

Our Innate Desire to Dance

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Human beings have been dancing for at least as long as recorded history. Our desire to dance appears to be programmed into our genetic makeup. This article will touch on some interesting theories regarding our natural inclination and attraction toward rhythm and dance.

Both music and coordinated rhythmic movement are clearly known to stimulate our brains' reward centers. Neuroscientific studies have revealed that there are specific areas within the human brain that play a role in analyzing musical sound patterns. Likewise, there are other areas within the brain that play a role in coordinating these sound patterns with rhythmic body movements. It is evident that humans have a natural ability to organize rhythm and movement in a complex way. Babies only months old respond to music and coordinate their physical movements in the same manner. This is due to the fact that humans possess specialized neuroanatomical connections that other primates don't seem to have. Perhaps the most important question to ask may center on why this attribute is so inherent in mankind. Some of the answers may very well be found by looking back historically at early man's relationship with rhythm and movement.



Dance rituals provided a natural means by which our prehistoric ancestors communicated. In fact, the coordination of rhythm and movement was believed to play a major role in the manner in which ancient tribes and whole communities bonded with each other. Communication and bonding through rhythmic dance movements is linked to a strong innate desire for both personal expression and social interaction. Rhythmic movement involving two or more people following the same beat has been shown to cultivate a strong sense of social bonding. This was found to be as true in ancient times as it is in modern times. The desire to dance to rhythm appears to be an inborn trait that is directly hardwired into the most primal part of our human nature.

Furthermore, it is believed that people of early civilizations who were able to coordinate movement with rhythm effectively during ritualistic ceremonies had an added survival advantage for themselves and their families. Dancing can largely be regarded as part of a primordial survival mechanism, especially since it is said to bring people together as a group. It is believed that people in primeval cultures who were best able to coordinate movement with rhythm had a survival advantage. This was largely due to the social bonding effect that it had on the entire group, especially during difficult times. The ability to strongly express rhythm through dance also implied strength and competence. This was most noted in the areas of hunting, food gathering and the struggle for leadership roles within the group.

An interesting study by a researcher at Columbia University found that movement synchronized with music stimulates the brain's pleasure centers in a most profound way. Accordingly, this is said to produce a 'pleasure double play' reaction in the brain. The study points out that movement paired with the rhythmic pulse of the music intensifies the pleasure response. Another fascinating finding of this study points to a similar pleasure response that takes place in those who are just watching a dance performance, especially a well-choreographed one. In this

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scenario, the same brain activation takes place as though the spectator is the dancer. The process of unconsciously planning and predicting the dancer's next move based on one's own personal experiences occurs for the observer during the dance performance. From this, it is instinctively evident that the combination of physical movement and rhythm has a powerful effect on both the dancer and the observer.

There are numerous positive effects from dancing that are far reaching with clear implications to improved physical and emotional health. Many studies have revealed a strong connection between dance and stress reduction. The feel-good neurochemicals that are released during dance activity is sometimes referred to as nature's pain killers and mood enhancers. Dancing reduces stress hormones in the body as it creates a feeling of well-being. All of these benefits associated with dancing are natural.

Other aerobic activities also activate the brain's reward system; however, dancing does this in a very intense way. The desire to dance is deeply tied to our inherent need for personal expression and social connection. It is as though nature has intentionally provided us with a pleasurable means by which to help ensure survival, good health, happiness and balance