

“We’re Not All Booty Twerkin’ Bomb Chicks”: A Mixed Methods Autoethnographic Journey into Zumba Classes¹

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In order to understand my relationship with Zumba, you have to understand my relationship with my body. My body, I say it like it’s something that belongs to me, something I own, not necessarily something that is a part of me. It is something that is both mine and me. She is a vessel that deserves respect and love and pleasure and nurturing. She didn’t deserve the hell I put her through. The hell the disorders put her through.

Anorexia, even as I look at the word it seems foreign. Like a foggy memory of jutting hipbones and exposed ribs. It belongs to another Emily, another person. Someone small inside of me, perhaps. But it is me, it was my body. The blurry years of fifteen, sixteen and seventeen were marked with repetitive meals, doctor’s visits, and blood tests. “Emily, your iron is too low,” “Emily, please try and eat something else,” “Emily, you’re not fat.”

Each night I would sit down to dinner, a process that took two hours at least. I would prepare exactly 1 cup of soymilk, 1 baked sweet potato, a veggie burger with no bun and lettuce. I ate this way for a year, my hands turned orange from the beta-carotene. I ate slowly and methodically, making my meal last. Snack was a plum. If I ate the smaller plum, the day was a victory.

It started out innocently enough, the summer after my freshman year of high school. I used those exercise cards you pull out of fitness magazines. I did them everyday and I felt stronger. Then I started to diet, I ate fat-free everything. No chips, no white bread, no peanut butter (too many calories). Only fruits and vegetables. I lost weight; I lost a lot of weight. And people noticed, they complimented me on it. It felt good; it felt like I was winning.

Chrestomathy: Annual Review of Undergraduate Research 12 (2013)

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I didn't even realize it was anorexia until October when my mom took me to the doctor. I needed an emergency blood test to decide if I needed to be hospitalized. I only thought I was being healthy, that I could finally have the body that I wanted. It turns out I was sick. It was a disease. I went home that night and laid on my bedroom floor in my underwear, sobbing, feeling my hip bones poke into me.

It only got harder after that, the therapy and process of recovery. It's like pulling your lungs out of your body and you're running to get them back. That's how hard it was for me to eat something different, something more. I made a peanut butter and banana sandwich, to my exact specifications- 1/3 of a banana and only 1 tablespoon of peanut butter. I ended up crying in the bathroom outside of my high school cafeteria because it was so painful and hard and frustrating for me to eat that sandwich. But I did eat it.

The funny thing about eating disorders is that they can morph. The more comfortable I got eating different foods, the more rigid I got with exercising. 45 minutes on the recumbent bike followed by an arms routine or abdominal routine, depending on the day. My muscles weren't hard enough, weren't toned enough. If I stopped, I'd get fat. Going to the gym became the center of my day, I felt off and uncomfortable and twitchy until I was able to go. I called it "exercis-arexia." This lasted for about a year until it morphed again.

Binge eating disorder. Something within me snapped, I stopped caring. The body I wanted suddenly wasn't worth the pain I felt. I ate and I ate. All the foods that I had forbidden myself to eat. I gained 70 pounds in 3 months. I hid food. After school I would buy boxes of cookie dough and muffins and eat until my stomach hurt. I tried to throw up a few times, but I couldn't get the hang of it. Instead I ate and ate and got fat. The pain didn't go away, I still hated my body. I hated my disease and myself. I hated my bright red stretch marks, marks of my shame.

Recovery is a process. One that I don't think ever ends. It's been 7 years and it's still a part of me. My stretch marks have faded into a translucent white, I exercise again, and some foods still turn my stomach inside out. But I am not my disease anymore; it does not control me or own me. I love my body, finally.

Zumba lets me love my body, my shapely, soft body. My body, a body that went through hell and now, my body, she dances.

Zumba Fitness, LLC. entices women to "ditch the workout [and] join the party" (Zumba.com). Zumba was created by Alberto 'Beto' Perez by accident when he forgot his aerobics tapes at home. Instead he used his own mixes of Latin music from his childhood, such as meringue and salsa. Zumba was "a new kind of dance-fitness, one that focused on letting the music move you" (Zumba.com). Zumba, the company, and Zumba instructors encourage everyone, regardless of gender, age, or dance experience, to try the Zumba fitness party. Zumba classes are taught "in over 140,000 locations across more than 150 countries" (Zumba.com). It has become a global phenomenon for the "14 million people of all shapes, sizes, and ages" who take part in the classes (Zumba.com). Zumba prides itself as being an inclusive and fun organization.

When I do Zumba, I take back my body. I take back the once-protruding hipbones, the now fleshy ribs. I claim them as my own. I move them and I move with them. I don't dance for anyone else, I dance for me. I meringue with verve, I salsa with passion, I shake my ass like I mean it. Zumba allows me to reclaim my once broken body.

