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The power of interactive flow in salsa dance: a motion-sensing phenomenological inquiry featuring two-time world champion, Anya Katsevman

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ABSTRACT

What might it be like to sense one's motile power as a follower in salsa dance, particularly in moments when flow manifests? Does a follower simply go along with the lead's flow or does a different kind of flow emerge? Such questions guided this motion-sensing phenomenological (MSP) inquiry into the felt sense of power experienced in the movements of interactive flow that features two-time world salsa champion, coach, and international judge, Anya Katsevman. Over the course of four years, interviews, observations and coaching sessions were analysed through theories purported by dance phenomenologist Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, Daniel Stern, a psychologist who inspired much of Sheets-Johnstone's writing on the primacy of movement, and the radical phenomenology of Michel Henry who provides a philosophy upon which one may frame the phenomenological 'search' for meaning in kinaesthetic terms. The conceptual structure that guided the motion-sensing gathering of data and analysis was the interdisciplinary Function2Flow (F2F) model with its constitutive dimensions of movement Function, Form, Feeling and Flow. As such, the MSP analysis organized in accordance to the F2F model afforded the emergence of micro nuances, detailed physical sensations of this practice, within this macro themed structure. Hence, in detailing the bodily functions and forms of the nuanced gestural communication in salsa dance, with particular attention on the motile sense of power experienced by a follower, a physical pathway to better understanding existential feelings of interactive flow emerged.

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What you will see from me [when I am in flow] is an excess amount of power and energy than my leader. It is not because I am leading or because I am dominating. It is just because I am better. I think that is an important distinction to make. I don't take charge. I am just stronger, and we often associate those kinds of words with masculine energy. But it's not masculine. I am not being the man. I am just the stronger presence of the two. (Anya Katsevman, pers. comm., March 2019)

I begin this motion-sensing phenomenological inquiry (Lloyd and Smith 2006b, Lloyd and Smith 2015, submitted; Smith and Lloyd 2019) with an ornamental quote taken from one of the many conversations I have had with two-time world champion, international judge and renowned coach Anya Katsevman. This particular conversation occurred on a weekend last spring when she flew up from her New York home to coach my ladies styling team as our first competition of the season was drawing near. We were sitting in my kitchen, sipping coffee and eating avocado toast and I took the opportunity to ask her about her flow experiences in her partner interactions. This excerpt stood out because she spoke of a felt sense of power in her motile presence, a power that had nothing to do

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with domination or masculinity. My curiosity was peaked. What might it be like to understand power in this way? As an academic I have come to know power in relation to oppression, gender, race and limitation (i.e., Butler 1999, 2004; Foucault 1995; Freire et al. 2018), perspectives that have notably carried much traction in partnered dance research (i.e. Bosse 2015; Davis 2015; Ericksen 2011; Harman 2019; McMains 2018; Skinner 2008). And as a salsa dancer with a sustained, dare I say addictive, interest in the cultivation of flow (Lloyd 2015a, 2015b), I feel compelled to disclose that have never given the felt sense of power much thought.

Looking back, I approached my role of following in a way that I would now consider to be somewhat submissive, similar to the imbalance described in Ericksen's (2011) ethnography – the man leads, the woman follows. I was not aware of my power, my motile agency (Sheets-Johnstone 2017) and in what ways I could contribute to the partnership (Davis 2015; Harman 2019; McMains 2018). My understanding was that if I were to be able to experience a consciousness where I could move in response to partner-initiated cues with complete openness, I would experience the pleasure of flow, a joyful feeling of being completely immersed and connected to one's experience as it is happening (Csikszentmihalyi 2000, 2008, 2014).

While my 'go with my partner's flow' tactic worked to some extent, it did not serve me well when I started to experience discomfort in my neck and shoulder. As my pain increased, I danced with an embodied tension, what Hanna (1988) describes as a somatic 'red light' fear response. I started to brace myself against cues I experienced on the social dance floor that were exerted with unexpected degrees of force or torque. Hence, the 'go with the lead's flow' consciousness I adopted did not prepare me to develop a motile repertoire of responses (Sheets-Johnstone 2017) needed to navigate such cues. Only after I spoke with Anya—what will become the 'data' (van Manen 1997, 53–55) of this inquiry – did I realise that my understanding of flow in the lead-follow partner dance dynamic lacked a connection to the felt sense of power available to me, what I was able to access within movement itself.

Accordingly, I wonder in the phenomenological sense (Sheets-Johnstone 2011, 234), what it might be like to sense one's motile power as it manifests in the experience of interactive flow? And with a desire to explore this through a motion-sensing approach (Lloyd and Smith 2015; Smith and Lloyd 2019), what bodily functions and forms inform this nuanced gestural communication? What existential feelings of connection manifest? In sum, what might we learn about the interactive nuances of the practice of partnered salsa dance from a 'Function2Flow', as in movement function, form, feeling, and flow registers of consciousness (Lloyd 2015c, 2016)? And in diving deeply into the underlying feelings, forms and functions at the heart of an expert-level salsa relational practice, I wonder what salsa dance might teach us with regard to better understanding the nature of interactive flow in human interaction? What might transcend this discipline? Are there interactive nuances that may help dancers and nondancers alike move in ways that result in a more connected, meaningful way of being-with others?

Approaching an inquiry into the way power is somatically experienced as a motile phenomenon contributes a novel layer of depth to partner dance research. Typically, power is understood as a gendered phenomenon where tensions exist between notions of dominance and submission. McMains (2018), a feminist who has been challenging such heteronormative gender roles in social dancing for decades (60), describes her lead-follow dance with Valentina. She writes, 'Valentina, who with a mischievous smile arrests my momentum mid-giro and reverses our turn, my acceptance of her suggestion also signaling my consent to the game, one that has turned a monologue into a playful dialogue' (McMains 2018, 63–64). Such an example invites us to consider the felt sense of what is being experienced in such an exchange, one that describes active contributions of a follower and how that might be understood through the kinaesthetic means of movement consciousness.

