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entitled

A Rationale for a Public Awareness Campaign to Promote Nia

by

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Master of Liberal Studies Degree in Liberal Studies

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An Abstract of

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The purpose of this study is to define the sensory-based, fusion-fitness dance form of martial arts, Nia, and show how it leads to health, wellness and better physical fitness. In my research, I conducted 21 interviews to show what experiences others have had and how Nia has created positive lifestyle changes related to exercise and well-being as well as reviewed the pertinent literature. The study examined how Nia and other forms of dance foster weight reduction, augment mental powers, and increase mobility. The final stages of the study provide information about marketing strategies and promotional ideas for fitness instructors.
The is dedicated to my sister LeeEllen Drechsler
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Chapter 1

Overview of the Healing Power of Dance

Dance stimulates many healing powers, and the true purpose of dance therapy is to help people achieve a greater sense of self-awareness and an overall positive sense of well-being. It is true with all dance disciplines that authentic movements promote individuality and positive self-awareness. The American Dance Therapy Association defines dance and movement as therapy that entails “the psychotherapeutic use of movement as a process, which furthers the emotional, cognitive, and physical integration of the individual” (Jourdan 1).

Dance is a fundamental art form, which involves direct expression through the body. Historically, dance was used as a method of socializing and enhancing relationships. However, recently, dance has been recognized as a healing art with qualities that enhance self-awareness, boost self-esteem, and promote cardiovascular endurance. Dance therapy was developed in the United States in the 1940s; its original purpose was to help individuals gain insight and become aware of their surroundings as well as release repetitive and rigid behaviors. “Dance therapy uses un-choreographed and spontaneous movements to bypass the conscious mind and increase body awareness” (Rueppel 15).
Although dance therapy, as a healing modality, did not receive official recognition in the U.S. medical community until the mid twentieth century, it is important to note that movement and dance have provided resources for expression and healing for thousands of years. An example of healing and dance form comes from the Kalahari Bushmen of the African desert. Historically, they were a group of people living together as hunters and gatherers. Richard Katz of the Harvard University Kalahari Project documented how the Bushmen danced several nights per week. They believed that dance “freed up the boiling energy within them and was the way to heal” (Down 1). He even wrote a book, *Boiling Energy: Community Healing among the Kalahari Kung*. When the Bushmen danced, their bodies began to heat up and, thus, the increased temperature precipitated lots of energy within them. Once they completed the dance, they fell into a long trance. The holistic healing ritual was a regular part of Bushman life, and everyone took part in the healing process. These people believed that the dance did the healing and the physical movements freed the healing energy. Dancing was not just a form of entertainment; dance and healing were one. For the most part, tribal people believed that a healing spirit could be released from within and dance was a holistic way to fully participate in the healing experience. The dances sometimes lasted all night, and even when the people got tired they just continued the ritual until sunrise. When the people saw the light of dawn, their energy grew stronger, and they danced faster and sang louder than ever. The dancers reached a powerful intensity and then suddenly stopped, collapsing, to savor a contented rest. As Albert Einstein noted, “Nothing happens until something moves” (Rueppel 4).
Movement and dance contribute integral parts of many creation myths, each as unique as its culture and time. Many creation myths are also associated with sound, and often drums create rhythm. In Hinduism, the Nataraj is one of the forms Lord Shiva assumes to serve as the Lord of the Dance who sets the tempo of creation. Nataraj symbolizes the movement of the universe: the cycle of life, death and rebirth and the balance between form and void. The cosmic and sacred Dance of creation combines art, science, and spirituality.

The Hindu warrior goddess, Durga (goddess beyond reach), is believed to have drummed the world into being, riding a lion. Layne Redmond, acclaimed drummer and composer primarily of the ancient Mediterranean world, indicates in *When the drummers Were Women*, "All of these lion goddesses were associated with the drum that leads the initiate deep into the labyrinth of the mind in search of expanded states of awareness. In her discussion of animal powers, she tells us, this emulation of other creatures is what researchers believe is the origin of human dance and music"(Rueppel 4). Dancers were often the keepers of the clan’s history, adding dances throughout time to commemorate the events that shaped their traditions. Most cultures throughout history have invented dances and related costumes to represent their people and region.

Likewise, beginning with their creation, animals also have danced for different purposes. A bee dances and drums its wings to communicate the location of food to those within the hive”(Rueppel 4). The buzzing hoedowns have fascinated humans. For example, in Turkey around 6,000 BC, these pollen distributors were considered a powerful animal that symbolized birth, death, and resurrection. Dance offers but one way of expressing the Divine. The Bible and many religious texts endorse praising the
Divine with music and dance. In *Sacred Women, Sacred Dance*, Iris Stewart points out, “In Aramaic, the language spoken by Jesus, rejoice and dance are the same words” (Rueppel 4). Early Christianity included dance as part of the ritual of worship until the male-dominated clergy determined that drumming and dancing were too closely associated with worship of the goddess and banned dancing as well as in some instances women from worship. “The word chorus, the Greek term for a choir that sang, spoke, and danced with the purpose of intensifying a mood, reveals the important role of dance in early Christian rituals” (Rueppel 4). In other languages, the word for dance also means joy or celebration.

Moving forward in time, one of the most influential dancers was Isadora Duncan. Isadora was born in San Francisco, California, on May 27, 1878. Her parents, Joseph and Dora, were both well established in the field of art. Joseph was a poet, and Dora was a pianist and a music teacher. Isadora was fond of music as a child, and she quickly mastered the art of listening to music with her soul. At the age of six years old, Isadora performed for money and taught other children to dance. Isadora was very gifted and spiritual. Unlike many who equated dancing with replicating precise formal steps, she dared to portray emotion and life experiences in her dancing. Her creativity and expression of ideas helped her shape the style of this new art form she originated, modern dance. In fact, Isadora was considered the mother of modern dance. Research suggests that Isadora herself was the “prototype of the uninhibited young American whose freshness and originality charmed a jaded Europe” (Zavrel). In 1903, Isadora’s lecture in Berlin, “The Dance of the Future,” was published as a pamphlet and soon became the manifesto of modern dance. Isadora then formed a school of modern dance where
hundreds of little girls were trained in her methods. She established modern dance that was comprised of free movement, instead of planned structured steps. She taught students to move naturally to express their feelings. Some dance critics felt that Isadora’s movements lacked technique. Indeed Isadora had received formal dance training, but she often questioned what she had learned. She preferred to employ dance techniques that produced free, curvilinear movements. Isadora traveled around the world teaching her modern dance techniques. Although “Duncan Dance” today honors Isadora’s legacy, Isadora did not mention “Duncan Dance”; however, she spoke with great passion of “The Dance.” To Isadora, the art of dance was very sacred; she never thought that the dance belonged to her; she felt she belonged to the dance. One of the unique contributions that Isadora made to modern dance was the practice of dancing barefooted. Removing the ballet shoes meant relinquishing the dancer from conventional forms. This new art form symbolized true freedom and natural expression as she employed skipping, jumping, leaping, and tossing into dances. Isadora Duncan made dance creative and carefree while using colorful expressions, which helped to inspire people to raise dance to a higher place among the arts than merely entertainment.