Susan Bordo states, "female bodies become what Foucault calls 'docile bodies'—bodies whose forces and energies are habituated to external regulation, subjugation, transformation, 'improvement'" (1989, p. 14). My anorexic body was under external regulation, struggling to conform to that ideal of femininity that I so tightly held on to. Foucault argues, "our bodies are trained, shaped, and impressed with the prevailing historical forms of selfhood, desire, masculinity, femininity" (Bordo, 1989, p. 14). These prevailing forms were thin ideal, the hyper feminine almost waif-like images spun around by our culture. Zumba rebels against the 'docile body'.

Once I was intimidated by the footwork and coordination I thought necessarily to do Zumba. A friend, who also experienced eating disorders, persuaded me to go to a class. I tripped over my own feet, and didn't care. I felt alive. I didn't feel the need to hide my body or make excuses for it. I just moved. Zumba makes me feel sexy. My hips make wide arcs and I feel love for them.

I check the clock, it's 5:05 and Zumba is three blocks away in 10

minutes. I'm already wearing my spandex capris and sports bra. I've got my Zumba shoes on, and I'm fully equipped with a water bottle. There are no excuses, even though I'm tired and my limbs feel like there are stuck in jello when I try to move them. Somehow I end up in the gym, I see my friend Amanda smiling at me and I feel more energized. She asks if I have any song requests for class, I respond, "I want to feel like a gangster, a thug, I want to dance out my feelings." She nods and smiles, Amanda gets it.

The music starts; I feel the bass beating in my chest. "Keep your abs tight and your hips loose," Amanda shouts to the class. Suddenly, my limbs feel light and nimble, but they also feel strong and fierce. I'm stomping and gyrating and sweating and smiling. My body is mine again, we move together as one. I'm no longer looking at her from the outside, picking out imperfections and storing them to dwell on later. Now I'm feeling her, every inch of her and we're luscious.

Methods

The autoethnographic method is one of intense vulnerability, an intimacy that is often absent from traditional scholarship. Carolyn Ellis describes autoethnography as "social science prose" (1999, p. 673). It is meant to "spark an emotional cord with the readers, causing them to think and feel" (Ferdinand, 2009) and engage with the material in a way that they have not done before. Ferdinand's assertion that "lived experiences lie at the heart of autoethnography" (2009) makes it an appropriate method for my research. Many of us focus our research on areas that directly affect us. It should make sense to tell our story, to reveal why our research is important; not only on a scholarly level, but on a personal level. Autoethnography "provides an avenue for something meaningful for yourself and the world" (Ellis, 1999, p. 672). It impacts the author/researcher as much as it impacts the reader. You cannot understand my research until you understand what led me to my research. You should leave this "text with an intimate understanding of [my] experience and the ways in which it may relate" (Ferdinand, 2009) to your own life.

My additional research consisted of a quantitative online survey and five in-person qualitative interviews. I chose to mix methods in order to get a broader picture of how Zumba affects women's body image and how that translates into how they feel during the fitness classes among women ages 18-24. Both research methods consisted of collecting demographic information (Appendix A and Appendix D). The online survey, administered through Qualtrics yielded 92 respons-

es, 48 of which had completed the entire survey. Participants were aged 18-26 years ($M=20.88$, $SD=1.63$) and were recruited through social media. The vast majority of women identified as White (89.6%), followed by Other (6.3%) and Black or African American (4.2%). The majority of the participants were enrolled in the College of Charleston (77.1%). Many identified as Heterosexual/Straight (95.8%) and the remaining participants identified as Bisexual (4.2%). A narrow majority identifies themselves as feminist (56.3%).

Results

This survey included four scales designed to measure various ways women feel about their bodies. The Objectified Body Consciousness Scale (OBC) was developed by Nita Mary McKinley and consists of 24 statements, "a Surveillance Scale of 8 statements, Body Shame scale of 8 statements, and a Control Scale of 8 statements on a 6-point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree"² (McKinley, 2011, p. 687). McKinley developed this scale in order to "measure the extent to which women engaged in body surveillance and had internalized cultural body norms and standards as their own" (2011, p. 685). She took from feminist theory in order to measure surveillance, shame, and control. Surveillance occurs when women police their own bodies and behaviors associated with achieving the ideal body. Shame occurs, of course, when women feel ashamed of their bodies within the context of the ideal. Control occurs when women employ behaviors to combat shame: these habits are usually unhealthy.

Surveillance, in past research, was linked to precursors such as "sexual objectification" and outcomes of "body shame, body dissatisfaction, and eating problems" (McKinley, 2011, p. 686). Results of constant surveillance are shame and control. McKinley chose to measure these based on Naomi Wolf's "contention that believing appearance is controllable was important in getting women to accept being judged by their appearance" (as cited in McKinley, 2011, p. 686). Drawing from this feminist scholarship, McKinley states, "this disciplinary gaze marks the female body as deficient and serves to control women's behavior" (2011, p. 686). In order to ascertain how young women feel about their bodies in a Zumba class, I employed the OBC scale to determine a baseline of how they felt about their bodies, in general.

