


## A silent look at the teaching and learning of belly dance and the stereotype applied to practitioners: An experience report

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigated the benefits of practicing belly dance and explored the phenomenon of prejudice within the teaching of this modality. Using a qualitative review approach, the historical context of belly dance, its relationship with physical education and the teaching/learning process were analyzed. The results showed that belly dance contributes to integral education, promoting the appreciation of life and improving the health and quality of life of practitioners. It was concluded that the body language of dance can be a powerful tool for expressing feelings and emotions, as well as providing a connection with cultural roots and promoting female self-esteem. Thus, prejudice towards belly dancing is unjustified, as it offers an enriching and empowering form of expression.

**Keywords:** Belly dance, Physical education, Teaching, Learning, Prejudice.

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## INTRODUCTION

Throughout the centuries that have passed, dance has been developing, changing and recreating itself more and more. However, there is no correct answer to understanding what dance is, when exactly it originated and for what reasons or purposes it was created.

According to Araújo (2009):

The understanding of what dance is comes about through a series of cultural factors, which are built up over time and reflect the specificity of each place. As such, dance takes on its meaning according to the historical, political and social context in which it is inserted. (ARAÚJO, 2009, p.22).

According to the idea of Nanni (2003, p.7) apud Gariba (2005, p. 01), in a slightly different thought, when dance is analyzed by its essence it is characterized by the form of expression of the human being:

Dances, in all periods of history and/or geographical space, for all peoples are a representation of their manifestations, of their 'states of mind', of emotions, of the expression and communication of their being and their cultural characteristics (NANNI, 2003, p.7).

Oliveira (2001) apud Gariba shows another perspective:

"One of the most significant physical activities for ancient man was dance. Used as a way of showing off their physical qualities and expressing their feelings, it has been practiced by all peoples since the upper Paleolithic period (60,000 BC)." (OLIVEIRA, 2001, p.14).

Dance in general marks the culture of a people, being related to religion, history, the form of communication, among other possibilities, and, for the most part, being used as a form of manifestation and externalization of emotions according to the idea of Gariba (2005, p.01) who says "to manifest his emotions and externalize them, man resorted to movement, to gesture", and can be complemented by Fahlbusch (1990, p.15) apud Gariba (2005, p. 01), "it is dance in its most elementary form". Laban (1978, p. 67) also brings us a thought in relation to this expressive potential that human beings can explore through movement: "The body acts like an orchestra, in which each section is related to any of the others and is a part of the whole".

Dances are defined as rhythmic and expressive activities in Physical Education, working on the motor and biopsychosocial aspects in the form of physical exercise, automatically working on conditioning, weight loss, well-being and health. It can therefore be used as a tool to improve health and quality of life.

In a comparison between dancers and swimmers, it was shown that individuals who practiced dance regularly had greater general physical fitness, and when 10 physical capacities were compared, only 03 swimmers scored higher (ZAGO, 2016).



Belly dancing is gradually gaining ground and nowadays is presented as a physical activity that can improve self-esteem, reduce premenstrual tension in women, help with the digestive process, among other benefits. Emphasizing the increase in self-esteem, historically speaking, belly dancing has presented different "standards" of bodies. In the beginning, the "fuller" women, who were not of the current standard, were the ones who were well-liked in performances, and it was believed that their bodies showed how fertile and strong ~~by~~ ~~we~~ As the decades passed and customs changed, this belief was put aside and gave way to vanity, thus developing the more accepted standard of the slim and defined body.

With the arrival of these standards, prejudice intensified against bodies that escaped this stereotype, and experiencing this is not an easy task, not only because the subject is complex, but mainly because it forces us to reflect on ourselves, on our feelings, thoughts and daily actions. In this sense, when researching the subject, I observed that it is a research topic that has been little studied in academic circles and it is possible to affirm that the silence on the subject is closely related to prejudice about belly dancing and also to the misconceptions related to its practice.

