

## Dance and age well

Regular ongoing participation in ballroom dance contributes to successful aging. While its physical and cognitive demands promote function, its enjoyment fosters a sense of well-being. In particular the love of dance enhances positive well-being. Dino's description of her love of dance illustrates this well-being:

"I feel elegant, graceful, and attractive when I am dancing. It is a nice feeling to dance ... Especially some dances, the waltz just makes me feel like a queen or something. I feel so elegant and refined ... The tango makes me feel sexy and hot. I would say swing and cha-cha make you feel joyful ... I cannot think of a single kind of dance that makes me feel bad about myself. Dancing makes me feel good."

The fun and social aspects of dance can be related to successful aging, which is a combination of good health, positive wellbeing, and engagement in a variety of cognitive and physical activities. Ballroom dance encompasses many of the qualities that are linked to successful aging. Dancing demands high cognitive and physical capacities as well as offers opportunities to develop social connectedness. Further, Ballroom Dance is an enjoyable and shared experience in which couples engage in a series of coordinated dance movement patterns. These dances include the fox trot, waltz, swing, tango, rumba, samba, cha-cha, and other Latin dances. The love of dance can motivate continued physical participation.

The current study investigated the role of Ballroom Dancing as a longstanding serious leisure activity and its role in successful aging. Serious leisure is a hobby activity that is so gratifying that its participants develop their skills and expand their participation. This study examined narratives and observable behaviors of 20 older adults who had currently been participating in ballroom dancing activities. All participants were older than 60 years and have been ballroom dancing for at least 10 years. Furthermore, the participants identified themselves as ballroom dancers and orchestrated their activities within a social world of dance. Ballroom dance can be considered serious leisure for these participants due to the time and effort they devoted into developing their ballroom dance knowledge and skill. They also expressed a love of dance and a desire to expand their ballroom dance activities.

These dancers stated that their ballroom dance contributed to their health, well-being, and overall successful aging. The participants derived a sense of accomplishment and much gratification from their dance accomplishments. Although their dancing was physically and cognitively demanding, these dancers were motivated to continue to learn and to develop their skills. For these older adults, ballroom dance was a physical activity that not only promoted their physical function but also fostered their well-being and engendered feelings of positive self-worth.

Ballroom Dance is an exemplar physical activity that can be used to promote continued high physical function in older adulthood. It provides opportunities for learning as well as developing

social connections. Health-care providers should encourage well older adults to engage in physical activities like ballroom dance to promote their health, well-being, and successful aging.

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## **Publication**

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