The OBC is measured on a scale of 1-6 with a higher score indicating a higher level of Surveillance, Body Shame or Control. Participants had a higher instance of Body Shame ($M=3.07$, $SD=0.74$) in comparison to Surveillance ($M=2.97$, $SD=0.50$)

and Control ($M=2.96$, $SD=0.50$). All of these scores fell almost exactly in the middle of the scale, suggesting that the participants had average levels of Surveillance, Body Shame, and Control. It is important to note that none are significantly correlated with one another. This suggests that increased Body Shame does not lead to an increase in Control or Surveillance and vice versa.

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Questionnaire (RSEQ) was created by Morris Rosenberg and is one of the most widely used self-esteem measurements worldwide (Sinclair et al., 2010). It consists of “10 statements with a 4-point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree”³ (Sinclair et al, 2010, p. 57). I utilized the RSEQ in order to gauge how young women felt about themselves overall, not just their bodies. As Sinclair et al. argue, “those who are more defined...will experience a more holistic sense of self” (Sinclair et al, 2010, p. 77).

The RSEQ is measured on a scale of 1-30 with 15-25 signifying normal self-esteem and below 15 indicating low self-esteem. The participants have depressingly low self esteem ($M=8.40$, $SD=4.85$). This scale demonstrated good internal consistency ($\alpha=0.84$).

The third scale I chose to include was the Body Esteem Scale (BES) created by Stephen L. Franzoi and Stephanie A. Shields. Franzoi et al. created a “reliable and valid body esteem measure that can be confidently used with young adult populations” (Franzoi et al., 1984, p. 178). Body esteem is “an important dimension of general self-esteem” (Franzoi et al., 1984, p. 173) so utilizing the BES allowed me to grasp yet another dimension how young women feel about themselves. This scale consists of 35 items⁴ within three subscales: the Sexual Attractiveness subscale, the Weight Concern subscale, and the Physical Condition subscale. The Sexual Attractiveness subscale includes “aspects of functions of the body that seem to be associated with physical attractiveness” and cannot be changed through exercise (Franzoi et al., 1984, p. 177). For example, the nose, ears or chin. The Weight Concern subscale includes “body parts that can be physically altered through exercise or control of food intake” (Franzoi et al., 1984, p. 177). Franzoi et al. note, “the body parts comprising this factor are the very parts most objectified by men in our culture as defining female sexuality” (1984, p. 177). For example, breasts, hips or legs. The Physical Condition subscale includes qualities “not typically under public scrutiny” (Franzoi et al., 1984, p. 177) such as “stamina, strength, and agility” (Franzoi et al., 1984, p. 177).

The BES-R, a revised version of the scale used in this research, is scored on a scale of 27-135 with scores above 54 indicating positive body esteem. The partici-

pants had overall positive body esteem ($M=86.13$, $SD=16.59$). This scale has excellent internal consistency ($\alpha=0.91$). The BES-R is significantly inversely correlated with the RSEQ ($p<.01$). For example, when body esteem is greater, self-esteem is lower and vice versa.

The last scale I included was the Body Appreciation Scale (BAS) developed by Laura Avalos, Tracy L. Tylka, and Nichole Wood Barcalow. This scale consists of 13 items ranked on a five-point scale ranging from (1) Never to (5) Always. This scale was created to measure "the extent in which women:"

- (a) hold favorable opinions of their bodies,
- (b) accept their bodies in spite of their weight, body shape, and imperfections,
- (c) respect their bodies by attending to their body's needs and engaging in healthy behaviors, and
- (d) protect their body image by rejecting unrealistic images of the thin-ideal prototype portrayed in the media. (Avalos et al., 2005, p. 287)

The above characteristics add up to "reflect unconditional approval and respect of the body" (Avalos et al., 2005, p. 287), or body appreciation. This scale allowed me to quantitate a more internal measure of body image as opposed to the superficial appreciation of specific body parts. This scale was determined to have "excellent psychometric support among women [because] its scores were internally consistent and stable...and it demonstrated evidence of construct and internal validity" (Avalos et al., 2005, p. 294). The ease with which the BAS is administered and scored makes it an ideal addition to a survey packet.

The BAS is scored on a range of 1-5 with a higher score signifying greater body appreciation. The participants had average body appreciation ($M=3.51$, $SD=0.65$). This scale also had excellent internal consistency ($\alpha=0.92$).

There are various positive and negative correlations among the scales. A positive correlation occurs when the variables on the X and Y axis increase and a negative correlation occurs when the variables on the X and Y axis decrease. For example, when the horizontal and vertical axis both increase, then there is a positive correlation, and when the horizontal and vertical axis both decrease, the correlation is negative. The RSEQ is positively correlated with OBC's Body Shame subscale ($p=.341$), negatively correlated with the BES ($p=-.488$), and negatively correlated with the BAS ($p=-.595$). This implies that when self-esteem increases, then body shame increases; when self-esteem decreases body-esteem decreases; and when self-esteem decreases body appreciation decreases. This would also correlate if the scales were reversed. For example, when body shame increases self-esteem would also increase; the correlation applies for both scales.