## THEORETICAL REFERENCE

### HISTORY OF BELLY DANCE

Just like the origin of dance, the story of how belly dancing may have originated is not certain, in which case there are various stories that are told, from the most coherent to the most absurd. Here in the West, there is a well-known narrative, widely propagated by belly dancers themselves, which links the dance to fertility rituals, goddesses, sacredness, the sacred feminine and so on. There is a problem with this narrative from the moment it is told in contrast to the sexualization of the dance, presenting this idea as a justification for society to accept the dance without the erotic bias.

The history of the name given to the "belly dance" modality was originally called *raqs sharqi* (راقص شرق), which in translation means "dance of the East" or "dance of the Orient", later the Americans translated it into "*bellydance*", and the French translated it into "*danse du ventre*", which was the translation that gave rise to the Portuguese version, which we call "belly dance" here in Brazil. According to studies by researcher Ainsley Hawthorne (2019, p. 2), the term first appeared in French printed sources in 1863, naming a painting that became well known in the 19th century by Orientalist artist Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824-1904), called *Ladanse del'almée*.

Figure 1: La danse de l'almée or "The Dance of the Almeh" (Jean-Léon Gérôme, 1863).



The term "*raqs sharqi*", in the Egyptian context, would have appeared between the 19th and 20th centuries, used to name the dances performed in entertainment houses in Egyptian urban centers with an official technique in exchange for payment, according to Ward(2018, p. 6). According to the author, the term "*bellydance*" can also cover various other types of dance that are developed outside the Middle East, most notably in the United States, such as "*tribal fusion*".

With this brief summary of the modality's nomenclature, we will now point out the association between the origin of belly dancing and the Egyptian colonial period, where Palestinian theorist Edward Said analyzed it through the concept of "Orientalism". The author characterizes "Orientalism" as a manifestation in which, during the post-Enlightenment period, European culture - above all English and French - can reshape, even develop, the Orient, politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively. With this, Said affirms that the vision of the Orient in the Western imagination is a creation of Europeans based on imperialist policies contextualized in colonialist expansion in the 19th century.

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Europe saw the consolidation of national states and the industrial development of powers, with England and France being the most prominent. These historical moments were known as the "Glorious Revolution", the "French Revolution" and the establishment of Enlightenment thoughts and ideologies. Understanding themselves as models at the height of civilization in humanity, they sought to expand their territories, politically, culturally and economically in the regions of Africa and Asia, initiating the process of neo-colonialism.

In 1798, with the aim of establishing himself as a world power, Napoleon Bonaparte invaded Egypt, an act that didn't last long given the alliance made in 1805 between the Ottoman and British empires, which together expelled the French and supported the rise of the government of Muhammad 'Ali, known as the "father of modern Egypt", during his rule he developed administrative and



bureaucratic reforms that had an impact on urban remodeling, higher taxes, especially among the rural population, while continuing to act in accordance with the ideal of Eurocentric modernity. Europeans began to occupy Egyptian territory, operating as military personnel, diplomats and civil servants, inhabiting and modifying Egyptian urban landscapes.

Following Napoleon's invasion of Egypt, some scholars such as biologists, anthropologists, geographers and visual artists went to the colonies with the aim of to study the lands they considered "savage", and began creating encyclopedias to catalog "all" aspects of ancient and modern Egypt. The material developed was intended to cover all the information on the lands to be explored by the colonizers, and was used by the Europeans as appropriation mechanisms for structuring what they stipulated to be the "Orient". Most of the sources and information we have today about the Egyptian dance that was practiced at that time arose from this circumstance.

As with all areas studied by Europeans, the dance developed by Arab women at the time was not left out. Orientalist paintings, travel accounts and even encyclopedias were created in an attempt to portray Arab women and their dancing, which was the aspect that most impressed and amazed Europeans. The local cultural customs of social separation between the genders, which in parts of the continent are still maintained today, considering the local religion, strongly contributed to the "obsession with the image of the embodied oriental woman", considering that foreigners had no access to the women of the Arab and Turkish elites, and this obsession was divided into two personalities: the harem odalisque and the dancer.