Today, many teach Isadora’s unique techniques. These instructors explore the true value of her dance learning environments where uninhibited students move uniquely. Many people agree with Isadora that feeling and intuition should guide movements to free students to express themselves in their creative styles.
Dance therapy initially began in 1940 with the work of Marian Chase. She was a modern dancer who started teaching dance after ending her career with the Denishawn Dance Company in 1930. She formalized dance therapy as she noticed in some of her classes that the students were more interested in the emotion they felt than the mechanics of the movement. For example, they sometimes expressed shyness, loneliness, and fear. Thus, she structured her teaching to emphasize freedom of movement rather than technique. In time, local physicians began sending her patients, including children with antisocial dysfunction, people with movement problems, and folks with psychiatric illnesses. In time, Chance became a member of the staff of the American Red Cross at St. Elizabeth’s Hospital and also made history as the first woman employed in dance therapy within a healthcare organization. “In 1966, dance therapy became formally organized and recognized when the American Dance Therapy (ADTA) was formed” (Boughton 1).

Dance therapy especially benefits those with poor verbal communication skills. Dance therapy liberates these individuals and empowers them to communicate, to tell a story, or act out a dream. They articulate their thoughts and feelings through dance as
non-verbal expressions. A major purpose of dance therapy is to stimulate the healing process from within. Many conditions respond positively to movement therapy, such as cerebral palsy, anxiety, autism, and cancer. Movement therapy helps those with physical disabilities to increase their awareness of their body and how it moves, which helps individuals cope better with physical limitations. Dance relaxes muscles, generates new energy, and provides pure pleasure, which contributes to the greatness and power of dance. For example, 5Rhythms Movement Practice involves meditation with a central teaching methodology, which infers “if you put the psyche into motion, it will heal itself”. Author, philosopher, and director Gabrielle Roth developed this theory to combine the concepts of dance, art, and learning. Her lyrical focus on repetitive patterns and stillness brings dancers back to emptiness. The five rhythms are simple but powerful moving medications that people of all ages, sizes, or physical abilities can do. Like light or ocean waves, the dancing body moves freely and passes through five patterns. The patterns repeat themselves in a wave of motion. The patterns rotate these elements: flowing, which increases fluidity with a continuous glide; staccato, a percussive pulsing beat; chaos, a rhythm of letting go and releasing oneself to dance as one wishes; lyrical forms, the light part of the dance where one can release thoughts and go into trance; and stillness, the quiet and subdued movements like rising and falling and practicing silence. All of these movements use space in a unique and creative way. Amazing people participate in 5Rhythms dance: physical trainers, teachers, doctors, dreamers, dancers, drummers, business owners, and computer experts. All become spiritually, emotionally, and physically integrated while focusing on the intention and the creation of healing.
Dance therapy can be used to treat social, emotional, physical, and cognitive problems. Dance therapy is based on the idea that the mind and body are interrelated, and some therapists believe that mental and emotional problems are suppressed inside the body, which creates muscle tension. The dance movements can reduce tension and promote healing in a number of ways. Moving as a group brings people out of isolation, and they learn to coordinate their actions and work together. Moving rhythmically eases muscle rigidity, diminishes anxiety, and increases energy. Spontaneity helps people recognize their impulses and feel joyful and confident. On a mental level, the deep breathing and progressive relaxation techniques innate in dancing help people reduce muscle tension and, therein, relax.

Dance can be considered healing medicine in many ways. One example is a dance therapy group. The dance therapist assesses how the group works together and how they all interact when sharing emotional expressions through the process of movement and direction. The movement instructor might decide that a particular member of the group is struggling to interact with others, so the therapist may ask this person to lead or direct for a short time. This leadership role will help draw the uncomfortable individual out of self-preoccupation or isolation. Dance can improve overall health in many ways, like encouraging positive perceptions of body image and self-esteem as well as increasing attentiveness.

The following case studies show how dance therapy can improve certain conditions. For instance, *The Times* of India ran an article about a woman who has successfully used dance to heal her ailments. Dermatologist Preeti Savardekar suffered a slipped disc and was very frustrated to hear that she would have to spend a lot of time
in bed and then be restricted to a very limited lifestyle. Her back problems stemmed from her occupation, which require her to spend hours treating patients from a wooden chair, at a clinic where she is employed, and to stand on the weekends for long sessions delivering lectures at the university. Fortunately, her bed rest was greatly reduced because she participated in Dilshad Patel’s dance therapy sessions, which are considered a “neuro-muscular workout.” Without using verbal communication in the process, Dilshad analyzed Preeti’s movements, mirrored them, and altered them to bring about a deep change. Theoretically, a person’s movements reflect their boundaries, feelings, and awareness of surroundings. For example, “a person who sits slouched with chest caved in and stretches a bent arm in greetings is in a different state of mind than a person who has a puffed chest and an outstretched arm” (Parekh 1). By mirroring participants’ movements, Dilshad gets in the same space as them, cementing a bond and then slowly altering the movements for them to copy to explore their boundaries and feelings. The result is catharsis with gentle physio-therapy” (Parekh 2). Once Preetie discovered dancing for wellness, not only did she lose weight and her spine became more limber, but also she improved emotionally. Prior to the dance movement therapy, she was embarrassed to go to the gym, but after the therapy sessions she began to gain self-confidence and realized that she could exercise in public. Preetie had the great fortune of learning that dance therapy works because each person develops movements subjectively and individually; moreover, there is no right or wrong move. In addition, dance sessions are never structured, and change in movement is communicated physically, not verbally. The beautiful ending to the case study is that Preeti has not suffered a single relapse, and
she feels much more energized and ready to face the days ahead because she was able to master the direct connection between mind and body.

Dance is also healing for people with Parkinson’s disease since they face numerous physical challenges including difficulty standing and walking as well as impaired balance. “Getting Their Groove Back, with the help of the Magic of Dance” is a great study about an instructor who teaches a combination from “Three Russian Preludes” to a class crammed full of dancers. The students are not professional dancers but adult students with Parkinson’s disease, and they dance at the Mark Morris Center in Fort Green, Brooklyn.

People living with Parkinson’s benefit from exercising. Parkinson’s causes a loss of brain cells that release a nerve-to-nerve signaling chemical called dopamine. Patients experience daily obstacles with movement and coordination often causing them to become isolated and depressed. They soon resort to leading a sedentary lifestyle and depend on medication too heavily.

Oli Westheimer, an outreach coordinator for the Parkinson’s Center, advocates passionately for dance as a treatment for people with movement disorders. Ms. Westheimer had studied dance herself, so she knew the benefits of dance for focus, physical agility, and flexibility. She approached Nancy Umanoff, the Executive Director of the Morris Company, to see if a dance instructor would be interested in teaching students with Parkinson’s disease. Both the teacher and the students were enthusiastic. Ms. Westheimer clearly emphasized from the beginning that the most important thing was that “people find joy in movement” (Sulcas 1). She structured the classes to include point and flex exercises, arm swings, and walking with long strides (all movements that
challenge patients with Parkinson’s but increase their confidence while improving their balance and stability.) Repeating motions restores some muscle memory that the body had lost because the brain always imprints what it sees. Thus, this physical activity incredibly benefits patients with Parkinson’s for these reasons. Moreover, dance is fun as well as therapeutic. It is fascinating that these dance classes have really become popular as a way for the students to display expressions and beauty, socialize, and experience freedom of movement in a nonjudgmental way. No doubt, the study of dance as a healing process for Parkinson’s patients is complex and certainly a worthy topic for further research.