The BES is positively correlated with the OBC Surveillance subscale ($p=.341$), positively correlated with the BAS ($p=.718$) and negatively correlated with the OBC Body Shame subscale ($p=-.484$). This implies that when body-esteem increases, then body surveillance increases; when body-esteem increases, body appreciation increases; and when body esteem decreases, body shame decreases. These correlations also apply to both scales. For example, when body surveillance increases, then body-esteem increases.

The BAS is positively correlated with the OBC Surveillance subscale ($p=.370$) and negatively correlated with the OBC Shame subscale ($p=-.670$). This implies that if body appreciation increases, then body surveillance also increases; and if body appreciation decreases, then body shame decreases. These correlations apply to both scales as well. For example, if body surveillance increases, then body appreciation increases.

Participants were nearly evenly split between attending Zumba class less than once a month (54.2%) and attending class at least once a month or more (45.8%). Zumba classes were primarily made up of women (54.2%), exclusively women (39.6%), and the remainder of responders practice Zumba alone (6.3%). It is interesting to note that the survey options “mostly men” and “all men” were (0.0%).

Participants were asked to mark all reasons for participating in Zumba. Health was the most popular reason for doing Zumba (70.8%). Enjoyment of music (68.8%) and interest in dance (58.3%) were also popular reasons for attending classes. About half of the women were interested in weight loss (50%) and weight management (47.9%). Fewer women attended classes for socialization (35.4%) or to feel sexy (20.8%).

I conducted five in-person qualitative interviews. The participants ranged in age from 19-23. All participants were white and identified as heterosexual. One of the participants was a licensed Zumba instructor and the rest attended classes at the college or at a local gym. Interviews were recorded using the SoundNote iPad application and were later transcribed. These interviews brought additional ethnographic perspectives to my research; they gave a face to the numbers. I found six themes in the content of these interviews: Zumba is fun, Zumba as a place for friends, Mixed feelings about music, mirrors and standing positions, Zumba as a safe space, and Zumba is good for women.

Zumba is Fun

In every interview the word “fun” was used at least twice. Interviewees de-

scribed Zumba as, "really fun," "a lot of fun," "it's fun, it feels like I'm at the bar dancing," and "like it's fun." This emphasis as Zumba as fun exercise conforms to the message of Zumba fitness as one of an exercise party instead of a workout.

Zumba is a Place For Friends

Every interviewee mentioned attending a Zumba class with a friend or being dragged to their first Zumba class by a friend. One woman said it's a "community activity kind of thing. It also makes people more comfortable with their body and themselves. Group fitness, in general, creates a community and Zumba has a really strong community." In our culture of "Mean Girls" and "Queen Bees and Wannabees" a strong community of women is a valuable commodity. A supportive, non-competitive group of women is inherently feminist. The feminist nature of female communities in Zumba counteracts the patriarchal nature of aerobics. The patriarchal nature of aerobics manifests itself in several ways. Aerobics is a fitness activity where it is acceptable and encouraged for women to participate. In comparison, weight lifting is a fitness activity in which women are often turned away. The sexual nature of aerobics, similar to Zumba, puts women on display for an audience of males.

Mixed Feelings about Music

As seen in the quantitative survey data, enjoyment of music was a significant reason for many women when it came to attending Zumba classes. The interviewees mentioned several songs that were frequently played or requested in their Zumba classes: "Booty Work" by T Pain feat. Joey Galaxy, "Forever" by Chris Brown, "Survivor" by Destiny's Child, "Jai Ho" from *Slumdog Millionaire's* soundtrack, and "Thrift Shop" by Mackelmore and Ryan Lewis. Artists such as Daddy Yankee, Prince Royce, Shakira, and LMFAO were also cited as frequent hits in their classes. One woman, a Zumba instructor, described the music in this way: "we do salsa. We do some cumbia. I like to do songs that you kind of have to get nitty gritty with. So like something you can dig in and really feel the music." Another woman took a different attitude towards the songs: "I think a lot of the songs are very, very anti-feminist like they're just...and so sometimes I'm, like, well, I'm just here dancing to the music but think it's something to be aware of for some. I don't know how many people pay attention to it, but I guess it's something I sometimes think about."

The song "Booty Work" includes lyrics such as, "Cause baby I like how you're working it, / I'm watching you, you're twerking it. / I'm trying to get you out of this club and get you off in my bed." The objectifying nature of the male gaze is clearly

stated in this song, however the lyric “get you off in my bed” alludes to female pleasure. That glimmer of progressiveness aside, this particular song emphasized the male watching the female shake her *derrière*.

In sharp contrast, the song “Survivor” by Destiny’s Child is performed by women. Some of its lyrics state, “I’m a survivor. / I’m not gon’ give up. / I’m not gon’ stop. / I’m gon’ work harder.” These lyrics, sung by women, are intended to empower other women after the ending of a relationship. This song is far more feminist than “Booty Work.”