To conclude, it is important to understand that historical processes are multilinear, influences come and go in various ways and at various times, cultural manifestations arise from many issues, but they are formed in dynamics of sharing, influences and transformations. It is possible that the movements performed in belly dancing today, such as belly rolls or hip thrusts, already existed in dances developed in the ancient world, in the medieval or modern periods.

## DANCE AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION - DISPUTE BETWEEN THE TWO AREAS

Dance and physical education are present in various areas of social life, in a systematic or unsystematic way, including schools, clubs and gyms, among others. Both have a specific degree course, both bachelor's and undergraduate, however, dance is part of the curriculum of other courses, "it is shared by Physical Education and other areas of knowledge" (EHRENBERG, 2003, p. 46), such as Performing Arts, Education, etc. Artistic, Social Communication (PACHECO, 1999), Plastic Arts and Physical Education, so in addition to Dance graduates, Physical Education, Performing Arts and Plastic Arts graduates are also qualified to teach dance classes in the school environment (EHRENBERG, 2003). Although Ehrenberg confirms that Physical Education and Arts professionals, among others, can teach dance, the author also points out the need to delimit the scope

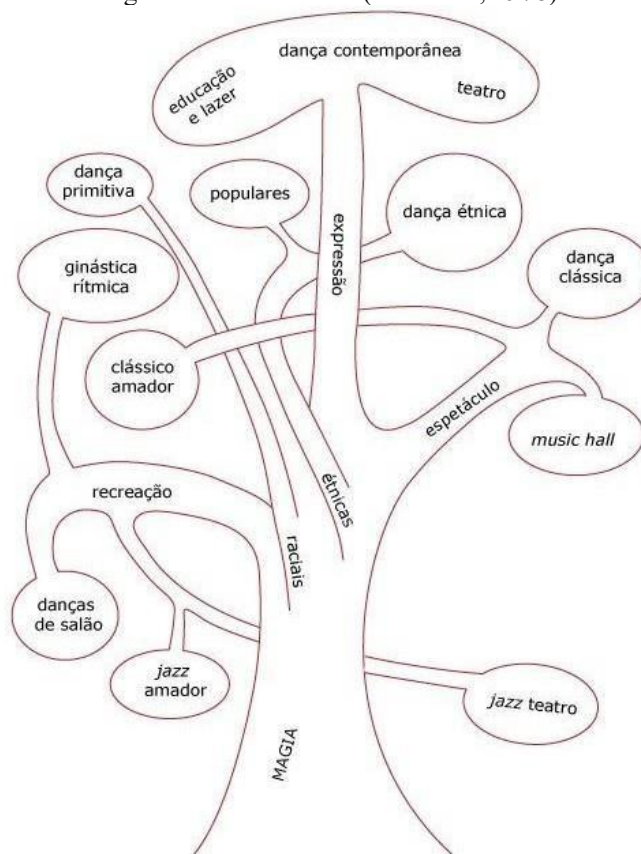
of action and highlight the objective of each professional's study (2003, pg. 59).

With Resolution 03 of 1987 (of the Federal Council of Education), and the remodeling of the Licenciatura and Bacharelado in Physical Education, a regional adaptation of the curricula at a higher level began, confirming the need for the Physical Education professional to develop skills in Dance in its various manifestations. In 1990, the Dance Physical Education method was developed with a theoretical proposal related to bodywork, aimed at including the individual as a whole, understood as an educational and formative work with a preventive format aimed at restoring body awareness.

Educational dance has become consolidated in social spaces, promoting motor, cognitive and socio-affective development and body culture, as well as expressiveness accompanied by rhythm, developing bodily autonomy. Amorim and Falsarella (2008) think of education as a process of evolution and transformation of the subject, and see dance as a constant in physical education, an expression of corporeality, and consider movement as a means of visualizing the corporeality of our students. For the authors, Dance should provide opportunities for the student to develop all their domains of human behavior and, through diversification and complexity, the teacher can contribute to the formation of more complex body structures.

