

Embrace tango and be happy

A study of subjective health and wellbeing among tango dancers in south-west London

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1. Summary

Aims

Previous studies indicate that dancing argentine tango has positive effects on mood, reduces stress and alleviates symptoms of depression. Among the elderly, dancing tango has been shown to improve balance, reduce the risk of falls and provide an effective form of rehabilitation for the treatment of Parkinson's disease. The aim of this scoping study was to explore, with a group of mainly older dancers in south-west London, the effects of dancing tango on their subjectively experienced health and wellbeing and to understand the motivations and meanings invested by them in their experience of tango.

Methods

The research was conducted in two phases. The first phase consisted of a questionnaire designed to elicit subjective beliefs about the impact of dancing tango on health, wellbeing and sociability. The second phase consisted of eight qualitative interviews with dancers selected from those who had participated in the survey. The semi-structured interview was designed to elicit information about dancers' motivations, the meanings they ascribed to their experience of tango, the challenges of learning the dance; the significance of the close tango embrace and the extent to which dancing tango had changed their lives

Results

The overwhelming majority of dancers believed that dancing tango had improved their health and fitness and believed that it was important for their wellbeing. The most common health gains identified were balance, general fitness, flexibility and mental outlook. Asked if tango had helped or changed them in any of a defined number of ways, the most common response was increased enjoyment of music, followed by new friendships. Almost half believed that tango had encouraged them to try new interests, with more than a third believing that it had helped them to be more confident. A fifth of those responding felt it had changed their lives.

The in-depth interviews provided eight narratives of how individuals came to tango and gradually assumed the identities of tango dancers. While each narrative was unique, reflecting their individual circumstances and biographies, there were commonalities of experience. Each individual invested considerable time (and money) in attending classes, milongas ¹ and other events, travelling in some cases to other countries. Recurrent themes included tango as a strategy for dealing with loss; a means of re-connecting with a more youthful and/or attractive self; a private arena where everyday worries and stresses could be escaped; and as a source of supportive personal relationships. In some cases, tango was communicated as redemptive, enabling personal transformation.

¹ Social dances where tango is danced

2. Introduction and literature review

Dance

Dance is universal. There are no cultures whose members do not engage in some form of rhythmic movement to music or other sounds and there are few individuals who have not danced at some point in their lives. Even babies respond to the rhythm and tempo of music and have been reported to find it more engaging than speech.²

Participating in dance is not only a form of cultural expression; it can contribute to health and wellbeing across the life-cycle. Being physically active through dance can reduce the risk of a range of diseases in adulthood, including type 2 diabetes and coronary heart disease as well as helping to maintain a healthy weight.³

A study undertaken for the Scottish Government in 2013 found that people who participate in culture and sport or attend cultural places or events are more likely to report that their health is good and they are satisfied with their life than those who do not participate. Those who participated in dance were 62% more likely to report good health than those who did not participate in dance.⁴

Dance is an inherently pleasurable activity. Studies using PET imaging have identified regions of the brain which contribute to dance performance and learning. In 2008, neuroscientists Brown and Parsons found that music stimulates the brain's reward centres while dance activates its sensory and motor circuits – “a pleasure double play”.⁵

For older people, dance can be a particularly effective form of exercise as well as source of enjoyment and a means of meeting people. Dance exercise can help maintain cognitive function, reduce cardiovascular risk, improve aerobic power, muscle strength, flexibility, balance and gait.⁶ It can also be tailored to the physical capabilities of an older age group.

Dance has been used as both a treatment and preventative for dementia and as a therapy for a range of conditions including arthritis, Parkinson's disease and depression.⁷ Dance Movement Therapy is a complementary alternative medicine, based on a bio-psycho-social model of illness in which there is interplay between mind, body and social circumstances.⁸

² Zentner, M. & Eerola, T. (2010) Rhythmic engagement with music in infancy: <http://www.pnas.org/content/107/13/5768>

³ <https://www.pdsw.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Breathe-Commissioning-Dance-for-Health-Wellbeing-Guide-for-Commissioners-by-Jan-Burkhardt-2012.pdf>

⁴ Leadbetter, C. & O'Connor, N., (2013) Healthy Attendance? The impact of cultural engagement and sports participation on health and satisfaction with life in Scotland. Scottish Government: <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/08/9956/0>

⁵ Brown, S & Parsons, L, (2008) The Neuroscience of Dance *Scientific American* 299(1) 78 - 83

⁶ Keogh J W L, Kilding A, Pidgeon P, Ashley L and Gillis D (2009b) Physical Benefits of Dancing for Healthy Older Adults: A Review, *Journal of Aging and Physical Activity* 17 : 1-23

⁷ Keep Dancing: The Health and Wellbeing Benefits of Dance for Older People (2011) <http://www.cpa.org.uk/information/reviews/shall-we-dance-report.pdf>

⁸ Goodill, S. (2005). *An Introduction to Medical Dance/Movement Therapy*. London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Tango

Tango conjures up an image of passion and erotic dance sequences as played out in stage shows and other performance. But this image obscures a gentler form of tango, as it is danced socially in clubs and dance schools up and down the country. Traditionally, tango is danced in a close embrace, bodies connecting, and chests close together or touching. The dance, which involves walks, changes of weight and turns is improvised, without standardised routines or choreographies. This enables participants to connect with and express their own creativity and to formulate their own step patterns.

Tango music expresses deep, sometimes dark feelings. A key instrument is the bandoneon which produces a sound full of sadness and longing. The lyrics of argentine tango songs frequently speak of failed love affairs and lost love.

Tango as a therapy for health conditions

An absorbing pastime, tango has emerged, in recent years, as a promising treatment for a variety of health conditions, many of them related to ageing.

A 2003 study looking at leisure activities and the risk of dementia in later life found that frequent partnered dancing brought effective reduction in the chances of developing dementia.⁹ Tango therapy is a therapeutic technique which uses tango dance and music as palliative treatment for certain diseases or conditions. Tango therapy, in this context, is used for the treatment of dementia because of the emphasis on coordination and memory.¹⁰

Falls and resulting fractures in older people are a costly and preventable health issue and older people are at the greatest risk of falls; in 2016/2017, there were more than 200,000 emergency hospital admissions due to falls in people aged sixty-five and older.¹¹ In the UK, falls are the most common cause of injury related deaths in people over the age of seventy-five.¹² This is because changes in muscle strength, sensory processing and other factors associated with ageing contribute to deteriorating balance in later life.

Those issues are similar but more pronounced in people suffering from Parkinson's disease, a progressive neurological condition currently affecting an estimated one hundred and forty-five thousand people in the UK.

