

THEORY OF UPBRINGING: PHYSICAL SELF-EDUCATION IN LATE MATURITY THROUGH ANIMATIVE APPROACH IN ANDRAGOGICAL PRACTICE

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Abstract: The transition to retirement is often accompanied by a gradual decline in physical activity and an increasing tendency towards sedentary living. For many women in late adulthood, movement has not become a stable personal value during earlier stages of life, which may contribute to heightened anxiety, reduced self-confidence, and lower levels of social participation. Within this context, physical self education assumes particular importance as a process through which individuals consciously take responsibility for maintaining an active lifestyle. The article explores the possibilities for fostering physical self education in late adulthood through an animative approach grounded in the Theory of Upbringing and the principles of andragogy. An authorial model was developed and implemented among women in late adulthood, employing group dance activities, music, movement, and social interaction as educational means for encouraging participation and strengthening motivation for physical activity. The empirical study involved 48 women divided into an experimental group and a control group. Anxiety levels were assessed using the State Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI). Following participation in the animative programme, the experimental group demonstrated a reduction in both state anxiety and trait anxiety. The findings indicate that regular engagement in animative physical activities contributes to the development of a more favourable attitude towards movement and encourages greater personal commitment to maintaining physical activity. The contribution of the study is associated with the interpretation of the animative approach as an educational mechanism through which insufficient physical activity and elevated anxiety may become a starting point for the development of physical self education in late adulthood. The results highlight the potential of animative practices to support active ageing and to strengthen the relationship between the Theory of Upbringing, andragogy, and physical self education.

Keywords: *Physical self-education; Late adulthood; Animate approach; Andragogy; Active ageing; Physical activity; Anxiety; Theory of upbringing; Theory of education; Adult education.*

Field: Social Sciences (Pedagogy)

1. INTRODUCTION

Later adulthood presents individuals with a range of challenges associated with maintaining vitality and sustaining active participation in social life. In practice, it is increasingly observed that many women gradually reduce their levels of physical activity after retirement, replacing a dynamic daily routine with a more sedentary way of life. Such a change rarely occurs suddenly. It is usually the result of long established habits, a lack of motivation to engage in physical activity, or the absence of an environment that encourages movement. For a considerable number of women, physical exercise has not developed into a stable personal need during the earlier stages of life. Consequently, in late adulthood, physical activity is often perceived as an additional effort rather than a natural component of everyday living. This contributes to a reduction in physical activity and a gradual decline in confidence in one's own capabilities. It is precisely at this point that the significance of andragogical approaches aimed at fostering a conscious attitude towards personal health and developing a lasting motivation for physical self education becomes apparent. From the perspective of the Theory of Upbringing, such a situation may be viewed as a need for physical self education. Self education represents a conscious and purposeful activity undertaken by the individual and directed towards personal improvement (Chavdarova-Kostova, S., Delibaltova, V., Gospodinov, B, 2018). Unlike upbringing in childhood, where the educator assumes the leading role, in adulthood the driving force becomes the individual's internal need for change. For this reason, physical self education cannot be imposed from external sources. It emerges when individuals recognise the necessity of maintaining physical activity and voluntarily undertake actions directed towards achieving this objective. According to Malcolm Knowles and his colleagues, adult learners are characterised by a strong need to understand the reasons for their participation in a given activity and to recognise its immediate practical value (Knowles, M., Holton III, E., et. al, 2020). This characteristic is of particular importance when working with women in late adulthood. They are rarely motivated by external pressure

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or obligation. More often, their participation is driven by a desire to improve their health, broaden their social relationships, or overcome feelings of loneliness. Within this context, the animative approach offers considerable pedagogical potential. Its essence extends beyond the organisation of enjoyable activities. Its primary function is to create conditions for voluntary participation, emotional engagement, and active interaction among participants (Dimitrova, 2017). When working with older adults, the animative approach becomes a means of overcoming the psychological barriers that often hinder participation in physical activities. Group dance sessions incorporating colourful veils and musical accompaniment provide a particularly illustrative example. At first glance, such activities may be perceived merely as a form of entertainment. A more in depth pedagogical analysis, however, reveals considerably more complex mechanisms. Through dance, participants engage in movements that enhance coordination, balance, and physical confidence. At the same time, music and artistic elements reduce the perception of physical exertion and transform movement into a positive experience (Taylor, 2021).