Robinson (1978), mentioned by Gariba and Franzoni (2007), created a drawing which he called the "Dance Tree" with the idea of representing the paths and phases taken by dance throughout history:

Figure 2: "Dance Tree" (Robinson, 1978).







According to the author, "magic", the main stem, is linked to the other paths through the direct relationship between human beings and society, considering expression an essential motivation for dance.

Strazzacapa (2001) studied the tree considering three main aspects: the expression, recreation and spectacle. The author confirms the importance of the world of dance and adds other styles: popular Brazilian dances, ballroom dances and regional dances. According to her study, the author points out that these modalities begin in the realm of expression, also participating in the paths of recreation and spectacle. With this study, Strazzacapa (2001) develops a new way of learning dance and its possibilities based on the "Dance Tree" studies, expressing that, regardless of the modality to be worked on, what is important is the way in which the attributes necessary for the evolution of the human being are developed.

With these explanations, we enter into the similarities between Physical Education and the Dance. The main similarity between them is the use of body movements, with this as the main focus, thus placing both as bodily activities.

This similar point is commented on by various authors, such as BRAUN and SARAIVA (2000), who say that dance and Physical Education "have in common human bodily movement" (p. 557); for SOUZA NETO (1992) it is "man in the context of bodily activities" (p.4) that brings the two areas together and for GASPARI (2005) both areas "use bodily expression as a language" (p. 11). According to PELLEGRINI (1988), the common point between dance and physical education "is man in physical activity" (p. 251) and in the view of PACHECO (1999) both areas have common characteristics such as the motor sphere (study), as well as artistic and cultural aspects.

In addition, some subjects are found in both courses such as biomechanics, exercise physiology, etc. (PELLEGRINI, 1988), and the two areas of knowledge have common objectives such as "developing motor coordination, knowledge of one's own body, rhythmic sense, flexibility and muscular strength" (MACARA, 1987, p. 72).

Both areas aim for high performance from their practitioners (PELLEGRINI, 1988; SOUZA NETO, 1992). However, while sport generally prioritizes disputes and competition, dance is more closely linked and seen as "art as cultural expression" (PELLEGRINI, 1988, p. 252) and as the "art of interpreting a given musical rhythm through bodily expression" (SOUZA NETO, 1992, p. 4).

Although the two areas are so similar and even complement each other, there has also been a constant dispute between practitioners and professionals for years, with each field defending its interests, characteristics and specific training. The Federal Council of Physical Education (CONFEF, 2002), in Resolution 046/2002, made it compulsory for professionals working in the different areas linked to the body and movement, including dance, to register with the Council of Physical Education. This act led to protests, one of which became Bill 7370/02, by congressman Luiz Antonio



Fleury, which excludes dance, martial arts, yoga and capoeira professionals from being supervised by the federal and regional physical education councils, thus seeking to prevent these activities from being regulated by CREF and CONFEF.

In Resolution 046/2002, in which CONFEF (2002) sets out the Intervention of Physical Education Professionals and their respective competencies, the first article defines the fields of professional activity:

"The Physical Education professional is a specialist in activities physical exercise, in its various manifestations - gymnastics, physical exercise, sports, games, wrestling, capoeira, martial arts, dance, rhythmic, expressive and acrobatic activities, bodybuilding, leisure, recreation, rehabilitation, ergonomics, body relaxation, yoga, compensatory exercises for work and everyday activities and other body practices - with the aim of providing services that favor the development of education and health, contributing to the training and/or re-establishment of adequate levels of performance and physiocorporal conditioning of its beneficiaries, aiming to achieve well-being and quality of life, awareness, expression and aesthetics of movement, prevention of diseases, accidents, postural problems, compensation for functional disorders, also contributing to the achievement of autonomy, self-esteem, cooperation, solidarity, integration, citizenship, social relations and the preservation of the environment, observing the precepts of responsibility, safety, technical quality and ethics in individual and collective care" (CONFEF, 2002, p. 1).1).

