aging, in the end we all have to accept that we are not getting any younger. One student talked about her white hairs: “My silver hair has a certain presence which announces to the world, ‘Here I am’.” Coming to terms with the changes our bodies go through is a complex process, which is both personal and affected by the time and culture we live in.

Dance/movement therapy enables past experiences to be processed, enhancing our ability to cope with present day challenges. The process of individuation discussed by Jung (1967), essentially a developmental process occurring in the second half of life, includes the acceptance of our limitations as well as the development of resilience and a tolerance of internal conflicts. This was expressed by one student as follows:

Today, together with this process of internal letting go, and authentic personal expression I feel that my hair, the way it is, expresses who I am in the best possible way, being perfectly suited to who I am, even if being exposed in this way is not always easy ... the changes I have gone through are also expressed in my hair, which is an outlet for my personality, for better or for worse, in tempestuous times and in tranquility ....

<sup>3</sup> It’s important to note that Rosenfeld expresses in her poem other deeper aspects of hair. According to Goodall (2002), Shulamit in Rosenfeld’s poem encapsulates the personal Shulamit of the poetess, the Shulamit of the Song of Songs, and the Shulamit of Paul Celan’s “Death Fugue” written after the Holocaust: “The gold of your hair, Margarete, the ashes of your hair Shulamit ...”. For Celan the golden hair and ashen hair expressed ethnic identity and destiny.

## Loving Our Hair and Self-Esteem (Self-Image)

Taking care of our hair is part of taking care of ourselves, a psychologically significant aspect of our lives expressing our relationship with our own bodies. Neglect of our bodies may reflect depression, a lack of self-love, or some kind of rebellion; however, too much attention to maintaining our appearance may cause hypersensitivity to any possible criticism. Dance/movement therapy may enable the development of a sense of identity and acceptance of self.

One student expressed her problem with her self-image through her hair:

I remember looking longingly across at the girls in my class who had long, straight healthy hair and so wanting to look like them. I thought that every girl in the class had hair that looked better than mine.

Students told of conflicting love–hate relationships with their hair, which they were able to express and work through using dance/movement therapy. One student described how the soft and gently caressing feel of her hair, which she greatly enjoyed, was also somehow combined with the chaos it engendered and the intrinsic power it embodied.

## Noa's Story: The Description of a Personal Process<sup>4</sup>

Following these extracts of memories, insights, and processes experienced by various students, I now turn to a narrative shared by Noa, which presents a complete process. This began with a movement class and continued through individual work and research towards a final project, and continued onwards.

In the movement class I took a long pleasant feeling cloth. I was asked to try to go back to my childhood. Suddenly a distant memory came back to me. When I was a young girl, I used to tie a skirt on my head, like a hair band, and [m]arch around the house with it on my head. The skirt gave me the feeling that I had long hair, which caressed my neck and my shoulders. That was my dream, having long hair. I felt like going back to those moments now. I tied the cloth to my hair and started walking round the room, trying to recapture those sensations and emotions. But suddenly I felt sad, so very sad. I couldn't carry on.

From that experience, a powerful need arose within me to try and look back into my life's story surrounding my hair. It wasn't that up until that time I hadn't been aware of my hair, but rather that I hadn't allowed myself to think about it. Every sensation or emotion related to hair stayed at the level of a strong bodily repugnance, nausea *and* the overpowering wish to stop as soon as a stray thought took me towards those feelings .... [T]here were images that I tried to forget.

<sup>4</sup> Permission has been received from the student, and the name has been changed to maintain anonymity.

My father is the first person I associate with my hair. There is a huge amount of guilt associated with this recognition—why am I putting my issues onto him? My father was always repulsed by hair. Father wanted us to have short hair. My father also could not tolerate anyone playing with their hair ....

I could not tolerate anyone touching my hair either; I was terrified that my hair was unpleasant to touch. I hated seeing people touching their own hair. I hated seeing it, but could not stop myself from watching ... and it was hard to stop myself feeling that it was me who was touching their hair ...

When father found a stray hair which had dropped somewhere, out of place, he would hold it like a dead cockroach, as if from the tentacles, far away from his body, minimal contact, and straight in the bin .... I too looked for stray hairs .... I might have missed some, I searched in cracks and crevices, but preferred not to see.

I remember that when we went away for the weekend when I was 12 and I had short hair. Each morning in the dining room, the waiter addressed me as if I was a boy. I remember the shame; the anxiety before the meal ... the terrible experience ... today I am always very careful not to make the same mistake with other people and feel terrible if I mistake their gender.

I think that today after reflecting upon this topic—in movement and in writing even though the difficulties are still there in part, I am now finally on my way towards understanding what hair means to me. I am certain that I am not repelled by hair in itself, but by its association with something primordial and deep rooted within me. Today I recognize two associations with hair: sexuality and dirt. The connection is actually threefold, as I could easily identify a connection within myself, independent of hair, between sexuality and dirt .... I was always asked to be modest at home ... to cover up ...

For the personal year project I chose to go back to the day we had worked with the lengths of cloth. This time I did not need to add cloth to my head, I just let my hair loose, something I hadn't been able to do as a child, with short, cropped hair. This time I enjoyed handling my hair, and the heavy sadness and choking sorrow had been left behind together with the superfluous piece of cloth. I checked how my hair responded to each of my body's movements. Almost everything felt pleasant. I called this, 'hair therapy'. Through the year I developed a less serious attitude .... [M]aybe the burden that I had carried was gone .... [P]erhaps I was closer than ever to regaining possession of my body together with my hair ....