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

A significant advantage of the animative approach lies in its capacity to eliminate the fear of failure. Many women in late adulthood refrain from participating in physical activities because of concerns that they may not perform successfully or that they may be judged by others. Within an animative environment, such fears gradually diminish. Attention is directed towards the experience itself and the satisfaction derived from shared participation. In this way, favourable conditions are created for the development of a positive attitude towards physical activity. From an andragogical perspective, this process is of considerable importance. According to Peter Jarvis, learning in adulthood is inseparably connected with an individual's life experience (Jarvis, 2024). Adults learn through reflecting upon their own experiences and integrating them into everyday practice. For this reason, regular participation in animative physical activities may gradually lead to the development of new patterns of behaviour. Over time, physical activity ceases to be merely a component of organised sessions and begins to acquire the status of a personal value. It is at this point that the relationship between physical education and physical self education becomes evident. Whereas physical education provides external pedagogical support, physical self education presupposes personal initiative and independent engagement. Effective andragogical practice should gradually shift the centre of gravity from external organisation towards the participants' internal motivation. The success of such practice becomes evident when physical activity develops into a sustainable part of participants' daily lives and continues to be maintained beyond organised sessions (Shephard, 2024). The social aspect of animative activities is of particular importance. Research conducted by John Rowe and Robert Kahn on successful ageing indicates that maintaining social contacts has a significant impact on quality of life in old age (Rowe, J., Kahn, R, 1999). Group dance sessions create opportunities for communication, mutual support, and the development of a sense of belonging. In this way, physical activity fulfils a social and educational function (Godwin, 2026). From an andragogical perspective, a model may be proposed based on four interrelated components: awareness of the need for physical activity, emotional involvement through animative activities, the formation of sustainable physical activity habits, and the development of physical self education. Each of these components prepares the ground for the next and creates conditions for the gradual development of personal responsibility for one's own health and well being. Such a model may possess the potential to be regarded as a valuable andragogical practice, as it combines the principles of the Theory of Upbringing, physical education, and adult education. Its value lies not so much in the specific dance activities themselves as in its capacity to transform movement from an externally organised activity into an internal personal need. It is precisely within this transition from participation to self directed engagement that the genuine educational potential of the animative approach in work with women in late adulthood may be identified. Dr Avi Abner's authorial model is founded upon the understanding that physical self education in late adulthood represents a process of compensating for insufficiently developed attitudes towards physical activity during earlier stages of life. For a substantial proportion of women of retirement age, physical activity has not been perceived as a lasting personal value, but rather as an activity of a temporary nature. This circumstance presents andragogical practice with a task that differs substantially from the objectives of traditional physical education. During childhood and adolescence, physical education is directed towards the formation of knowledge, skills, habits, and attitudes related to physical activity. In late adulthood, such a task can no longer be accomplished in the same manner. Individuals possess established patterns of behaviour, extensive life experience, and clearly formed perceptions of their own capabilities. For this reason, educational influence should be directed not towards the acquisition of new physical skills, but towards a reconsideration of attitudes towards physical activity as a vital necessity. The essence of the proposed model is based upon transforming externally

organised physical activity into an internally motivated personal need. It is precisely at this point that the animative approach becomes a means of restoring the interrupted connection between the individual and their own physical culture. Through music, rhythm, movement, and collective participation, physical activity ceases to be perceived as an obligation. It begins to be experienced as a source of satisfaction, belonging, and personal fulfilment. This transformation in experience represents the key moment within the educational process. Whereas the traditional approach seeks to motivate individuals to engage in physical activity, the animative approach creates conditions in which individuals themselves develop a desire for movement. In this way, physical self education becomes an indicator of successfully realised educational influence in late adulthood. Its manifestation may be observed in everyday actions such as the purposeful pursuit of physical activity, participation in new forms of exercise, and a commitment to maintaining an active lifestyle without the need for external supervision. The scientific contribution of the model does not lie in the use of dance as a form of movement. Such practices are well established within the field of physical education. The novel aspect emerges from the interpretation of the animative approach as an educational mechanism for compensating for deficiencies in physical culture and for fostering physical self education among women in late adulthood. In this respect, the model offers an opportunity for a new understanding of the relationship between the Theory of Upbringing, andragogy, and active ageing.

Figure 1. Model of physical self education in late adulthood through an animative approach



Source: Created by Dr. Avi Abner using Canva. All rights reserved.

3. RESULTS

Within the initial assessment, the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI), developed by Charles Spielberger and adapted for the Bulgarian context by D. Shtetinski and P. Paspalanov, was administered. The instrument comprises two independent scales. The first scale (STAI Y1) measures state anxiety and assesses how participants feel at the specific moment of testing. The second scale (STAI Y2) measures trait anxiety as a relatively stable personality characteristic. Each scale consists of 20 items, resulting in a total of 40 questions completed by each participant across the two sections of the instrument.