Although CONFEF's role is not to supervise Physical Education, but rather the professional practice of physical educators outside the environment, this Resolution is one of many demonstrations of the disputes that take place between the two fields in Brazil.

### THE BENEFITS OF ITS PRACTICE

Considering that when talking about the similarities between physical education and dance, the use of body movement is the first to be mentioned, the physical and psychological benefits of dance as a physical activity can also be the same.

According to Szuster (2011, p.29), "dance as a physical activity has many benefits: it improves muscle elasticity, improves joint movements, reduces the risk of cardiovascular diseases, problems with the locomotor system and sedentary lifestyles, reducing blood pressure". The author also states that dance as a physical activity also allows for the physical improvement, health and well-being of the practitioner. Other authors also analyze the subject from similar points of view:

To dance, feeling and thinking, is to experience a greater awareness of the sense and twisting of the bones, the movement of the joints, the waists scapular and pelvic and the relationship between the two, muscle tone and sliding, sensitization of the pelvis. Dancing means working with the transfer of support, with the perception of weight and direction, with micro and macro movements, with changes of planes, intentions and intensity. (CALAZANS, et al (coord), 2003, P.34)

When we link dance and quality of life to health, Szuster (2006, p. 28) also states that:





It is part of the universe of dance to promote improvements to the individual's organism in a harmonious way, respecting their emotions and physiological states, developing motor skills, self-knowledge and also acting as a preventative factor in combating stressful situations.

A study carried out at the Edson Garcia Dance Company in the city of Porto Alegre - RS, with the aim of studying the effect of practicing dance as a physical activity on women over 50, found that, out of a group of 53 individuals, 58.49% of the participants identified dance as quality of life and health in the first place (SZUSTER, 2006).

Dance as a physical activity improves the mood for day-to-day activities and can provide the individual who practices it with muscle strength, body aesthetics and self-esteem through the movements performed by the activity (HASS and GARCIA, 2006).

With this in mind, practitioners of any dance discipline can enjoy the benefits mentioned above, and each one has specific benefits. Belly dancing is no different. According to Bencardini (2002, p. 135), "the lateralization movements, which involve the hips and torso separately, [...] work the abdominal muscles exhaustively, particularly the obliques of the abdomen, which become defined, giving the impression that the waist is thinner and the body slimmer." According to Cenci (2001 apud RIBAS, HAAS E GONÇALVES, 2013), pelvic exercises improve metabolism and provide a feeling of well-being.

Today, society has created an ideal standard for women. As a result, women have been put under much more pressure by society, when it comes to production in chores, self-care and self-image, among other things. Today we see women who are much more frustrated and who are unhappy because of these demands, and thus neglect the care they need for their health and well-being.

Figueiredo (2005, p. 1) highlights the aesthetic demands of this standard, which is so demanding of women today,

The female subject, in her different institutional contexts, distances herself from her femininity by occupying a place governed by the institutionalized discourse of the beauty myth. Discourses are conveyed in relation to the body by discursive practices aimed at constructing a 'perfect' body that cannot be 'deformed'. With these discursive practices, a relationship is established with the body: a commercial relationship and the industrialization of beauty.

## TRANSDISCIPLINARY EDUCATION AND THE WHOLE BEING

The human being must be understood in an integral way, as a whole and not as a fragmented being. The body and mind are part of a whole, so they should not be disregarded in the teaching-learning process.

Pereira (2008) states that:



It's important to think about an education geared towards the integral formation of the human being, which takes into account their thoughts, their body, their feelings and their spirituality, and which enables them to live in a pluralistic society that is constantly changing. (p. 153)

Observing a society in constant evolution, we realize that these changes will directly interfere in the field of knowledge, making it necessary to renew the pedagogical practices that lead to knowledge in various areas.

