

## A new approach to relationship prevention: Introducing the Rebuild-Relationship Building Dance® method

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**Abstract:** High divorce rates worldwide require strengthening and maintaining the quality of relationships and marriages, but it is still a problem in therapy that partners in crisis begin to seek professional help too late, so it is important to draw attention to the potentials of prevention. The marriage and relationship-building programs developed for this purpose, using classical methods, have been shown to have a number of benefits, but they have been widely criticized by researchers studying this topic: a new approach, the practical psychoeducation method called Rebuild-Relationship Building Dance®, which uses ballroom dancing as a tool to strengthen relationships, can be an answer to most of the criticism. The aim of the present research is to examine the effectiveness of the method using quantitative methods. The two-year survey involved partners preparing for their wedding. The study group ( $N = 64$ ) completed a test battery measuring several variables of the relationship (BFI, RAS, DCI, FACES IV/communication, PSI, RSES, PAIR) three times and the control group ( $N = 38$ ) twice. Statistical analysis confirmed the beneficial effects of the Rebuild® method on relationships in terms of self-esteem, relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict management, intimacy, sexuality, and caring for the partner, while there was no change between the results of the tests administered at two different time points without relationship intervention; moreover, deterioration in several variables (sexuality, communication, relationship satisfaction) was seen during the 8 months observed. In light of the results, the method offers a new, practical alternative in relationship prevention and can be complementary to classical therapeutic methods.

**Keywords:** relationship, marriage, ballroom dancing, prevention, strengthening relationships

## Nov pristop k preventivi v odnosih: Predstavitev metode Rebuild-Relationship Building Dance®

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**Povzetek:** Visok delež ločitev po vsem svetu opozarja na potrebo po krepitevi in ohranjanju kakovosti partnerskih odnosov in zakonskih zvez, vendar v terapiji težavo pogosto povzroča to, da partnerja pomoč ob težavah pričneta iskati prepozno. Zato je pomembno pozornosti posvetiti tudi možnostim preventivnega dela v odnosih. Programi, namenjeni gradnji odnosa, ki so bili razviti v preventivne namene, imajo številne prednosti, a so jih raziskovalci pogosto kritizirali. Odgovor na kritike bi lahko bil tudi novo razvit pristop za praktično psihoedukacijo Rebuild-Relationship Building Dance®, ki za krepitev odnosov uporablja dvoranski ples. Cilj študije je raziskati učinkovitost metode s kvantitativnim pristopom. Dve leti trajajoča študija je vključevala partnerje, ki so se pripravljali na sklenitev zakonske zveze. Raziskovalna skupina ( $N = 64$ ) je trikrat izpolnila sklop vprašalnikov o kakovosti partnerske zveze (BFI, RAS, DCI, FACES IV/komunikacija, PSI, RSES, PAIR), kontrolna skupina ( $N = 38$ ) pa je te vprašalnike izpolnila dvakrat. Statistične analize so podprle pozitivne učinke metode na partnerske zveze na področjih samozavesti, zadovoljstva z odnosom, komunikacije, soočanja s konflikti, intimnosti, spolnosti in skrbi za partnerja. Med rezultati testov kontrolne skupine v obeh časovnih točkah ni bilo (pozitivne) razlike, v osmih mesecih pa je bilo moč opaziti celo poslabšanje pri nekaterih spremenljivkah (spolnost, komunikacija, zadovoljstvo z odnosom). Rezultati kažejo, da metoda predstavlja novo in praktično alternativo za preventivno dejavnost v partnerskih zvezah, ki lahko dopolnjuje klasične terapevtske metode.

**Ključne besede:** partnerska zveza, zakonska zveza, dvoranski ples, preventiva, krepitev odnosov

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## Background

In the United States, 50% of first marriages, 67% of second marriages and 73% of third marriages break up, while according to 2015 data, the proportion of first marriage divorces in Europe is around 45% (»Divorce Statistics«, 2012; Eurostat, 2015). All this adds to the fact that relationship coaching and therapy still have pejorative overtones, which prevents many people from seeking professional help in time when they are in crisis. Consumer attitude has also infiltrated our human relationships, so it is important to emphasize that relationship problems can be solved and even prevented (Hawkins et al., 2004). Pre-marriage training courses can reduce the risk of divorce by up to 30% (Stanley et al., 2006), and a preventive-educational approach to training can help improve the quality and long-term stability of relationships.