The case studies and research indicate that dance can help those coping with physical or mental challenges to develop strong, healthy bodies and brains. In addition, dance helps people to become more self-aware as they express themselves and comfortably exploring the space around them.
Chapter 3

Nia as a Representative Dance Form with the Power to Heal

In chapter three, I will explore Nia as a representative dance form with the power to heal. Nia is the Body’s Way and about body awareness, body sensation. Nia is a fusion fitness program integrating elements form martial arts, dance arts, and healing. The Nia fitness program promotes a lifestyle that supports our individual needs and promotes focusing on creativity, intention, and purpose.

Nia is a Swahili word that means with purpose, with intent or movement. Outside the Nia community it is referred to as non-impact aerobics. Within the Nia community, the dance form is considered Neuromuscular Integrative Action. The goal of Nia is to provide a fitness program that is creative, relaxed, and fun. The core strength of the movements in Nia are its internal focus, it’s amazing capacity to increase fluidity in the moving body, and the resultant change of consciousness. Nia helps those who are healing and can regenerate the nervous system, muscles, and other body tissues.

The co-founders of Nia, Debbie and Carlos Rosas, started Nia in 1983 during a time when most fitness instructors were doing hard-core high impact aerobics. The Rosases began to question the traditional models of exercise and decided to start an entirely new, more holistic program specifically geared toward doing things in the body’s
way. They eliminated high impact, painful movements. They replaced them with movements that created comfort, joy and pleasure. “From their discoveries, a new lifestyle and fitness practice was born—Nia—which offers a new perspective on how to get fit and be healthy while embracing individual creativity and self-improvement Nia supports the principle: if it hurts, don’t do it” (Nia Joy 1) Those, like the Rosases, who devote their lives to the practice of Nia see it as a spiritual practice, which allows emotions and feelings to connect with the body as well as the spirit. This fusion brings one closer to the interconnected flow of life through experiencing the body and embracing fluidity and change.

Most Nia classes are taught in group session typically a few times per week for several weeks. Students can take the time to embrace the mind, body, and spiritual beauty of Nia rather than focusing on a single mechanical approach to movement. The fundamental movements in Nia do not involve any jarring, pounding, or repetitive motions. However, Nia is considered cardiovascular conditioning because it uses intrinsic and extrinsic muscles and variability. A Nia workout includes seven cycles. The first sets the focus or intent. The idea of intent individualizes the workout, making suit each person’s need for that moment. For example, a sore arm might inspire focusing on relaxing those muscles. The second cycle of Nia celebrates the idea of stepping in or introducing movement as an invitation to leave behind all the stress of day and give the body time for relaxation. The third cycle, the warm-up cycle, includes a song or two to warm up muscles and get the body moving. In cycle four, the workout progresses, the music speeds up, and the energy crests. However, all moves are flexible to empower each dancer to invest in the workout what intensity he or she wants. Some
stay at level one and expend a little less energy than those at levels two and three which build on a larger range of motion or intensity. Often participants experiment on all three levels of intensity as their bodies dictate. In cycle five, everyone slows down and focuses on flexibility. Cycle six is designated as floor play, hence the name, and continues the stretching movements there. Lastly a stepping out cycle involves taking a deep breath and giving thanks for the beautiful time together moving in the body’s way. Then the dancers step out into the world again, feeling refreshed and prepared for what lies ahead.
Chapter 4

The Interview Procedure

As part of my qualitative research, I had the opportunity to conduct voluntary standardized open-ended interviews with roughly two dozen Nia instructors and Nia students with the goals of demonstrating the value of Nia as a health and wellness activity and of studying the positive changes that have occurred to those who regularly participate in Nia. I accumulated data about Nia and how it has contributed to positive healthy outcomes for individuals. The interview strategy consisted of each person being interviewed individually. Then, I used qualitative methodology, to organize and summarize data in non-numerical ways to reflect the nuances of personalities and other factors lost in quantification.

I told every participant that we would stop the interview at any point to preclude invasion of privacy, embarrassment, or any other negative experience. I took notes and did not record the interviews electronically. I used the telephone, Facebook, e-mail, and Skype as additional tools to talk to people who live in distant places and, therein, could not meet face-to-face. Fortunately, my interviewees felt so comfortable responding to my inquiries that most provided additional information beyond the scope of my questions. For a list of specific questions, please refer to Appendix A in the document.
Each question was phrased exactly the same way and asked in a particular order. When appropriate, the interviews shared additional information beyond the scope of the standard questions. The objectives of the questionnaire were to collect responses related to the participants’ intrinsic feelings about their participation in Nia and to explore what positive changes it has inspired. More specifically, they described the impact of the practice of Nia on their lives both physically and emotionally; including changes in behavior, opinions, values, knowledge, feelings, sensory responses, fitness, and spiritual growth. To further enhance the study, the interview questions consisted of a few demographic variables, including age and where they had learned this fusion dance form of the martial arts.

4.1 The Analysis

The rest of this chapter examines the responses to each question and then summarizes the key themes that emerged across the interview pool. Instead of using a strictly question-and-answer format, replies to each question are placed in context and compared to one another, which spotlights the strength of qualitative research as a tool for contrasting the insights and experiences of participants.

The first question, how did you learn about Nia? sets the stage for the respondents to share personal history of participating in Nia. Winalee Zeeb, an instructor and the owner of Heartdance Studio in Lansing, Michigan, told me about her surprising and life-changing introduction to Nia. In 1991 Winalee attended an IDEA Health and Fitness Conference in July. She quickly became disenchanted with the usual fitness routines that included mostly hardcore step aerobics and high impact dancing, which were breaking down her body and causing some long-term injuries. She participated in a few of the
IDEA classes and, growing discouraged, abruptly exited to her hotel room. Winalee said her husband encouraged her to go back to the training because she would find something there that was right for her. When Winalee walked into the session in progress, she met Nia trainer, co-creator, teacher, author, and artist Debbie Rosas, who introduced her to Nia. Upon trying the new way of approaching physical fitness, Winalee loved it. The subtle movement intrigued her with a continuity of joy and form, like she had never experienced in her previous exercise programs. She left the old world of “no pain—no gain” to find her bliss in dance and has never looked back.

Some of Winalees’ students, who volunteered to help me with this research project, noted that they had found Nia in an array of ways. For instance, Nia student, Anita Lee Evans, said, “I learned about Nia at a bonfire dance retreat and continued training with instructor Winalee Zeeb. “ Nia student Paullete D. Kilmer said, “I discovered Nia at a Church weekend escape. Instructor Deb Reis demonstrated the dance movements at the Weber Retreat Center in Adrian. Student Erin Shawn shared, “I learned about Nia via the IYS (The Integration Yoga Studio) website.”

