

Scientists take a look at the feel-good benefits of belly dance

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Belly dancers have fewer hang-ups about their bodies. Most women who participate in this torso-driven dance do so because it is fun and they get to perform interesting moves – not because they necessarily feel sexier while doing so. This is the conclusion of Marika Tiggemann of Flinders University in Australia, leader of a study in Springer's journal *Sex Roles* about the body image of people who belly dance in their free time.

Body image is the way in which someone perceives, feels and thinks about his or her body, especially factors regarding shape and weight. Previous studies in the US and the UK have shown that street and modern dancers hold a more positive [body image](#) of themselves than exotic dancers do. Tiggemann's team wanted to add to the scant literature available on belly dancing. The researchers therefore tested how participants of this potentially sexually alluring yet embodying dance form see themselves, and also sought to find out what they gain from it.

The authors recruited 112 belly dancers from two dancing schools in Adelaide, Australia, along with 101 college women who had never participated in this activity before. The participants completed questionnaires in which they rated their own bodies, how they think others view their bodies and about the attention they attract from men.

The researchers found that belly dancers see their own bodies in a better light than the college students do, and are less likely to be dissatisfied with how they look. They also have fewer self-objectifying thoughts, and

therefore take what others might think about their bodies less to heart.

Most belly dancers enjoy this activity because it is fun, and because they get to perform interesting movements with their body. Tiggemann says this underscores the fact that belly dancing is an embodying activity that gives women a sense of ownership of their bodies. It allows women to be mentally and physically present "in the moment" and to feel good about themselves.

Most women rated the possible sexual nature of the activity as a lesser reason for enjoying belly dancing. This supports the idea that women participate in this somewhat erotic and sexually alluring activity purely for themselves, rather than to feel sexier and more attractive to others. In fact, the belly dancers in the research group scored no differently in their enjoyment of such sexualization, or being seen as sexual beings, than the [college students](#) did.

"Belly dancing is an activity associated with positive body image, because participants tend to focus less on their external appearance, and more on the experience and what they are able to do with their bodies," concludes Tiggemann. "It allows [women](#) a rare, safe and creative opportunity for exploring and expressing their sensual and sexual selves."

More information: Tiggemann, M. et al (2014). Belly Dance as an Embodying Activity? A Test of the Embodiment Model of Positive Body Image, *Sex Roles*. [DOI: 10.1007/s11199-014-0408-2](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-014-0408-2)

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