

Influence of dance training on the body image of patients with eating disorders

Project work for the Dance Medicine Certificate – ta.med
Tanzmedizin Deutschland e.V.



Introduction

This paper deals with the question of whether dance lessons are a suitable means of improving one's relationship with one's own body and self-esteem.

In our consumer society, great importance is attached to appearance; the body is increasingly becoming a commodity and 'losing itself as a feeling body.' (Zitt, 2008, p. 143) A general increase in dissatisfaction with one's own body often leads to the development of a negative body image and culminates in clinical pictures such as anorexia and bulimia, which occur predominantly in industrialized countries (DGPM, 2010, p. 20). They are characterized by a pathological alienation from one's own body and its needs and are typically accompanied by serious body perception disorders.

In order to illustrate the effect of dance on the development of a positive body image and self-esteem, six subjects with eating disorders were examined for this project.



Corinna Janson is a naturopath and dance teacher. She runs the Tanzhologie Studio in Bad Kreuznach and devotes her professional activities primarily to the question of the extent to which dance can contribute to maintaining human health. As part of her MAS studies at the University of Bern, she researched the „Male Attitudes Towards Recreational Dance“ (completed in 2018). For her certificate in dance medicine at ta.med e.V. (Association for Dance Medicine in Germany), she researched the "Influence of Dance Training on the Body Image of Patients with Eating Disorders" (completed in 2011). Based on her training at the Institut für Tanz und Bewegungsdynamik in Essen with Dr Detlef Kappert (graduated in 2004), she developed Tanzhologie® as a teaching system for a health-oriented dance training for amateur dancers
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Summary

At Franziska Stift, a Psychosomatic Clinic in Bad Kreuznach (Germany), patients with eating disorders were offered dance lessons on a voluntary basis under the guidance of dance teacher Corinna Janson, in addition to the mandatory therapy sessions.

The dance project ran for a period of seven weeks, with two lessons per week, and a total of six participants (four anorexia and two bulimia patients) took part. The used teaching concept 'Tanzhologie' (danceology), combines simple technical elements from various dance styles with improvisation, perception and relaxation exercises. It was developed by Corinna Janson and has been taught by her for many years in various groups of 'healthy' amateur dancers.

In terms of content, Janson's method is largely based on the scientific and practical work of Dr Detlef Kappert (dance training, perception training and personal development, 1990). Both concepts are based on the idea of an inseparable connection between the human body, mind and emotions, according to which changes on one level automatically affect the others.

Each dance therapy session at the clinic lasted 90 minutes and followed a fixed pattern: beginning with centering exercises, followed by presence, breathing, balance, rhythm, dynamics, choreography and improvisation tasks, and ending with verbally guided deep relaxation. Before the first and after the last dance intervention, as well as three months after the end of inpatient therapy, the participants were each asked individually to complete a standardized questionnaire with open and closed questions

Eating disorders are serious illnesses that must be treated. They primarily involve disturbed eating habits and a distorted relationship with one's own body. In psychology, **self-esteem**, or the synonymous terms self-confidence, self-assurance or self-awareness, is understood as the emotional assessment of one's own worth. Self-esteem is the subjective value that one attributes to oneself and one's person (Stangl, 2020). **Body image** is understood as the way in which someone sees themselves and how they believe others see them. (Prica 1990 in Salter 1998)

(numerical scale from 1-10) about their feelings regarding their emotions, dancing in general, and individual teaching elements of the dance interventions. In addition to the questionnaire, the participants were asked in the first two interviews to make a pencil drawing based on the question 'How do I feel in my body in space?'

Results

In general, the participants enjoyed attending the exercise sessions, which they saw as a welcome change from their daily routine at the clinic. During the interviews, all of them willingly provided information and vividly reflected on their experiences during the exercise sessions.

The patients' feedback shows positive effects on body image, body perception and self-esteem. Five of the participants described themselves in their second self-image (question: How do you feel in your body in space?) after the dance interventions as significantly taller and more 'centered' in the picture than before the first class. In the third interview, three participants reported that, remembering the dance lessons, they occasionally

consciously changed their posture in everyday life, which had a positive effect on their self-esteem and mood. Two stated that the dance lessons (and especially the improvisation elements) had given them the experience of being able to overcome their own perfectionism and personal inhibitions. Three participants expressed a desire for further dance lessons of this kind in the third interview.

Conclusion

Due to the small group size, it cannot be determined with certainty whether the results of this project are representative or whether they are a random finding. Nor can it be conclusively clarified what exact proportion dance plays in relation to the other therapies during the subjects' inpatient stay at the clinic.

Nevertheless, the results are encouraging and suggest that dance interventions have a lasting therapeutic effect.

The non-performance-oriented teaching concept seems to be particularly important in this regard. A holistic approach to dance education, as practiced in Tanzhologie, helps participants to overcome inhibitions and encourages them to use dance as a field of experimentation for new (movement) experiences.

To quote Eibach: "Dance does not heal, but it is a healing medium for making bodily expression and bodily experience understandable. It is therapeutically effective if I have therapeutic knowledge." (Eibach, 1996, p. 119). Dance lessons can therefore be used for self-awareness and stimulate therapeutic processes in the long term without being perceived as therapy.

Literatur

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