How long have you been practicing Nia? The interviewees had logged different amounts of time as Nia enthusiasts. Instructor Deb Reis who then was giving classes at the former Integration Yoga Studio, on Bancroft Street, in Toledo, Ohio, had been practicing Nia twelve years and instructor Patricia Scott, who teaches in several places in Michigan for fifteen years. Some students also had spent many years perfecting their skills in the fusion-fitness dance form of Martial Arts. Austrian instructor Mario Reinthaler discovered Nia six years ago. Nia student Erin Shawn recalled participating in Nia for a little over two years. Many of the students and instructors said that they had
practiced Nia consecutively for a number of years without a break. I learned that Nia continues to inspire many followers for years after they first encounter the creative art that teaches them to appreciate the body’s way.

How many times a week do you teach or attend Nia classes? The answers to this question directly relate to the student or instructors’ passion and commitment to Nia. There were a variety of answers. Instructor Patricia Scott from Michigan teaches at four different locations a total of six to seven days per week. Instructor Mario Reinthaler offers between eleven and fourteen Nia classes per week in Vienna. Instructor and student Kelly Gibson from Michigan leads two classes per day and about seven classes per week. Instructor Deb Reis, in Toledo, Ohio, teaches three to four times per week. Overall, most of the Nia students danced an average of two to three times per week.

At what location do you practice Nia? Although Winalee Zeeb offers a myriad of creative Nia opportunities from her Heartdance Studio in Lansing, Michigan, many teachers rely on shared facilities rather than maintain their own studies. The list of places they transform into joyous dancing spaces reflects both their ingenuity and sincere effort to help all kinds of people reach their potential via Nia. For example, instructor Deb Reis has taught at Tiger Martial Arts in Sylvania (Ohio), Integration Yoga Studio in Toledo (Ohio) and the Oncology Center with in Flower Hospital in Sylvania. Three instructors have taught in Michigan: Stacey Peper at West Bloomfield; Brooke Mallon at St. Clair Shores and at an eating disorder clinic; and Theresa Meyers in Ann Arbor. Nia Instructor Mario Reinthaler has worked with students at fitness centers, community centers and schools in Vienna.
Who is your primary instructor? Most of the Nia students indicated that they dance with a primary instructor who is close to their home or work. The Nia instructors also participate at other Nia locations and learn new Nia techniques from other instructors. They emphasized that the national organization constantly issues new techniques and routines for teachers to learn, so working collaboratively and attending workshops is important. Sometimes, instructors meet at jams, which often are also open to the public, to learn new moves from each other.

Has Nia helped you become more aware of the relationship between body movement and body awareness? Mario Reinthaler explained that Nia has enhanced his person understanding of his body’s potential to use its muscles. “Oh, yes,” he exclaimed. “I have gained insight from moving my body with full attention and awareness to each sequence of a motion and a gesture.” Student Barb Starling pointed out, “Nia has really helped me to become more aware of my body. The training has helped me to become more aware of bones and tendons.” Instructor Kelly Gibson said, “Nia teaches us to become more aware of our body movements, and teaching it helps us to guide others to become aware of exercise and what movement felt right to them.” Nia Instructor Anita Evans recalled, “Prior to Nia, I was a ballet dancer where there is a lot of movement judgment [emphasis on doing things just one way]. Nia is very good because it helps one release judgment, and it is easier on the joints. Instructor Deb Reis commented, “Nia helps us become much more aware of our balance, and it helps us become more in touch with spiritual, emotional, and physical self-awareness or the whole self.”

Has practicing Nia helped you to move more flexibly? All respondents reported a favorable correlation between practicing Nia and increased flexibility. For example,
student Paulette Kilmer said, “It has helped me tremendously with flexibility and balance.” Nia routines are structured so that each person can find his or her own body’s way to increase flexibility. Brooke Mallon observed, “The improved flexibility occurs at your pace, without producing the pain and discomfort when pushing the body beyond the personal comfort zone. Since there are three levels of difficulty for most of the Nia movements, the Nia technique lends itself to a gradual expansion of the muscles and ligaments, enhancing flexibility.” Anita Lee Evans explained, “Some of the best flexibility comes from the ‘floor play,’ which is where we sit, rock, and side stretch keeping the spine aligned and tall. ‘Floor play’ allows us to use gravity, space, time, and sound; moving on the floor to improve stretch, balance, and definition. Stacey Peper said, “Nia is a great form of aerobic exercise with movements that especially loosen the muscles in the spine so that we can move more freely. There are many motions that promote flexibility; for example, rocking side to side releases tension in the tailbone increasing more torso flexibility.

Do you enjoy the variety of steps that Nia provides? Teacher Theresa Myers (Ann Arbor) loves the variety of steps that Nia provides because it gives her an opportunity to be creative. She pointed out that the steps are very fun, low impact, and highly energizing. Student Marshall Mullar said Nia is offers great variety of steps, especially for the male population because they tend to be a little more rigid, and this variety helps them “step out of the box” and be more creative. Student Barb Starling loves the steps and concluded that they are never repetitive, and she explained that she learns from the variety and changes that occur at each session. The creativity helps us open our minds and think about new and better ways to do things, the body’s way.
In your opinion what are the main benefits of Nia? Student Barb Starling said that Nia helped her become more flexible and caused her to have more mental and physical energy. “You feel more comfortable, confident, and unrestrained,” she noted. “The concept of low-impact is very beneficial to my joints. I look forward to class each week, and I love the people, movements, and the energy that the exercise gives me.” Kathy Okuley observed that Nia has greatly increased her body awareness, respect for individuality, and appreciation for emotions that come with the movements. She also said Nia creates a path for her that connects the mind-body and spirit as well as helps her focus. Sharon Devenish concluded that Nia gives her more joint flexibility and muscle definition. In addition she said her balance has improved tremendously since she began to practice Nia and she has gained more overall strength. Anita Lee Evans credited Nia with giving her the flexibility to open and lengthen her muscle and joints, which have resulted in greater mobility, range of motion, and freedom of movement. Many Nia exercises promote joint mobility to empower individuals to more productively and efficiently move hips, shoulders, spine, and all other body parts. In Nia teachers never force the exercises or range of motion; they do everything reasonably to facilitate weekly improvements.

Do you think that Nia classes are taught at a level that provides you with maximum fitness? Most students and Instructors responded favorably about the fitness benefits they have obtained by participating in Nia. Jean Jambas, Nia instructor, said that Nia is a good workout because it improves posture, builds muscle tone, and increases muscle definition. Also, Nia participants can improve endurance at their own pace. “If
you want to make the workout more intense, you can use one of the higher levels to achieve a more challenging workout,” she explained.

Kelly Gibson said Nia provides a great opportunity to get more fit because you can go as many times a week as you would like and you can work out as hard or easy as you like. “The program is very flexible, and it helps me to relax on an emotional and physical level,” she noted. “It benefits me from a fitness level because it is self-paced and I can gradually improve by experiencing the tools and concepts that are offered at each session. The Nia classes have greatly improved my sensory awareness levels and my endurance.”