The LMFAO song, “Sexy and I Know It” equates being sexy with working out, “Ah...girl look at that body. / Uh huh I work out.” This song is a narcissistic ode to the body of the singer. The pejorative use of the term ‘girl’ aside, it does not objectify or degrade women. The music used in Zumba classes can be questionable at times, but, overall, the women do not take the lyrics into account. Many either ignore them or are too focused on the rhythms and beats to notice.

Mirrors and Standing Positions

Many fitness facilities have group fitness rooms that include mirrors and the majority of women prefer some mirrors in the room (56.3%) while others prefer mirrors all round the room (27.1%) or no mirrors in the room (16.7%). The Zumba instructor who was interviewed was the only woman comfortable standing directly in front of the mirrors, “I like standing close. I definitely like looking at how I look in the mirror.” The other women preferred to stand in the middle or further away.

I usually stand in the middle so I can see what other people are doing and I can keep up. Um, but I probably wouldn’t stand in front of the mirror...

.I think that I would be more self-conscious. Like I would be worried, like am I doing it right.

The self-consciousness does not stem from lack of body-esteem, but rather lack of self-esteem in the dance moves featured in the Zumba class. Another woman seconded this discomfort: “I like standing further away from the mirrors just because I know I’m not the best one, so I like being towards the back of the rows.” As did another:

I can, like, watch what I’m doing but also watch what the instructor is doing. So it’s good to be able to focus on, especially once I know that dance and once I’ve done it before. I can pay more attention to how I’m moving as opposed to [the instructor].

Other women prefer a room free of mirrors because they can focus on how their

body feels instead of how it looks.

Sometimes it's more encouraging when you're in a Zumba class without mirrors. Um, because you're so focused on your body and the images that it, like, you're more focused on how you feel. Like, do you feel good doing Zumba?, do you feel good afterwards?, like, not how you look.

It is not likely to find a group fitness room that does not include mirrors. The women interviewed did not mind the mirrors, some of them found them helpful in learning the dance routines. However, they were often times not confident or comfortable enough with their skill level to stand close to the mirrors.

Zumba as a Safe Space

It is undeniable that many of the dance moves associated with Zumba are sexual in nature, involving movement of the hips and booty. These moves are key motivators in determining why women choose Zumba as opposed to a spin class or another group fitness class. It gives them a chance to be someone else for an hour, someone who shakes her ass freely with abandon.

I feel it gives me an opportunity to, like, be more sexual than I am, in general. And I'm doing it for myself, not for anyone else. Or, like, especially not for, like, just to feel better about myself, not, uh, for, like, male eyes or really anybody.

The predominantly female make-up of Zumba classes encourages this form of self-expression. Women can be sexual and flaunt their bodies while not worrying about being on display for "male eyes."

There's really no one there that's not involved in the Zumba, so, um, you're kinda, I feel like you're kinda in your own world because everyone else is trying to like, is involved in what they're doing and how their body's moving. So people aren't, unless you're me, just trying to keep up, you're not really paying attention to, like, what everyone else is doing.

The group dynamic of Zumba and the concentration involved in mastering the moves allows women to feel safe and unjudged. They are free to feel their own bodies in ways that have been societally forbidden to them.

It's a great way to let out a dance. And no one judges you and, like, some people are stiff. And I used to be stiff, but I mean girls made it seem like no one is really watching you. It's, like, your safe zone.

The Zumba class is a safe zone for women to be sexual, to dance suggestively, and feel their bodies without fear of being judged or leered at. They do not have to

worry about being judged by other women in terms of their dance moves or their bodies, and they do not have to worry about men objectifying them while they are exploring their own sexualities. One of the only other instances where it is socially acceptable for women to gyrate is in nightclubs. However, in these clubs it is not uncommon for men to gaze at women and often touch their bodies without consent. Zumba provides a female friendly space for women to dance without the worry that their bodies don't just belong to them.

[It] gives everyone kind of an escape maybe from who they are. Like, *we're not all booty twerkin bomb chicks*, and the chance to do something so uncharacteristic from our everyday lives, it's good for us, and it's good for the soul to just let yourself go like that.

The act of doing something uncharacteristic is a radical act expelling the "docile body" from our lives. As Bordo argued in her appropriation of Foucault, femininity is pushed upon the female body and it is constantly self-monitored (1989). The rejection of that quiet femininity and embrace of the escape of Zumba empowers women to reclaim their bodies as their own.

Zumba is Good For Women

It was the overwhelming belief of the women I interviewed that Zumba is good for women. When asked if Zumba increases self-esteem one woman responded, "Absolutely. Abso-fuckin'-lutely." Another offered this testament that speaks for itself:

It's a great way to meet new people. It's a great way to get to know yourself, what do you like, what ways of dancing do you like, how do you feel when you dance a certain way and then when you can break through the barrier of realizing that no one cares about you as much as you care about yourself when you're dancing and able to just go all out and shake your entire body in whatever way you want to. I think that does a lot for your character. Your soul. Like all of that, just like who you are as a person [and] being able to be okay with maybe not being perfect at it, but knowing that the way you are moving right now is going to benefit you today and the next day and the next day.