To phenomenologically inquire into such power differs very much from a study which explores power in relation to gender roles (Ericksen 2011; Liska 2017; McMains 2018) or notions of expressing sexuality (Skinner 2008). While some researchers suggest that we cannot engage in contemporary partnered dance such as tango, 'without drawing upon the exoticized/eroticized images that are part

of tango's imbrications in the gendered, racialised legacies of colonialism' (Davis 2015, 15), as a phenomenologist, my interest delves into the primacy of movement (Sheets-Johnstone 1999; Sheets-Johnstone and Cunningham 2015). Attuning to what is there in the felt sense is an orientation to research shared by many dance phenomenologists (i.e., Bellerose 2018; Bingham 2018; Fraleigh 2018; Midgelow 2018; Williamson 2018) as phenomenology invites us to suspend or bracket what is imposed on our consciousness through socially constructed layers. And in turning my attention from prior motion-sensing phenomenological inquires in other contexts such as running, climbing, hula-hooping, snowboarding and snowshoeing (Lloyd 2011a, 2011b, 2012a, 2012b, 2016) to the flow consciousness as it is experienced in partnered dance (Lloyd 2015a, 2015b, 2017), I aspire to add somatic depths to existing socially constructed research. Direct experience with 'the thing itself' (Husserl 1982; Fraleigh 2018; Embree 2011; Merleau-Ponty 1962, 1968; van Manen 1997, 2014), in this case 'power' as a felt sense (Henry 2008, 2015; Gaines 1990; Sheets-Johnstone 2014, 2017, 2018) as it manifests within the pleasures of interactive flow (Csikszentmihalyi 2014, 2000; Lloyd and Smith 2006b) is thus the intention of this inquiry.

From cognitive decision-making to a somatic sensing of movement agency

This phenomenological inquiry into the pre-reflective consciousness of the partnered dynamic also adds to the cognitive, decision-making orientation so often articulated ethnographic studies. By decision-making, I am referring to the way the dynamic of the lead-follow relation has been described through the lens of 'invitation and acceptance', i.e., 'The man [...] invites her to perform a move. If she wants to, she does it. If not, she doesn't' (Bosse 2015, 82–83). Such is the lexicon of the pedagogy of partnered dance, yet I am curious how often this is palpably felt and put into play within the rhymical constraints of the social dance floor. Is there time to ponder an acceptance that is communicated by a push or pull or other ways a cue might be given and received? Does a follower feel cues that welcome notions of acceptance?

McMains (2018) spoke of her trepidation and lack of confidence in becoming more active in her role of following, yet she was unable to separate whether this was 'related to the gender dynamic [or] the teacher/student dynamic' (64), a noteworthy wondering as the gender dynamics in partnered dance may be traced back to the 1800s, 'a time of increased emphasis on the separate spheres for men and women, with men being associated with work outside of the home and women with domestic labour within it' (Harman 2019, 5). Other researchers of social dance have articulated such imbalances in the roles of leading and following as many women, who have 'benefited from second-wave feminism on their paths to success [...] continue to] dance in a world that seems traditionally gendered, where appearance is all important, and where men lead and women follow' (Ericksen 2011, 14). Bosse (2015) further describes how such tensions play out, particularly in the following conversation she had with a self-identified feminist who danced for years.

"Why did you quit?" I asked. After a long pause, Mai responded, "Because a feminist shouldn't be led around by a man!" I had trouble reading the smiling twinkle in her eye, which seemed a contradiction to the indignant tone in her voice. "So, what changed? He still leads doesn't he?" I responded. "Well," she paused, "we missed it. So now I tell myself that I *allow* him to lead me." I would have preferred to continue the discussion, but the music started, and before I could even say "Thanks," Mai was dragging Dan onto the dance floor. (Bosse 2015, 75-76)

The more time I spend observing Anya Katsevman dance, I know that she does more than decide to accept an invitation or allow herself to be led. She moves in a way that in no way resembles trepidation, contemplation or doubt. She exudes power with each and every one of her movements in a way where the interaction appears effortless. I am curious to better understand these experiences in terms of the consciousness exuded in the spontaneous dynamics of interactive flow (Lloyd and Smith 2006a, 2015; Smith and Lloyd 2019). I am not alone in wondering about such moments. Harman (2019) articulates the need for future social dance research to be dedicated to better understanding the follower's experience of flow as she wonders if they just 'switch off' and 'go

with the flow' of the leader or if a different sort of flow unfolds (Harman 2019, 114). By delving deeply into the consciousness of a follower's flow, an embodied, motion-sensing understanding would emerge, hence a welcome alternative to the cognitive decision-making depiction of the gendered, partnered dynamic (Bosse 2015).

Motion-sensing phenomenology (MSP): a function2flow approach to sense making

Professional video recordings edited into a mini video documentary entitled, 'The InterActive for Life Project, Episode 1, Salsa Dancing' (Studio 7 Multimedia 2018) and a series of interviews were conducted over a four-year period with two-time world champion, international judge, coach, and professional dancer, Anya Katsevman. Framed by the conceptual structure of the interdisciplinary Function2Flow (F2F) model (Lloyd 2011a, Lloyd 2012a, 2015c, 2016, 2019), questions were formulated with a specific interest in understanding a kinetic-aesthetic-kinaesthetic-energetic oriented pathway towards flow cultivation. Questions pertaining to movement *Function*, the physiological kinetic dimension, inquired into the physical capacity to move. Questions relating to movement *Form*, the aesthetic dimension, explored the shapes and structures that provided a foundation for interactivity. Questions that dove into movement *Feeling*, attuned to the kinaesthetic dimensions of movement affectivity. And questions relating to *Flow*, explored perceptions of existential merge between movement, others, and the more-than-human world. Questions posed to Anya framed by the F2F model thus included, but were not limited to:

- *Function*: What fitness attributes provide a foundation and physical capacity to engage in your practice, e.g. aspects of cardiovascular capacity, muscular strength and endurance, agility, and flexibility?
- *Form*: Is there a visibly identifiable 'correct' form in your practice? How does this form vary from one partnership to another? How does it help one connect to a partner?
- *Feeling*: What is it like to feel sensations of alignment and balance in specific actions of your practice? How does this internal awareness affect your practice?
- *Flow*: Is the feeling of flow something that is simply 'there or not there' or does it build and fade with various intensities, energies, rhythms or frequencies?