In a 2008 study of the effects of Argentine tango, a group of adults aged more than 60 years who had sustained a fall in the previous year and reported a fear of falling, participated in twice-weekly, two-hour long tango classes for 10 weeks. Another group participated in a walking group for the same frequency and duration. Members of the Argentine tango group demonstrated a greater improvement in lower extremity strength as well as normal and fast gait speeds than the walking group.¹³

⁹ Verghese J, Lipton R B, Katz M J, Hall C B, Derby C A, Kuslansky G, Ambrose A F, Sliwinski M and Buschke H (2003) Leisure Activities and the Risk of Dementia in the Elderly, *New England Journal of Medicine* Jun 19;348(25):2508-16

¹⁰ <http://www.tangotherapy.co.uk>

¹¹ <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/search/falls#page/3/gid/1/pat/15/par/E92000001/ati/6/are/E12000004/jid/22401/age/27/sex/4>

¹² <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/falls/>

¹³ McKinley P, Jacobson A, Leroux A, Bednarczyk V, Rossignol M and Fung J (2008) Effect of a Community-Based Argentine Tango Dance Program on Functional Balance and Confidence in Older Adults, *Journal of Aging and Physical Activity* 16 : 435-453

The close tango embrace is a good source of support for those with balance difficulties. In addition, the emphasis on walking and weight changes; and a strong rhythmic beat may benefit those with movement difficulties.

Argentine tango was found to be more effective with Parkinson's patients than other forms of partnered dance. A study of people with mild to moderate Parkinson's disease comparing the impact of tango and waltz/foxtrot found that while both types of dance led to improvements in movement and balance when compared with a control group of patients who received nothing, the tango group, on several measures, improved more.¹⁴

Several studies have confirmed the value of tango as a treatment for individuals with Parkinson's disease but the numbers involved have been small. A systematic review and meta-analysis of these in 2015 found that argentine tango can be a supportive approach for individuals with Parkinson's disease and has the potential to improve Parkinson's-specific symptoms and balance but also concluded that more research was needed. Of the studies reviewed, several had also found that dancing tango increased wellbeing by strengthening social relationships and through gains in self-esteem. The authors concluded that this variable, in particular, required further investigation.¹⁵

Tango and wellbeing

Tango provides opportunities for physical exercise, relaxation, and enjoyment. A study of the motivations of one hundred and ten tango dancers in the Netherlands and Germany in 2008, found them to be grounded in pleasure-seeking and relaxation, as well as in beliefs that dancing brings about physical, social and emotional benefits.¹⁶

A further study of four hundred and seventy-five non-professional dancers – including tango dancers - found that participants believed that dancing contributed positively to several aspects of their wellbeing, including enhanced mood, improved balance, reduced tension and body awareness. Participants also reported dancing to have had positive effects on self-esteem, social relations and spirituality and many described dance as a significant coping strategy for daily stress and difficult times.¹⁷

Cortisol is a hormone produced by the adrenal cortex and is involved in responses to physical and emotional stress. In a 2009 study, changes of emotional state in the form of reduced Cortisol were found in regular tango dancers dancing with a partner to music. The authors suggest that tango dancing to music can be seen as an anti-stress behaviour capable of producing short-term positive psycho-physiological changes.¹⁸

¹⁴ Hackney, M. E., & Earhart, G. M. (2009a). Effects of dance on movement control in Parkinson's disease: a comparison of Argentine tango and American ballroom. *JRehabil Med*, 41(6), 475-481. doi: 10.2340/16501977-0362

¹⁵ Lötze, D., Ostermann, T. & Bussing, A. (2015) Argentine tango in Parkinson disease – a systematic review and meta-analysis *BMC Neurology* 2015**15**:226

¹⁶ Kreutz, G. (2008) Does partnered dance promote health? The case of tango Argentino. *Research, JRS* 2008;128(2):79-84

¹⁷ Murcia CM, Kreutz, G, Clift, S. & Bongard, S., (2010) Shall we dance? - An exploration of the perceived benefits of wellbeing. *Arts& Health* Vol 2, September 2010, 149-163

¹⁸ Murcia CM, Kreutz, G, Clift, S. & Bongard, S. (2009) Emotional and Neurohumoral Responses to Dancing Tango Argentino: The Effects of Music and Partner *Music and Medicine* Volume 1 Number 1 July 2009 14-21

Isolation and loneliness can affect people at any age or stage of life. In 2016-17, five percent of British adults described themselves as often or always lonely. Disabling health conditions, caring responsibilities, unemployment and being widowed are particular risk factors.¹⁹ More than one in three people over the age of seventy-five are reported to feel their feelings of loneliness are out of their control.²⁰

Tango offers the opportunity for social contact and fulfils the need for close physical contact with another person. Traditionally, tango is danced in a close embrace - the *Abrazo* - bodies connecting, and chests close together. This close physical connection has sometimes been described as the "healing embrace".²¹

*...in the tango two strangers embrace each other closely, find a common ground and move as one. Not through our eye but through our physical contact and intuition, we dancers immediately know something deep and private about one another. We dance who we are. If we feel sad we dance sadness. If we feel confident, we dance confidence*²²

Tango may also provide a clinical tool for depression. A group of sixty-four individuals with self-reported depression were randomly placed into meditation, exercise, tango dance, or control groups. After eight weeks and at a one-month follow-up, tango was shown to have induced a broader and more persistent range of benefits, spanning depression, insomnia, satisfaction with life, and mindfulness, than the other treatments.²³

Some dancers describe themselves as addicted, dancing several times each week. This is given some substance by research which found that tango dancing could lead to dependence analogous with other forms of behavioural addiction e.g. gambling but also found that "this dependence is associated with marked and sustained positive effects whilst the negative are few".²⁴

Questions for the research were:

How important is tango to those who dance it and why is it important?

What are the subjectively experienced benefits and how do these relate to both physical health and mental wellbeing?

Do the perceived benefits vary according to other variables such as being in work or retired or single versus attached?

Do perceived benefits increase over time?

Can tango change lives?

¹⁹http Office for National Statistics (2018) What characteristics and circumstances are associated with feeling lonely?

²⁰ https://www.jocoxloneliness.org/pdf/a_call_to_action.pdf

²¹ <http://www.argentinaindependent.com/life-style/tango-therapy-the-healing-embrace/>

²² Dujovne B. In Strangers Arms: The Magic of the Tango, 2011: MacFarland & Co Inc

²³Pinniger, R., Thorsteinsson, EB, Brown, RF & McKinley, P. (2013) Tango Dance Can Reduce Distress and Insomnia in People with Self-Referral Affective Symptoms: Am J Dance Ther DOI 10.1007/s10465-012-9141-y

²⁴ Targhetta et al. (2013) Argentine tango: Another behavioral addiction? *Journal of Behavioral Addictions*, 2(3), pp.179-186.

3. Research design and methodology

The study explored the impact of a particular dance form – Argentine Tango – on a group of predominantly middle-aged and older dancers in Richmond upon Thames. The aim was to scope the benefits of tango as subjectively experienced by participants and to understand why tango was invested with such importance in their lives.

Two of the researchers were also dancers and teachers of tango and the third had danced tango in the past. The study was undertaken by Freedom Tango, a small community dance school in south-west London, supported of Dr Jonathan Skinner, Reader in Anthropology at Roehampton University. The research was undertaken in two phases between November 2017 and March 2018.