Figure 2. Process of collecting empirical data within the study



Source: Photographic material from the conducted study.

A total of 48 women in late adulthood participated in the study and were allocated to two groups. The experimental group consisted of 24 participants who took part in systematic animative dance activities. The control group also comprised 24 women from the same age category. Some of them were active readers at the Regional Library "Peyo Yavorov", Burgas city, and regularly attended cultural and educational initiatives organised by the library. During the study period, they did not participate in organised physical activities and were therefore included in the control group. This made it possible to compare participants involved in the animative programme with women of similar age characteristics who maintained their usual lifestyle.

Table 1. Results for state anxiety measured by STAI Y1

Group	N	Initial assessment M	SD	Final assessment M	SD	Mean reduction
Control group	24	46.54	2.8	45.88	2.71	0.66
Experimental group	24	46.58	3.28	34.83	2.41	11.75

Source: Empirical data processed by the author.

At the initial assessment, the control group recorded a mean STAI Y1 score of $M = 46.54$, with $SD = 2.80$. The experimental group recorded a nearly identical mean score of $M = 46.58$, with $SD = 3.28$. The difference between the two groups was only 0.04 points and was not statistically significant, $p = 0.964$. Thus, the groups started from comparable levels of state anxiety. At the final assessment, the mean score of the control group was $M = 45.88$, with $SD = 2.71$. The reduction in this group was 0.66 points. In the experimental group, the mean score decreased to $M = 34.83$, with $SD = 2.41$. The reduction amounted to 11.75 points. The difference between the two groups at the final assessment was 11.05 points and was statistically significant, $p < 0.001$. The comparison of the changes observed in the two groups also showed a statistically significant difference, $p < 0.001$.

Table 2. Results for trait anxiety measured by STAI Y2

Group	N	Initial assessment M	SD	Final assessment M	SD	Mean reduction
Control group	24	47.88	3.01	47.21	2.93	0.67
Experimental group	24	47.71	3.13	38	2.59	9.71

Source: Empirical data processed by the author.

At the initial assessment, the control group recorded a mean STAI Y2 score of $M = 47.88$, with $SD = 3.01$. The experimental group recorded $M = 47.71$, with $SD = 3.13$. The difference of 0.17 points was not statistically significant, $p = 0.849$. The two groups were therefore comparable in terms of trait anxiety before the beginning of the animative activities. At the final assessment, the mean score of the control group was $M = 47.21$, with $SD = 2.93$. This represents a reduction of 0.67 points. In the experimental group, the mean score decreased to $M = 38.00$, with $SD = 2.59$. The reduction in this group was 9.71 points. At the final assessment, the experimental group recorded a mean STAI Y2 score that was 9.21 points lower than the result of the control group. The difference was statistically significant, $p < 0.001$. A statistically significant difference was also found between the changes recorded in the two groups, $p < 0.001$.

Table 3. Comparison of changes in the control and experimental groups

Indicator	Reduction in the control group	Reduction in the experimental group	Difference in change	Statistical significance
State anxiety, STAI Y1	0.66	11.75	11.09	$p < 0.001$
Trait anxiety, STAI Y2	0.67	9.71	9.04	$p < 0.001$

Source: Empirical data processed by the author.

Table 3 presents the differences between the changes recorded in the control and experimental groups. For state anxiety, the control group showed a reduction of 0.66 points, whereas the reduction in the experimental group was 11.75 points. The difference between the changes in the two groups was 11.09 points. For trait anxiety, the control group recorded a reduction of 0.67 points, while the experimental group showed a reduction of 9.71 points. The difference between the changes was 9.04 points. For both STAI Y1 and STAI Y2, the differences between the changes recorded in the two groups were statistically significant, $p < 0.001$.

4. DISCUSSION

The initial assessment established comparable levels of state anxiety and trait anxiety in the control and experimental groups. This similarity provided an appropriate basis for examining the changes recorded during the study. The absence of statistically significant differences at the initial assessment indicates that the subsequent differences cannot be attributed to unequal starting levels of anxiety. The results of the control group remained relatively stable. State anxiety decreased by 0.66 points, while trait anxiety decreased by 0.67 points. Although a slight change was recorded, the final mean scores remained close to the initial values. A different tendency was observed in the experimental group. The mean STAI Y1 score decreased from 46.58 to 34.83 points. The reduction of 11.75 points represents 25.23% of

