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Queer Dancemaking as a Practice Within Mind-Body Medicine

Robert Edward Taylor Jr.

Saybrook University, Pasadena, CA, USA, Rtaylor5@saybrook.edu

Abstract: Scholarship on queer dancemaking is dispersed across dance studies, queer studies, trauma research, and Mind-Body Medicine (MBM), leaving its potential relevance to LGBTQ+ well-being insufficiently examined. This interdisciplinary literature review explores queer dancemaking as a process of improvisation, choreography, rehearsal, reflection, and collective movement creation in relation to embodied experience, identity expression, and community belonging. The literature, identified through university library databases, Google Scholar, organizational reports, and reference lists between May and July 2026, was interpreted through phenomenology, Practice-as-Research, queer worldmaking, and Polyvagal Theory. The synthesis identifies three conceptual connections: creative decision-making may offer opportunities to explore agency and embodied identity; collaborative movement-making may provide contexts for negotiating relationships and belonging; and trauma-informed attention to bodily experience may inform questions relevant to MBM. Queer dance scholarship documents cultural resistance and collective expression, while research on other mind-body and movement practices offers adjacent, rather than directly transferable, evidence concerning psychological or physiological outcomes. The review therefore proposes queer dancemaking as a culturally situated site of inquiry, not an established clinical intervention. Direct studies are needed to examine participant experiences, safety, accessibility, possible benefits and harms, and measurable outcomes across diverse LGBTQ+ populations. This distinction between cultural evidence, theoretical interpretation, and intervention evidence provides a foundation for more precise interdisciplinary research.

Keywords: Alternative Art, Dancemaking, LGBTQ+ Mental Health, Mind-Body Medicine, Trauma, Phenomenology, Queer Dancemaking

1. Introduction

LGBTQ+ individuals continue to encounter discrimination, minority stress, and barriers to affirming care, making culturally responsive approaches to psychological and embodied well-being an important area of inquiry. The Trevor Project's *2025 U.S. National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ+ Young People*, reported by Nath et al. (2026), provides context for these concerns. Such disparities should not be understood as intrinsic to queer identity; rather, they emerge in relation to social and structural conditions. The need to address those conditions remains essential even when investigating community-based practices.

For the purpose of this review, queer dancemaking refers to the iterative, embodied process of generating, selecting, negotiating, rehearsing, revising, and reflecting upon movement in queer-identified or queer-affirming contexts. The term includes improvisation, choreography, and communal participation, rather than treating a completed performance as the sole object of inquiry. Its queerness may concern the identities of participants, the questioning of normative movement and gender conventions, and the cultural or political context in which movement is made. It is also important to note that these dimensions do not appear identical in every practice. Buckland (2002) and Croft (2017) provide historical and

cultural perspectives on queer dance, while Nelson (2022) provides a framework for understanding creative practice as a mode of inquiry.

The distinction between dance and dancemaking matters because participants do more than execute movement. They can propose gestures, negotiate decisions with others, revise material, and reflect on how bodily choices express or unsettle expectations. These possibilities are not exclusive to queer dancemaking; their configuration within queer cultural and relational contexts is the focus of this review. Muñoz's (2009) account of queer worldmaking further invites attention to how alternative ways of being together may be imagined and practiced through embodied activity.

Although trauma, movement, and queer cultural practices have been examined in several disciplines, relatively little direct empirical research has evaluated queer dancemaking as a distinct MBM practice. This review asks: How does scholarly literature describe the potential role of queer dancemaking in relation to trauma recovery, psychological well-being, identity expression, and community belonging among LGBTQ+ individuals? Its purpose is to identify conceptual connections, distinguish direct from adjacent evidence, and establish priorities for future inquiry (not to claim that therapeutic effectiveness has already been demonstrated).

2. Literature Review Method

A scholarly literature search was conducted between May and July 2026 through the Saybrook University TCS Education System Library, including EBSCOhost, ProQuest, OneSearch, Gale Health and Wellness, Taylor & Francis Online, and the American Journal of Dance Therapy. Google Scholar, reports from The Trevor Project, and reference lists of relevant publications supplemented the search. The emphasis was on publications from 2016 to 2026, with earlier foundational texts included when relevant to queer dance, trauma, phenomenology, Practice-as-Research (PaR), Polyvagal Theory, worldmaking, or Mind-Body Medicine (MBM).

Search expressions included "queer dancemaking," "queer dance," "dance making," "conscious dance," "queer choreography," "LGBTQ+ AND dance," "dance AND trauma," "mind-body intervention," "mind-body medicine AND movement," "queering somatics," and "dance AND Polyvagal Theory." Sources were considered for their relevance to LGBTQ+ mental health, queer movement, trauma and embodiment, creative inquiry, identity, and belonging. Scholarly articles, books, dissertations, and established organizational reports were prioritized. This is an interdisciplinary narrative literature review; no systematic screening protocol or quantitative meta-analysis is claimed.