The motion-sensing phenomenological process of meaning-making, as guided by the F2F model, us invites to kinetically, aesthetically, kinaesthetically and energetically feel our way towards meaning (Lloyd 2017; Smith and Lloyd 2019) as opposed to turning to vision, the dominant mode of sense making in phenomenology (Henry 2008; Kleinberg-Levin 1999; van Manen 2014) as depicted in traditional phenomenological texts, (i.e. Heidegger 2010; Husserl 1982; Merleau-Ponty 1968). Such a shift from vision to embracing the primacy of movement (Sheets-Johnstone 1999, 2011) is philosophically inspired by Michel Henry (2008), particularly in regard to the ontology of feeling which he described as a field of 'auto-affectivity'. By including Henry (2008, 2015), we are taken one step back from the phenomenological trilogy articulated by Sheets-Johnstone (2014), "the 'I move', 'I do', 'I can do' or 'I can' (254) as we consider the first the vital power we possess, the sensation of life that precedes all movement, i.e., 'the power to move' that Henry (2008, 217) articulates before we intentionally move.

By beginning an inquiry from the philosophical orientation put forth by Henry (2008, 2015), we thus enter an intersubjective terrain premised in affectivity where there is no sentient-sensible gap (Merleau-Ponty 1968; Irigaray 1999, 2001), just an omnipresent modality of sensation, an affectivity that exists even before we begin to focus on the world that our eyes place before us. Such an orientation shifts attention in the data gathering process from what is seen, in this case manifestations of power that may be construed as external to oneself, to what is felt. Henry (2008) describes the radical phenomenology he puts forth in contrast to Husserl's notion of 'being-with.' He asks,

How is the other given to me? That is the question of phenomenology, because phenomenology does not interrogate objects but the mode of their givenness, “objects in their how.” For Husserl the other is given to me in and through intentionality. To say that the other enters into my experience means that the other enters into this primordial Outside into which intentionality casts itself. (Henry 2008, 101)

Rather than start an inquiry from the point of intentionality, the moment when we perceive the other before us in a manner that might objectify the perception of the other’s body, Henry invites us to consider the realm of transcendental affectivity, the feeling that connects each of us in experiencing the power of life itself. He explains that,

every experience of the other in the sense of a real being with the other occurs in us as an affect. It is not a noematic or noetic mode of presentation that founds the access to the other; instead, it is givenness consisting of transcendental affectivity and thus of life itself. The universal a priori of the experience of the other in its original modalities is located in the essence of life, not in intentionality and constitution. (Henry 2015, 115)

To access this realm of affectivity, the interviews that formed much of the data collection may be reconstrued as ‘inter-feels’ (Lloyd 2017, 62) as Anya was continually prompted to describe her experience in a sensing, kinaesthetic language. The goal in orienting the data gathering and analysis in this way was to create a resonant, somatic and kinaesthetic understanding of the power of interactive flow.

A function-to-flow orientation to Anya Katsevman in flow

To phenomenologically orient towards (van Manen 1997) the Function-to-Flows of Anya’s powerful prowess, the following vignette was written in response to watching Anya in performance at the 2018 Montreal Salsa Convention, an experience which was filmed and included in the professionally edited video documentary that accompanies this inquiry entitled, ‘The InterActive for Life Project, Episode 1, Salsa Dancing’ (Studio 7 Multimedia 2018). Such descriptive text invites a kinaesthetic, living breathing attunement to our phenomenon in question, a phenomenological ‘write up’ if you will that methodologically adds to traditional notions of ‘writing down’ transcribed conversation (Smith and Lloyd 2019).

Anya has her back to the audience, yet you can feel the intensity of the look she is giving her partner Luis as her chin lowers and her eyes lift. Their song, both mystical and mysterious, stands in contrast to the typical selection of high-energy, repetitious beats one hears at salsa events. Dramatic accents and pauses afford a wide array of motile responses and with that a layer of depth and intensity. A quick intake of breath is drawn into the concavity of Anya’s chest as her heavy hand drops into Luis’s outstretched palm. Not a split, kick, flip or trick invites the audience to audibly respond, but the palpable intensity projected in this simple hand-placed-in-hand gesture. The power shifts from her connected palm to every step she makes as she transfers weight from one foot to the next. She circles, turns, and then folds into Luis in an airborne caress ... the two momentarily meld into one as the music softens and fades ... Hands release upward as they soak in the moment of stillness. A burst of instantaneous energy surges out from their side-by-side, synchronized samba-like footwork. Their hips, rotating and spiralling, as their feet energetically pick up every percussive beat, are supported by quiet, calm torsos that move only in response to occasional dramatic accents. While the average dancer might be inclined to hold their breath and experience stress in such moments of fast-paced intensity, Anya’s eyes are playful. She winks at the audience then looks to her partner as they pop out musical accents through their torsos. A sly smile widens ... synchronous movements ... lightning speed ... effortless ease.

When one watches Anya dance, a salsa queen who has been crowned with a world title not once, but twice, there is a sense of inter-active presence and depth to each and every moment she shares with us on stage. She in no way gives an image of a weak, passive woman going along for a ride, rather, she appears to be strong, dominant even.

Function: inquiring into the physical capacities of Anya’s movement experience

When Anya experiences her best performances, she is rarely matched in energy. When asked about the unfathomable power she is able to generate, she gives credit to her ability to transfer weight

from one foot to the other. According to Anya, this ability is her primary strength, the source of her power. When she moves forward (or side or back depending on the desired direction) her power comes from a push into the floor from her oppositional foot. She does not give every weight transfer a similar force, rather she has developed a repertoire of movement possibilities so that the force and control of each push into the floor and corresponding bending and straightening of her knees can be performed in a multitude of tempos, accents, or what Stern (2004) and Sheets-Johnstone (2014, 1999) describe as vitality affects. This degree of ankle control is rare in salsa dance. It sets her apart from others. It also creates a visual difference in the dynamic of her partnership. For if her partner steps with less precision and less control, his movements will appear softer, weaker, yet to the untrained eye, there will be no visible explanation as to why. Anya provides further detail in regard to the power she generates in her weight transfers.