I am a licensed Zumba instructor; I have been for about five months. Training was a long, sweaty day of dancing and ladylove. At the local YMCA, I met 60 others (2 men) who shared my passion for Zumba. The website was right, they were "all shapes, sizes, and ages." I learned the brief

history of Zumba, the key steps to the basic dances, and how to create a Zumba class. I haven't taught yet, but I fully intend to. I intend to share my passion for movement with other women.

My Zumba Mama (that's what they call the instructor who teaches other instructors) was a small, tightly muscular Black woman who brought her husband and two sons. Her husband is also an instructor and her boys like to do the routines alongside their parents. She utilized a simple technique that I intend to adopt. After each song, the rows would rotate; the front row would go to the back and the next row would move up front. This made it so everyone in the class was able to have a clear view of the instructor and, I think, it could help take away some mirror anxiety.

This study was twofold for me. It fulfilled my undergraduate capstone requirement and helped me develop my own Zumba class. After collecting survey data and interviewing women, I have a clearer idea of what women look for in Zumba classes and what I can do to further their Zumba journey. Step one: choose music that does not objectify or degrade women, but also has a killer bass beat. Even if you tune out the lyrics, some of it could stick right?

Zumba helped me reclaim my once battered, broken and bruised body. Now I dance, I dance for me; I dance to celebrate this body that is worth shaking. Because I am 'bootylicious.'

Conclusions

Yes, Zumba is problematic. The music is often written and performed by men and contains content that objectifies and devalues women. The dance moves are sexual in nature and draw attention and emphasis to the hips and butt. However, the women have spoken. They enjoy (or ignore) the music; they revel in the sexuality of the dance moves and enjoy the female companionship that comes with a Zumba class. Zumba is simultaneously a patriarchal and feminist institution. And that is okay.

Notes

Emily Rogers of Alexandria, VA graduated from the College of Charleston with a degree in Women's and Gender Studies with a minor in Health. "We're Not All Booty Twerkin' Bomb Chicks: A Mixed Methods Autoethnographic Journey Into Zumba Classes" served as her capstone research project for Women's and Gender Studies. The essay was supervised by Professor Alison Piepmeier with instrumental guidance provided by Professor Andrea DeMaria. The summer of 2013, Emily will relocate to Phoenix, AZ for an AmeriCorps VISTA position with the nonprofit Social Venture Partners. In the future she hopes to attain a Masters of Public Health degree.

1. This paper would not have been possible without the help and teachings of Dr. Andrea DeMaria, Dr. Alison Piepmeier, and Dr. Beth Sundstrom. It took a village of women to empower me in taking on the challenge data collection process, and I offer my deepest gratitude. I dedicate this paper to all the young women who are reclaiming their bodies in Zumba classes, those who are shaking their asses for themselves. Keep dancing, ladies.
2. The original scale included an option of N/A. I chose to leave this out in order to ensure participants to responded to each statement.
3. There was no N/A option present in the original scale and I did not include one.
4. I used a modified version of the BAS, choosing not to include nose, lips, ears, chin, width of shoulders, eyes, checks/cheekbones, or face. I excluded these because they did not directly relate to my aim of studying bodies in Zumba classes.

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Appendix A

Zumba Online Survey

Zumba Survey

Q20 You are invited to participate in a capstone research study. This research, to be conducted by Emily Rogers, is designed to gain information related to Zumba fitness and body esteem. Participation in this study will take about 10 minutes of your time. As a participant in this research, you will be asked to complete a web-based survey.

Participation is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time. Clicking the arrows below constitutes your consent to participate in this research. All data obtained will be anonymous and kept confidential. If you have any questions before completing this survey, please contact Emily Rogers at earogers@g.cofc.edu or Alison Piepmeier at piepmeiera@cofc.edu. This research has been reviewed by the Human Resources Protection Program at the College of Charleston. For more information about the review process, please contact the Office of Research and Grants Administration, compliance@cofc.edu or 843-953-7421. IRB approval code: HHJG-03-14-2013 If you wish to participate, please proceed to the questionnaire by clicking arrows below.

Q4* Do you identify as a woman between the ages of 18 and 24?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

If No Is Selected, Then Skip To End of Survey

Q5 Have you ever attended a Zumba exercise class?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

If No Is Selected, Then Skip To End of Survey

Q6 How often do you attend a Zumba exercise class?

- Less than Once a Month (1)
- Once a Month (2)
- 2-3 Times a Month (3)
- Once a Week (4)
- 2-3 Times a Week (5)
- Daily (6)

Q7 Where do you typically Zumba?

- Home (1)
- College of Charleston (2)
- Local Gym (3)
- Other (4) _____

Answer If Where do you typically Zumba? Local Gym Is Selected

Q8 Which local gym do you go to?

* The survey begins with Q4 instead of Q1 because that is the order the questions were created within the Qualtrics program. They were reordered before activating the survey.