Pereira (2008), in his article, cites Wilhelm Reich who was one of the first to systematize the relationship between the body and the psyche in Western scientific society:

Reich postulated the functional unity between the psychic and the somatic, concluding that the same energy feeds these two aspects, generating the relationship and mutual influence between bodily attitudes and psychic attitudes. Psyche and body are part of a totality. The human being is, at the same time, body and psyche; dialectically, the psyche determines the body and the body determines the psyche (p. 157).

Reich argues that body and psyche are always related and any action that influences one of these aspects will also influence the other. In view of this, we can see the importance of a transdisciplinary education in the formation of the whole being, since it takes into account the different ways in which students learn and provides them with methods and interventions according to their needs. According to the Reference Center for Integral Education (2018), "education must guarantee the development of subjects in all their dimensions - intellectual, physical, emotional, social and cultural - and be constituted as a collective project".

Delors (2010, p. 31) states that "lifelong education is based on four pillars: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be". Learning to be is one of the most important pillars, as it involves all the others from the moment we are able to recognize and understand our potential, where they have space to manifest themselves in society. "Thus, education, as proposed in the UNESCO report, should offer tools and conditions that help students learn to learn, learn to think, live together and love" (PEREIRA, 2008, p. 154).

SANTOS (2008, p. 76) also states that "Transdisciplinarity maximizes learning by working with images and concepts that jointly mobilize the mental, emotional and bodily dimensions". In this way, transdisciplinary principles applied in education make learning a pleasurable activity insofar as they rescue the meaning of knowledge, which is often lost due to its fragmentation and decontextualization.

## BELLY DANCING AND ITS BENEFITS

Belly dance is well known mainly for its sinuous and striking hip movements, the undulations of the torso and its dances with swords and chandeliers. However, it is also made up of steps from classical ballet, jazz and sometimes contemporary, but always keeping its essence. "As far as the body



is concerned, it is an ancient technique of intense physical conditioning that works all the muscle groups that make up the human body" (BENCARDINI,2009, p.18). '

Bencardini (2009) points out the benefits of belly dancing:

The study of belly dance is a sure source of self-knowledge and personal growth. It develops the sense of perception and latent aptitudes in each practitioner. Dancing is also a free act of expression, in which a woman can learn to know herself and also to deal with her own emotions. This generates consequences for the individual and their interpersonal relationships, leading to social responses, which happen like a chain reaction. (p. 19)

According to Reis and Zanella (2010), all dance genres have their own specific characteristics. However, belly dance gives the dancer more autonomy in relation to other dance modalities, enabling experiences of creative processes and body awareness when planning a sequence of steps.

Belly dancing has been recommended as a therapeutic practice for pregnant women, people suffering from stress, depression (LÓPEZ, 2011) and fibromyalgia (BAPTISTA et al., 2012).

For practitioners of belly dancing, there is the possibility of perceiving the changes that occur in the physical, mental and emotional aspects. "The woman undergoes revitalization, awareness of her own value grows, a sense of dignity and self-esteem develop" (ABRÃO ET AL, 2005, p. 245).

Belly dancing triggers an encounter with oneself based on tools, considering that acquiring knowledge of movement requires a high level of body awareness and perception, with the neuromotor system being stimulated in a more complex way.

Body awareness is worked on, promoting the expansion and realization of self-confidence, which also evolves significantly. "In dance, women begin to see their bodies not simply as a space for aesthetic modeling, but as the vehicle of their minds and their most direct way of relating to the world" (BENCARDINI, 2009, p.175).

Abrão et al (2005) states that:

On an emotional level, belly dancing works to transform a woman's emotions, instilling in her more femininity, more lightness, more softness and beauty, while at the same time working on confidence and security. The dance works to unblock repressed feelings, helping women to verbally release their fears, and, on a mental level, reasoning becomes more agile, stimulates memory and encourages greater concentration of attention, awakening awareness to the moment. (p. 245)

There are three very important aspects to develop when learning belly dance: discipline, patience and creative activity. When these three points are well targeted and worked on, they result in excellence in technique, making the path of self-discovery more enjoyable.