What you will see from me is an excess amount of power and energy than my leader ... I don't take charge. I am just stronger ... Let's say from point A to point B, from the transfer of my left leg shifting my weight to the right I will produce more athletic power in the shift so I will visually look stronger. I am using more force. I use the ground better. I will look more powerful. And this anyone can see. (Anya Katsevman, pers. comm., March 2019)

The functional capacity of the ankle joint in terms of the relational power it has to generate in a salsa partnership is rarely understood by those who take up salsa in a recreational capacity. One foot typically transfers weight to the other as it is experienced within the generalist action of a pedestrian-like walk. Imagine a beginner salsa lesson. All participants begin by facing the same direction, similar to a group fitness class, and experience the herd mentality of being corralled into a 1-2-3, 5-6-7 repetitious walk in a few set directions, forward-and-back, side-to-side and on occasion, crossing behind. When a certain amount of proficiency is established, the instructor will turn on the music and lead the group through the same set of patterns with the goal of matching 'count 1' of the steps with 'count 1' in the music. As a consolidation of this introductory lesson, participants will be invited to couple-up and repeat the same learned patterns in a mirror-like fashion. And as the lessons continue, the focus tends to be directed towards learning more complex patterns. The sensitivity and fundamental capacity of the ankle joint in terms of attending to the various ways weight can be transferred from one foot to the next tends to be the furthest thing from one's mind. Anya gives further insight into the attitude of a recreational dancer.

If my intent is just to have a good time, then dancing could be easy ... I could learn to social dance. I could pick up a few patterns and I can learn to stay on beat so I'm one with the music and nothing else is required of me. And that's okay. But if you want to be a good dancer, if you want to actually look good, if you want to manifest movement that you control and intend to produce, you need physical ability which is literally just strength training. It's the capacity of your muscle mass aiding your joints to do what you want to do. It's no different than any physical activity whatsoever. (Anya Katsevman, pers. comm., March 2018)

Such insight speaks to the sport specific training in the acquisition process of increasing one's physical capacity to be strong in salsa, a strength that pertains to controlling and producing force through the ankle joint.

The fundamental action of the salsa walk, what Anya describes as a weight transfer, is done in such a way where there is no vertical up-and-down bounce. As one transfers weight to walk forward or back, the head stays level as the knees bend and extend. To cultivate such controlled body movements for the basic locomotive, fundamental action of salsa takes much dedicated time and effort. And for the muscles to develop a natural instinct to move in this way, a salsa dancer must spend time developing control of the joints and muscles within the practice itself.

In terms of the flexibility required for salsa, Anya explains that it has nothing to do with how we typically think of flexibility in terms of high kicks, splits or circus-like tricks. Rather, flexibility in salsa dance relates to the movements of the spine and the capacity to rotate from one direction to the next. Anya explains:

When you say flexibility as a salsa dancer, I'm thinking about the rotation of my hips so I can create more body movement. I'm thinking about the rotation of my scapula so I can create more upper body movement. I'm

thinking about the flexibility in my spine because that's the most important for any kind of movement. I'm not thinking about splits and kicks or any kind of elongation aesthetically through the limbs or any kind of handstands or bridges because for rhythmical movement that isn't as important ... Our bodies need to be well equipped for the work ... it's not a 'go to yoga kind of thing' because then your body will develop some kind of muscle that it doesn't know how to control unless you've done it through the practice that you need to utilize it in ... Range of motion will always require flexibility and strength and delivery of that range of motion will always require endurance ... Foundation-wise your body needs to be strong, physically fit, and flexible but in the range that you need to use it and you can only utilize it when you're practicing what you're doing. (Anya Katsevman, pers. comm., March 2018)

To summarise the foundational functional movement capacities of salsa that contribute to the cultivation of power and flow on the performative stage or social dance floor, one must first mindfully attend to the articulation and control of the ankle, knee, hip, spine and shoulder blades with the goal of increasing flexibility and endurance to not only maintain a rhythmical percussive beat but also develop a repertoire of possibilities to accent particular beats. It might feel awkward and mechanistic at first to refine the qualitative features of a weight transfer, but with practice, like any other movements we learn in life such as throwing a ball, we develop a kinaesthetic agency as Sheets-Johnstone (2017) explains in that moment of experiencing 'I can.'

"I cans" are both a declaration and a validation of agency. As shown earlier, a repertoire of "I cans" is inscribed in kinaesthetic memory in the course of normal development, which is to say that habitual ways of moving can, and commonly do, flow forth effortlessly, but only because their qualitative dynamics are familiar kinaesthetic themes – themes with possible variations according to circumstance. (Sheets-Johnstone 2017, 12)

For such kinaesthetic memory to develop, one accesses 'our foundational learning [in] primal animation ... Just as such animation or dynamics undergird our learning our bodies and learning to move ourselves, so they undergird our correlative build-up of kinaesthetic learnings into "I cans" ' (Sheets-Johnstone 2014, 252). Hence, through a dedicated motion-sensing practice in regard to refining the salsa walk, one eventually develops, as Anya has, a range of dynamic possibilities with each step. As such, one continues to expand a 'repertoire of "I cans" and, hence ... agency and the capacity to make things happen' (Sheets-Johnstone 2017, 13). Over the course of time, 'habitual qualitative dynamics are constituted' (Sheets-Johnstone 2017, 12).

One may conclude that to develop the functional capacity to generate and maintain power in salsa dance, one does not need a partner. To refine one's practice of transferring weight and communicating what is rippling up from the floor through one's spine to the extent where flow is cultivated, is the first step to preparing oneself to experience an interactive flow with a partner. Not every partner will commit to such practice as they are likely drawn to this dance because they enjoy the experience of moving with another, and this attention to detail involves time with oneself, one's interiority, one's ability to tap into one's primal source of power. For this reason, partners who dance together may experience varying levels of power in each weight transfer depending on the repertoire of 'I cans' developed through motion-sensing practice. From a movement function perspective, therefore, it is obvious that 'power' as it is experienced within the movements of salsa is not a term mapped to gender in the lead-follow dynamic. Rather, it is the manifestation of joint and muscle control that may be performed by anyone committed to developing sensitivity in a movement that, more often than not, is taken for granted.