Our current scientific knowledge of relationships and marriage, their course of change and development come from cross-sectional and longitudinal research, as well as observational studies, which have revealed a number of minor or major problems related to marriage-enrichment and marriage preparation programs by focusing on various aspects. The following criticisms have been made over the past 30 years (Bradbury & Lavner, 2012; Gottman, 1998; Halford & Bodenmann, 2013; Hawkins et al., 2004; Jakubowski et al., 2004; Olson et al., 2009):

- Couples who are most vulnerable in terms of the long-term outcome of their relationship (children of divorced parents, divorced people, those with low education, people struggling with financial difficulties or increased stress, people living with disabilities, or physical/mental illness or who were too young when they got married) would have the most need to learn the methods for strengthening their relationship, but they are the most difficult to access and engage in programs.
- Many programs ignore factors that strongly influence relationship variables such as stress, previous relationship experiences and personality.
- There are several programs that use the same approach, methods and tasks to try to help couples at different stages in their relationship (the focus should be different for a married couple, when the first child arrives, and for a middle-aged couple who are living in their “empty nest” again).
- Preventive and educational courses are often held under the same conditions using the same method for couple and family therapy, but a well-functioning couple needs something different than a couple in crisis, struggling with difficulties.
- Most training programs seek to convey information in the form of knowledge-based and classical frontal presentations, with very few practice-oriented methods.
- Lasting effects on relationships cannot be achieved without a deeper understanding of couples. After learning about the pure facts and completing the theoretical curriculum, the couple often does not know how to incorporate the principles acquired into their own life and how to change their established routines. Due to the number of participants and time constraints, group trainings are not

beneficial for putting into personal practice what has been acquired.

- There is still limited scientific information on what the real difference is between learning something on one’s own and learning together as a couple, on how to gain new skills easily together, although it would be important for the development of an effective methodology.
- Learning the theory of how relationships work does not mean that the partners can apply it right at the moment when the acquired knowledge is needed (possibly many years after the training). New behavioral mechanisms need to be practiced regularly and intensively so that they can become a skill in the couple’s life.
- The importance of motivation in strengthening relationships can be demonstrated: couples who make the most spectacular progress as a result of completing the programs are those who seek the opportunity for development themselves and not those who are required to participate.
- For individuals with a practical, experiential learning style, the teaching methods used in most programs (teacher-type frontal presentation, group discussion, role-play) are not effective.
- Even today, there are very few methods that are known to have undergone scientific impact assessment in accordance with EST (Empirically Supported Treatment), and therefore, it can be stated with absolute certainty that it has a positive effect on relationships. The criteria for EST are randomized clinical testing with a control group, development of detailed procedural guidelines for replicability, re-testing by a research team independent of the original author, and publication of the results in a peer-reviewed journal.
- Based on the results achieved so far, immediate and short-term positive effects of the program can be demonstrated, but there is much less evidence on long-term effects: right after end of the marriage counseling process, 75% of couples report on progress, but when they are retested later, only 30-50% of them show the same level of satisfaction. It would be necessary to carry out longitudinal studies spanning 5 to 10 years in a control group setting.
- The person of the program leader can also influence the success of information transfer: if a single person delivers the trainings, it proves to be less effective, as he or she is able to speak really authentically from the perspective of one gender only, in spite of his/her professional knowledge. Participants are more confident towards couples leading the training sessions, when the opinions of both genders can prevail equally. Hawkins et al. have found that men are more willing and responsive when tasks come from a male-female dyad.

## Previous areas of the application of dance

The use of different types of dance in many fields of therapy is not entirely new, and in recent decades, various dance and movement methods have been increasingly used. The first and still the most common form of interdisciplinary therapy is dance and movement therapy, which uses the body

as a means of treatment and movement, as a departure for exploring the unconscious. For healthy participants, the method is used primarily for stress management, personality development and acquiring self-knowledge, and for people with an illness, it is also successful in the rehabilitation of many different physical, mental and psychosomatic syndromes (Pratt, 2004). In addition, dance is very popular in children's school education, where it has demonstrated a positive effect on increasing attention to one another, developing respect and basic rules of etiquette and acquiring gender roles. It also improves self-confidence (Lobo & Winsler, 2006).