According to Sueli Lyz (1999):

The magic that belly dancing brings to those who practice it, or simply enjoy looking at it, allows them to capture the energy that is back in the Heavens and on Earth, and can



stir the unconscious. When practicing the exercises, you can see that the physical and energetic go hand in hand, opening up and making body- mind-soul evolve in harmony. (p. 23)

Sueli Lyz refers to a harmony in the quote above where, Bencardini (2009, p. 21) also states that "the balance between mind, body and emotions is achieved through intense experience in the art of belly dancing, combined with the philosophical knowledge that comes from it".

Practicing belly dancing allows you to rescue the feminine core, being the link between the conscious and the unconscious. Belly dancing "puts women in touch with positive energies.[...], it is worked on and developed to support our fragility, soothe our suffering, enhance the dull glow of our hearts agitated by routine and rescue our feminine identity" (ABRÃO ET AL, 2005, p. 245).

## RESEARCH PROBLEM

Body acceptance is a challenging journey for many women, who face pressure to fit into unrealistic aesthetic standards. Belly dance has challenged these standards from its inception to the present day, welcoming bodies of all shapes and sizes and allowing them to move freely, wherever they wish.

In the contemporary context, women face a series of expectations, especially with regard to their appearance, which often distances them from their true feminine identity. According to Penna (1993), belly dancing can play a profound role in the female psyche, making it possible to recover an essential identity for modern women.

Body image is a fundamental part of the human experience, and we constantly seek to adjust our posture and perception of our own bodies (Shilder, 1999, p.222). In addition to their own body image, women are constantly bombarded with dress standards, make-up, accessories and other elements that shape their perception of their own beauty.

With the advent of the internet, imposed beauty standards have become even more oppressive, especially on social networks, where comparisons between the real body and modified images are frequent. This can lead to internalized feelings of frustration and inadequacy for not achieving the "perfect body".

Belly dancing has played a significant role in liberating women from these unrealistic standards of beauty. By offering a space where all bodies are celebrated and allowed to express themselves freely, it promotes a change in the way women see and value themselves. This form of body art not only challenges stereotypes of beauty, but also strengthens self-esteem and promotes a deeper connection with the feminine self, helping women to reconnect with their true essence.



## HYPOTHESIS

Belly dancing and its benefits can be enjoyed by all bodies.

## GENERAL OBJECTIVE

Analyze how the practitioner's body influences her learning to dance. belly.

## SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

Whether there is effective learning for "non-standard" belly dancers; What are the benefits of belly dancing for the body?

Belly dancing involves all kinds of people.

## JUSTIFICATION

This study is of paramount importance for the psychological health of women, as well as providing an opportunity for those who are unfamiliar with belly dancing to understand its positive impact on self-esteem and body image, which can result in the development of self-care. In addition, it is relevant for researchers to perceive belly dancing as an area of study that contributes significantly to physical and mental health, introducing new approaches and possibilities. By highlighting the positive consequences of practicing this modality, these studies help to disassociate the sexualized view that part of society attributes to belly dancing, presenting it as a hobby or a form of physical exercise that actually promotes health.

## METHOD

### STUDY DESIGN

This is a bibliographical study with a personal narrative, with a qualitative approach, aimed at analyzing and synthesizing what the literature has to say about learning belly dancing for people "outside the body standard" and its benefits.

### DATA COLLECTION

The searches were carried out using the following descriptors: "Belly dancing", "The benefits of belly dancing" and "The origin of belly dancing". These descriptors were applied to the following databases and electronic journals: Scientific Electronic Library Online: SciELO, Periódicos CAPES and university libraries.



## DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis, which was qualitative, was based on comparisons and associations of the materials found on the subject, including studies by authors and researchers. Around 50 materials were found on the subject, including articles, TCCs, theses and others.