As a student in the course for training dance/movement therapists, Noa underwent a complex process that included movement experience, building a dance sequence, exhibiting it in class, and sharing the topic with the group. It culminated with academic research and a written essay. This process enabled a reorganization of memories, experiences, and insights concerned with internalizing the figure of her father and connecting this with hair, sexuality, and dirt. Noa asked questions through which she could start reaching individuality, and arrive at a different experience of sexual and existential femininity.

Noa's hair had become representative of a dissociative state of self, which had become frozen in its original state in Noa's mind. The piece of cloth she had come across almost by chance in the DMT class awakened an echo of an early memory. The choice of the cloth had an element of serendipity, and suggests that providing a variety of different props in DMT classes may similarly lead to other beneficial processes. For Noa, the cloth allowed the gradual beginning of a process of reclaiming the part of her identity that had been expelled. The piece of cloth tied onto her head had been at first an artificial extension of her hair, which had stimulated the arousal of deeply hidden emotions of sadness and loss. Later on, a transformative process took place that was given the name hair therapy, through which Noa could dispense with the artificial "limb" and discover her own real hair together with the full range of significance associated with it.

Noa summarized the lengthy process she had undergone: "A significant change has taken place in me in relation to hair. It is no longer perceived as dirty and it is even possible for me to enjoy hair and find pleasure in it." The process had allowed the reorganization and re-processing of the significance in body and mind, which in turn influenced a significant change in the experience of self.

## Empowerment Through Dance/Movement Therapy

Dance/movement therapy enables us to emerge from a sense of discomfort into a sense of joy. An important part of this process is finding the ability to enjoy our bodies, rather than only learning our capabilities and accepting our physical limitations. In general, deriving physical pleasure from one's body strengthens one's sense of individuality. Dance and movement connect us to the healthy core within us. In order to express and deal with weaker aspects of our selves, a strong emotional base is needed, firmly grounded in our strengths.

As a woman becomes emotionally empowered, she becomes less dependent on her external appearance. The way in which she relates to her hair is gradually freed from social and cultural impositions, or from the relative *burden* of objectification and the social inhibitions built up during childhood and adolescence. After this, there can be authentic self-expression free from external influences, along with personal growth and pleasure at becoming uninhibited. As one student said:

I associate my hair with strength, with my ego, with a blameless use of who I am, and of my assets. To present myself for whom I am without apologizing, uninhibited by all sorts of environmental factors. To live in this world as I truly am. What a liberating and frightening feeling—my internal truth being revealed to the outside world.

Sometimes in DMT, issues only arise gradually, as the mind sometimes tries to repress difficult experiences or topics we are uncomfortable with. One student emphasized that the emotions and memories related to her hair only came back into her conscious awareness very gradually:

On the surface everything was OK, there was nothing wrong. It's only when I went deeper and went there for long periods that things began to surface, a new truth about myself.

In DMT according to Shachar-Levy (1994) movement is detached from its everyday roles and becomes connected to the flow of emotions and memories, allowing a person to become more attentive to their inner voices. This allows memories of past experiences, which reside beyond the realm of a person's conscious awareness, to rise to the surface. It is important to note that although particular props were provided, no suggestions were made as to the existence of suppressed memories. This avoided as far as possible the issue of false memories. During DMT sessions, every movement may be a metaphorical statement and as such may include: situations from the past, which still reside in the body (stress, patterns of movement), the quality of "relationships with significant others, the extent to which such relationships are internalized (object relations) and self-image (including body image)" (Shachar-Levy, 1994, p. 70).

Group discussions held throughout the course enabled the processing and expression of experiences. Through these discussions, students discovered that they are not alone in their feelings regarding their hair:

I have suddenly realized that everyone has their own story about their hair. It's interesting to discover that everyone has issues about their hair, about femininity, about womanhood and being a girl. The lesson is very powerful.

In my therapeutic work as well as in the process of training dance/movement therapists, I strive to expand positive associations with our body's parts and to view them as an empowering resource. In DMT, I believe that hair should be treated as a body part in its own right, like any other limb or organ. This approach allows a true investigation of feelings towards hair.

We meet patients who have a complete detachment between body and mind. They are disconnected from any emotional experience and function only through the rational and intellectual sides of their personality. As initial insights indicate that dance is processed in interconnected regions of the brain, which also affect non-dance behavior, these connections may allow dance to affect function in other areas of the brain (Hanna, 2014). Physical movement and dance are now considered to have an impact upon neural pathways and neurogenesis in the brain, and thus may help reverse detachment between body and mind. As Damasio (2010) stated, "A spectacular consequence of the brain's incessant and dynamic mapping, is the mind" (p. 70).

People suffering from some kind of mind–body disconnection may find it easier to start the therapy process by relating to their hair rather than to any other limb. Focusing on hair may trigger a possible connection between body and emotion, leading to a better integration of self. When experiencing movement, the process begins once attention is directed towards hair. The intention is only to consider the movement without any thought processes or ulterior motives. This allows the conscious mind to pause and dwell on the movement itself without rushing towards any conclusions. It is the opportunity to investigate movement or emotions, to

dream, or simply move. And even if we don't actually move, but rather remain in one place, experiencing how it feels as memories are evoked. Many different memories and stories may be triggered. The body *talks*; the body *remembers*, sensing and feeling the emotions that we have experienced, and something new may be set in motion.

## Conclusion

This article focused on female hair and on its symbolic, emotional and social significance. Even though hair does not receive the attention it deserves in the therapeutic setting, there is no doubt that it has a very significant place in a woman's life and is central to her experience of body image and of self. When I first suggested that women try movements while relating to their hair, I did not expect the intensity of their emotions and the multitude of deeply meaningful associations that would eventually arise. Hair is a body part and a powerful resource. Through therapy, a better balance can be attained between the rational and the cognitive, as represented by the head, and the emotional sides expressed by the body.

**Conflict of interest** The author declares that the author has no conflict of interest.

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