The third major area of application is rehabilitation, where dance has resulted in improvement in physical, emotional and social areas among patients with mental and chronic illnesses, and studies report on improved well-being, increased self-confidence and changes in the overall quality of life (Guzmán-García et al., 2012; Hackney & Earhart, 2010; Mangeri et al., 2014; Murrock & Graor, 2014; Shanahan et al., 2015). The last major group of research focuses on geriatric treatment, where dance sessions result in positive changes in both cognitive and motor functions. The participants say they become more confident in their movements and the impact of dance on social relations is a great experience for them (Kshtriya et al., 2015).

From a neurological view dance is a complex, multidimensional activity: the stimulation is auditory, visual and sensory at the same time through perception of music, movements and touch, it develops memory, motor learning, and the recognition and expression of emotions. (Alpert, 2011; Kattenstroth et al, 2011; Lima & Vieira, 2007; Quiroga et al., 2010). In addition, in couple dances it is crucial to tune in to the partner's intentions, without this moving together is impossible. So during dance there is a persistent *kinesthetic communication* between partners (Alexander & LeBaron, 2012).

Interestingly, however, the only research that links ballroom dance to marriage, although it is not representative, is a doctoral dissertation from South Africa (Hanke, 2007). Using qualitative data analysis, the author sought to answer the question whether there is any perceptible and measurable effect of ballroom dancing on marriage relationship according to the couples participating in the study. She conducted two interviews with three couples learning to dance, in which the participants typically reported on progress in four categories: communication, intimacy, conflict management, and "negotiation/investment/cooperation".

Against this background – lack of methods merging dance and its impact on strengthening the relationship, and the criticism against traditional marriage-enrichment programs raised by the research community – the various studies (Bradbury & Lavner, 2012; Gottman, 1998; Hawkins et al., 2004; Jakubowski et al., 2004; Olson et al., 2009) have revealed a gap that the Rebuild® method may be able to fill.

### Short introduction of the Rebuild–Relationship Building Dance® method

Rebuild – Relationship Building Dance® is a preventive, experience-based proprietary psychoeducational method that uses dance as a means of maintaining relationships'

quality. It combines classical marriage-enriching exercises and tasks for increasing self-knowledge and jointly acquired knowledge with competitive ballroom dance techniques and the couple's experience of learning to dance together, seeking to achieve long-term results in the couples' lives in addition to short-term positive changes that are noticeable during the traditional marriage-preparation and counseling programs.

As a preventive-educational method, its aim is to strengthen, enliven and deepen relationships; it is not designed primarily to save problematic relationships and marriages that are already on the brink of divorce. It is designed to give couples a tool through which they can recognize the strengths and growth areas of their relationship and get to know each other and themselves even better from a new perspective, through a new language. It helps to multiply the effect of resources identified and to find new ways and solutions through crises (experienced on a much smaller scale while learning to dance). In doing so, it strives to preserve and continuously develop relationships and to prevent relationship problems and crises. Thanks to its practice-oriented approach, the method is capable of focusing not only on solving an outstanding problem, but also on promoting long-term results that can be incorporated into the everyday routines of the couple.

In addition to being used in relationship counseling, marriage management and preparation for marriage, it can also help solve more serious relationship problems, working together with couple or family therapists, so it can be used as a complementary method in therapy.

The main approach of the fundamentally and mostly system-based method explores the patterns taken from the families of origin to create a couple and family structure map based on the Circumplex model (Olson, 2000) and highlights the importance of dynamic unity between the members of the couple. It exhibits a behavioral therapy effect in that it considers it important to learn the proper strategies for communication and conflict management, as well as to formulate and express emotions and needs towards the partner. On the other hand, its experience-centered approach can be considered humanistic, as it uses dance as its main tool rather than communication of frontal information and provides an opportunity for couples to explore their own solutions and learn through practical experience.

### The four pillars of the method

The method consists of 4 large methodological units, the mixture of which optimizes the learning process from the point of view dance and helps connect the experiences gained in the context of movement with various areas of the relationship.