Phase 1

The first phase consisted of a questionnaire – *Talk Tango* - designed to elicit responses from dancers about the impact of dancing tango on their health, wellbeing, and sociability. The questionnaire included closed and open questions. Participants were asked to select from a variety of statements about the possible benefits of tango any or all of those which applied to them. They were also invited to sum up those benefits in their own words. The questionnaire also elicited socio-demographic information on age, marital status, employment status, frequency and length of dance experience as these were thought to be variables which might affect the impact of tango on health and wellbeing. A copy of the questionnaire is contained in Annexe 1.

Copies of the questionnaire were distributed to dancers attending tango classes run by Freedom Tango and to dancers attending monthly milongas. More than one hundred and fifty people attend monthly dances and social evenings and/or classes in Teddington in south-west London on a regular or occasional basis. While people join the classes to learn to dance, the group has become a community of interest and friendship with many dancers participating in tango performances for good causes and in helping less experienced dancers.

During a period of two months, sixty dancers completed a questionnaire. Participants were able to complete the questionnaire anonymously or to provide contact details if they were interested in the possibility of being interviewed in the second phase of the research. It is not known how representative the resulting sample was of tango dancers either in the local area or more widely. It is possible that those who were prepared to complete the questionnaire held more positive views of tango than those who did not.

Phase 2

The second phase consisted of eight qualitative interviews with dancers selected from the larger survey group. All of the interviewees had been dancing for three years or more and danced at least twice a week and had, therefore, considerable experience of tango and its impact on their lives. Each interview lasted approximately forty minutes and was recorded.

A semi-structured interview format was developed relating to the motivation to learn tango, health and wellbeing benefits, and the experience of dancing in the close embrace with another person, either as leader or follower. A copy of the topic guide is contained in Annexe 2.

4. Phase 1

4.1 The Dancers

The participant dancers in the survey were almost evenly balanced in terms of gender, thirty-two females and twenty-eight males. The majority were middle-aged or older. Forty-six were aged 46-70; and ten were aged seventy one or older. Only one dancer was in the age group 21-30 and three were aged between 31 and 45. Thirty-one had a partner, sixteen were single, nine were widowed and four people did not disclose their marital status.

Just over half (32) were retired, twenty-six were in work and two were unemployed.

Fifty-one dancers described their health as good; nine described it as fair and none described their health as poor. Just five disclosed health conditions, which included arthritis and total knee replacement, heel problems, diabetes and hearing difficulties.

Fifty dancers took part in other regular forms of exercise. This included other types of dancing; Pilates; swimming; tennis; yoga; weight training; and gym. This proportion is in line with the average for the local area, Richmond upon Thames, where five in six people take part in at least 30 minutes of physical activity a week.²⁵

Seventeen dancers had been dancing tango for two years or less, fifteen for three to five years, but nearly half (28) had been dancing for six years or more, including eleven who had been dancing tango for more than ten years.

More than half danced just once a week or less, but a third danced twice a week or more. Four people danced between three and five times a week. All but two who danced twice a week or more had been dancing for at least three years.

4.2 Tango and health

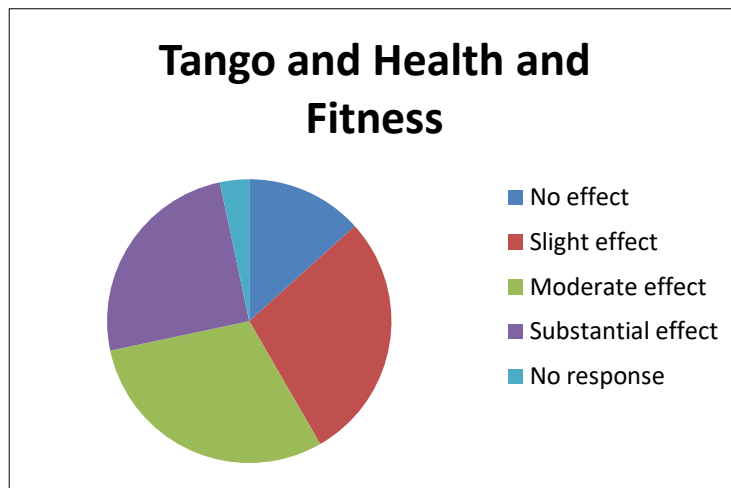
Two participants did not respond to this section of the questionnaire. Of the remainder, eighty-six percent of dancers believed that dancing tango had improved their health and fitness. They believed this whether they took other regular forms of exercise or not. Only eight dancers reported that dancing tango had no overall effect on health and fitness. Each of them, however, identified aspects of health – balance, fitness and mental outlook – which had improved as a result of dancing.

For the majority, the impact on health was considered slight or moderate, but more than a quarter of dancers rated the impact of dancing tango on health as substantial. Those who danced twice a week or more were more likely to identify the impact on fitness as substantial (50%) than those who danced only once a week or less (10%).

More dancers who were in work (36%) said tango had had a substantial impact on their fitness, compared to 21% of those who were retired.

²⁵ Richmond upon Thames JSNA 2017

Fig 1: Impact health and Fitness all respondents



For almost all of the participant dancers, the health effects were experienced as positive and enabling. Only seven dancers identified adverse effects, including bunions, leg ache, knee issues and overstretched muscles but each of them also identified health gains, including balance and fitness, stamina and mental outlook.

4.3 Aspects of health and fitness

The most frequently stated belief was that dancing tango improved balance. Eighty-one percent of responding dancers identified balance as a benefit. Among those who had been dancing for three years or more; eighty six percent identified improved balance as a benefit. Proportionately fewer dancers who were retired (70%) identified balance than those who were still working (93%). Among the eleven dancers who were aged seventy-one and over, six identified improved balance as an impact.

Tango has helped with my posture and flexibility – retired female 46-70

Better posture and balance than before I started tango – retired female 46-70

Balance, core strength and stronger left ankle – female 30- 45

After balance, the most frequently identified health gains were general fitness (53%) flexibility (47%) and mental outlook (43%).

Helped with my mobility and mental health –female, retired 71+

Excellent aerobic exercise for the ageing body –male, retired 71+

Tango has increased my core strength and given me a reason to seek out being more fit – male, employed 46-70

Very positive as it makes me feel good mentally and physically –female, retired 46-70

The following table shows the distribution of responses to the health and fitness section of the questionnaire by gender, whether retired or in work ²⁶ and by length of dance experience.

Proportionately more retired dancers identified increased general fitness and fewer identified improved balance than those who were still employed. Significantly more of those who were employed identified improvements in mental outlook compared with those who were retired. In addition, those who had been dancing for longer were more likely to identify specific benefits than those whose dance experience was shorter.