## EXPERIENCE REPORT

### MY ENCOUNTER WITH DANCE

My journey into dance began when I was very young, around six years old, when my parents enrolled me in classical ballet classes, along with my older sister, at a renowned dance school here in Rio Branco. Attending the school's annual shows was always fun for me back then. Over the years, I attended several other dance schools, trying classical ballet and jazz at different times. However, I was never able to fully establish myself, sometimes due to financial constraints and sometimes because I felt pressured aesthetically, as I didn't fit the "pattern" of a classical dancer.

I still feel a bit frustrated when I think about ballet, even though I had the opportunity to teach several girls during college. It was always a dream for me to be immersed in that world, dancing in a tutu, tights and pointe shoes. Then, when I was 14, I discovered that there were belly dance studios here in Rio Branco, thanks to my older sister, who started taking classes at the invitation of a friend. I was very curious, I had no idea that this type of dance existed in Acre. I accompanied my sister to a few classes and ended up getting close to the teacher and the other students. As the annual show approached, I became more involved with the dance studio and helped out on the days of the event. During this time, I fell in love with belly dancing and started practicing as a student at the same studio.

Since then, I have found myself more and more in belly dancing. With each class, I can visualize myself dancing this discipline for many years to come, and that's exactly what happened and continues to happen today.

### DANCE AND MY SELF-ACCEPTANCE

At first, it was a challenge for me to deconstruct concepts and learn to dance with my belly exposed, even to take part in classes wearing only a top. It was a process to look at my body reflected in the mirror as I danced and realize its beauty in movement. The comparison with other women in the same studio was inevitable; while their bellies looked firm, mineswayed during the dance. Unfortunately, I was always told that it was ugly and even disgusting for a woman to have a "soft" belly.

As time went on and I took part in performances, people began to compliment not only my dancing, but also my appearance, which helped me to accept my body while dancing. My current





belly dance teacher and longtime friend, Laura de Lys, introduced me to a different perspective: our body is what sustains us, allows us to accomplish so many things, and, above all, is who we are. How can we be so cruel and even hate ourselves?

One of the best things she ever said to me, and which I always remember when I feel bad when I see myself dancing on video, is: "If you're swaying, if you're moving, it's because you're alive, and that's good!".

## DANCE AND THE TEACHING-LEARNING PROCESS

The journey of learning belly dance challenges us on personal levels and, at the same time, provides us with significant achievements. From the most basic movements to the most complex, each stage brings with it an evolution that leads us to explore new levels of skill. As a student and practitioner, it is extremely gratifying when we manage to successfully execute a movement and incorporate it into a choreography. The process of creating a choreography is essential for the students, not only to improve their technique, but also for them to discover themselves as dancers and develop their own form of expression, thus promoting their autonomy in dance.

From a teaching point of view, my experience as a belly dance teacher has allowed me to see how each person interprets instructions differently. Some students respond better to more playful explanations, while others prefer a more direct approach. In addition, each student's level of motor coordination directly influences their understanding and execution of the movements. As teachers, it is our role to observe and identify each student's difficulties and help them overcome them.

As a teacher, it's extremely rewarding to see my students' progress, from assimilating new moves to creating their own choreography. Even though I'm no longer teaching, it's very moving to hear from my former students how belly dancing has positively impacted their lives and how much they miss the practice. This shows the transformative and lasting power of this art in their lives.

## CONSIDERATIONS

Based on the research carried out, it is clear that belly dancing offers a number of benefits for the body and mind. As well as improving posture, this practice contributes significantly to raising women's self-esteem. It is a mistake to think that belly dancing is limited to sensuality; this prejudice may not be completely eradicated, but its reduction depends largely on the dissemination of accurate information.

It is important for dancers to promote their work professionally or as a form of entertainment, avoiding feeding distorted concepts. They must convey to the public a sense of respect for this art, in order to generate a positive reaction that benefits all belly dancers.



Each dancer has the opportunity to contribute to eliminating prejudice by sharing their knowledge and experiences with others. It is essential that this is done with the aim of presenting belly dance in its entirety, without its essence being distorted by those who are unaware of its true nature.



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