Adolescent girls’ perceptions of the impact of a four-week dance intervention on self-worth, identity and coping: A thematic analysis

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SERVICE RELATED RESEARCH PROJECT
**Background literature**

**Adolescence**
- Challenges include establishment of relationships with peers, separation from family and creation of adult identity (Richaud de Minzi, 2003)
- Self-esteem, the value we place on ourselves, may be influenced by the extent to which an individual believes they meet societal standards
- Body image dissatisfaction and low self-worth is particularly high amongst this group (Tiggeman, 2004).

**Gender role identity**
- Gender role identity can be conceptualised as possessing personality traits stereotypically associated with being male or female (Littlefield, 2004).
- If a female shows characteristics more strongly associated with being male (e.g. in sport or leader) it may be met with social disapproval (Heilman & Okimotio, 2007)
Background Literature

**Sport and exercise**
- It can improve children’s self-esteem, well-being and body image (Fox, 2000).
- Has shown to have an effect on reducing anxiety, stress and depression in adolescents
- Physical activity may increase self-concept, our perception of the self
- Research has shown that self-concept is protective against depression and obesity

**Dancing**
- It contributes to positive self-perception, body image and self-esteem, since it may give the individual a sense of mastery through being in charge of the body and its action, physical health and appearance (Hanna, 1995).
- Dancing can also be a valuable social experience
- A study by Minton (2001) showed that adolescents who participated in one dance class showed significant improvements in social self-esteem
Current Study

- An evaluation of a four-week dance intervention based in a secondary school.
- Participants identified as they were partaking in an emotional resilience programme in the school and seen as those who may benefit.
- It aimed to increase social participation and build emotional resilience through learning about women in history, self-defence and female archetypes aimed to empower women.
- The aim of this research was to explore participants perceptions and experiences of the dance intervention.

Research Question

- What was participants perceived impact of the dance intervention?
Method

- Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)
- Six individuals who participated in the dance intervention agreed to take part in the research
- Semi-structured interviews
Results

Three main themes: Learning who I am and the confidence to be that, Understanding others and Coping and resilience

- Increased self-esteem
  - A safe place to explore me and be me
  - Learning about others
    - Being who I want to be
    - Understanding and accepting others
    - Understanding each other
- Not keeping it all in
  - Protecting yourself
    - Using skills learnt to cope
- Coping and resilience
Learning who I am and the confidence to be that

- Identifying with various archetypes and learning who they wanted to be the participants' gain confidence and self-awareness.

"could see how you were like them...see if you wanted to be like them or not" (P2).

- Increased compassion and appreciation towards themselves, as they had an increased understanding of who they were and why they may act in a particular way.

- After learning about their archetypes, some participants reflected on what they wanted to start doing to be who they wanted to be as a person; this included possible career paths or holding a respected position in school.

"get on with my life, make new friends and maybe get a good job and be a prefect" (P4).
Learning who I am and the confidence to be that

For some, the impact of the intervention resulted in a change of personality. "because the group...I was like very quiet but now I am outgoing,...and I've got more confidence in myself so I know I can do things" (P6).

For others, this enabled them to strive to be different and change for the better. "I've always wanted to be that person...better than I was in the first place" (P4).

The group provided a new experience of trust for some of the participants. "it was quite nice because there was like a promise where no one would like say anything outside the group so long as you were confident enough to share it you found out quite a lot of ideas from other people about what they think of it" (P5).
Learning who I am and the confidence to be that

- Learning about female role-models from history, mythology and present day was helpful

"because usually I'd feel like I was on my own... but...I know famous people are the same as me it feels like I am not on my own anymore" (P5).

- This resulted in increased confidence and determination to achieve and be who they want to be

"if she could do that then I can, and then you would try to reach that you would try to be like them" (P1).

- They did not compare themselves to others any more as they were happy with who they were and realised everyone is different

"shouldn't be comparing each other because everyone's perfect in their own way" (P4).
Learning who I am and the confidence to be that

- One participant believed females could be at an increased risk of low self-worth due to believing women couldn't achieve as much as men could.

  “We also had to find people who were like that character, like female role models...we would be able to say and think we are not worthless we do have some meaning” (P1).

- One participant stated she wanted to continue with dancing following the intervention and other participants would have liked more dancing to be incorporated into the dance intervention.

  "I am gonna stay on with the dancing bit because I like dancing so I am gonna try and join a dance group again cause I kinda miss dancing after I did that" (P1).
Understanding and accepting others

- The dance intervention resulted in participants having an increased understanding of others and feeling socially competent.

  "it is also helping me outside of school because it has helped me change more and start getting involved with a lot more things and started going out more with friends" (P1)

- Participants respected and listened to each other's perspectives on various subjects within the group.