I have combined questions eleven and twelve, which asks has practicing Nia caused you to make some lifestyle changes and if so what changes have occurred? Anita Lee Evans said that Nia has helped her improve her movement and become much more flexible. Nia has also helped me to meet friends and become more established socially within the community,” she added. “Nia is a great activity that promotes a healthy lifestyle.” Barb Starling said that Nia has helped her make better choices about physical activity. “Nia is very flexible, and it allows me to feel more pleasure from exercise,” she pointed out. “It has helped me with weight maintenance by helping me think about exercise and make better food choices. The activity is very pleasurable, and Nia has given me the benefit of meeting some great new people.” Mario Reinthalter said that Nia is a comprehensive program that supports many positive lifestyle changes, like changing the way we thinking about activity so that we perceive exercise as a positive and creative plan rather than a painful and tiring process. “Nia has improved my endurance and flexibility,” he concluded. Deb Reis said that practicing Nia has helped
her to establish an overall wellness plan. Nia has helped her to better tone, increased flexibility, and given her much more energy every day. It has also helped her to improve her balance and bone density. Shawn Devenish pointed out that Nia has helped her positively change her life, like eating healthier than before, and as a result she has lost weight. In addition, she commented that Nia has also helped her to recognize the value in continuously seek pleasure over pain while exercising.

In reflecting on the questions asked, I observed that most Nia students and instructors were very passionate about their role in the Nia community. The instructors and students both communicated to me that practicing Nia brings joy, expression, and positive fitness outcomes, such as more flexibility, increased muscle control, and less pain. The somatic movements of Nia have helped all instructors and students to sense their own body and move in a way that is individually natural and comfortable, and, thus, in each class, benefit from boosted energy and deep relaxation.
Chapter 5

Using the Benefits of Nia in Marketing Strategies

Although my instructor, Deb Reis, has offered Nia classes for roughly fourteen years, I learned about Nia approximately three years ago. At the time, I was looking for some fun and non-impact exercise, and my friend, Paulette D. Kilmer, invited me to attend the class with her. I found immediate joy in the Nia movements. The dance steps are fun and easy to learn; the music is flexible, sometimes lively and other times soothing and relaxing. The routines are very energizing and filled with a variety of movements that strengthen muscles and get hearts pumping. Nia has been really a great exercise experience for me; the cardiovascular exercise has helped in toning and weight management and my flexibility and balance have both improved. One important aspect of marketing anything is making sure the leaders understand the potential personal benefits for their clients. Therein, before focusing on attracting students, I will review some studies that document the value of Nia for strengthening the mind-body connection. These investigations demonstrate that folks can literally dance their way to improved health.

I think my experiences suggest that many potential Nia dancers are unaware of the opportunity here, in Toledo, Ohio, and so this chapter will focus on marketing Nia.
One important aspect of marketing anything is making sure the leaders understand the potential personal benefits for their clients. Therein, before focusing on attracting students, I will review some studies that document the value of Nia for strengthening the mind-body connection. These investigations demonstrate that folks can literally dance their way to improved health.

After reviewing these pluses, my goal is to provide for teachers some basic adaptable and flexible marketing strategies based on the dynamics of the community. The marketing information should serve as a detailed guide for those who want to review current wellness programs that have succeeded and take steps to establish similar programs. These pages will also provide information related to trends in marketing communication, utilizing potential data sources such as healthcare delivery systems, national wellness centers, and community health facilities. A well-designed communication plan can help teachers create messages and materials that reach specific audiences who are interested in new opportunities related to fitness and health management.

5.1 The Health Benefits of Nia and other Dance Forms

For many years, dance manuals and publications have focused on the health benefits of dance, typically as a great form of physical exercise. More currently, some studies have investigated how the benefits of dance reach into many areas of a person’s life. For example, some studies suggest that dance can improve well-being by reducing stress, increasing serotonin levels, and increasing cognitive acuity at all ages.

Health studies suggest that routinely doing dance such as Nia promotes optimal health in many ways and one of the benefits is heightened mobility. Dance can improve
mobility by increasing the amount of synovial fluid around the joints. The gliding joint allows linear motion; smooth sliding of bone past bone and angular motion such as bending, stretching, and circular motion. The role of the gliding joint in human health is to allow freedom of movement and flexibility to the skeleton. Dancing is a fantastic and enjoyable way for people of all ages to stay in good physical shape. It improves mobility because it requires a great amount of flexibility. All dancers strive to achieve the full range of motion for the major muscle groups and thus can increase mobility and flexibility, which decreases the risk of muscle and bone degeneration. As flexibility improves, people feel lighter and healthier.

According to Beth Miller, a writer at the Newsroom of Washington University in St. Louis, doing the tango improves balance as well as mobility in patients with Parkinson’s disease. Two researchers: Gammon M. Earhart, Ph.D., an assistant professor of physical therapy, and Madeleine E. Hackney, a predoctoral trainee in movement science, conducted the study of patients with Parkinson’s disease. According to Miller, Parkinson’s disease “is a disorder that affects nerve cells in a part of the brain that controls muscle movements; the nerve cells that make the neurotransmitter, dopamine, die or do not work properly, resulting in the trembling of hands, arms, legs, jaw and face; stiffness of the arms, legs and trunk; slowness of movement, and poor balance and coordination” (n.pag.).

Earhart and Miller’s method of study consisted of randomly assigning 19 patients with Parkinson’s disease to 20 one-hour sessions of tango dancing or group strength and flexibility exercises that were specifically designed for patients with Parkinson’s. A healthcare professional completed a physical assessment of each patient, prior to starting
the exercise program and after completion. Each tango session included stretching, balance exercises, tango-style walking, footwork patterns, experimenting with the timing of steps to music, and dancing with and without a partner. The exercise classes consisted of 40-minutes of seated exercise followed by standing exercises supported by a chair and core strengthening.

The results of Earhart and Miller’s study indicated that patients who took part in regular tango classes for 20 sessions showed significant improvements in balance and mobility when compared to patients who did conventional exercises. The scientists assessed the results using the Unified Parkinson’s Disease Rating Scale (UPDRS) Motor Subscale 3, which measures overall disease severity with respect to movements such as facial expression, ability to arise from a chair, gait, postural stability, and hand movements.

Based on Earhart and Miller’s study, one can conclude that tango is a good form of exercise that has proven beneficial for those with Parkinson’s disease because this dance includes movements such as dynamic balance, turning, moving at a variety of speeds, and walking backwards. These elements in the style of the tango increase the mobility for patients with Parkinson’s disease and improve their quality of life.

John Shepherd’s article in Peak Performance, a magazine celebrating sporting excellence, suggests that many athletes turn to dance to increase their mobility and agility. American football players have swapped their pads for ballet points because ballet dancers are well known for their agility, flexibility, and mobility as they leap, land, and pivot. These actions have led some sports trainers, team players, and coaches to experiment with dance. American football players have learned ballet since the 1970s,
and some of the most famous NFL (National Football League) players such as Lynn Swann, the Pittsburg Steelers; Willie Gault, the Chicago Bears; and Herschel Walker, the Dallas Cowboys, supported ballet and recognized that Mikhail Baryshnikov’s performances on stage required incredible strength, flexibility, and stamina. For example, a ballet position called a “turnout” involves rotating the legs from the hips and helps strengthen small, injury susceptible muscles. Also the position, “tendu,” requires the leg and foot to point in a particular direction, but the foot does not leave the floor. According to *Peak Performance*, this move enhances foot flexibility, which promotes agility. Football athletic trainers also found that when practiced correctly this particular movement could increase range of motion in the hips. This study concluded that dance does have the potential to improve agility and speed as well as reduce injuries for some NFL football players.

