

# THE INFLUENCE OF DANCING ACTIVITIES ON WOMEN'S SELF-IMAGE

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**Abstract** Dancing not only improves our development, but also changes us. It changes our attitude to many issues. It influences our temperament thus transforming the perception of our body.

The chief aim of this research was to prove that dancing classes are a form of work on reaching self-awareness and that they have therapeutic properties. The subjects were female participants of all kinds of dancing classes, conducted in various schools by different instructors. 51 females, aged 20–60 years old voluntarily participated in a diagnostic survey.

Dancing class participants, often unknowingly, undergo a certain metamorphosis. Indisputably, dancing has therapeutic influence; it allows to create and discover hitherto unknown recesses of ourselves.

Dancing classes considerably diminish our low self-esteem and distorted perception of our body. The analysis of research shows that behavior of women who participated in dancing class change so that they can more effectively fulfill their life aims.

**Key words** dancing classes, self-acceptance, self-image, self-awareness

## Introduction

The issue of perception of one's self was first dealt with in 1930s. One of the precursors was Alfred Adler, who claimed that "the person's conduct is a result of their beliefs or outlook that they have about themselves and the world" (Adler, 1939, p. 11). Many psychologists and pedagogues agree that our behavior considerably influences the recognition of our self-esteem. Human corporeality is inextricably linked to personal development and functioning in the environment (Hurlock, 1960; Wylie, 1961; Konorski, 1969). Murphy suggested a very apt definition: "My sense of self is how I perceive myself" (Murphy, 1947, p. 487). Snygg and Combs also stated simply that the perception of one's self is a group of features and properties that we define as ours (Snygg, Combs, 1959). Raimy maintained that the picture of ourselves is a result of observing ourselves in the past as well as in the present. It is a sort of a map that we use in the most difficult moments of our lives (Raimy, 1975). Similarly, others authors stated that deciding factors determining the formation of our self's perception are experiences through which we recognize our possibilities and secure a certain position and image in a society (Reykowski, 1970, Reel, Petrie,

SooHoo, Anderson, 2013; Thompson, Sherman, 2011; Krane, Stiles-ShIPLEY, Waldron, Michalenok, 2001; Loland, 1999; De Bruin, Oudejans, Bakker, Woertman, 2011). This development depends on the degree of self-awareness, formed in interpersonal contacts (Reykowski, 1970).

Contrary to appearances this is a complex issue, including knowledge not only about one's own traits, but also values that govern our conduct (Brzezińska, 1973; Baley, 1947; Zaborowski, 1967; Przetacznikowa, 1971; Koziellecki, 1986). J. Reykowski differentiated between two kinds of one's self-esteem: too low and too high. The former is ascribing to ourselves lower possibilities than possessed in reality. As a consequence, our activity and expansiveness are diminished. We are often depressed (nothing can give us real satisfaction), worried about everything, feeling guilt, dislike, and sometimes even loathing towards ourselves. We also underestimate our own attractiveness, which is destructive especially for females (Fredrickson, Roberts, 1997; Szymanski, Moffitt, Carr, 2011; Grogan, 2017). All of the above lead to underachievement. Too high self-esteem, on the other hand, is uncritical perception of ourselves and attributing greater possibilities than we really possess (Reykowski, 1970).

The picture of our self is created on the basis of data from two sources. The former is life experience, which place us in a society. It makes us aware of what we can really achieve. The latter is other people's opinions (Siek, 1993).

The level of self-acceptance is determined by a general judgment of ourselves, based on comparing our own achievements with the goals we set (Rogers, 1959; Kantanista et al., 2018). Fair judgment requires recognition of all properties and factors that condition the development of the individual's picture of their sense of self. This is the first step to form a positive, accepting self-image. Only then we are able to act properly, be satisfied with our life and reconciled with ourselves (Gough, Heilbrun, 1983).

The chief aim of this research was to prove that dancing classes are a form of work on reaching self-awareness and that they have therapeutic properties.

## Material and methodology

The subjects were female participants of all kinds of dancing classes, conducted in various schools by different instructors. 51 females, aged 20–60 years old voluntarily participated in a diagnostic survey. The survey contained open-ended and closed-ended questions. Only those women who answered all of the questions were taken into consideration, *i.e.* 40. This fact shows that even anonymous evaluation of one's physical appearance posed a problem for some of them.

Results On the basis of the obtained data concerning the height and body mass, the body mass index (BMI) was calculated. This indicator, also called Quetelet II, is a ratio of the body mass (in kilograms) and quadratic height (in meters). The average height (rounded) is 1.67 m, and the body mass – 66 kg. It follows that the average BMI is 23.7. This result is within a norm, but is not highly satisfactory. 25 is the upper limit of the norm, whereas 18.5 is the lower. The average BMI of dancing classes participants is close to danger of diseases connected with overweight and obesity. Barely over a half of subjects (55%) have an ideal body mass, as much as 35% are overweight and 5% struggle with severe obesity. Underweight occurs much more rarely (5%) than the tendency to overweight. Underweight more frequently concerns professional dancers than amateurs. Nevertheless, the following must be taken into consideration: for those who regularly do sports, BMI is not a perfectly accurate indicator of the fat content in their organisms.