Form: inquiring into the foundational shapes and structures for Anya's movement

To share this locomotive rhythmical, rotational and fluid fundamental functional capacity with a partner, one must assume a posture that affords a sense of connection. To kinaesthetically orient to a posture that lends itself with forming a connection, take a moment and stand up if you are able or imagine yourself doing so. Now imagine what it is like to lean back and put weight in your heels versus lean forward with your weight over your toes. Such a shift is subtle but the effect and affect is enormous in terms of a weight in the heels posture that puts on the breaks and pulls one away from

leaning into the fullness of the moment, an impulse to lean into the moment-to-moment experience of life itself (Smith and Lloyd 2019). Anya explains that the only difference between the forward leaning salsa posture and the universal anatomically correct neutral posture is that instead of stacking the hips over the mid foot, they are situated over the balls of the feet. This alignment creates a forward lead to one's walk and a sense of connection between the face-to-face slight compression of interconnected palms and arms. If a follower leans too far back in their stance towards their heels, they will feel heavy and hesitant to the lead. Anya explains what it feels like to assume such a posture:

[You] literally line up the top of your head with the bottom of your tailbone in a straight line. If I want what I do to primarily come from the feet for the sake of speed then all of that [my postural alignment] has to go over the ball of the foot, the joint I access [to make it] quicker. If my alignment is straight but is more over the heels, then the message is kind of delayed. (Anya Katsevman, pers. comm., March 2018)

When I first thought of the salsa posture prior to consulting Anya, I thought of the spine in a serpentine way, where there is a continuous rippling sway, a dissolution of upright form. The image of the medical symbol came to mind, the *Staff of Asclepius* which is a serpent-entwined rod that was wielded by the Greek God Asclepius, a deity associated with healing and medicine (Shetty 2014). I thought of the rod as the typical anatomical posture one assumes in various types of fitness activities and the form of the salsa dancer posture to be more like the snake. Anya had an interesting response to this analogy in that she thinks the dancer is simultaneously both the rod and the snake. Anya elaborates:

What's interesting about your analogy is you can't tell that this is flexible without the rod. You need the rod to show the elasticity of the snake otherwise the snake just looks natural or normal, it looks like a snake, you wouldn't interpret it as being fluid unless the rod was there. When you dance you have to do the same thing, that's why I talk about internal rotation of the spine. The spine has to remain erect then I can showcase the range of motion in my joints [around the spine]. If everything starts moving [at once, without the upright posture] then it doesn't have value to the motion. (Anya Katsevman, pers. comm., March 2018)

What enables this spiralling, fluid, upright posture to connect to one's partner through a mutual lean in towards each other, is the cultivation of one's frame. To kinaesthetically orient to feeling a frame through the torso, imagine starting the initial phase of a wall push up. There is a bend in the elbows and flexion of the wrist which enables the palms to press into the wall and remain in place as the torso has the capacity to spiral, twist and turn from one direction to the next. As your hands are given to a partner to be led, the mobility of the twisting and rotating spine is stabilised by the back and scapulae muscles which continually draw each shoulder blade back and down in a figure-8 like rotation. As much as the back muscles actively fire, the arms and hands soften and relax. To experience such control of the shoulder blades while one experiences softness in the arm extremities is incredibly difficult, yet it is required to preserve the integrity of the shoulder joint. This form can also prevent injury when a lead becomes too aggressive or dominant. Hence, the amount of presence and connection Anya gives her partner through her forward lean and connection through her frame varies on the qualitative features of the lead. If he is too aggressive, dominant and forceful, she will noodle her arms completely to the point where the lead will feel nothing on the receiving end. It would be like doing a push-up into a wall made out of marshmallow. There would be nothing pushing you back to support your forward lean. By softening completely, Anya explains that the lead just feels himself.

If someone is pushing too hard, I have two options I can accept that and push back or completely loosen up, so they feel their own pushing; I become a noodle. I remove myself from the situation. I relax my arms physically to such an extent that I give nothing and take nothing. I use my legs to get the job done because there is still a significant amount of lead I feel because we are holding hands, but I don't give my body to that person. So that the direct point of contact isn't hurt. If they are rough it doesn't affect the rest of me, and all that person is feeling is themselves. (Anya Katsevman, pers. comm., March 2019)

While one might assume that it is natural to respond to a forceful lead in this way, until Anya explained how she handles such force, I had no idea that such a response in the repertoire of 'I cans'

(Sheets-Johnstone 2014), hence motile agency, existed. Prior to this communication I leaned into every dance with the same amount of openness and trust. Sometimes it felt good, in fact, sometimes it felt so good that flow manifested (e.g. Lloyd 2015a, 2015c). Yet, on many occasions I experienced pain, so much so that I sought regular shoulder and neck treatments from a physiotherapist to maintain my social dance practice. My first salsa teacher never articulated how much forward lean I was to employ. I learned about the salsa posture as if the forward lean was a constant, a continual and bodily way of giving oneself fully to the other, to the moment.

Michel Henry (2015) speaks to what it is like to not hold back and give oneself completely in an intimate act of relation, a being-with the other to the extent where one gives in or gives way to the life of the moment.

“To give oneself” means to expose a body where the other can indeed attain it, to invite her to do so, to put in front of his desire this fascinating body that can give rise to a series of sensations in it that will be its very life, the secret life of the one who gives his or her body and thus not only gives their body, but also this gift itself: their freedom. (Henry 2015, 215)

The context in which Henry articulates this union is a moment when a man wonders if the young woman, whose hand is leaning on the railing of a balcony beside him, will accept his invitation to dance. While the dance to which Henry alludes leads to an act of passionate entanglement, his example of articulating the nuanced dynamics one feels before an invitation is accepted is particularly relevant. What Anya adds to Henry’s description of the dance is the nuanced degree of freedom and palpable dynamics experienced in such acts of giving.

Feeling: inquiring into inner somatic sensation

When the pressure of the cue from a leader is done in such a way that feels good, one that invites a mutual lean into the other, much can be sensed through this mode of tactile communication. Beyond the macro cues, i.e., the gesture for right turn, left turn, or cross-body lead which invites a linear exchange of place which most beginners learn after a few lessons, what creates excitement and feelings of aliveness for a seasoned dancer are the subtle cues that take one out of a monotone, predictable existence. Anya explains:

When you’re truly artistic, the things you do are subtle. The subtleties [are] your internal sentiment ... that feeling that comes out ... [these sentiments are premised on function and form] as it takes more technical skill to be slow and subtle and controlled. (Anya Katsevman, pers. comm., December 2018)

Depending on the subtle dynamics being expressed in any particular moment, from a certain look in one’s eye to the accent articulated in the shimmy of a shoulder blade, it is important to not cognitively map romantic feelings to what emerges. Salsa is a responsive dance premised on spinal and joint flexibility that is exemplified in continuous oscillating motion. Yes, these motions include the shoulder and hip joints which may have sensual connotations for some. Yet, there is a physical purpose to these motions. As Anya describes in a musicality workshop that is featured in Episode 1 of the Inter-Active for Life project page of the Function2Flow website, such constant rhythmical oscillating movement enables one to react spontaneously to the song that provides not only the rhythmical structure, but also the mood of the dance.