The first major part is *learning to dance* itself, which results in tangible, widely applicable practical knowledge that appears to most couples as a new common hobby in everyday life: the couple learns to dance together. The benefits of learning movement can also be seen at an individual level, as dance is a regular anaerobic exercise: strengthening the skeletal system, improves posture and balance and has a beneficial effect on the cardiovascular system, coordination and spatial perception. Music has a positive effect on mood

and develops a sense of rhythm, while creative movement promotes the creation of new neural connections and develops implicit memory. Moving and laughing together, frequently touching each other stimulate the development of neurotransmitters and hormones responsible for a sense of happiness, satisfaction and attachment, and they have a beneficial effect on overcoming anxiety and stress by reducing the level of cortisol (Demers et al., 2015; Lesté & Rust, 1990; Quiroga et al., 2009). During learning to dance, the members of the couple can discover many new things about each other, themselves and their relationship. The most important areas of influence involved are: focusing on their relationship, intimacy, communication, conflict management, self-confidence, learning modes, patience and roles rather than on performance.

Second, the couples learn what is key to a dancing unit, the basics of *leading technique*. The leading technique is part of the professional knowledge of competitive ballroom dancers, which enables fast and accurate non-verbal communication between the dancers, and one of the prerequisite for this is proper and secure posture and the development of male leading and female following skills. The leading and following roles are not subordinate but equal; the two roles perfectly complement each other, and if the members of the couple are able to fully perform their own tasks, a dancing unit is created in which it is not two dancers moving separately but a couple moving in harmony. The leading technique exercises are also effective for the relationship: they facilitate an understanding of each other, bringing to light the difference between how men and women learn, and the tasks built on each other create more intimacy between the partners.

Then comes the use of a *dance booklet* as a third element. Both members of the couple use their own booklets during the whole learning process, in which all important technical details and each steps learned are described during the lessons, and the couples should be able to express their feelings and thoughts on certain topics in the form of guided tasks and share them later by reading them out. They are given technical instructions for taking notes on the dance steps, but in the end, they describe the movements in their own words – the point is that after reading their notes a few days later, they should be able to recreate the same movements that they correctly presented in the lesson, which could be used as home exercises as well. In addition, handwritten notes facilitate the formulation of individual thoughts, the development of fine-motor coordination and the role of learning in perceptual and sensorimotor pathways, making note-taking and learning more effective than using digital devices (notebook, mobile phone, tablet; Mueller & Oppenheimer, 2014; Péntek-Dózsa & Sélley, 2019).

The fourth pillar of the method consists of targeted exercises and tasks that link different *relationship topics* to what has been learned during the dance sessions and are designed to promote their development through classical psychoeducational techniques. In the lessons, we address issues of intimacy, communication, conflict management, personality, roles, self-esteem and automatic reactions brought from the family of origin, in addition to the tasks embedded in dance mentioned so far, through conversations

and homework. These parts mean approximately 15 minutes in every class related to the just acquired knowledge of the couple and use a wide variety of exercises from different psychoeducational schools (from Arthur Aron's 4 minutes of staring in each other's eyes to increasing intimacy, through Olson's Couple and Family Map about the family patterns, to the exercises of practicing communication as "I-statements" or active attention).

## The goal of the present study

In absence of relevant literature, the scientific impact assessment of the method is of paramount importance in order to support the impact of our work on relationships with quantitative, statistical results. Following Hanke's research (2007), we first compiled a non-validated, online qualitative questionnaire for our couples taught in previous years (55 respondents – 20 men, 35 women) in which we wanted to find out what they remembered from the dance learning sessions and in what areas they perceived any change in quality in themselves, their partner and their relationship.

Based on the qualitative responses collected here, we got an insight into which personality and relationship variables are worth examining with statistical analysis, including communication, intimacy, conflict management, self-confidence, concentration and harmony, empathy, male-female roles, common experiences and having fun.

At the same time, the method we used, is not entirely new in terms of the psychoeducational intervention for couples. Several studies found for instance that group training of transactional analysis can raise the social intimacy in couples by improving the relational skills. In one study, the experimental group received eight 90-minute training sessions of Transactional Analysis, and the intimacy was measured by a scale assessed the emotional closeness in form of affection, altruism and satisfaction (Nayeri et al., 2014). Similarly, Salamat (2005) showed that transactional analysis method resulted in decreasing the marital conflicts and increasing marital satisfaction. Using a group counseling based on acceptance and commitment approach on couple's marital adjustment, it was found a significant difference between the scores of post-test and pre-test of marital satisfaction (Ziapour et al., 2017). Knutson and Olson (2003) used a PREPARE program for couples receiving premarital counseling in community settings by professional, and they found a significant increase in couple satisfaction. We used similar experimental design in the impact assessment of the Rebuild® method to these former researches.