The numeric data shows that 52.5% of the surveyed consider their body mass as normal, and 47.5% as too high. This is the reason why most of women make attempts at losing weight regardless of the actual need. It is often the case that those who should do so, do otherwise, and the other way round. Out of all the respondents merely 15% never made this attempt. The rest attended fitness/aerobics classes (82%), went on various types of diets (77%), exercised at the gym (27%), practiced various sports (26%) or did jogging (9%). The desperate ones even used weight loss products (15%), as well as underwent beauty treatments, allegedly aiding weight loss.

80% of the respondents claim they like their body, but as much as 45% of them would gladly change some parts of it, even if plastic surgery were involved (35%). Lack of cohesion may result not as much from the lack of inner harmony, but rather from outside pressure. Nowadays slim females are glorified in all the media, which makes over a half of women (52.5%) feel pressurized. Only 5% of the respondents pay absolutely no attention. "What will others think of me?" is a typical question that blocks women. It is advisable to strive for emotional freedom and to feel as one wants to feel, regardless of other people's opinions. Thanks to the dancing classes, women realized that they had trusted other people instead of themselves. An opinion may influence people only if they themselves believe it. Dancing gives emotional freedom, where everybody consciously decides how they want to think and act.

Representatives of fair sex, regardless of their appearance, occasionally feel awkward. Common changing rooms in dance schools make most women a bit self-conscious. As much as 20% feel awkward in the presence of other women, especially younger ones. Self-consciousness in the presence of men concerns only 7.5%. Unfortunately, psychological barrier that discourages women from any contacts with others, occurs in 5% of women. It is however advisable to follow an example of those who are not ashamed of their body, but are proud that despite of their imperfections they want and are able to fight them or simply accept them (22.5%).

Dancing not only improves our development, but also changes us. It changes our attitude to many issues. It influences our temperament thus transforming the perception of our body. Dancing class participants, often unknowingly, undergo a certain metamorphosis. Indisputably, dancing has therapeutic influence; it allows to create and discover hitherto unknown recesses of ourselves. Even if some women (especially the youngest ones) attend dancing classes only because of trends, it still leaves a permanent trace on their inner, as well as outer, self. As much as 95% of the surveyed perceive, through the participation in dancing classes, an attractive woman not only as the one with an ideal body, but also the one who accepts her body regardless of its shape.

80% think that a woman may be perceived as beautiful at every age, as femininity is much more than Aphrodite's looks. It can have a face of a young girl, mature woman, or elderly lady. Each of them has her unique assets. A question about characteristics that best portray femininity was answered in as many different ways, as there were respondents. This is perfectly obvious, as every girl, since a very young age, is subject to upbringing – she is continually told what is good or bad manners, what is and what is not the right thing to do. Girl's clothes are pink, dolls are for playing, it is not becoming of a young lady to be angry, however, crying is appropriate. As the time passes, depending on a peer group that a young woman identifies with, her behavior starts to be shaped, and boundaries of femininity and masculinity are determined. Therefore in such a case it is not reasonable to make generalizations. Similarly, the ideal of beauty will be different for everyone; even the most beautiful Caucasian woman will not fulfill the criteria of beauty of other human races. Miss World has never been fancied by everyone. The most important thing, however, is to feel good in one's own body and be able to use it in different ways, depending on the purpose. Research indicates that thanks to dancing classes women look in the mirror more often (75%), and 62.5% like their bodies more, no matter if it changed or became more attractive. Their attractiveness

manifests itself in the desire to be fancied by others and themselves. Some of the women (45%), since they began attending dancing classes, started to pay more attention to their make-up, hairdo and clothing. They want to look fashionable, introducing new and braver elements into their style. Caring about their looks, women spend less on beauty treatments (83 PLN), cosmetics (96 PLN) and more for doing sport (181 PLN). It is because they can see better and long-lasting effects of their physical activity. They feel not only more attractive, but also healthier. 90% of respondents noticed a considerable improvement of their physical condition and 17.5% defines it as “very good” and 80% as “good”. 2.5% of participants considers their condition to be on a low level as a result of considerable overweight (nevertheless they recognize improvement).

It is uplifting that the average self-evaluation of appearance of the women participating in dancing classes is 7.2 (in 10-point scale). This may be due to high level of self-acceptance and considerable influence on the level of self-esteem.

## Summary and conclusions

1. Dancing classes considerably diminish our low self-esteem and distorted perception of our body.
2. The conducted research suggests that women participating in dancing classes have greater consciousness of their own body. They appreciate not only esthetic values, but above all the harmony between the body and the spirit. Dancing classes satisfy their physical as well as emotional needs.
3. The results confirm that experiencing one's self in dancing gives positive effect within the Self structure.
4. The results shows that dancing classes diminish awkwardness of our own body, allow women to dismiss complexes and give strength to fight them or simply accept them.
5. The research confirm that as a result of gaining social experience in dancing classes, women's behavior change so that they can more effectively fulfill their life aims.

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