Fig 2: Aspects of health and fitness by gender, employment status and length of dance experience

	All N=58	Male N= 27	Female N=31	Retired N=30	Employed N=28	Less than 3 years N=15	3 years + N= 43
Has improved my balance	47 (81%)	21 (77%)	26 (84%)	21 (70%)	26 (93%)	10 (67%)	37 (86%)
Has helped my general fitness	31 (53%)	11 (41%)	20 (65%)	18 (60%)	13 (46%)	7 (47%)	24 (56%)
Has improved my flexibility	27 (47%)	16 (67%)	11 (35%)	12 (40%)	15 (54%)	5 (33%)	22 (51%)
Has improved my mental outlook	25 (43%)	14 (59%)	11 (35%)	9 (30%)	15 (54%)	6 (40%)	19 (44%)
Has increased my stamina	20 (34%)	7 (26%)	13 (42%)	11 (37%)	9 (32%)	4 (27%)	16 (37%)

Other health benefits suggested by dancers included enhanced co-ordination and memory, improved core strength and weight loss.

Helped with co-ordination and memory – male 46-70

The fact that you dress up has encouraged me to lose weight plus the actual exercise of dancing has helped me to do – female 46-70

Combined with the exercise programme and a planned diet, it has reduced my weight and increased my fitness – male, retired 71+

Of the five participants who disclosed disabilities or health conditions two said tango had helped with their issues while two said that their disabilities had limited their dancing. but every one of them nonetheless identified improved balance as a benefit of dancing tango

Very quickly Tango improved my physical posture; I am more upright. I believe the exercises for tango will eventually improve my balance and the agility of my feet... This can be considered good remedial therapy for someone recovering from total knee replacement–male, retired 71+ with arthritis

²⁶ This included two people not in jobs at the time.

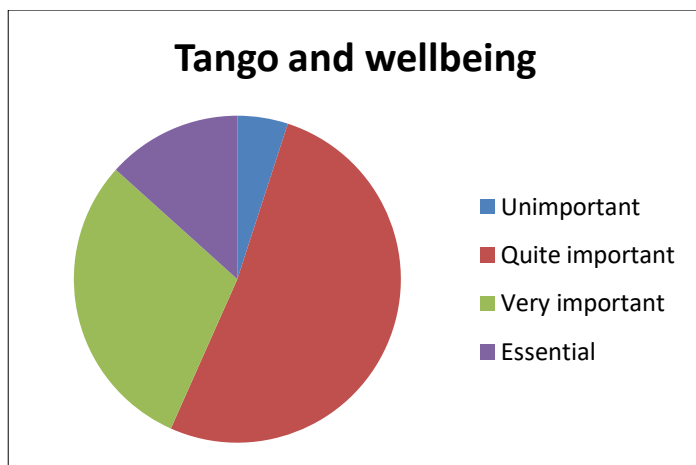
Increased my fitness following diagnosis of diabetes - my feet become sensitive but improved diet and dancing – has helped - female 46-70

This was a study of subjective impact. The actual physical challenges facing the individual dancers in the study are not known and there was no means of assessing any actual changes occurring as result of their dance participation. However, the fact of their strong belief in health gains – in particular improved balance - was a consistent finding, irrespective of age or other demographic variables.

4.4 Tango and wellbeing

As a group, the participants held the firm belief that tango was good for wellbeing. Only three participants believed tango was *unimportant* to their wellbeing and yet they also identified positive changes in their lives - new friends, enjoyment of music, knowledge of other people, which they attributed to tango. The remainder – fifty seven dancers - dancers believed tango was important for their wellbeing with forty five percent describing it as *very important* or *essential*.

Fig 3: Tango and wellbeing – all respondents



Asked to describe in their own words the impact of tango on wellbeing, a recurring theme was pleasure and enjoyment.

Positive, always feel good after tango...! Love the challenge, love the promise! –male, retired 46-70

I dance primarily because I love it. Anything that makes you feel good impacts on your general wellbeing and probably on others too. Dancing is the greatest and can only be good for you - female 46-70

It has transformed my life. It is a wonderful distraction from work – female 46-70

It continues to give me joy as all dancing does. I just love dancing –female, retired 71+

4.5 Wellbeing and personal change

The dancers were asked to identify, from a list of possible responses how, if at all, tango had helped or changed them and every one of the dancers could identify at least one change relating to their wellbeing. More than half could identify at least four such changes, with a smaller proportion (20%) identifying between seven and ten ways in which they had changed. Those who had been dancing for three years or more were more likely to believe that tango had changed them in multiple ways.

Overall, forty-eight dancers (80%) identified an *increased enjoyment* of music while forty-seven dancers (78%) identified *new friendships* as a change in their lives arising out of their tango dancing.

I love South American music and am now listening to a lot more of it - male 46-70 employed

Something to look forward to each week, meeting people and exercise – female, single 71+

It gives you everything, from exercise, feel good factor from the music, social life plus human contact via warm tango hugs – female 46-70, widowed

Tango was also associated for some with new horizons. Nearly half (47%) believed tango had led them to try new interests while forty-three percent travelled to places outside of their local area as a result of their involvement with the dance.

For some dancers, changes related to their feelings about themselves and others. More than a third agreed that tango had increased their confidence and the same proportion believed that the dance had increased their knowledge and understanding of other people. Nearly a third believed that dancing tango had increased their self-esteem.

Thirty percent of dancers felt more creative; eighteen per cent felt less lonely and twelve dancers believed tango had made them a different person.

Some dancers believed that Tango had helped them to deal with stress or a cope with difficult life events.

Tango gets me out of the house and increases my enjoyment of life. It's completely absorbing and so takes my mind off other worries in my life – female, retired 46-70

Tango has been beneficial in providing both mental and physical exercise. Additionally it has helped to make me a more relaxed and pragmatic person –male, retired 71+

Helped me to get over a break-up - female 46-70, employed

The following table contains the responses to the wellbeing section of the questionnaire by gender, work status and length of tango experience. Proportionately more females than males believed that tango had helped them to be more confident. Those in work were more likely to highlight creativity, while more retired dancers believed that tango had helped them to find new friends.

Fig 4: Wellbeing and personal change by gender, employment status and length of dance experience

	All N=60	Males N=28	Females N=32	Retired N=32	In work ²⁷ N=28	2 years or less N=17	3 years + N=43
Increased my enjoyment of music	48 (80%)	25 (89%)	23 (72%)	23 (72%)	25 (89%)	12 (71%)	36 (84%)
Helped me to find new friends	47 (78%)	24 (86%)	23 (72%)	27 (84%)	20 (71%)	11 (65%)	36 (84%)
Encouraged me to try new interests	28 (47%)	16 (57%)	12 (38%)	14 (44%)	14 (50%)	10 (59%)	18 (42%)
Encouraged me to travel outside my area	26 (43%)	14 (50%)	12 (38%)	11 (34%)	15 (54%)	4 (24%)	22 (51%)
Increased my knowledge of other people	22 (37%)	12 (43%)	10 (31%)	11 (34%)	11 (39%)	5 (29%)	17 (40%)
Helped me to be more confident	22 (37%)	8 (29%)	14 (44%)	11 (34%)	11 (39%)	8 (47%)	14 (33%)
Increased self-esteem	18 (30%)	8 (29%)	10 (31%)	7 (22%)	11 (39%)	4 (24%)	14 (33%)
Made me more creative	18 (30%)	7 (25%)	11 (34%)	5 (16%)	13 (46%)	4 (24%)	14 (33%)
Made me a different person	12 (20%)	6 (21%)	6 (19%)	4 (13%)	8 (28%)	0	12 (28%)
Made me less lonely	11 (18%)	5 (18%)	6 (19%)	5 (16%)	6 (21%)	0	11 (26%)

Twelve dancers believed that tango had made them a different person. All had been dancing for at least three years, the majority for six or more years. All believed that dancing tango was very important or essential for their well being. For half of them, feeling a different person was associated with being less lonely; travelling to different places, enjoying music, having new friends and feeling more creative, but all of them identified multiple changes or ways in which tango had helped them. Six were male and six female and three were more than 70 years old. Three had been widowed.