If my body is still there’s no way I can react to what I’m hearing so I need some kind of plan. The idea behind moving your body all the time is to actually put it in motion. That way you are musical to begin with and if you get inspired great. And if you don’t that’s okay. (Anya Katsevman, as featured in the video filmed and edited by Studio 7 Multimedia 2018)

For those who do not regularly engage in Latin dance, moving in such responsive ways to a guttural, percussive beat that invites hips to shake and shoulders to shimmy may be misconstrued. Hence, it might be difficult for some to distinguish a gyrating gesture that signifies a desire to copulate from a movement that sustains and carries the life of a dance. Anya elaborates further:

I always have a hard time defining for my students the fact that we have sensations that aren't human emotions. I have feelings but I can only process what that felt like and give it a human explanation later, so when you're dancing [you are not] necessarily [feeling] happiness or sadness or anything that you will psychologically process unless you sit down stop what you're doing and actually process it ... My body is physically active by being focused on the work. It's not like a sensory block off to where I dictate what I want to feel. I focus internally on what is happening to my body ... I accept the fact that it will give me a sensation and I don't try to humanize it (like label it). I don't try to interpret it. I'm not trying to interpret what it means or what it represents or what I'm going to express. That takes away from the art and the physicality of the movement. (Anya Katsevman, pers. comm., December 2018).

Daniel Stern (2004, 2010), a psychologist who inspired much of Sheets-Johnstone's (1999, 2018) pivotal phenomenological offerings, has written much about how the power of vitality is physically experienced within nuanced temporalities of the unfolding present moment. Hence, his writings as a means to analyse the feeling of Anya's movements add a layer of theoretical depth to what Anya is describing. To physically experience the sensation of time, the subtle manifestations of various musical accents that might be hard or soft or anything in between, one enters a particular consciousness that is not premised on Cartesian notions of labelling or structure. To feel such response in rhythmical variations of movement is to experience a sense of freedom from what has the potential to be predictable and metronomic. Hence, to experience the nuances in the motility of a moment is to experience 'the Greek's subjective conception of time, Kairos ... [...] the passing moment in which something happens as the time unfolds. It is the coming into being of a new state of things, and it happens in a moment of awareness' (Stern 2004, 7). Kairos thus carries a consciousness, a moment of meaningful motility that Stern describes as

a moment of opportunity, when events demand action or are propitious for action. Events have come together in this moment and the meeting enters awareness such that action must be taken, now, to alter one's destiny – be it for a minute or a lifetime. If no action is taken, one's destiny will be changed anyway, but differently, because one did not act. It is a small window of becoming and opportunity. (Stern 2004, 7)

While one might consider Stern to be speaking about the course one takes over a lifetime in this aforementioned excerpt, a similar sense of destiny exists within every partnered dance. Windows of becoming and opportunity live within subtle responses, moments of emergent surprise. Such shifts from predictable time sustain Anya's passion for dancing. In those unanticipated moments, Anya connects her to her soul.

a lot of times you just all of a sudden accent something you practice 1000 times totally differently or you add something extra or you find a moment that you didn't find before in your choreography ... that's how you connect your soul (Anya Katsevman, pers. comm., May 2016)

In terms of agency, there is a shift from what Sheets-Johnstone (2014) and Merleau-Ponty (1962) describe as an intentional 'I can' when such spontaneous moments are experienced. There is no purposeful thinking in terms of cultivating spontaneous acts of giving. There is almost a regression from 'the experiential sense of agency' (Sheets-Johnstone 2017, 16) one develops in moving through what Sheets-Johnstone describes as the phenomenological trilogy, the 'I move,' "I do," "I can," each of them being a differentiated ability and form of awareness from primal animation to the 'free Ego,' (Sheets-Johnstone 2017, 16) as one delves beneath the primal realm of 'I move', what Henry (2008) articulates as the 'power' to move.

To move without intentionality, is to experience a deeper giving of oneself in comparison to the various ways one may experience the forward lean that was described earlier. To move in spontaneous responsive ways that emerge from an interplay between the music and one's partner is to exemplify the reversal that Henry (2008, 2015) takes us back to, before phenomenology became intentional. Anya elaborates further on the consciousness that is evoked when one becomes open to the motile nuances living within a moment:

When you're dancing or practicing dance you can physically feel the sensations in your body; you understand what is happening, *but you don't control it* with imagery or verbiage or anything solid that the brain produces

that we have control over. The mind is 100% part of the process because it keeps you focused. You need to be focused but the mind isn't controlling you; it's not dictating what will happen next. It's not dictating how you're going to feel. It's not prompting anything. It's just part of it. It keeps you focused on the task. Your body is doing the work and your instinct is sort of guiding where the work is going to go . . . how long you have to spend over here before you have to go over there. Your instinct makes sure you're at the right place at the right time, not your mind. (Anya Katsevman, pers. comm., March 2018)

To situate such movement possibilities, consciousness, and sense of unintentional motile agency that may or may not be evoked in everyday life, imagine instead of receiving a cue on the social dancefloor, you experience the gesture of a door being opened. The obvious pre-reflective response would be to nod, smile and walk through the door with a predictable pace and rhythm. But imagine that when the door is opening, music starts to play. Your favourite song comes on and grabs you in a hesitating bodily sway. In this moment the music, what might be considered to be an invisible dance partner, wraps around you and draws you into the depths of each beat. It would be wrong of the person holding the door to take you away from this joyful vibe and rush you through by pulling on your arm or adding pressure by pushing on your back. That would be forceful and uncharacteristic of a healthy, mutually consenting relationship.