  "it was alright because you know other people have different opinions on things so it was nice to hear other sides to it" (P6).

- This increased their understanding of others, facilitated togetherness and affiliation, thus improving their social self-esteem (Minton, 2001)

  "knowing everyone was really nice to you and people weren’t going to laugh and they were going to properly listen and properly think about it" (P5).
Understanding and accepting others

- One participant stated this improved their general well-being, as they had a small social circle before and increasing this resulted in a bigger support system. "I made new friends as well...I only used to hang around with my brother in school" (P3).

- Some participants also described a newfound confidence in interacting with others, which allowed them to initiate conversations as they had developed the skills to do so. "I usually wouldn’t know what to do around a lot of people, I’d just sit there but now I’ve got the techniques that I can use around them that’ll make a conversation starter" (P5).
Some participants believed other peoples’ views and opinions about them might have changed because of the intervention.

“it's changed me...because like it's made others think different of me, thinking that I can actually take control of things a lot more than what I used to be able to probably before the dance, because like I had anxiety... but now I've been telling people they can't have their own way, I've been able to take control for a lot more things now” (P1).

Other peoples’ perceptions helped them understand and accept themselves as they were able to see what they could do. Self-trust, which is closely related to self-esteem and self-efficacy can be increased by the contributions of significant others.
Resilience and coping

- Most participants felt they were now able to seek support from others. 
  "It has helped quite a lot because it helped me express myself a bit more and not keep it all inside and not be scared to do stuff" (P1)

- A few participants felt able to walk away from difficult situations or stand up for themselves. 
  "The techniques that we were shown, it helps if you get hurt you can just walk away or retaliate and walk away and act as if nothing happened. And that person will probably stop picking on you" (P4).

- Many believed this was due to positive social interactions within the group and being able to tell people things within the group, in addition to an increased social network and awareness of coping resources they planned to utilise in the future. 
  "Because you've got more people to turn to, more people to tell more things" (P6)
Resilience and coping

- Having more awareness of different supportive resources in the community was also experienced as beneficial.

  “maybe knowing you can talk to someone, because maybe some people don’t know they can talk to people and there’s people around you to talk to you and special things like psychiatrists and GP’s” (P4).

- The log book used to reflect between sessions was perceived helpful, as they could keep it and refer back to it in the future, in order to continue utilising the coping strategies they had learnt in the dance intervention.

- Some participants stated they were going to continue using the log book to write down thoughts or feelings as a way to cope.

  “I think it’d be calming and relaxing because at some point during the day you can sit down and relax and write down your thoughts and feelings of the day” (P5).
Resilience and coping

- One participant believed girls are less emotionally strong and resilient than boys in their community.

“It doesn’t really help girls when they think oh boys are better so they always think they are worthless, that is why girls break down a lot more than boys, so like it helps to know there are girls who can do things boys can’t do” (P1).

- Some participants stated they felt safe and more in control of their body and what happens to it due to the self-defence skills learnt in the dance intervention.

“Feels like a weight has been lifted off my shoulders because I know I have some skills so I’m not worrying constantly about what could happen to me so I know a way to get out if it does happen” (P5).
Further discussion

- The dance intervention carried out in this study does not have any particular psychological theoretical underpinnings and is innovative in that it incorporates learning about different archetypes and martial arts.

- The researcher was not involved in the development or delivery of the dance intervention evaluated in this study, therefore there were no preconceived ideas about or gains from this research. However, this is a potential limitation.

- A quantitative study would also be of benefit to further investigate if the dance intervention has measurable effects on identity, self-worth and coping.
Service recommendations and clinical implications

- As the biggest impact of the intervention appeared to be on identity, further use of this dance intervention could make this a focus.

- One aspect of identity is self-concept clarity, the “extent to which the contents of an individual's self-concept (e.g., perceived personal attributes) are clearly and confidently defined, internally consistent, and temporally stable” (Campbell et al., 1996).

- Therefore, if participants become more certain of their roles/identity this may be a protective factor. Provides evidence of the potential benefits of asking specific questions exploring identity/roles during assessment and consider identity when formulating and planning an intervention.
Service recommendations and clinical implications

- Media images may affect how girls conceptualise femininity and sexuality, leading them to accept more stereotypical notions about gender roles (Zurbriggen & Morgan, 2006).

- School personnel, parents and community-based teams could encourage positive extracurricular activities that help build relationships with peers and enhance self-esteem based on abilities and character rather than appearance, in addition to critiquing and recognising the salience of these images in the media (APA, 2007).

- Clinical supervision and consultation to support professionals involved in this work and develop new and innovative ways to access this hard to reach group, may be of benefit.


Thank you!
Any Questions?