4.6 Tango and sociability

Dance, as a pastime which brings together people from different backgrounds, age groups and occupations, is potentially a force for social integration.

Asked if tango had affected their life in the community, three dancers did not respond and all but two of the remainder affirmed that it had. Each could identify one or more ways in which this was the case. The most common impact was a larger network of friends, followed by knowing a broader range of people and going out more. A third said tango had made them feel more connected to others, although for some dancers tango meant they saw less of other friends.

²⁷ Includes two people out of work at the time

The following table shows the responses to the sociability section of the questionnaire by gender, and marital status. Proportionately more male dancers said that they felt more connected to others and single and widowed dancers were more likely to be affirmative on going out more and feeling more connected to others.

Fig 5: Sociability by gender and marital status

	All N=57	Male N= 26	Female N=31	Partner N=29	Single N=16	Widow N=9
Has increased my network of friends	43 (75%)	20 (77%)	23 (74%)	25 (86%)	10 (63%)	7 (78%)
I know a broader range of people	30 (53%)	14 (54%)	16 (52%)	19 (66%)	9 (56%)	2 (22%)
I go out more than I used to	27 (47%)	12 (46%)	15 (48%)	12 (41%)	10 (63%)	5 (56%)
Has made me feel more connected to others	19 (33%)	10 (38%)	9 (29%)	6 (21%)	7 (44%)	6 (67%)
I see less of friends than I used to	11 (19%)	7 (27%)	4 (13%)	7 (24%)	2 (13%)	2 (22%)
Has had no effect	2 (4%)	1 (4%)	1 (3%)	0	2 (13%)	0

4.7 Phase 1 Discussion

Every participant in this study believed that he or she derived some benefit to their health and/or wellbeing as a result of dancing tango. For some, the benefits were slight and/or discrete, whereas for others, tango had not only boosted their health and wellbeing but – they believed - had changed them in multiple ways. For some, tango appeared to be an enveloping experience which dominated their lives and their leisure time. Twelve dancers described themselves as *different people* as a result of dancing tango but many more spoke of transformative changes in their health, lifestyle, mental state and outlook.

A few dancers saw tango in redemptive terms – an effective medication for the loss of a loved one, or the break-up of a relationship, or stress induced at work or elsewhere.

The benefits perceived by dancers were consistent and largely independent of age, gender, marital status and employment status. There was a firm consensus that tango was an aid to health, particularly in respect of balance; was a source of wellbeing; enriched their enjoyment of music; and had brought new friendships into their lives. For a significant minority, tango had led them to go out more, to feel more connected to other people and to feel confident and good about themselves.

Although the most commonly identified health benefits are those which are particularly relevant for the ageing body, proportionately fewer retired people identified improved balance and flexibility. In addition, twice as many of those who were in work identified improvements in mental outlook as did those who were retired. However, given the nature and size of the sample and lacking information about the actual physical challenges affecting participants, it would be unwise to draw any firm inferences from these variations.

Gender, in particular, appeared not to be a factor influencing dancers' beliefs about tango with the responses of males and females being for the most part consistent. Marital status also appeared not to be a factor related to dancers' beliefs about the benefits of tango, although there is a suggestion that for proportionately more those who were single or widowed, tango provides a means of going out and being more connected to other people.

Longevity of dance experience and dance frequency were related and appeared to be influencing factors. Those who had been dancing for three years or more were, with only two exceptions, those who danced twice a week or more. They were more likely to believe that tango had changed them in multiple ways and more likely to believe that tango was very important or essential to their wellbeing.

As previously noted, this was a study of subjective beliefs, without access to information or data about actual changes in respect of health wellbeing or lifestyle affecting any individual dancer. However, it is entirely reasonable to suppose that each individual was a qualified informant regarding their own health and wellbeing and the nature of their responses as robust evidence of the positive impact of tango.

5. Phase 2

5.1 The Interviewees

Of the eight interviewees five were male and three female. Two were aged 71+, the remainder in the age group 46-70. Three were widowed, two lived with a partner and three were single and/or divorced or separated. Three were retired from managerial jobs and five were currently in occupations which included care-giving, HR, secretarial employment and the legal profession. Two had age-related arthritic/rheumatoid conditions, one interviewee suffered from diabetes and another had joint issues relating to an earlier hip replacement.

At the time of the interviews, two had danced for more than three years, three for more than six years and three for more than ten years. Each believed that tango was important or essential to their wellbeing and four of the eight believed that tango had made them a different person.

To provide anonymity, the names of the interviewees have been changed.

5.2 Motivations

Why was tango so important to them? None had any prior knowledge of the dance and came to it almost by chance – a passing conversation during a car journey; a postcard in a shop window; the recommendation of a friend. Four had never danced before. One interviewee came to lessons very reluctantly, purely to please his wife.

For each of them, a pastime has become a consuming passion. Dancing several nights a week, most regularly travel across London and beyond for more opportunities to dance; attend classes run by visiting teachers; or, where they have the means, travel to other countries for tango holidays. Four have spent time in Buenos Aires, sampling milongas and having further instruction. Away from classes, they listen to tango music, attend concerts and search the internet for tango demonstrations and performances. They keep in touch with large numbers of tango friends through social media or use Facebook and similar media to monitor upcoming tango events.

5.3 Health

Only one person cited health as a primary reason for taking up tango. For the others, the health benefits were largely secondary and evident only in retrospect.

‘Colin’ is in his seventies, is single and is retired. He has undergone two total knee replacements, a spinal operation and has an arthritic ankle.

I wanted an activity and I couldn't do very much because I was immobile. But I went to Spanish classes and there was a lady there in the Spanish classes who used to do tango quite a lot. I would give her a lift home, and she told me about tango and I thought, "Oh, that's good, I want to get around to doing that." Three years later I did.

His arthritis is severe but he is determined to keep dancing, which he believes to be remedial for his particular health issue.