From a door being opened by a lead to the multitude of ways a follower responds, the dynamics of this interaction emerge within the pre-reflective realm. There is no verbal accompaniment to these gestures. They are communicated at lightning speed within a shared sense of time dictated by music. Anya explains:

There is the feeling of the leader initiating a change, not necessarily action. Action is always manifested by time. Time is always kept by the music . . . I could follow what he wants and not have to do it at the time he specifies . . . as long as I get there. You can always speed things up. You can always slow things down. You can always emphasize the downbeat of a rhythmical component. You can also emphasize the upbeat of a rhythmical component. The same way music can make dynamic ranges in its sound, a dancer can make dynamic ranges in their weight transfer. (Anya Katsevman, pers. comm., March 2019)

Flow: inquiring into the existentials of actions, reactions & inter-actions

Not all dancers hear the subtle accents and rhythmical components of a song but when you find yourself with a leader who does, magic begins to happen. Bosse (2015) describes flow on the social dance floor as that moment 'when movement, momentum, and ideas move seamlessly, without reflection or critical awareness, between the two dancers, causing them to form one entity moving fluidly among others' (133). Just imagine leaning into the arms of your partner as you flow across the dancefloor in a series of spins and sweeping gestures, only to stop in momentary pauses of spiralling embrace. Hands trace your face, neck, back and on occasion . . . hips. Connected in a percussive 1-2-3, 5-6-7 beat, you transfer weight from one foot to the next in mirror-like synchronicity, except of course when the music, the invisible partner, steps in and slithers up your ankles, knees, hips, spine and shoulder blades to the point where your entwined palms break apart as you surrender to the rhythmical release. During this side-by-side dance known as a 'shine', guttural musical accents become visible in the snake-like rotations and articulations of joints that feel more fluid than solid. No verbal message is uttered when it is time for the shine to end. The moment of connection is felt, not anticipated. Perhaps the impulse comes from the ending of a musical phrase or a longing to be close once more . . . whatever the motivation, the union is instantaneous. There is no fumble or hesitation. In one moment, you are moving to your own beat, in the next, your interlaced hands and synchronised feet charge forth as if they know exactly where they are going, yet there is no pre-determined plan. Destination? Heaven — an omnipresent reality that is always there to access, sense, and experience — not only for this dance but for all couples who have cultivated a practice that enables them to relish in an emergent, spontaneous existence.

This feeling of heaven, accessed through a cultivated motion-sensing practice, is an affective realm, that according to the philosophy of Henry (2008, 2015), is omnipresent. Construing the effects

of flow in this way would be to image that the feeling of flow, and the possibility to act and inter-act with this sensation, is always a possibility, that it is always there and available for us. Similar to the sweet spot one experiences in golf, that stroke where everything comes together in one moment is motivation enough to complete all eighteen holes. But when flow emerges with another animate being, instead of a metal golf club or any other inanimate object for that matter, the positive feelings intensify (Lee et al. 2017; Sawyer 2015; Tse et al. 2018; Walker 2010). Stephen Smith describes the bubbling up of this sensation as an ‘upwelling’ of vital powers, hence, the well of life of such sensation is always there to drink. He explains that

the upwelling of vital powers in ourselves and in others with whom we interact is the very tonic, the elixir of life if you will, that guides the conduct of our respective professional and work endeavours. The relations we seek with others and others seek with us may essentially and potentially be of the most powerful kind when bringing up the immanent auto-affectivity and inherently ecstatic hetero-affectivity of enlivened interaction, focused energy, and our most vital powers of moving in concert with one another. (Smith 2018, 9)

Returning to the social dance floor, to move in concert, in subtle, spontaneous rhythmical ways is to access sensations of vital power, of life. Unlike those who seek pleasure from external means, such as drugs, food, or purchasing material items, to experience the vital powers of moving with others is to experience the singular mode of givenness, of life itself. Such sensation is not external to oneself as in out there, a destination or a goal to reach, rather it lives within the subtle nuances and vitality affects of the motions themselves. Henry (2008) emphasised that

No road leads to life except life itself. In life, no road leads outside of itself. By this, we mean that it does not allow what is living to cease living. Life is absolute subjectivity inasmuch as it experiences itself and is nothing other than experience. It is the pure fact of experiencing itself immediately and without any distance. (Henry 2008, 120)

Yet, just because the possibility to tap into and experience such sensations of life is omnipresent, it does not mean both parties in the social interaction experience the sensation in the same way. Some might be more open than others to sense what is happening, the givenness of life in the motility of the expansive moment. Anya for example has never experienced a moment where the power and life of flow was mutually accessed, where she could completely give herself to the flow of her partner. Anya reveals,

I’ve never felt on the same page as my partners ever or connected to them in a way where I could just let go and feel free and let things take their natural course ever. I’ve recently got to dance with someone that I think to be superior and even then he was injured . . . even though the energy was flowing between us and it was equally matched there was still that kind of dynamic where it couldn’t just be natural because there was still something to take care of. (Anya Katsevman, pers. comm., March 2018)

Hence Anya never lets go of her sense of agency, the power she accesses in and through her salsa movements. She certainly experiences flow, but not one that completely merges into the flow of her partner to the extent where she dissolves into his flow. Yet, despite not letting go completely, she also does not overthink what she does when she performs on stage. There is no second guessing of herself or deliberation where her inner critic takes over. No. There is no ego, no mind chatter, no sense of being controlled by a decision-making process as Montaro (2017) described in her perfectionistic experience of performing ballet. Anya shuts off that inner dialogue part of her brain and physically accesses her talent through what she describes as ‘gut instinct.’ And to move from this level of instinct feels like a meditation as she details in the following passage:

Your instinct makes sure you’re at the right place at the right time, not your mind . . . I think meditation is the closest thing to that kind of practice. Or listening, any kind of listening. (Anya Katsevman, pers. comm., March 2018)

And to cultivate this meditation Anya draws upon what she senses in her environment – her partner, costumes, music, lighting . . . anything that will take her out of the type of thinking that resembles mind chatter. Hence, to move from one’s gut instinct is different than the passive experience of

'going with the flow' of another nor is it indicative of excessive control sought from a cognitive level of engagement. Anya talks further about the importance of shutting off her thinking mind:

A dancer only produces at their best when their brains shut off. You have to find a way to physically access your talent, your gut instinct, and react to the moment instinctively which can only happen if you're not thinking ... to get in that almost meditative state where you can just be one with the music and your environment, you use all of these things to put that into practice. I'll use my partner, the moment, the stage, the lighting, my costumes, my audience ... my environment, to help me get out of my own head. (Anya Katsevman, pers. comm., March 2018)

When Anya refers to thinking it is important to note that she is conceptualising the thinking process as something that only the mind does. Sheets-Johnstone (2018) introduces the notion of thinking in movement, a sort of thinking that departs from the assumption that 'thinking is tied to language and takes place only via language' (11). While Anya prefers to use the term 'gut instinct,' Sheets-Johnstone philosophises within the improvisational dance context, the possibility for the thinking process to manifest in kinaesthetic, tactile ways.