In addition to mobility, balance is also an important part of improving our quality of life, independence, and safety. We would expect to find that dance training improves balance. To validate this hypothesis, an Italian investigation focused on the non-sporting senior population. The study consisted of forty cohorts, aged 58 to 68, who were randomly allocated to either a three-month exercise group (which consisted of dance training) or a control group, which did not engage in physical activities. The final results showed that physical activity, based on dance alone, improved balance, which led the researchers to conclude that dance training could reduce the risk of falling among the elderly.

A small study in Cincinnati, Ohio, compared the body movements of track and field athletes to ballet dancers. The researchers found no significant difference between the
two groups until they conducted a balance experiment. They asked the participants to balance on a foam surface with their eyes closed. Under these conditions there was a clear difference between the two groups. The dancers were more stable in terms of holding a stationary position and made less complex movements when they did move.

Dance can provide great physical and emotional benefits, and scientists have shown that it improves cognitive function and augments brain power. The Centre for Policy on Ageing’s online article, “Keep Dancing… the Health and Well-Being Benefits of Dance for Older People,” concludes that dance has proven useful in the treatment of a number of conditions, such as dementia and depression. Taking part in ballroom dancing reduces the chances of getting dementia by 76 percent (Kovadlo, 80). Also, dancing improves the mental health of older people, including their reaction times and cognitive performance.

Dance therapy can help those with dementia. A 2003 study reviewed leisure activities and the risk of dementia in later life and found that while mental stimulation, such as crossword puzzles, reduced the chance of dementia in later life, physical activity generally did not. However, the one major exception was ballroom dancing, “which brought about a 76 percent reduction in the chances of developing dementia and was the most beneficial of all the hobbies and leisure activities examined” (Verghese 6). The researchers concluded that the art form of dance is very suitable in treating people with dementia because it matches well with person-centered care and it gives people who have lost the skills of ordinary conversation an opportunity to express themselves in a different way.
In 2003, the *New England Journal of Medicine* published research related to leisure activities and the risk of dementia in the elderly. The doctors noted that “cross-sectional studies report an association between dementia and reduced participation in leisure activities in midlife, as well as between cognitive status and participation in leisure activities in old age” (Verghese 5). Elderly persons who participated in activities, such as dance, reduced their risk of dementia. The study consisted of 469 subjects and lasted for 20 years. Subjects were tested according to their frequency of performing certain leisurely physical activities: tennis, golf, bowling, walking, and dancing. Each subject underwent psychological and clinical evaluations before and after the study. They were awarded points for their participation daily, weekly, monthly, or never. For each activity, subjects received seven points for daily participation; four points for participating several days per week; one point for participating once per week, and zero points for participating monthly, occasionally, or never. The researchers concluded that among the leisurely physical activities, dancing was the only one associated with a lower risk of dementia and elderly people who reported taking frequent turns on the dance floor were less likely to show signs of dementia.

On a therapeutic level, people have used dance for centuries for nurturing and improving their well-being. Since dance is both a social and physical activity, one who dances acquires the mental health benefits associated with physical activity and social interaction. A 2006 investigation of the health benefits of physical activities confirmed, without a doubt, that exercise, such as dance, a positively affects moods and reduces depression (Parekh 4).
Today, dance forms, like Nia, offer an artistic means of focusing on a person’s mind and body, which leads to improved health. Dance, as a therapy, provides an alternative way to externalize suppressed feelings. During dance sessions, patients learn to act out hidden hurts. When people have used dance and movement therapy to cope with depression, many have found that participating is uplifting and enhances creativity. As a therapeutic intervention, dance therapy is relatively new, but research has shown that it can facilitate an emotional release that can improve mental health.

A dance work-out can promote weight loss. Dance is considered one of the greatest cardiovascular activities in shedding calories. Dancing gives individuals a metabolic boost and increased heart rate, both of which will help to burn fat and build muscle. Each one half-hour Nia session burns between 150 to 300 calories (Rosas 2). Salsa dance burns about 420 calories per hour; belly dancing burns 380 calories per session; ballet burns about 300 calories per hour, and aerobic dance burns about 540 calories per class. According to the wellness and fitness website, “Live Strong,” dancing burns visceral fat or abdominal fat and adds lots of fun to a workout. In order to effectively use dance to lose weight, people dance five days per week for 90 minutes (measuring their heart rate periodically).

5.2 Marketing Tools For Selling the Health Benefits of Nia as a Dance Form

It is important to prepare a tool kit to market the health benefits of Nia. This section explores principles for engaging audiences through marketing. The toolkit includes these strategies: raising public perception of Nia, knowing the audience, tapping into new markets, and incorporating social media into information campaigns, which involves blending traditional with Web sales tactics.
While everyone desires to live a long and healthy life, influencing people to make decisions that will enhance their health is challenging. In order to make an impact, we must be able to sell Nia using a variety of creative marketing venues. Effective campaigns accomplish increased awareness and eventually positive health outcomes. However, the most critical challenge is to identify the most influential form of communication that will invoke behavioral change. The many forms of message delivery channels are important to this study because they determine where to deliver the message and how to reach the most appropriate people for persuasive health interventions (those willing to change their routines).

5.3 Raising Public Awareness of Nia

Since Nia is a creative form of movement, it should be easy to market, but a big part of the sell is getting people to understand the need to exercise and then motivating them to do it. Therein, psychology plays a big role in the marketing campaign. According to Rod Dishman, “The problem of Exercise Adherence” as many as 80 percent of the individuals who start an exercise program do not stick to it (Dishman 280). They often feel fired up at the beginning because the experience is new and they are ready to complete a new goal, but many fail to continue the momentum over the long term. Understanding what exercise motivators help students stay motivated might enable a Nia instructor to retain class retention. Nobody can predict changes in health, domestic crises, or job schedules, but perhaps some ideas might prevent laziness or inertia from taking a toll on attendance.

Researchers with the Association of Applied Sports Psychology and the National Association for Physical Education in Higher Education both point out that the best
motivators are personal satisfaction and joy (Applied psych 1), Thus Nia instructors make the experience fun. In fact, one of the few rules in a Nia class is “no judgments,” which fosters a caring, accepting atmosphere. However, if nobody outside of the class hears about the potential benefits of Nia, including the fusion of laughter with healthy movement, then the unique mix of healing, dance, and martial arts remains hidden from the community’s radar. Getting the attention of men and women who dash from place to place with scarcely any breaks may be the biggest challenge Nia teachers face. Indeed, they search for ways to motivate students just as ardently as the Knights of the Templar quested after the Holy Grail.

Many Nia leaders have discovered that reaching an obtainable fitness goal also motivates their charges. Most people enjoy working out with friends, so establishing a Nia community is very important to the success of a Nia class. When people dance with friends at Nia not only do they enjoy the company, but also they encourage and support each other. It is more difficult for students to skip class if someone else is counting on them being there. People usually stick with activities that they like, so Nia instructors highlight the fun and creative exercise advantages that Nia provides.