I'm trying to get my balance back as well. I was 10 years or more as a cripple, hobbling around with bad knees and a walking stick. So, muscles atrophy and my balance isn't the same as it was. Yes, I know it's good for me to do all those (tango) exercises, do all those moves, and that's where I am, well, that's where I'm going ahead with it all the time, trying to learn more and more.

'Charles' is eighty five, widowed, but took up tango nearly 20 years ago with his late wife. He appears remarkably fit for his years, but confides that he suffers from rheumatism in his knees.

You know I'm dancing, taking a step and suddenly it just comes out, so you've got to quickly move your weight and change your weight quickly get it on the other. It doesn't happen too often but at eighty five, I'm very lucky that I can dance at all. I'm very appreciative of the fact, thank God I can dance. If I didn't have tango life would be awful.

'Evelyn', who is in her late fifties and working as a social care professional, took up tango at the suggestion of her tango teacher friend and discovered unexpected health benefits.

But the thing that's interesting was that I was diagnosed with diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol a few years ago, and initially, before I lost the weight, my feet were really sensitive to cold floors. But I also found for a while I couldn't bear wearing the high heels, which I hated because I like to wear a high heel when I dress up. Because I've since lost the weight - tango has been one of the main reasons - I've got a beautiful pair of Werner Kern shoes and I'm like, "I want to wear them!"

'Adam', fifty, works in HR, and is in good health but wants to lose weight. He now believes that tango is the key to this.

I've found that it's given me the impetus to actually improve my general physical wellbeing. Because if you want to dance well; you need to have a good core. It's made me look at myself consciously, and I am a work in progress.

'Iris' works as a secretary, is widowed and also believes that tango has been a stimulus for getting into better shape.

It is brilliant. You are taking exercise but it does not feel like it is exercise because the music drives you on and it is such fun. It encouraged me to lose weight in order to look nice at dances.

'Brian' retired some years ago. Dance has enabled him to have a much more active lifestyle, has lost weight and is much fitter as a result.

I'm more healthy than I was, because I had quite stationary jobs, previously, so moving around a lot more is certainly been beneficial.

'James' is a lawyer living with his partner. His busy professional and social life means that he no longer dances as much as he once did but, in retrospect, he believes it increased his fitness.

They say if you walk three times a week at a pace which makes you slightly out of breath, that's really good cardio-vascular exercise. So if you go dancing twice a week, dancing tango for an hour or two, that can only be a good thing, it must be. I mean, when I used to dance a lot, it definitely increased my fitness.

Only 'Helen', a trained ballet dancer who also dances ballroom and flamenco, did not attribute her fitness to tango.

I don't think tango has necessarily had any impact on my health and fitness. Having done years of ballet, I believe I am pretty fit and healthy anyway.

5.4 Connection

For those who were single, the need to meet people and find new friends was an important motivation.

Adam *Well, I was hoping that, you know, to expand my social life. That was definitely something that I knew was going to happen... It was mainly, really, meeting a different group of people... instead of being stuck indoors, or basically going home from work, not doing anything... playing computer games, or something else, I'd decided that the time has come to do something different. It was really just to expand on my social life, see what else is out there, who else is out there.*

Evelyn *I have had quite a kind of complicated living set up and my husband and I are estranged anyway and so it kind of ...it helped me to have some kind of social base in this area, because I'm not from around here. I don't have contacts or friends here. My work and my family were my life, so living down here I have M- as a friend. I didn't have any other social contacts, so it kind of gave me a new group of friends.*

Colin *I'm single at the moment, and if I did...well, let's put it that way. It also places me in the realm of women whereas in my life here I hardly meet any women at all. I was an engineer and well, that's a long time, I'm retired now, but I don't bump into women all the time. So, that's it. Yes, mostly my life I've been with men and things, so easy. I was in the Territorial Army and I was an engineer, they all tend to be men.*

As previously noted, isolation is a rising issue in the UK, the scale of the problem reflected in the appointment, in 2018, of a government minister for loneliness. In 2014, Britain was found to be "the loneliness capital of Europe" with its inhabitants less likely overall to know their neighbours or have strong friendships than people anywhere else in the EU. ²⁸

Not everyone who seeks out new social connections is necessarily lonely, but four of the interviewees had experienced the emotional devastation of the death of a partner and another had suffered the break-up of a long-term relationship.

Iris *A few years before I mean quite a few years before my partner died and I was very lost and I think I had two years where I didn't even know what I did do and then you have to like reinvent yourself and I took up yoga and I liked that. I went through this yes, yes, yes, just trying a list of things. I have my yoga but when I got this tango it was like I love this. I was really passionate about it and I was so excited to find something that I just loved.*

Evelyn *I'm just going through a break up...well someone broke up with me. I'm estranged from my husband, but I've had a partner for about 8 years, who was younger than me, and he's decided to end it before Christmas last year. So, but Tango is the one...yes, I'm just coming out of it*

²⁸ http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20160105160709/http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171766_406995.pdf

now. And tango has been the most important thing for me in terms of...feeling somewhere where I've actually forgot all about that.

Charles *I think it was a big help that when she died after...we were married fifty three years, and we used to go dancing three times a week roughly. Suddenly she died, and just for a while I stopped dancing, of course busy clearing up the ... then I wondered if I should carry on or not, and I'm pleased I said, "Yes. I love dancing, might as well. I'm sure she doesn't mind".*

Tango has been described as *a sad thought which can be danced*.²⁹ The music – written during turbulent periods of Argentinean history, expresses deep sometimes melancholy feelings. Lost love or loss of homeland is mourned in one tango lyric after another.

James *I think we all have issues that are hidden from ourselves...to some degree. And we all have unresolved incidents in our lives...and feelings that are deep under the surface and I can't... I can't say whether tango, releases something of that ... but to me the slow tango track contains both the melancholy and the resolution ... sad but it's for dancing, you know and dancing makes it worthwhile. We can carry on despite ...our deep feelings, our heavy burdens, because we're dancing.*

5.5 The Embrace: Bridging Differences

What distinguishes tango from other dance forms is the closeness of the embrace. Both partners move, their bodies touching, heads together. To dance like this they need to learn to isolate their upper bodies so that they can turn and change direction without losing body contact. In essence, the tango embrace is the act of hugging the other. In stage performances of tango, the closeness of the embrace is eroticised, but others have suggested this physical closeness is more emotional than sexual.³⁰

Touch is the first of the senses to develop in the human infant, and it remains perhaps the most emotionally central throughout our lives. Touching or hugging can lower blood pressure, reduce anxiety and may even help to ward off colds and other ailments.³¹ Bereavement, the break-up of a relationship and living alone are all factors which can reduce opportunities for physical touch.

Iris *I've made some lovely friends and yes you do ...you know you're on your own and this I don't want to sound a bit like creepy. It's just, I don't know what it is. If it's just the music or, everything works beautifully. But for me because I am on my own, I sort of feel sometimes, I have that contact of another human being but not in a sort of pervy or creepy way.*

Charles *You learn the steps and then the main thing is to make sure you're comfortable with a woman. If they're good dancers, straight away they will fall into your arms. It's a lovely feeling, heart to heart, you can really feel it. It's a lovely feeling*

For James, tango has helped him to relate and interact with other women.