Thinking in movement is thus a way of wondering or exploring the world directly

taking it up moment by moment and living it in movement, kinetically. Each movement has a dynamic density, a density that stretches out the present moment, transfiguring it from a mere momentary bodily happening into a qualitative kinetic fullness or plenitude that radiates outward and into the ongoing qualitative process of motion that is the dance. (Sheets-Johnstone 2018,10)

The follower is not the only one to experience such an instinctual consciousness, a thinking in and through movement. Just as the follower must completely open herself up to gut-level, cultivated responses to experience interactive flow, so too must the lead. While a new lead might have a limited set of patterns, a seasoned dancer in comparison will have a multitude of possibilities at his fingertips that may emerge in response to what is happening in the music. If a lead is practicing a pre-determined, choreographed set of movements that do not pick up the nuances in the motility of the present moment (Stern 2004) and its various accents and vitality forms (Stern 2010; Sheets-Johnstone 1999), the dance will take on an automaton, robot quality and the sense of life will be lost. According to Anya a lead:

makes their decisions in the moment, they don't predetermine them. And the minute [they] start to predetermine them or define them or box them into a rule, that's the minute that the dance becomes regimented and no longer looks like dance ... [If they are thinking in a rational, pre-planned way] you will feel it. Because you are Rebecca and you are sensitive to the touch, you will feel it that way. And because I am Anya and I am sensitive to weight transfer I will feel it that way. [Regardless of where you feel it in your body], there is a hesitation in the step. (Anya Katsevman, pers. comm., March 2019)

Hence, the lead must invite a movement not from a place of intentionality, a predetermined desire, but rather from a consciousness that opens himself up to the power, the life force that enables his touch, his physical cue, to manifest itself in the first place. Henry's (2015) radical phenomenology elaborates on the sensations and potentiality of such power manifested in physical touch: the 'power to touch means finding oneself in possession of this power, being placed in it beforehand, coinciding with it, being identified with it, and in this way and this way alone being able to do what it can' (Henry 2015, 137).

Conclusion

Throughout this inquiry into the power of flow from a motion-sensing phenomenological orientation, key learnings emerged in relation to the movement dimensions of *Function*, *Form*, *Feeling*, and *Flow*. Such explorations elucidated a physical manifestation of power and how it is experienced in moments that do not feel so good to moments that are so pleasurable that flow flows forth. In terms of movement *Function*, the capacity of joints, i.e., the ankle, knee, hips,

shoulder blades, and spine, to be flexible to rotate, as well as one's muscular endurance and strength to control these joints and keep them in continual motion became apparent in terms of physically accessing, generating and maintaining power. In regard to movement *Form*, what emerged was the varying degree that a partner may lean into the other. Such variations of forward lean are developed through motile agency, what Sheets-Johnstone (2014, 2017) describes as the 'I can' of movements that over time increase in repertoire and thus form new habitual ways of being-with others. Exploring the power of interactive flow through the dimension of movement *Feeling* brought out the sense of connection one not only has with oneself or one's partner, but the music in terms of the various accents it produces and the spontaneous kinetic-kinaesthetic-energetic attunement that becomes possible. As the final dimension of movement *Flow* revealed, to experience such an attunement within a dance, one departs from a consciousness steeped in intentionality. One thus enters the visceral realm, the gut level instinct that taps into the primordial power that is there before any intentional experience manifests. Hence, the power of interactive flow is a sensation that is omnipresent and accessible. For Anya, she accesses this power through the motions of salsa dance. She might tap into and thus exude more power than her partners, yet this differential does not diminish her desire to feel it. When asked if she would ever dampen herself to match the power generated in her partner's movements she simply said, 'You keep being you because when you start to purposefully play [with it], when you start catering to [your partner], you ruin it for both of you' (Anya Katsevman, pers. comm., March 2019).

Anya's words encourage me to continue to refine the power I access in my salsa steps and the degree to which I share this power with others through my variable forward lean and physical frame. If I think of how this existential way of being permeates my life off the social dance floor, it deepens an awareness of my nature to dive or lean right into the task at hand, whatever that might be, a tendency that at times has left me depleted or compromised. Like the somatic awareness I am cultivating in my variable degrees of forward lean on the dance floor, I am in the process of developing a somatic gauge in knowing on a gut level when to pull back when necessary versus when to give of myself fully. Such a delicate balance in attuning to one's energy has a universal sense of appeal, not just for me, but any relational encounter in which one finds themselves, from the giving of one's energy in a romantic relationship to the realm of a professional pedagogical engagement. Rather than worry or cognitively decide how much of yourself you wish to give in any given relational encounter, to develop a visceral, gut level of knowing is to approach a divine existence as there is no separation between what one thinks, in a detached cognitive capacity, from what one feels. While the pathway to such a liberating sensation was contextualised throughout this inquiry in the salsa dance context, the motion-sensing nuances of interactive flow is very much a life practice and thus may manifest in many ways in being-with others.

In conclusion, the next time one might find themselves in a relational situation where their sense of power depletes or alternatively brims in abundance, one might lean into the *Functions-Forms-Feelings-Flows* of one's experience as a way to phenomenologically *understand* it, i.e., to delve into and get 'under' the fundamental capacities, forms and feelings in the way one 'stands' and moves with kinaesthetic responsiveness. Hence, a kinaesthetic physical literacy (Lloyd 2011b, 2016) for attuning and describing such interactive sensations has the capacity to emerge. As I approach the next phase of the InterActive for Life project in which this inquiry is situated, I look forward to comparing and contrasting these motion-sensing articulations in salsa with what is sensed in other relational movement practices, namely, equestrian arts, martial arts and acro-yoga (Studio 7 MultiMédia 2019a, 2019b, 2019c, 2019d). It is my hope that one day, this line of inquiry may produce a universal offering to anyone interested in not only feeling the depth of life's vital power but also the nuanced, somatically attuned ways in which we may access those joyful sensations that moving in response to and with others affords.

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Notes on contributor

Dr. Rebecca Lloyd, a Full Professor at the University of Ottawa, has researched the kinaesthetic cultivation of flow in a variety of contexts from teacher education to physical education, coaching, dance, and exercise pedagogy. Her award-winning, innovative Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) funded programme of research, conceptually framed by the Function2Flow interdisciplinary model, also informs her approach to teaching and her co-direction of the teacher education Comprehensive School Health cohort. Dr. Lloyd continues to draw upon her past experience in sport psychology, fitness education, and ballet as she strives to create vibrant interactions, not only on campus, but also on the Latin dance floor where she is known to medal.

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