Q9 What is the typical make-up of your Zumba classes?

- All women (1)
- Mostly women (2)
- Equal women and men (3)
- Mostly men (4)
- All men (5)
- I do Zumba alone (6)

Answer If What is the typical make-up of your Zumba classes? Mostly women Is Selected And What is the typical make-up of your Zumba classes? Equal women and men Is Selected And What is the typical make-up of your Zumba classes? Mostly men Is Selected And What is the typical make-up of your Zumba classes? All men Is Selected

Q10 How do you feel when men participate in your Zumba classes?

- Completely comfortable (1)
- Comfortable (2)
- Slightly uncomfortable (3)
- Uncomfortable (4)

Q11 How do you feel when men observe your Zumba class(es)? Observation could mean having them watch through a window, door, or another close by area.

- Completely comfortable (1)
- Comfortable (2)
- Slightly uncomfortable (3)
- Uncomfortable (4)

Q12 If you had to choose, what would your preference be for how your Zumba exercise room or area is arranged?

- Mirrors all around the room (1)
- Some mirrors in the room (2)
- No mirrors in the room (3)

	Strongly Disagree (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	Strongly Agree (6)
It doesn't matter how hard I try to change my weight, it's probably always going to be about the same. (22)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can weigh what I'm supposed to when I try hard enough. (23)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The shape you are in depends mostly on your genes. (24)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q2 ROSENBERG SELF-ESTEEM QUESTIONNAIRE

Please record the appropriate answer for each item, depending on whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with it.

	Strongly Agree (1)	Agree (2)	Disagree (3)	Strongly Disagree (4)
On the whole, I am satisfied with myself. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
At times I think I am no good at all. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that I have a number of good qualities. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Strongly Agree (1)	Agree (2)	Disagree (3)	Strongly Disagree (4)
I am able to do things as well as most other people. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel I do not have much to be proud of. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I certainly feel useless at times. (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that I’m a person of worth. (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I wish I could have more respect for myself. (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
All in all, I am inclined to think that I am a failure. (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I take a positive attitude toward myself. (10)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q3 BODY ESTEEM SCALE

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)
body scent (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
appetite (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
physical stamina (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
reflexes (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
muscular strength (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
waist (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
energy level (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
thighs (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
biceps (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
body build (10)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)
physical coordination (11)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
buttocks (12)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
agility (13)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
arms (14)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
breasts (15)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
hips (16)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
legs (17)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
figure or physique (18)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
sex drive (19)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
feet (20)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
sex organs (21)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
appearance of stomach (22)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
health (23)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
sex activities (24)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
body hair (25)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
physical condition (26)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
weight (27)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q23 BODY APPRECIATION SCALE

Please indicate whether the question is true about you never, seldom, sometimes, often, or always.

	Never (1)	Seldom (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)	Always (5)
I respect my body. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel good about my body. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
On the whole, I am satisfied with my body. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Never (1)	Seldom (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)	Always (5)
Despite its flaws, I accept my body for what it is. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that my body has at least some good qualities. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I take a positive attitude towards my body. (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am attentive to my body's needs. (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My self worth is independent of my body shape or weight. (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I do not focus a lot of energy being concerned with my body shape or weight. (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My feelings toward my body are positive, for the most part. (10)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I engage in healthy behaviors to take care of my body. (11)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I do not allow unrealistically thin images of women presented in the media to affect my attitudes toward my body. (12)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Never (1)	Seldom (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)	Always (5)
Despite its imperfections, I still like my body. (13)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q14 How old are you?

- 18 (1)
- 19 (2)
- 20 (3)
- 21 (4)
- 22 (5)
- 23 (6)
- 24 (7)

Q21 Please check both boxes and provide the following information in order to calculate your Body Mass Index (BMI):

- Height (in inches) (1) _____
- Weight (in pounds) (2) _____

Q15 Which of the following best describes your race or ethnicity?

- American Indian or Alaskan Native (1)
- Asian or Asian American (2)
- Black or African American (3)
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (4)
- Hispanic or Latino (5)
- White or Caucasian (6)
- Other (7)

Q16 Are you currently enrolled at the College of Charleston?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q17 Which of the following commonly used terms best describes your sexual orientation?

- Heterosexual/straight (1)
- Homosexual/gay or lesbian (2)
- Bisexual (3)
- Asexual (4)
- Queer (5)
- Intersex (6)

Q18 Would you consider yourself a feminist?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q24 If you are interested in participating in a confidential in-person interview (30-45 minutes), please type your email in the box below. Someone will contact you to schedule an interview at your convenience.

Yes (1) _____

No (2)

Q19 Thank you for your participation. Please click the arrows below to submit your answers.

Appendix B

In-Person Interview Script

[Welcome the interviewee and introduce yourself. Introduce the research study.]
Thank you for taking the time to come today. I have a consent form for you to review. [Hand interviewee consent form.] I want you to know that your insights are very important to me and there is no such thing as a wrong answer. You don't have to answer all of the questions, you can ask me questions, and you can stop the interview at any time. All of your responses will be kept confidential.