²⁹ Enrique Santos Discépolo

³⁰ Dujovne, B, Ibid

³¹ Cohen, S., Janicki-Deverts, D., Turner, R., & Doyle, W. (2014). Does Hugging Provide Stress-Buffering Social Support? A Study of Susceptibility to Upper Respiratory Infection and Illness. *Psychological Science*, doi: 10.1177/0956797614559284

You're pressed up to a women's body; you're co-operating with her on a very intimate and intense level. You are both respecting each other because it is working out well, ideally. You respect each other and are keeping a certain distance, but on another level, you are almost fusing into one moving organism. And that was an eye-opener for me and wonderful.

I think it has opened up for me a way of interacting with women, which is completely different from any other channel of communication I've had with women. With women I've had normal channels of communication, whether intense relationships, or just respect, or colleagues at work, whatever, or with sisters or mothers.

Achieving this closeness with a dance partner is not a given, but has to be worked at. In *Dancing Tango, Passionate Encounters in a Globalizing World*, Kathy Davis points out that individuals have to bridge the differences between each other and that their perceptions of the encounter will not always be the same.³²

Colin *That (close embrace) opens another can of worms in the sense that it's whether cooperate with each other to do the dance, or whether they're antagonistic to each other in the dance. Sometimes you think people are being awkward just deliberately or it's difficult to know. I can be on the floor, I end up not dancing, I just end up navigating, and just getting out of the way all the time and there's no joy to that at all, no joy.*

Helen *And I think it takes three dances with a stranger to get to know. And sometimes, you are a little bit frightened. You know, you get some men, who are very sort of ... if they are quite experienced...you are not used to their way, if you like, and it's slightly different and ... sometimes we don't respond straight away... they sometimes look down their noses a little bit, and that's a little bit off-putting in Tango.*

5.6 Constructing Identity

Personal identity refers to how we think about ourselves and the type of person we consider ourselves to be. Identity directs our actions and can be focused on the past -what used to be true - the present, or the future. Life events such as retirement, sudden unemployment or the loss of a relationship, can pose a threat to identity. Attitudes toward the ageing body, particularly female bodies, can lead older people to feel unattractive. For some of the interviewees, and for a variety of reasons, tango has helped them to feel more youthful and to recover a younger identity.

Charles *Yes. I think so. I'm 85 and most people look at me and say, "Gosh, we wouldn't dream you're 85." A lot of other people there, half my age, they dance about 15 minutes and they're- they flop. I dance again and I'm the first on the floor. It must be helping to keep me young and fit and much nicer than going to a gym. To have a beautiful woman in your arms...!*

Colin *Well, I mean it's kind of magic. I can get a big limping, and I've got every reason not to go. I think well, "I'm a bit tired, my ankle is sore, and my shoulder's sore today." I go, and even I can limp into the room, and when I put the shoes on, and the pretty girls are there it seems to have a magic effect, and I get up and can go around.*

Evelyn *I've lost some weight and people have been really nice to me, and you know, noticed it, and keep saying how well I look and that I look younger, and it's made me feel like myself*

³² Davis, K. 2015, In *Dancing Tango, Passionate Encounters in a Globalizing World*

again....It's weird, isn't it, when you become older you're a mother, a grandmother...I have five grandchildren, so in those roles I am that person. I'm happy in those roles. But Tango is about me. It's not for anyone else, no one else gets anything out of it, it's all about me and what I like and what I enjoy. And it gives me a certain happiness that I don't get anywhere else in my life.

Brian *Having retired- I've always worked with large groups of people in a factory environment with 300 or 400 people working for me. I've always had to communicate with lots of different people and I'm used to being with lots of different people. That is an advantage to me-I'm still keeping that side of thing through dancing*

Four of the interviewees believed that tango had made them different people. Others did not go this far but, nevertheless, did identify instances of change, whether in their relationships, their habits, health and fitness and in how they felt about themselves.

Mezirow (1978) coined the term "meaning perspective" as paradigm for understanding ourselves and our relationships. A *transformation* of a meaning perspective can occur when an old perspective can no longer deal successfully with problems and issues in a new situation. A new meaning perspective has the following features:

A new meaning perspective has dimensions of thought, feeling and will. It involves seeing one's self and one's roles and relationships in a consistent, coherent way, a way which will dictate action priorities. Meaning perspectives are more than a way of seeing; they are proposals to experience one's life which involve a decision to take action. Feelings and events are interpreted existentially, not intellectually as by an observer...

As we move forward to new perspectives, we can never return to those in our past. Indeed, we are continually reconstructing the reality of the past by reinterpreting it from each successive vantage point as we move from one perspective to the next. ³³

Tango is not only an iconic dance; it is associated with a rich culture of music, art, history and literature. Dancing tango also offers engagement with a very large number of people who share the same passion. For some individuals, it appears to offer an immersive experience which adds a layer of meaning to life; is goal-focused (dancing well); and is emotionally satisfying

Adam *(Not to tango) would be a very huge gap, it would be something... I mean ... human nature is very funny that if you can't do something, something else replaces it. But what would replace dance, I don't know. I think it would be quite a difficult thing for me to find something to replace it.*

Charles *We always used to go somewhere where there was a tango festival going on like in Budapest or wherever. You go there for, say a week or 10 days and all day we used to go sightseeing all over there and in the evening you know there's tango going on. They were pleased to see foreigners. "Oh you're you from London?" They were very pleased to you to chat with us. Some of these places have very good dancers, in Germany and Holland. I danced in Paris, in Italy and Spain cities at Barcelona. They're very good there and Miami. We've been many times to Miami.*

³³ Mezirow, J. (1978). Perspective transformation. *Adult Education*, vol. 28, n. 2, pp. 100-

- Iris *I can't imagine life without it. I do wonder what I'm going to be. I'm an old lady now, so what will I be when I'm a really old lady and I can't... when you look around, there are some older people there. Keep going and there's some lovely young men and they are gorgeous and they are so friendly. I say, "This is for my old age."*
- Colin *It's my social life. Last night I really couldn't dance at all, because my ankle was so bad, but I still went just to go and listen to the music, have a couple of beers, talk to some people. I really enjoyed doing that. The alternative was I could have stayed and watched TV or something, or done some work. So, yes, it's major. Also on the basis that to prolong your life you need to do something for your brains, so I'm learning Spanish, and you need to do something for the body. I will go back to Buenos Aires again. Normally I go away at Christmas. I don't take holidays*

5.7 Conclusion

The eight dancers who were the subject of the extended interviews represent one end of a spectrum of involvement in dancing tango. Each has, to some degree, reconstructed herself or himself through the medium of a leisure pastime, in this case, tango. For some, these transformations have been at least partially precipitated by life events - bereavement, the loss of a relationship, or retirement - but a common factor was a willingness to embrace change and the largely unanticipated joy of dancing.