Since Nia technique includes more than dance, teachers who focus on the entire scope of the fusion fitness process teach their students the joy of rhythmic movements in pace with “the body’s way” or personal growth, not solely the practice of formal dance. Many people like a new learning experience that provides variety and attainable challenges. Thus, many teachers promote an array of different routines in the Nia classes so people can learn new moves and be satisfied with their workout. The goal always revolves around encouraging people to listen to their body and to start slowly because
pushing too much can result in sore muscles and injury, which would violate another Nia principle: No pain--ever. Nia teachers learn the value of being flexible and realistic with classroom expectations and praise students for making small but regular improvements. Attendance should increase if classes are offered at various times and days of the week. Busy lifestyles require flexibility. Achieving visibility amid the clutter of activities available to prospective students can elude even the most personally gratifying Nia programs. Perhaps, some marketing ideas could put the spotlight onto these innovative but too often overlooked Nia classes.

5.4 Incorporating Social Media into Nia Information Campaigns

Many ways exist to market a Nia class. Fitness researchers have suggested some very specific ideas for promoting dance and fitness activities that are sure to appeal to interested parties. The first step entails creating a publicity plan and budget. Regardless of the size of the marketing budget, the key is to never stop campaigning for the business. Without leads or prospects, it is impossible to recruit new members. Retaining the Nia program’s market share or viability to attract new investors involves staying visible.

Of course, Nia practitioners must be realistic, but marketing does not have to be costly. Although typically marketing costs account for about 10 percent of a business’ fixed expenses, some Nia teachers get by on much smaller amounts until they build enough capital to expand their operation (Kavadlo 79). On the other hand, each Nia teacher sets individual boundaries concerning their goal for financial remuneration. Today, Nia teachers, who must work with biscuit-sized budgets in an often towering-wedding-cake world of high finance, turn to cost-effective marketing tools: Facebook, websites, referrals, health care systems, and local small business, or networking groups.
Often the public library holds meetings for small businesses to discuss marketing options as well as receive materials at no cost. Nia professionals build their practice on a foundation of the healing, martial, and dance arts, but they must also master the financial skills that will empower them to reach the potential clientele in their community who will embrace learning in the body’s way and, therein, embark on a lifelong journey of self-discovery.

Nia teachers have discovered that social media marketing is an art, not a science, and experiment to determine the ways to use the Internet to maximize visibility. They avoid frustration by doing some research before diving into potential online venues. To keep “intimidating” and “time-consuming” out of their conversation as much as possible, they take the time to implement a system of best practices that will guide incorporating social media into information campaigns in a logical, effective manner (Peterson 437). These best practices include fine-tuning communication so that the business website is devoted to work while the Facebook page fills the need for a personal channel to share news with family and friends. In this fashion, Nia professionals reach out to clients but distinguish personal contacts from business connections.

Besides carefully maintaining the separation of business and private correspondence, best practices also include attention to quality. Of course, they check grammar to insure quality and maintain an immaculate, polished, and professional image. Frequently, they create connections rather than merely emphasize selling their classes. For example, a posting might read, “Please come to my class and bring a friend.” Not only do Nia instructors constantly learn new routines to teach to their students, they must also keep updated on social media venues as they are ever-changing, and what works
today may not tomorrow. They collaborate with colleagues and learn from those who are succeeding. Through asking questions, they gain insight into building better communication and business plans.

5.5 Knowing The Audience of Prospective Students:

Every Nia teacher struggles with figuring out how to find students. Studying the other types of physical fitness businesses and nonprofit health programs in the area sheds light into what the community already knows about exercise. Nia practitioners market their fusion-fitness program as an energizing option to existing choices. They talk about the benefits, not the features (Milner 27). They focus on the joy of exploring new ways to move, the wonder of discovering that dance is everybody’s birthright, and the power of releasing stress and frustration, losing weight, and increasing energy. The different Nia teaching styles inspire the leaders to create a unique selling message that differentiates their business from the competition and offers prospective students something that they really want. They show both the benefits and features in marketing Nia, but truly they know that the individualized “body’s way” will make the sale. People new to a health activity look for convenience, an inviting environment, and an effective program that meets personal needs. For example, Nia instructors highlight the relaxation gifts of Nia as well as the cardio benefits.

5.6 Tapping into New Markets to Expand Nia Programs

Marketing Nia as one of the arts may creatively get an organization noticed and greatly increase public awareness. Nia teachers could form partnerships with local arts consortiums, sharing space with dance studios, and/or establishing exchanges with
theatre, music, and other fine arts groups based on the promise to promote each other’s classes and events by posting flyers and making announcements via social media. Cooperation reduces the cost of marketing. Of course, these free exchanges complement if not replace other strategies, like pinning up a flyer at a grocery store, or purchasing a series of newspaper ads.

No matter what channel one uses, basic marketing includes the four basic “P”s: product, price, place, and promotion (Milner 28). Marketing a Nia class involves think of “the body’s way” as a product that consumers will buy but possess only through experience that enriches them emotionally as well as physically. The “place” really matters because conveniently situated, light, clean, airy, and ample spaces inspire students to explore the body’s way freely. That “P” for price to Nia teachers means keeping fees reasonable compared to other health and wellness classes. Promotion “P’s” include placing a map in flyers and Web posts to help students find the classes as well as using as many venues as possible such as advertising, PR, direct mail, the grapevine, and community outreach resources.

Nia teachers who work in an academic setting might find this study completed at a large mid-western university interesting. A physical educator at a University conducted a case study with a wealth of sports, fitness, and health classes to explore how through marketing, programs could be promoted as relevant in meeting students’ needs and how to choose the best physical fitness course offerings. The study focused on these major goals: (1) profiling demographically the students enrolled in the program, (2) Determining the frequency of course enrollment, (3) Assessing why students enrolled in these particular courses, (4) analyzing the students’ opinions. The researchers delivered
surveys to 3,307 students and 2,181 were returned. The questionnaires featured factors that influence course enrollment, including the quality and delivery of the courses. The findings suggested that the students’ desire to learn about health issues and the instructor’s performance most greatly affected their decision to enroll in courses, which reflects the powerful implications of enlightened content in the curriculum and teaching. Other important variables underscored the link between enrollment increases and improvement in the promotion as well as delivery of the courses. Nia teachers could adapt these results to both community and educational settings, particularly by pursuing informal methods of attaining feedback (e-mail polls with their students and suggestion boxes) rather than attempting to design a scientific survey.

Since seniors are the fastest-growing population of fitness clients, I will offer some tips to selling to Nia classes in this market (The AARP Group). The key to selling to seniors is to believe in the product. For example, according to the article, “Marketing Successfully to Age 40-Plus Women,” one way to thrive in marketing entails making a product stand out from the competition (Milner 24) as the best option. For example, Tylenol engendered trust to position itself against Bayer Aspirin with successful claims that “doctors and leading health organizations recommend Tylenol more than other brands, and I trust my doctor so the product must be effective” (Milner 24). Nia teachers could build trust in the community with marketing materials that show how the benefits of the body’s way over the long run as well as immediately compare against similar exercise options that are less effective and more like to cause injuries.