Yet, our method differs from these studies in several points. First, our private lessons clearly focus on the specific personal needs of the given couple, and after mastering the basics, we are making progress at a pace suitable for everybody in terms of both dancing and the relationship-building exercises. Thus, the personal attention to every couple is expected to make better result in the studied factors of relationships. Second, learning movements jointly by a couple offers a new area of study where techniques that can help bridge the often very significant gap between partners' learning styles, pace of learning and methods become

clear. Third, the participants receive information from the perspective of both sexes, since the Rebuild<sup>®</sup> sessions are led by a male and a female leader together in every case. Fourth, by learning to dance together, they gain experience in how to overcome unexpected obstacles together, how they can help each other, express their feelings and listen to their partners.

Therefore, we assume that couples might be able to maintain the positive changes generated by the method in their relationship in the long run.

## Method

### Participants

The study group of the two-year survey included those of our couples taught in private lessons (mean: 13.5 hours) who undertook to complete the test battery three times together with their partner, which was compiled for research data collection ( $N = 64$ , 32 couples,  $M_{\text{age}} = 29.29$  years,  $SD = 5.33$ ). The mean length of their relationship before the marriage was 4.94 years ( $SD = 2.69$ ) and 78.1% of them lived together already, 81.3% of them had a church wedding.

We did not meet the couples forming the control group in person. They were recruited in groups of social media sites interested in wedding topics, and some of them received the invitation online to participate in the scientific experiment using the snowball method. The couples included in the control group met the following criteria: they did not learn to dance together, nor did they participate in any relationship-building courses (courses for engaged couples, training, therapy) before marriage ( $N = 38$ , 19 couples,  $M_{\text{age}} = 30.18$  years,  $SD = 5.65$ ). The mean length of their relationship before the marriage was 4.62 years ( $SD = 3.33$ ) and 94.7% of them lived together already, 42.1% of them had a church wedding.

### Instruments

In addition to the introductory demographic questions, the test battery included the following validated and often used questionnaires focusing on the most important and commonly examined factors of the relationships:

**RAS** (Relationship Assessment Scale; Hendrick, 1988; Martos et al., 2014) – A validated brief test with 7 items designed to measure general relationship satisfaction using a 5-point Likert scale. In the Hungarian version (RAS-H), the original items are supplemented by an eighth question on sexuality. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of .84 for men and .90 for women, and test-retest stability ( $r = .90$ ) estimates are excellent.

**FACES IV/communication** (Family Adaptability and Cohesion Scale IV; Mirnic et al., 2010; Olson et al., 2004) – The 10 items included in the test reflecting the concept of the Circumplex Model provide feedback on the quality of communication in a couple on a 5-point Likert scale. ( $\alpha = .90$ , test-retest stability scores = .86.)

**DCI** (Dyadic Coping Inventory; Bodenmann, 2008; Martos et al., 2012) – The test comprises 37 items, which are used to evaluate the respondent's own reaction and his/her partner's reaction to stress on a 5-point scale. (Global Cronbach  $\alpha$ s  $\geq .82$ ).

**BFI-44** (The Big Five Inventory; John et al., 1991; Rózsa et al., 2006) – In the 44-question version of the best-known personality test, the respondents evaluate themselves on a 5-point Likert scale. The five basic traits measured by the test are Agreeableness, Extraversion, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness to Experience. Reliability on the five traits is between .84 and .90.

**PAIR-H** (Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationships; Kövér et al., 2017; Schaefer & Olson, 1981) – The Hungarian version of this questionnaire, which originally has 36 items, consists of 25 questions, which measures the intimacy of two large dimensions experienced in a relationship (“understanding, support” and “shared experiences”) on a 5-point Likert scale. Cronbach  $\alpha$ s are between .70 and .77 in the subscales.

**PSI** (Partner-Specific Investment Inventory; Ellis, 1998; in manuscript in Hungarian) – An evolutionary psychological, multidimensional questionnaire designed to measure the different types of manifestations of energy, mental and physical resources invested in a relationship. The 52 questions of the test are divided into 10 factors: Expressive/Nurturing, Future-Oriented, Giving of Time, Sexually Proceptive, Monetarily Investing, Honest, Physically Protective, Socially Attentive, Good Relationship with Partner's Family, and Not Sexualizing of Others. The reliability coefficients are .78 for men and .75 for women.