Each has, to some extent, embraced the identity of a tango dancer and in so doing has found the security of an enlarged social network, an absorbing pastime, opportunities to travel, the mastery of a skill set, new cultural experiences and enhanced fitness and wellbeing. For some, the journey has been occasionally fraught with the challenges of learning this provoking dance and overlaid with the frailties that we all bring to relationships. However, the fact that this is a dance and not a form of therapy should not obscure its very real impact, in the minds of participants, on their health and wellbeing.

The transformations described here were more complete for some and smaller for others, but in each there was a redemptive element. This was also true for some of the wider group of dancers who participated in the survey alone.

Tango is danced by people of all ages but, as a low-impact form of exercise is particularly accessible for those with lower fitness levels or mobility issues. This scoping study set out to capture – among a group of older dancers – some of the subjective health and wellbeing benefits of this particular dance form. It was not able to assess or quantify any actual physical, neurological or affective changes, but evidence in respect of this does exist and is cited above in the introduction to the study.

Other forms of learning can be transformative. What is clear from the present study is that dance – in particular tango – holistically combines friendship, exercise, music and emotional and artistic expression and has the potential to lift mood. In some cases it can provide help to overcome depression and to set a new trajectory.

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Annex 1: Questionnaire



Talk Tango

What has dancing Tango meant for you? Freedom Tango would like to know more from you; about why you dance tango; and what if any benefits you have felt in yourself and your life as a result of dancing tango. Your answers will form part of a report as part of a Celebrate Tango exhibition in Teddington in early 2018. It will also contribute to pilot research into tango and wellbeing with Dr Jonathan Skinner (University of Roehampton), and feed into the development of tango in the local area. Information will be confidential and kept secure, and can be anonymous if you wish. Further contact: margaretlochie@blueyonder.co.uk, jonathan.skinner@roehampton.ac.uk.

About You

Are you: Female ☐ Male ☐

Your age: 15-20 ☐ 21-30 ☐ 30-45 ☐ 46-70 ☐ 71-80+ ☐

Are you: Single ☐ Have a partner ☐ Widowed ☐ Have a dance partner ☐

Are you: In work ☐ Retired ☐ Unemployed ☐ Student ☐

Is your health: Good ☐ Fair ☐ Poor ☐ Have disabilities: please state.....

Your Tango

How long have you been dancing Tango? ☐

Less than 1 year ☐ 2 years ☐ 3-5 years ☐ 6-10 years ☐ More than 10 years ☐

How many times do you dance tango each week?

Once ☐ 2-3 times ☐ 3-5 times ☐ More than 5 times ☐

Tango and wellbeing

How important is tango to your wellbeing?

Unimportant ☐ Quite important ☐ Very important ☐ Essential ☐

Would you say you that tango has helped or changed you in any of the following ways?

Helped me to be more confident	
Increased my self-esteem	
Helped me to find new friends	
Encouraged me to try new interests	
Encouraged me to travel outside my area	
Increased my knowledge of other people	
Increased my enjoyment of music	
Made me more creative	
Made me less lonely	
Made me a different person	
Other please state:	

Tick all which apply

Using the space below, how would you sum up the impact tango has had on your wellbeing?

.....

.....

.....

Tango and health

Apart from tango do you take part in other regular forms of exercise?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, what types of other exercise?

Has dancing tango affected your general level of health and fitness?

No effect ☐ Slight effect ☐ Moderate effect ☐ Substantial effect ☐

How has tango affected your health and fitness?

Has affected me adversely e.g. joint pain	
Has helped my general fitness	
Has improved my balance	
Has increased my physical flexibility	
Has improved my mental outlook	
Has increased my stamina	
Other: please state	

Tick all which apply

If you have a specific health issue or disability has this affected your ability to dance?

Has not affected me ☐ Has limited me ☐ Has helped me with a health/disability issue ☐

Using the space below, how would you sum up the impact tango has had on your health and fitness?

.....

.....

Tango and sociability

How has tango affected your life in the community?

Has had no effect	
Has increased my network of friends	
I go out more than I used to	
I see less of friends who don't dance	
Has made me feel more connected to others	
I know a broader range of people	
Other: please state	

Tick all which apply

Follow up Contact for interview (optional)

Name: Telephone:

Annexe 2: Talk Tango Qualitative interviews

Name of Interviewee:

Length of interview: 45 minutes

Introduction:

Explain the purpose of the interview – to gain further insights into why people dance tango; what if any challenges arise in learning tango; and what if any are the benefits of tango for health and wellbeing and relationships with other people and sociability.

Consent:

Explain that the interviewee's responses will be subject to data-protection and not shared with other parties except where consent is given. In the report of this study, interviewees will be identified by initial or other name. The data provided might be relevant to use in other academic research conducted by one or more of the researchers and ask if the interviewee consents to this (limited) use.

Consent given: Yes/No

Question 1

What led you to start dancing tango?

Additional questions/probes:

What were your expectations of the dance?

Was it what you expected?

Had you any prior dance experience?

How easy or difficult did you find it at the early stages of learning the dance?

What were the main challenges for you?

Question 2

In your replies to our short questionnaire you have told us a little bit about how tango has helped or changed you. Could you tell me more about this? (Refer to individual response to survey).

Additional questions/probes:

How important is the social aspect of tango – meeting new people?

In what ways has tango changed you as a person?

Do you behave in different ways since dancing tango? Can you give any examples?

Has tango affected your life style?

Has tango changed your view of yourself. How?

Question 3

In tango one person leads and the other follows in an improvised sequence of steps. What for you defines a good leader/ good follower?

Additional questions/probes:

Is it easier to dance with someone you already know e.g. your partner/spouse?

What makes a good tango for you?

What do you think about when you are dancing?

Can you recall a tango that you particularly enjoyed. What made it special for you?

Question 4

In tango, you dance in a close embrace, involving physical touch, sometimes with a complete stranger. Do you feel comfortable with this and how important is it for your enjoyment of the dance?

Additional questions/probes:

Are you conscious of an emotional connection with the person you dance with?

Tango has been described as "a feeling which can be danced." Do you think tango helps us to understand our own feelings?

Has tango anything to teach us about relationships?

Tango music is very emotional, often sad. How, if at all, does affect you?

A number of people have told us that they feel more connected with other people as a result of dancing tango. Is that true for you?

Question 5

A number of people have told us that tango has helped them with balance, fitness, stamina and mental outlook. Do you agree with this? Additional questions/probes:

Has tango helped with any specific health and fitness issues? Can you describe these?

If you stopped dancing tango how, if at all, would this affect your health and fitness?

Question 6

Finally, a number of people have told us that tango is very important or essential for their wellbeing (Refer to individual response to survey). Is there anything more you can tell me about why tango is important for you?

Additional questions/probes:

What is the furthest you have travelled to dance tango?

What is that encourages you to keep dancing tango each week or several times a week?

How do you see your future dance development?