Terminology differed across fields: studies of somatics, performance, dance/movement therapy, and embodied movement do not necessarily study queer dancemaking itself. This limits both search completeness and the transferability of findings. Phenomenology, PaR (Nelson, 2022), queer worldmaking (Muñoz, 2009), and Polyvagal Theory (Porges & Porges, 2023) were used as complementary interpretive lenses, not as interchangeable empirical methods or independent proof of clinical effects.

3. Thematic Synthesis

3.1 LGBTQ+ Mental Health Disparities and Structural Conditions

Across the literature, LGBTQ+ psychological distress is discussed in relation to stigma, discrimination, intersecting marginalization, and unequal access to supportive resources. Marzetti (2018) examines the experiences of LGBT+ students, while Lyons et al. (2019) and Ream (2019, 2020) address suicide-related disparities in particular populations and datasets. Gubán et al. (2025) examine associations involving minority stress and somatic symptoms. These sources differ in design, population, and outcome; they should not be treated and written as one uniform estimate of risk.

Taken together, this literature situates mental health disparities within social contexts rather than individual identity. It also explains why an inquiry into queer dancemaking must attend to access, safety, and belonging. Yet documenting disparities does not establish that dancemaking reduces them. Instead, it identifies questions for culturally responsive research and highlights the importance of addressing structural inequities alongside any individual or community practice.

3.2 Trauma, Embodiment, and Mind-Body Medicine

Embodied approaches to trauma direct attention to bodily sensation, movement, and relational experience alongside spoken accounts. Oh (2021) considers the difficulty of articulating trauma through language and the possibilities and limits of dance ethnography. Denton and Cain (2023) discuss narrative and arts-based approaches to queer knowledge-making. These contributions support treating embodied experience as meaningful material for interpretation, while leaving open how particular dancemaking activities affect trauma-related outcomes.

Porges and Porges (2023) offer a theoretical account of autonomic responses to perceived safety and threat, and Blanning (2025) discusses trauma-informed therapeutic perspectives. Such accounts can generate questions about felt safety, arousal, and social connection during collaborative movement. They should not be read as measurements of participants' nervous systems or as evidence that queer dancemaking produces autonomic regulation. Physiological mechanisms and outcomes require independent, appropriately designed investigation.

Jones et al. (2020) describe mind-body skills groups in an adolescent primary-care context, and Liang and Bryant (2024) review dance and movement approaches in relation to interpersonal trauma among women and girls. These works offer adjacent evidence about structured mind-body or movement interventions, but neither establishes equivalent effects for community-based queer dancemaking. The distinction between an artistic practice and a clinically defined intervention is essential when interpreting the literature.

3.3 Creative Agency, Queer Dance, and Embodied Knowledge

Queer dance has long been connected to social expression, cultural memory, and political resistance. Croft (2017) situates queer dancing bodies within histories of activism and social change; Forsgren (2021), Gagnon (2024), and Tschaepe (2024) offer related perspectives on gender, racialized experience, history, and embodied cultural practice. Hanna (2010) examines how dance communicates and is interpreted in relation to sexuality, gender, and social expectations, including the distinction between a dancer's intentions and an observer's interpretations. Together, these perspectives illuminate dance as a site of cultural meaning and negotiation, but they do not, on their own, demonstrate therapeutic benefit.

The specific contribution of dancemaking lies in the creative decisions through which movement comes into being. In a hypothetical workshop, participants might create and revise gestures associated with gendered expectations, decide whether to share them, and reflect on how those choices feel. Such decisions foreground authorship, refusal, negotiation, and reflection rather than a predetermined performance outcome; the example does not imply that one format yields better health outcomes. Nelson's (2022) Practice-as-Research (PaR) approach and Martin's (2017) account of spontaneous dancemaking help articulate creative processes as sites of embodied learning and inquiry. Read alongside Hanna's (2010) discussion of sexuality and the interpretation of dance, these approaches raise further questions about how participants might challenge or rework gendered expectations through the process of making movement.

Research on conscious dance offers an additional perspective on the relationship between embodied movement, creative agency, and psychological well-being. Laird et al. (2021) describe conscious dance as an unchoreographed, nonjudgmental movement practice

emphasizing present-moment awareness, authentic self-expression, and interpersonal connectedness. In a cross-sectional survey of 1,003 conscious dance participants, longer participation was associated with higher levels of trait mindfulness and life satisfaction, while more frequent participation was associated with greater trait mindfulness. These findings provide empirical evidence of associations between free-form movement practices and psychological well-being, although the study design does not establish causality. While conscious dance and queer dancemaking share an emphasis on embodied exploration and creative freedom, queer dancemaking is distinguished in this review by its intentional questioning of normative expectations surrounding gender, sexuality, and identity. Consequently, conscious dance offers a related body of empirical literature for considering the potential relevance of queer dancemaking to Mind-Body Medicine without assuming equivalent psychological or therapeutic outcomes.