**RSES** (Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale; Rosenberg, 1965; Sallay et al., 2014) – A brief test used for decades in various disciplines to assess the positive and negative aspects of general self-esteem with 10 questions, using a 4-point Likert scale. (Cronbach  $\alpha = .87$ , test-retest reliability = .91).

### Procedure

The participants completed the test battery three times: before the start of their first dance class (about 2-3 months before their wedding), at the end of their last dance class and 6 months after their wedding. The first two surveys were conducted using the paper-and-pencil method, and for the third time, the questionnaire was completed online.

The attendants of the control group filled out the test package two times: also 2-3 months before their wedding and 6 months after it (because there was no external intervention in the relationships during this period). The questionnaire was completed online both times in this group.

Statistical analysis was performed using the GraphPad Prism 8.4.2 software, and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to compare the data of the study group at three time points, if the distribution of values allowed it, and Friedman's test as a non-parametric test for non-normally distributed data. Paired  $t$ -tests were suitable for establishing the changes between the two data lines of the control group, while independent sample  $t$ -tests or the Mann-Whitney test was used for comparison with the data of the study group collected at the same time point. A significant difference was accepted at the  $p < .05$  level.

## Results

*Self-assessment* – Using one-way analysis of variance, we found a significant increase in the values of the study group, and the self-assessment score of the participants was the highest at the end of the dance learning period and remained almost the same after half a year (see Table 1 for mean scores across the factors). The control group, however, showed no significant difference in self-assessment in the paired *t*-test as time progressed ( $p > .05$ ).

*Relationship Satisfaction* – There was a significant difference between the two groups at baseline (Mann-Whitney  $U = 326.5$ ,  $p = .031$ ); the control group rated their relationship as better at the time of the first test. However, at the last time point, their satisfaction decreased numerically (it was significant for the male-only paired *t*-test,  $p = .046$ ) in contrast to the study group, where the data showed a significant positive change and there was greater improvement between the dates of administering the second and the third test.

*Communication* – There was a numerical decrease in communication in the control group ( $p > .05$ ), but in the study group, analysis of variance showed a strongly significant stepwise improvement.

*Conflict Management* – There was a steady increase in the study group, with a larger difference between the first two test dates. The distribution of data in the control group justified the use of the Wilcoxon test and there was no significant change between the values recorded at the two time points ( $p > .05$ ).

*Intimacy* – The data of the “shared experiences” dimension of the PAIR-H questionnaire did not correspond to normal distribution in the study group, so we performed a Friedman test, which showed a significant and continuous increase in the results of the three tests. In contrast, there was no change in the control group at all, and the average of the data recorded before the wedding and half a year after

marriage was the same. There was also a significant change in the *understanding-support* factor based on ANOVA in the dancer group, while there was no significant difference in the data of the control group members between the two test dates, although their mean values decreased slightly at half a year after the wedding ( $p > .05$ ).

*Investing in the relationship* – In the *sexuality* variable of investing in relationship, the results of the control group in a paired *t*-test showed a significant decrease after the wedding compared to the period of engagement. In the study group, couples who did not make love at all before marriage (8 couples) were excluded from the analysis due to their biasing effect (hence  $n = 56$ ). Here, there was a numerical increase in values, although the change was not significant. In the *care/mental nutrition* factor, the control group showed no change between the dates of the two tests ( $p > .05$ ); in contrast, the members of the study group showed an increase in conscious care and attention to the other partner: the results of the test taken immediately after learning to dance were the highest, but the value were still better half a year after the wedding than it was initially.

## Discussion

As the quantitative results corroborate, the effect of Rebuild-Relationship Building Dance® on relationships can be demonstrated in a number of variables by statistical analysis, so we could confirm our research hypothesis: We were able to establish that the study group learning with the Rebuild® method developed self-esteem, increased relationship satisfaction, and improved communication and conflict management during the dance-learning period. There was a positive change in both measured dimensions of intimacy, sexuality and care for the partner, while in the control group, there was no difference between the data collected at the two time points. In fact, the values deteriorated in several variables