Besides incorporating appeals to emotions, like trust, some teachers seek endorsements from reputable health professionals in the community, like The University
of Toledo College of Medicine, or large organizations, such as The American Heart Association and American Medical Association. The American Association of Retired People (AARP) has very promoted exercise for the aging population. They launch campaigns and study the outcomes. The AARP 2007, “Active For Life” website provides data that a Nia teacher could use. For example, the Guide to Marketing and Communications offers ideas for networking with local reporters and health professionals as well as a strategy for building partnerships with local agencies, such as the Area Office on Aging, community adult centers and intervention programs. Marketing expectations sometime fall shortfalls of projected objectives, and so the AARP provides information about lessons learned from campaigns that failed because of unclear messages and goals, or misfired exchanges that did not reach the intended audience. Thus, people learn from others’ mistakes. Nia teachers would benefit from getting their classes included in AARP community resource guides.

The national Web page and Winalee Zeeb’s Joy Pod online resources have taught Nia teachers to understand the power of networking. Networking is critical for enrollment. The *Journal of Active Aging* offered tips for networking and fostering support for activities. For example, Nia teachers could try some of these approaches to building solidarity: preparing a social outing, such as a student luncheon; organizing community support groups; partnering with community wellness centers, where consumers, peers, professional groups, and service providers chat on free social media. For example, the “Social Network of Care” sponsors forums, groups, and blogs to facilitate making vital connections.
Selling Nia to sedentary people offers them the opportunity to dramatically improve their quality of life. This is a huge bonus for senior citizens. Nia teachers think in terms of quality of life; after all, someone who is 65 could live another forty or fifty years. An abundance of studies show that those who are physically active and maintain a low body weight live the longest and get the most enjoyment out of their golden years. Nia innately offers opportunities for working with this population because the teachers make exercise fun. They sell their classes with a positive attitude and emphasize the ways that Nia improves its followers’ life. Nia experience by its nature comprises an enriching and motivational process that students and teachers enjoy with their friends and community. Finally, teachers listen to their students and empathize with them. Forming new exercise habits can be especially challenging for seniors as they may feel limited or cope with specific health concerns. The best thing Nia instructors do to empower their students of all ages is to help them feel comfortable and capable. Indeed, for seniors this cheerful, supportive approach is particularly important. Teachers help seniors understand the movements and show them how to go at their own pace as they are more susceptible to injury than young students.

This chapter first reviewed talking points for selling Nia as an essential life art, a key to aging felicitously, that like other dance arts improves posture, balance, strength, and cognitive functioning. The last half considered some practical approaches to marketing a fitness program, which researchers had demonstrated work. Moreover, the literature indicates that some marketing strategies enhance participation while there are others are not as effective. Most studies refer to a variety of marketing venues and
communication channels for increasing a campaign’s impact. Perhaps, the value of reading about others’ investigations amounts to sparking new thoughts.

One idea the dozens of articles about selling wellness programs did not mention but taken together inspired is creating a community coalition of health promoting programs and agencies that would unite to promote each others’ classes and events as well as maintain communication among members via the electronic grapevine of social media. Nia practitioners would join a league of professionals dedicated to motivating people to improve their fitness and make moving a lifelong pursuit—a never-ending joy. Through this bond, Nia instructors would belong to a nexus far more powerful than any single participant as well as gain prestige and visibility. Working with other dedicated souls, Nia teachers would find opportunities for expanding the fusion fitness form of martial arts in ways unimaginable to any individual cutoff from the community’s life-giving web of solidarity.
Chapter 6

Epilogue or Conclusion

Chapter 6 encompasses my experiences and perspective concerning what I feel I have accomplished as a result of my research of Nia technique and theory as well as promotion of public awareness. I chose this topic because I enjoy the health benefits that Nia provides, and I believe in promoting physical activity to all populations. My rationale was not only to write about Nia theory but to promote its benefits. There are many reasons why I have chosen to do qualitative research and an evaluative study of Nia. When Nia became a part of my life, it prepared me to better focus and realize that I can learn to use my body to stretch, become more flexible, and enhance my body length by learning the many movements and working with the art of posture and form. Nia is beneficial to well-being because it is free-form movement and the theory encourages self-awareness. For example, sometimes when I arrive at Nia class after having the most stressful day at work, I slowly begin to unwind and focus on myself, and the Nia movements begin to enhance relaxation.

The reason I would like to promote the study of Nia in Northwest Ohio is the general lack of awareness in the community as a whole. There are many types of dance; however, Nia uniquely blends several forms into one fusion fitness practice, and thus it is
less structured than more traditional dance practice, such as ballet. Nia combines 52-steps borrowing from jazz, modern, and Duncan dance as well as body integration therapies (Feldenkrais, yoga, and the Alexander Technique) and martial arts (Tai Chai, Tae Kwon Do, and Aikido). In addition, the discipline offers healing properties for people suffering from many illnesses, ranging from cancer to anxiety disorder. Of particular value, is the focus on intent within the Nia practice; I have found this element especially useful at times when my body needs energy.

Physically, Nia develops muscle tone, strength, good posture, positive feelings, balance, and coordination and, thus, promotes increased health and longevity. I wanted to concentrate on some of these physical attributes in greater detail than merely definitions so that the value of Nia’s “body’s way” emphasis is addressed as a “therapeutic method.” Lastly, I was interested in analyzing the many resources available for Nia instruction and practice, including videos, instructional manuals, books, and websites. I was interested in exploring how the availability of these resources can further promote Nia within the community.

In my opinion, I have experienced a great deal of personal growth as a result of this study. I have learned that Nia is not only fun, but it also has helped me to appreciate its deep influence on my body. For example, this movement can be done for a lifetime, and Nia gives individuals a comprehensive workout using all muscle groups. Nia is adaptable, non-impact, and very invigorating. Furthermore, I enjoy the people whom I connect with in the class. The cost is reasonable; the instructor is positive, upbeat, very knowledgeable, and non-judgmental. Nia helps you learn to recognize healing, energy, and relaxation. After each class, I feel that I have learned something new, and I feel great
about the exercise. The Nia instructors had it right when they said, “Nia is like chocolate. It’s difficult to describe, you have to taste it.” [The Nia Technique, 3]

My research has enabled me to focus better in each class because I can now apply my knowledge to the class routines. I better understand why I have chosen to implement this particular physical activity, Nia, into my lifestyle. I hope my research will motivate others to explore Nia and find the same as well as additional benefits.

Further research could be done on Nia as part of wellness-impact programs. For example, others could examine the potential for applying Nia to improve health outcomes and enhance the quality of life for various populations. Researchers could apply health data and education models to Nia practices. Investigators of the role of play, the arts, or creative expression in combating depression or merely staying cognitively healthy might also consider Nia as a new frontier for expanding the human quest for healing through laughter and joyous movement.
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Appendix A

<Enter Heading (Title) of Appendix A here>

Name:

City or Town:

Age range: under 20  21 to 30  31-45  46-60  over 60

(Respondent’s answer will be circled).

1. How did you learn about NIA?

2. How long have you been practicing NIA?

3. How many times a week do you teach or attend NIA classe(s)?

4. At what location do you practice NIA?

5. Who is your primary instructor?

6. Has NIA helped you become more aware of the relationship between body movement and body awareness? How?

7. Has practicing NIA helped you to move more flexibly?

8. Do you enjoy the variety in steps that NIA provides?

9. In your opinion, what are the main benefits of practicing NIA?

10. Do you think that the NIA classes are taught at a level that provides you with maximum total fitness?

11. Has practicing NIA caused you to make some lifestyle changes?