I would like to audiotape our conversation so that I can get all the details later. If you agree, please sign the consent form.

Basics

1. Can you tell me about the last Zumba class you attended?
 - a. Probe: What music did they play?
 - b. Probe: What time of the day was it?
 - c. Probe: What did you wear?
2. How long have you been doing Zumba?
 - a. How often do you do Zumba?
 - b. Where (CofC, local gym, home)?
3. Do you do any other forms of physical activity or exercise?
 - a. Probe: Does your gym offer other classes (if applicable)?
 - b. Probe: Have you done other forms of exercise in the past?
4. How would you describe your health?
 - a. Probe: What “healthy activities” to do engage in? How often?
 - b. Probe: How do you measure health?
 - i. How you feel? How you look?

Feelings About Zumba

5. Why did you choose Zumba fitness classes?
 - a. Probe: Have you gone to classes with friends?
6. How do you feel during your Zumba classes?
 - a. Mentally
 - b. Physically
7. How do you feel after your Zumba classes?
 - a. Mentally
 - b. Physically
8. What kind of music is played in your Zumba classes?
 - a. Probe: Can you name any of the artists or songs?
 - b. Probe: Do you like the music?
 - c. Probe: Is there a song you have requested in your classes? Why that song?
9. How do you feel about the dance moves?
 - a. Probe: Does the footwork ever trip you up?
 - b. Probe: Do you find the moves sexual?
10. How does your instructor teach class?
 - a. Probe: Verbal cues? Gesture cues?
 - b. Probe: Does your instructor face the class or have their back to the

class?

Feelings About the Body

11. What do you normally wear to your Zumba class?
 - a. Probe: Have you ever bought any Zumba brand clothing?
12. Does the room you do Zumba in have mirrors?
 - a. Probe: Do you prefer to stand close or far from the mirrors? Why?
13. Does anyone observe your Zumba classes?
 - a. Probe: How do you feel if men observe your classes?
 - b. Probe: How do you feel if men participate in your classes?
14. Are there any parts of your body that you are conscious of while doing Zumba?
 - a. Probe: Which parts?
 - b. Probe: Are you conscious of them when you are not doing Zumba?
15. Do you compare yourself to others in your Zumba class?
 - a. Probe: The instructor? Other women?
 - b. Probe: Do you compare your dance moves? Clothing? Body?

Conclusion

16. How would you envision your perfect Zumba class?
 - a. Probe: What kind of music would play?
 - b. Probe: What dance moves would you feature?
 - c. Probe: How would the instructor teach?
 - d. Probe: What would you wear?
17. Would you consider yourself a feminist?
 - a. Probe: How would you define feminist?
 - b. Probe: Why or why not?
18. If yes to 17, Do you identify any contradictions between being a feminist and doing Zumba?
 - a. Probe: Any of the dance moves?
 - b. Probe: Any of the music?
19. Is Zumba beneficial to women?
 - a. Probe: Does it increase self-esteem? Body-esteem?
 - b. Probe: Does it create a safe- environment to be sexual?

Those are all the prepared questions I have for our interview.

20. Are there any questions you wish I would have asked that I didn't?
21. Is there anything you wish to add?

Thank you very much for your time. To help ensure we are gathering data from a diverse group of people, please fill out a **short demographic sheet**? This will be anonymous. Have a great day!

Appendix C

Interview Consent Form

Zumba Study

You are invited to participate in a capstone research study. This research, to be conducted by Emily Rogers, is designed to gain information related to Zumba fitness and body esteem.

Participation in this study will require about 30-45 minutes of your time. As a participant in this research you will be asked to complete an in-depth interview that will be audio recorded. This recording will be destroyed when the research is complete. If you are willing to permit us to audio record this interview, please circle the item above the signature line.

Your information will be kept confidential. For research purposes, you will be quoted regarding the information you gave in today's interview. However, you will not be identified.

If you have any questions concerning this capstone research study please contact Emily Rogers at earogers@g.cofc.edu or Alison Piepmeier at piepmeiera@cofc.edu.

This research has been reviewed by the Human Resources Protection Program at the College of Charleston. For more information about the review process, please contact the Office of Research and Grants Administration, compliance@cofc.edu or 843-953-7421.

I permit you to audio record my interview. No Yes

I have read this consent form, and I agree to participate in this research study.

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

Appendix D

Interview Demographics Questionnaire

1. **How old are you?** _____ years
2. **Which of the following best describes your race or ethnicity?**
 - a. American Indian or Alaskan Native
 - b. Asian or Asian American
 - c. Black or African American
 - d. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - e. Hispanic or Latina
 - f. White or Caucasian
 - g. Other: _____
3. **Are you currently enrolled at the College of Charleston?**
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
4. **Which of the following commonly used terms best describes your sexual orientation?**
 - a. Heterosexual/Straight
 - b. Homosexual/Gay or Lesbian
 - c. Bisexual
 - d. Asexual
 - e. Queer
 - f. Intersex