

MEN AND WOMEN LIKE TO DANCE...

Maria Aleksandrovich, Pomeranian University Slupsk

Motor activities in sport and dance are usually consistent with masculine and feminine stereotypes. According to Clifton & Gill (1994) most boys tend to like team sports more than girls who prefer creative and rhythm activities. Today the public performance of dance is regarded as a feminine activity, so that men who dance often operate in a sea of stereotypes (Fisher & Shay, 2009). In the presentation will be discussed the issue of gender stereotypes in the history of classical dance and the gender differences in personality traits of modern ballet dancers.

Keywords: Ballet; Personality traits; Gender differences.

1. Introduction

Motor activities in sport and dance are usually consistent with masculine and feminine stereotypes. According to Clifton & Gill (1994) most boys tend to like team sports more than girls who prefer creative and rhythm activities. Today the public performance of dance is regarded as a feminine activity, so that men who dance often operate in a sea of stereotypes (Fisher & Shay 2009). In recent years, scientists studied a lot the question about how to make young people physically active, but in the society the stereotype of “appropriate” physical activity for a particular gender still exists. Nowadays boys and girls very quickly learn that they are different and that it is better for them to develop toward the activities “appropriate” for their gender. Parents want young people to be more physically active, but when boy wants to do ballet often it is to hear: “*boys do not dance*” or “*ballet is not a business for a real man*”, as well as when girl starts to be interested in football it comes: “*a girl has nothing to do on the foot ball field*”. So the common stereotypes ruined the idea of individual interests’ and physical activities’ development.

Conducting research with ballet dancers I faced stereotype thinking. I often hear from the dancers: “...*oh, again you will ask us about our sexual orientation and problems with eating...*”. Indeed, in the field of psychology and medicine most of the researches are concentrated on the study of development of body and body image of ballet dancers, their professional illnesses, eating disorders and gender differences (Bakker 1988, Hanna 1988, Burt 2001 and 2007, Gard 2006, Ravalidi, Vannacci, Bolognesi, Mancini, Faravelli & Ricca 2006 etc.). Being interesting in personality traits of ballet dancers and their career development I decided to discuss the issue of gender stereotypes in the history of classical dance and scientific study of gender differences in personality traits as well as to answer to the main research question what are the differences in the personality traits of modern *danseur* and *danseuse*?

2. Gender role of the dancers in the history of ballet

The roots of the gender roles’ stereotypes and prejudice about *danseur* we can find in the history of ballet. In the history line of this art it is possible to see ballet as a masculine art, which is changing into a feminine romantic art and feminine occupation, and nowadays turning into a creative form of dance that is choreographed using steps, body movements and gestures. As famous Russian ballet dancer, Maya Plisetskaya said: “*It turned into a wonderful drama through a sculptural language. Sculpture is the most expressive quality that each of us has, I am convinced that it was not the word that came first but gesture. A gesture is understood by everyone. A gesture can be like this or it can be one of despair, such a gesture, every gesture, it can be understood, you need nothing else, no words.*” (Maya Plisetskaya quotations, 2012).

2.1 Dance in the Renaissance period

Ballet was born in Europe in the XIV-XVIIth centuries during the Renaissance period in the early Court dances in France and Italy. The Court dances in the beginning of the XVth century became more detailed and complicated. The performances were a mixture of spoken word, music, dance and pantomime. Movements of the dancers were often limited by the size and decorations of the costumes. Many nobles wanted to be able to dance the right steps and proper bearing. That is why special dance instructors or “Ballet Masters”, the first dance makers or choreographers began to appear. It also became necessary to codify the dances and to create dancing manuals. One of the best-known dancing manuals of that time, the “*Orchesography*”, was published in 1589. It was written by Jehan Tabourot, under the pseudonym Thoinot Arbeau. In this book he described dances of the fifteenth and sixteenth century, and included drawings and musical excerpts of different dances. Among the qualifications of a good Renaissance dancer there were mentioned:

- rhythm,
- memory,
- use of space,
- lightness,
- coordination,
- the gift for expression (Dance kinds).

In 1661, King Louis XIV established the world’s first ballet school, the *Academie Royale de Danse*. Pierre Beauchamps, a Ballet Master at the school, developed the five basic foot positions of ballet. Famous composer of that time, Jean-Baptiste Lully, started what is today known as the *Paris Opera Ballet*. Lully not only began distinguishing professional dancers from courtiers, he also included women. Previously, ballet was almost exclusively performed by males (History of ballet, p. 4).