**Table 1**  
Summary of results in 8 examined factors in study and control groups

Factors	Study group								Control group					
	Test 1		Test 2		Test 3		$F/\chi^2$	$p$	Test 1		Test 2		$t$	$p$
	$M$	$SD$	$M$	$SD$	$M$	$SD$			$M$	$SD$	$M$	$SD$		
RSES Self-assessment	33.27	4.44	34.64	3.87	34.50	4.29	6.31	.004	30.45	6.19	30.97	6.33	0.89	.374
DCI Conflict management	149.18	13.49	155.18	13.47	155.58	14.18	8.77	< .001	155.79	15.88	154.33	20.82	0.74	.468
FACES IV	43.28	2.46	43.85	2.28	44.58	2.50	6.47	.003	44.08	2.87	43.17	5.54	0.78	.442
Communication														
RAS Relationship satisfaction	36.35	2.84	26.65	2.91	37.85	2.11	5.98	.004	37.92	1.99	37.49	2.24	0.75	.463
PAIR Understanding/support	40.03	3.74	40.89	3.50	41.14	3.51	3.95	.024	40.08	3.78	39.42	5.64	0.84	.407
PAIR Shared experiences	27.94	6.17	28.48	6.12	30.42	4.01	6.62 <sup>a</sup>	.037	30.05	3.62	30.05	4.78	0.00	.999
PSI Sexuality	21.61	3.93	21.73	4.48	22.23	3.55	0.92	.391	23.92	2.35	22.50	3.35	2.46	.019
PSI Care/mental nutrition	47.69	4.58	48.55	4.23	48.13	4.95	5.75 <sup>a</sup>	.056	48.55	4.35	48.05	6.25	0.65	.519

Notes. The numbers and results of the different tests are not comparable with each other because of the different scales.

<sup>a</sup>  $\chi^2$  test was used, otherwise *F*-test was used.

(sexuality, communication, relationship satisfaction) over the 8 months observed. All this demonstrates that a marriage in fact deteriorates over time without trying to preserve and invest into the relationship (Hawkins et al., 2004).

The fact that the results in the study group not only stagnated in several areas at the third test date, but there was a further increase in values after six months, supports the assumption that the practical approach of the Rebuild® method allows couples to effectively incorporate their newly gained experience and behavioral patterns into their everyday life, ensuring that development does not stop at the end of the dance-learning period, but the results achieved are sustained in the long run. That is an important finding in the light of the results of previous, mainly knowledge-based programs where the theory usually can not be applied in practice by the partners later in life: usually after the end of the counseling period the results of the studied factors deteriorated significantly.

We can also state that Rebuild® method, as opposed to classical relationship-enriching programs with frontal presentations and group discussions, offer a joyful and interactive way of development, furthermore, because of its multimodal approach, the program is suitable for participants with every learning style.

Of course, our research also has serious limitations: due to the small number in the sample, the validity of the study results cannot be extended for the time being, so we have good reason to continue our research even at international level. After subdividing the groups in the study, a meaningful statistical analysis was no longer possible due to the low number of participants, although this would allow us to make useful comparisons for several variables (e.g. between sociodemographic groups or by personality traits), so the sample size should be increased with further data collection. The long-term persistence of the changes brought about by learning to dance with the Rebuild® method could be conclusively confirmed by longitudinal studies: the data should be re-examined over a period of 3 to 5 or 10 years. In addition to the control group, which did not participate in any relationship intervention programs, it would be important to create a group with members who regularly attend dance classes, but they encounter dance only as a form of movement, without the extra content of leading technique and relationship building. Alternatively, the results should be compared with marriage-enrichment programs that use classical methods and primarily transfer theoretical knowledge.

## Conclusion

Dance makes a spectacular impact on relationships, but the topic has very few scientific literature yet. In our present survey we wanted to introduce the Rebuild® – Relationship Building Dance method and make a first impact assessment of it by statistical analysis of the beneficial effects on most important factors of relationships (self-esteem, relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict management, intimacy, sexuality, and caring for the partner).

According to the first results we can declare that this new, practical approach means a novel language in enrichment of relationships, preparation for marriage and offer an alternative in prevention, which is incredibly important in the

light of today's high divorce rates. In the immediate future, working together with couple or family therapists, Rebuild® can be used as a complementary method in therapy, to help solving serious relationship problems also.

In addition, we consider it important to make the Rebuild® method widely known to the professional community and the general public, as dance has the advantage of being universal: different dancing styles will be preferred for different occasions in different parts of the world, but dance can be used globally. Therefore, we are planning to launch an international teacher-training program in the near future and the research continues with the collection of first longitudinal data with the same couples after 3 years of marriage.

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