the initial result. The mean STAI Y2 score decreased from 47.71 to 38.00 points. The reduction of 9.71 points corresponds to 20.35% of the initial result. The more pronounced change was recorded in state anxiety. This result may be explained by the fact that state anxiety reflects the participant's emotional condition at the time of assessment and is therefore more sensitive to experiences involving movement, music, communication and shared participation. Trait anxiety represents a more stable personal characteristic, which may account for its comparatively smaller, although still substantial, reduction. The comparison between the two groups gives particular importance to these findings. While the results of the control group changed only slightly, a considerable reduction in both forms of anxiety was recorded in the experimental group. The statistical significance of the differences, $p < 0.001$, provides grounds for associating the observed change with participation in the animative physical activities. The results should also be interpreted from an andragogical perspective. The animative activities created an environment in which movement was connected with music, communication and a shared emotional experience. These activities also included elements of psychosocial support. According to Dilyana Milkova, psychosocial support is aimed at preserving mental health and helping people cope with difficult life situations (Milkova, 2026). This is important in work with adults whose established habits and previous experience influence their attitude towards physical activity. The reduction in anxiety does not by itself constitute a direct measurement of physical self education. Nevertheless, it establishes an important condition for its development. When movement is associated with satisfaction, emotional security and social participation, the individual may gradually develop a more favourable attitude towards maintaining physical activity. In this sense, the animative approach can be considered an educational means through which externally organised participation may support the emergence of personal responsibility for an active way of life.

Figure 3. Animative model for promoting physical activity in late adulthood



Source: Author's photographs from the conducted pedagogical study.

The model was implemented through group based physical activities of an animative nature, designed in accordance with the age related characteristics and physical capabilities of the participants. Throughout the programme, the women engaged in animative dance sessions, exercises accompanied by music, and activities intended to encourage communication and mutual support. Particular attention was devoted to creating a positive emotional environment in which movement could be experienced as a source of satisfaction. Following the completion of the programme, a repeated assessment was conducted in order to determine whether participation in the animative activities had resulted in changes in anxiety levels and in readiness for physical self education. The elevated levels of anxiety identified during the initial assessment highlighted the need for the implementation of the authorial model of physical self education in late adulthood through an animative approach. At the core of the model lies the aspiration for participants to develop an awareness of the significance of physical activity for their own health and quality of life. The animative activities created conditions that enabled the women to gain experience, overcome concerns associated with physical exertion, and gradually develop a more favourable attitude towards movement. As a result, physical activity began to be perceived as a personal need. It is within this transformation that the process of physical self education may be identified. The participants came to understand that maintaining physical activity depends primarily upon their own decisions and efforts. As a result, a more sustainable readiness to maintain an active lifestyle was developed, while the reduction in anxiety emerged as a natural consequence of physical activity and positive emotional experiences. The obtained findings support the understanding advanced by Malcolm Knowles and his colleagues that adult learners change their behaviour when they recognise the practical significance of a particular activity (Knowles, M., Holton III, E., et. al, 2020). In the present study, movement was perceived as a source of positive experiences and social interaction. It was precisely this perception that created the conditions for

the gradual development of physical self education.

5. CONCLUSION

The study examined the possibilities for applying an animative approach to physical self education among women in late adulthood. The comparison between the control and experimental groups made it possible to assess the changes in anxiety associated with participation in systematic animative physical activities. At the beginning of the study, the control and experimental groups had comparable levels of state anxiety and trait anxiety. At the final assessment, the results of the control group remained close to their initial values. In the experimental group, state anxiety decreased by 11.75 points, while trait anxiety decreased by 9.71 points. The differences between the two groups were statistically significant, $p < 0.001$. The empirical results establish a reduction in anxiety following participation in the animative activities. They do not directly measure the complete development of physical self education. Their pedagogical significance lies in showing that movement, when organised through music, communication and shared participation, can create favourable conditions for reconsidering one's attitude towards physical activity. The proposed model presents physical self education in late adulthood as a gradual transition from organised participation towards personal responsibility for maintaining an active way of life. This understanding corresponds with contemporary views concerning the importance of physical activity for preserving health, independence and quality of life in later adulthood (Attia, P., Gifford, B, 2023). Through the animative approach, movement acquires an emotional and social meaning and is no longer experienced solely as a physical obligation. The reduction in anxiety recorded in the experimental group provides grounds for considering the animative approach as a valuable element of andragogical practice. Its importance lies in connecting physical activity with positive experience, voluntary participation and social interaction. Sustained participation in physical activity is also regarded as an important condition for well being and continued social involvement in later adulthood (Olival, D., Fernandes, H, 2025). In this context, physical self education may be understood as the outcome of an educational process in which movement gradually develops into a recognised personal need. As individuals assume greater responsibility for maintaining their physical activity, movement can become an enduring part of everyday life. The value of the proposed model lies in creating the educational conditions necessary for this transition.

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