2.2 Dance in the XVIIIth century

French Revolution of 1789 brought a lot of changes into the habits and style of cultural life in Europe. Dancers followed the fashion. Women abandoned corsets for light and transparent Greek-inspired dresses, so dancers introduce these dresses and could perform a greater range of movement. Men’s costumes also reflected fashion and the tonnelet was replaced with a jacket and fitted breeches. Now that costumes had become freer, men and women could dance together. Dancers of that time wore flat slippers, which allowed greater flexibility in the foot, and women developed the trick of rising on tiptoe *on demi-pointe* (Origins of ballet <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/o/origins-of-ballet/>).

The eighteenth century was a period of advance in the technical standards of ballet and the period when ballet became a serious dramatic art form on par with the opera. French dancer and choreographer, Jean-Georges Noverre, was writing about art of ballet of that time so:

- ballet plots should all be logical and well constructed,
- choreographers, composers and designers should collaborate from the early stages of planning a work,
- masks should be removed in favour of facial expression,
- costumes needed to be pared down to show the dancers figure, choreographers should have a broad education, including painting, in order to learn to bring life to images (Origins of ballet).

Perhaps the most important late eighteenth-century dance’s technical manual was Gennaro Magri’s *Trattato teorico-prattico di ballo*, published in Naples in 1779. This book has been a significant link between the technique of Baroque dance and Romantic ballet. Although Magri’s manual included descriptions of steps from earlier in the century, it also described many new steps, such as four types of *battemens*, nine types of *pas de bourrée*, *balloté*, *fouette*, and *cabriole* (Dance Instruction Manuals).

By the end of the eighteenth century, the differentiation between theatrical and social dance was nearly complete. Professional dancers were performing increasingly complex steps while social dancers were concentrating on the growing genre of group dances (Dance Instruction Manuals).

2.3 Dance in the XIXth century

The Pre-Romantic period in dance began in the early 1800s. From that time comes most of dance vocabulary used today, as well as changes in the costumes and the origin of pointe work. The Italian dancer Marie Taglioni is considered to be the first ballerina to dance *en pointe*, balancing and moving on the ends of her toes as well as who shortened the skirt. Marie Taglioni, being synonymous with Romantic ballet, shaped an image of a Romantic dancer, who should show:

- outstanding mastery of technical difficulties,
- create an illusion of effortless grace,
- allow the dance role to be the focus of attention,
- gliding en pointe,
- outstanding pointe work by giving it a light, floating quality (Dance kinds).

2.4 Dance in the Romantic Period

The period from 1830-1870 is considered the Romantic Period of classical ballet. Romantic is now used to refer to a specific style of movement that was popular during that era. Ballets from this period utilize a very specific, soft line of the body and arms. The ballerina became the most popular dance performer in Europe in the first half of the 19th century, gradually turning the spotlight away from the male dancer. In many performances, ballet heroes were played by a woman (Origins of ballet <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/o/origins-of-ballet/>). As women's pointe work reached new levels, the Romantic period marked a shift in gender roles, as women stole the spotlight.

Indeed, the nineteenth century belonged to the ballerina and created the mystique of the ballerina. It is possible to find her weightless image on lithographs and paintings as an ethereal creature touched with the charm of another age. Even when romantic ballerina turned into the fast, leggy ballerina of modern times, her ideology survived. *“The nineteenth century also gave birth to one of the more curious phenomena of ballet history. Beginning with romanticism, a twenty-year golden age stretching from the July Revolution to about 1850, the danseuse en travesti usurped the position of the male danseur in the corps de ballet and as a partner to the ballerina. Stepping into roles previously filled by men, women now impersonated the sailor boys, hussars, and toreadors who made up “masculine” contingents of the corps de ballet, even as they displaced real men as romantic leads. Until well into the twentieth century, the female dancer who donned the mufti of a cavalier was a commonplace of European ballet.”* (Lynn 1985/86: 35).

2.5 Dance in the XXth century

Up until the XIXth century in Europe prejudices against the male dancer did not exist. By the end of the XXst century these have developed and changed in response to social and historical factors (Burt 2001).

In 1909 impresario Serge Diaghilev, brought together a coterie of designers, composers, choreographers and dancers to create ballet pieces, to create *the Ballets Russes* in Paris. This influential company had both strong Russian and French influences and was responsible for introducing such choreographers such as Vaslav Nijinsky, Enrico Checchetti, and Georgi Balanchivadze. This ensemble of dancers travelled throughout Europe bringing with them innovative

new choreography as well as costumes and scenery designed by master artists (Introduction: The Ballets Russes, p. 9).

Unfortunately “a confluence of factors, personal and societal, emerged to shape Diaghilev’s future: his openness with his homosexual identity and cultivation of gay advisers and lovers; diminishing Imperial patronage and political upheavals in Russia; his self-awareness as “an incorrigible sensualist”; a recognition of the modernist cultural cauldron that Paris was at the turn of the century; and, writing in 1902 at the age of 30, his Futurist view that, “The culture of twenty centuries pressing down on our shoulders prevents us from creating...” (Stein 2013: 3). Later, on July 26, 1929 the company *Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes* performed for the final time in London at the Covent Garden Theatre.