Through this lens, creative agency is not merely a theme represented onstage, but a vital concept investigated through acts of proposing, refusing, adapting, or collectively shaping movement. This review therefore proposes queer dancemaking as an artistic and relational site of embodied inquiry in which identity, bodily autonomy, and social expectations may be negotiated through creative practice. Its potential relevance to Mind-Body Medicine lies in questions about embodied awareness, agency, and belonging. Whether and under what conditions these experiences contribute to sustained psychological or physiological well-being remains an empirical question.

3.4 Community Belonging and Queer Worldmaking

Muñoz (2009) provides a conceptual vocabulary for imagining queer futures beyond restrictive social norms. Buckland (2002) locates queer social dance within historically situated forms of participation, while Allegrini and Izci (2024) discuss community-building through artistic practice. Dominguez et al. (2025) further examine queer relationality and solidarity. Together, these perspectives suggest that collective artistic spaces can be understood as contexts in which participants negotiate recognition, mutuality, and alternative forms of belonging.

Dancemaking makes this relational dimension tangible where participants may respond to one another's movement, accommodate different bodies and capacities, and decide what shared material to retain or discard. These interactions can be studied phenomenologically as experiences of connection or disconnection rather than presumed to be universally safe or affirming. For some participants, exposure, touch, improvisation, or group dynamics may also be uncomfortable. Attention to consent and participant choice is therefore part of the research question, not simply an implementation detail.

4. Discussion

The reviewed scholarship offers a conceptual bridge between queer dancemaking and MBM through embodied awareness, creative agency, relational participation, and culturally situated identity exploration. The bridge is interdisciplinary rather than evidentiary proof of a clinical intervention. Queer dance scholarship is strongest in explaining historical and cultural meanings; PaR and phenomenology support inquiry into creative and lived processes; trauma and mind-body literature informs possible research questions about psychological and physiological experience.

This distinction also clarifies what queer dancemaking adds to existing movement scholarship. The practice is not defined by movement alone, nor by the assumption that queer participation is inherently therapeutic. Its proposed significance lies in the combination of creative authorship, iterative experimentation, and the negotiation of identity and community within particular queer contexts. Future studies should describe those contexts carefully rather than generalize from all dances, all LGBTQ+ people, or all therapeutic movement practices.

5. Limitations

This narrative review draws on literature with varied terminology, populations, methods, and evidentiary purposes. It does not report systematic quality appraisal or pooled outcomes. Much of the relevant literature concerns queer performance, social dance, arts-based inquiry, or other mind-body practices rather than direct studies of queer dancemaking. Consequently, claims about clinical efficacy, trauma recovery, or autonomic regulation cannot be established from this synthesis. The frameworks used also differ in scope: phenomenology attends to lived experience, PaR to knowledge developed through practice, queer worldmaking to cultural and political possibility, and Polyvagal Theory to proposed neurophysiological processes.

6. Future Research and Practice Considerations

Future qualitative research could investigate how LGBTQ+ participants describe agency, embodied identity, emotional experience, and belonging during the process of creating movement. PaR and phenomenological approaches may be especially useful when paired with careful documentation of improvisation, reflection, and group decision-making. Quantitative or mixed-methods studies could then examine prespecified outcomes using suitable comparison conditions and validated measures, without presuming positive effects in advance.

Research reports should specify facilitator qualifications, session structure and duration, recruitment, participant characteristics, and how queer dancemaking differs from Dance/Movement Therapy (Murphy, 2023; Liang & Bryant, 2024). Studies should attend to variation across race, disability, age, gender identity, socioeconomic context, and access to affirming care (Marzetti et al., 2024; Dominguez et al., 2025). Potential harms, including unwanted disclosure, distress, or exclusion, require attention alongside possible benefits.

Community organizations, artists, clinicians, and researchers may collaborate in exploratory, trauma-informed programs that prioritize informed consent, accessibility, cultural responsiveness, and participant agency. Participants should be able to modify activities, observe, decline touch, or discontinue participation without penalty. Such safeguards support ethical inquiry but do not convert a community arts program into an established clinical treatment.

7. Conclusion

This review identifies queer dancemaking as a distinct, embodied, artistic, and relational process worthy of investigation within Mind-Body Medicine. By bringing scholarship on queer dance, creative practice, trauma, and community belonging into conversation, it shows how movement-making may provide opportunities to examine agency, identity, and shared experience. The existing literature supports these conceptual connections more strongly than it supports claims of clinical effectiveness. Future research must therefore investigate participants' lived experiences, safety, potential benefits and harms, and measurable outcomes directly. In doing so, interdisciplinary scholarship can recognize queer dancemaking as a meaningful site of knowledge production without asking cultural practice to stand in for evidence it has not yet produced.

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