Creating a safe dance environment that honors mental and physical health through Ruth Zaporah's "Action Theater" and improvisation practices

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Stigmatization of Mental Health

- Dancers experience a taught mindset of pushing limits

  - Overworking, "push through pain," "suck it up"

- Prioritization of physicality

  - Ignore mental health

- This leads to physical and mental concerns such as anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, body image issues and injury

Causes of Mental Health Issues

- "Get over it" attitude
  - "The 'get over it' attitude teachers and choreographers have, only intensifies the multitude of issues that come with the discipline and rigor of dance" (Ducci 1).

- Suppression of emotion

Benefits of Improvisation

- Mental Benefits
  - Increased personal empowerment and self-esteem
  - Opportunity to express and embody emotion
  - Increased sense of agency
  - Increased self-awareness and mindfulness
- Physical Benefits
  - Explore authentic, safe movement
 - Tend to problem/painful areas
  - Set boundaries and limits

Ruth Zaporah's Action Theater

- Ruth Zaporah is an "improviser truly living in the moment" (Kourlas)

- Action Theater is an improvisation physical theater training and performance method

- It is a tool to disempower thoughts of fears, judgments and analysis

Action Theater

- Exercises deconstruct normal behavior, inviting awareness of the present

- Uses improvisation as a way to be present and mindful through observation of movement without judgment
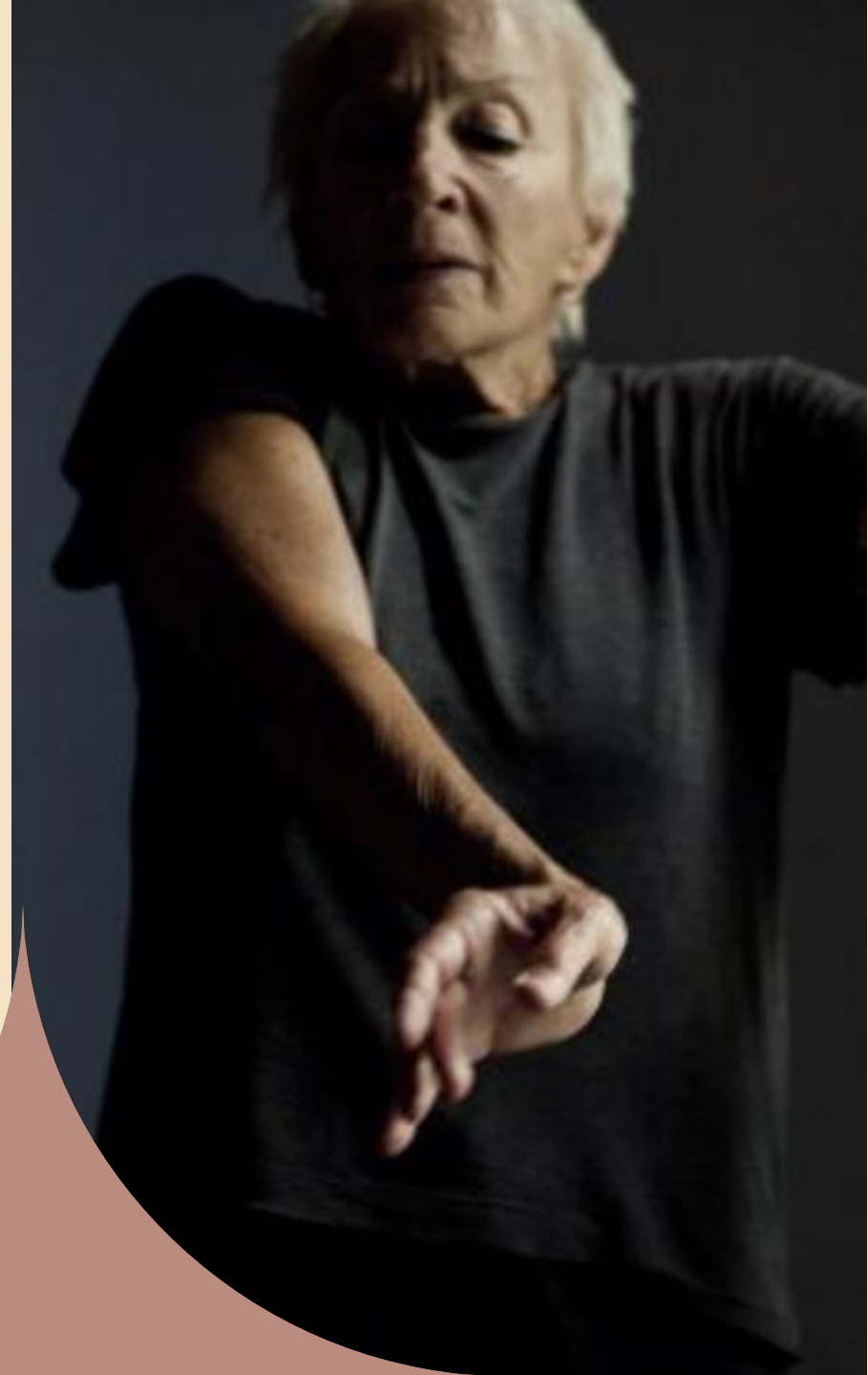
Action Theater & Mindfulness

- Mindfulness is the ability to be present, aware of where we are and what we're doing, and not reactive or judgmental towards our actions and feelings

- Action Theater's ideals and exercises work to create a safe dance environment that focuses on healthy physical and mental dance practice

Conclusion

- Improvisation and "Action Theater's" incorporation of mindfulness, self-awareness, agency and connection between mind-body lead to healthy physical and mental wellness.

- Zaporah's methodologies show us how to solve the problem of mental health issues such as depression, low self-esteem, and pressure to overwork.