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## Panel: Dance Therapy and Jewish Roots

Saturday, October 29, 2022

Chair: Ilene Serlin. Participants: Miriam Berger, Marsha Kalina, Sharon Chaiklin, Susan Kleinman, Elissa White and Beth Kalish.

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This panel will feature the narratives of prominent Jewish women who played an outsized role in the development of dance therapy in the United States. It is based on the recently released chapter by Miriam Berger, Marsha Kalina, Johanna Climenko and Joanna Harris in *The Oxford Handbook of Jewishness and Dance* called "Jewish Roots and Principles of Dance Therapy." Participants include Miriam Berger, Marsha Kalina, Sharon Chaiklin, Susan Kleinman, Elissa White and Beth Kalish. The panel is chaired by Ilene Serlin.

To help address these questions, Marsha Perlmutter Kalina, a clinical psychologist and an early practitioner of dance therapy, contacted nine Jewish women who were part of that first generation of dance therapists in the United States and one from the second generation. The majority of these women studied with Marian Chace and developed their skills on the East Coast. The majority of the first generation of leading dance therapists, who began working in the 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s, had diverse Jewish backgrounds.

These original women include Janet Adler, Irma Dosamantes Alperson, Beate Becker, Miriam Roskin Berger, Cynthia Berrol, Ruthanna Boris, Norma Canner, Mara Capy, Sharon Chaiklin, Joan Chodorow, Blanche Evan, Joanna Gewertz Harris, Beth Kalish, Stephanie Katz, Susan Kleinman, Marcia Leventhal, Lee Straus Maslansky, Nitza Broide Miller, Iris Rifkin-Gainer, Elizabeth Rosen, Susan Sandel, Claire Schmais, Roberta Shlasko, Elaine Siegel, Arlene Samuels Stark, Shirley Weiner, and Elissa Queyquep White.

Jewish dance therapists were strongly represented among the next generation of influential leaders in the field as well. They include Zoe Avstreich, Joan Berkowitz, Bonnie Bernstein, Bette Blau, Karen Kohn Bradley, Johanna Climenko, Linni Silberman Deihl, Jane Ederer-Schwartz, Tina Erfer, Judith Fischer, Danielle Fraenkel, SuEllen Fried, Barbara Govine, Fran Hamburg, Rachel Harris, Phyllis Jeswald, Marsha Perlmutter Kalina, Susan Kierr, Barbara Kirsch, Virginia Klein, Nana Koch, Ann Krantz, Joan Lavender, Julie Leavitt, Pamela Lerman, Fran Levy, Joan Naess Lewin, Susan Loman, Julie Miller, Donna Newman-Bluestein, Barbara Nordstrom-Loeb, Susan Orkand, Ilene Serlin, Vivian Marcow Speiser, Jody Wager, Anne Wilson Wangh, and Nancy Zenoff, and one man, Paul Sevett.

These Jewish women—who were, in a sense, mothers of this new profession— established practices, organizations, and theoretical frameworks that remain influential today. Their contributions include the early dance therapy master's programs at Hunter College (Schmais and White) and New York University (Leventhal, Berger, and Rifkin-Gainer); the Dance Therapy and then the Creative Arts Therapy Department at Bronx State Hospital (White and Berger); and a book, *Foundations of Dance Therapy*, about the life and work of Marian Chace (Chaiklin and Sandel). Later, some of these women founded other master's degree programs, including those at Hahnemann Medical College (Kalish), Lone Mountain College (Harris), and Goucher College (Samuels and Chaiklin). Iris Rifkin-Gainer was a protégé of Blanche Evan, a very early pioneer who did unique work with neurotics and did much to spread her work. Ruthanna Boris had been a Balanchine ballerina, and her ballet background deeply informed her dance therapy efforts. Joan Chodorow and Janet Adler created a theoretical perspective of dance therapy based on several Jungian concepts, such as understanding what meaning individuals give to thoughts and actions, what actions individuals can take that embody what they want to express, and the human need for wholeness and connection to the collective unconscious. Berrol and Katz researched the effect of dance on therapy on those with head injuries. Adler and Kalish did important work on autism. Siegel created a theoretical framework based on psychoanalysis. Alperson developed a theoretical rationale for dance therapy based on Eugene Gendlin's concept of the "felt experience." And most of these first-generation dance therapists were founders of the American Dance Therapy Association in 1965. Lee Strauss Maslansky, had herself escaped from Germany as a child with her family. Her niece, the distinguished choreographer Noa Wertheim, became the co-creator with Adi Sha'al of the renowned Israeli dance company Vertigo, which was founded in 1992. Another first-generation dance therapist, Elaine V. Siegel, wrote a book about her childhood in Nazi Berlin.

Did these women's Jewish backgrounds influence their approach to the field? Are there connections between Jewish values, experiences, and traditions and the development of dance therapy in the United States? What can we learn by considering the connections between Jewishness and dance therapy?

All the women agreed to be interviewed, and Kalina was ultimately able to speak with eight of them. Interviews of the women who appear in the chapter were based on the following questions:

1. In what religious tradition/denomination did you grow up?
2. With regard to Judaism, how do you identify now?
3. What would you describe as “Jewish values”?
4. If you think back to when you decided to become a dance/movement therapist, do you think your Jewish upbringing and its values, as you define them, contributed to your making this professional choice? If so, how?
5. In what way(s) might your Jewish background and its values have influenced the direction in which you took your contributions to the development of the field (your practice or teaching of dance/movement therapy)?

Certain social factors seem to have influenced many of these leaders. Many of these early leaders in dance therapy grew up in Jewish communities marked by profound trauma with parents who had fled poverty and entrenched antisemitism in Europe. They often linked dance and the arts to larger political messages of personal liberation and collective social good—themes that would become resonant for many pioneers of dance therapy. Some worked in New York City, where a network of Jewish communal and cultural organizations, including the 92nd Street Young Men’s Hebrew Association and the Henry Street Settlement House, took care of youth at risk.

Several themes came up repeatedly in the interviews and personal histories. First, these Jewish dance therapists saw themselves as pioneers, having established a new discipline and explored uncharted territory. Second, they understood their dance therapy work as an intellectual, analytical pursuit, as well as a hands-on practice. Third, they often described dance as a spiritual or mystical practice, and as a healing art. And finally, many of them framed their dance therapy work through the Jewish language of *tikkun olam*, a multivalent Hebrew term that translates to “repairing the world.”

We explore each of these themes in the panel. Taken together, they present a rich picture of the way dance therapy practice can intersect with Jewish texts and traditions. They offer a glimpse into the ways that Jewish tradition—and the ways in which these women conceive of their Jewish heritage—aligns with, and shapes, the work of these groundbreaking Jewish dance therapists.