In the twentieth century, the dance world tended to appear to be predominately a feminine realm in terms of audiences, dancers, and teachers. Nevertheless, for many people, a key source of contemporary prejudice is the association between male dancers and homosexuality. It is certainly true that there are a lot of gay men involved in the dance world. Although by no means all male dancers are gay, this is what prejudice suggests (Burnt 2001).

The re-emergence of the male ballet dancer occurred after a time when the male ballet dancer had been constructed as a particular kind of dancer: an athlete who is out of the ordinary, who is able to embody emotion through his art and who was, ultimately viewed as homosexual and effeminate (Fisher 2007, Gard 2006, Risner 2009). This view of the male ballet dancer has arguably persisted well into the present day.

Burt (2007) examined the representation of masculinity in the twentieth century dance. In his study he was taking this issue with formalist and modernist accounts of dance, which dismiss gender and sexuality as irrelevant, and he argued that prejudices against male dancers are rooted in our ideas about the male body and male behaviour.

“Today the art of ballet celebrates the danseur nearly as often as the danseuse, it has yet to rid its aesthetic of yesterday’s cult of the eternal feminine. Like her nineteenth-century forbear, today’s ballerina, an icon of teen youth, athleticism, and anorexic vulnerability, incarnates a feminine ideal defined overwhelmingly by men.” (Lynn 1985/86: 35).

3. Ballet, personality traits and gender differences

Dance, sport and exercise, while displaying numerous health and lifestyle benefits, can also increase the risk of both long and short term injuries in dancers and athletes. Psychology and personality is a significant indicator of performance in dance and sport. Psychologists become the members of dance companies and sport clubs, while personality traits become the object of scientific study as the influential factors of success’s achievement in dance and sport.

Interesting researches longitudinally designed study of young female ballet dancers were done by Bakker (1988, 1991). The results of his later study confirmed the typical personality profile of dancers, reported in an earlier study. He proved that the dancers are introverted, relatively high on emotionality, strongly achievement motivated, and exhibiting less favourable self-attitudes. Differences in personality scores between dancers who had continued their professional ballet education and those who had dropped out were small. It is interesting to underline, that Bakker (1991) concluded that differences in personality traits between dancers and non-dancers are most likely the result of a process of self-selection. In fact, the ballet subculture attracts persons who possess particular personality traits.

Clifton and Gill (1994) hypothesized in their study that females would possess more self-confidence in their ability at cheerleading and in various subtasks than males, and that cheerleaders would rate their sport as less gender-stereotyped than would non-cheerleaders. The study of the results supported these

hypotheses. On only two subtasks, partner stunts and tumbling, males possessed as much confidence as females did. Females reported more self-confidence on cheerleading and all other subtasks. Furthermore, cheerleaders of both sexes were aware of the stereotypes held by others, but viewed cheerleading and the tasks within it as more gender neutral than did non-cheerleaders.

The evaluate the relationships between gender role, eating behaviour, and body image in nonprofessional female ballet dancers conducted by Ravaldi, Vannacci, Bolognesi, Mancini, Faravelli and Ricca (2006) showed that ballet dancers scored higher than controls in most of the items evaluating body image and eating behaviours. At the same time a high number of ballet dancers with undifferentiated gender role were also observed. It allowed authors to conclude, that ballet schools' cultural pressure towards an ideal of leanness could interfere with the process of gender role acquisition. Ballet dancers appear to be overconcerned with performance; this could reinforce the internalization of several constructs that are generally considered as typically male.

With introducing of NEO Personality Inventory a new wave of gender differences studies started. Costa, Terracciano & McCrae (2001) analyzed data from 26 cultures and found out, that gender differences are small relative to individual variation within genders; differences are replicated across cultures for both college youth and adult samples, and differences are broadly consistent with gender stereotypes: Women reported themselves to be higher in Neuroticism, Agreeableness, Warmth, and Openness to Feelings, whereas men were higher in Assertiveness and Openness to Ideas.

These results were confirmed in later studies. Schmitt, Realo, Voracek & Allik (2008) after the study of gender differences in 55 nations found that women tended to be somewhat higher than men in Neuroticism, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness. The results of the research conducted on the samples with different cultural background it was found, that gender differences in personality traits are largest in prosperous, healthy, and more gender-egalitarian cultures.

Research conducted in the frames of Scandinavia Jyväskylä Longitudinal Study of Personality and Social Development, showed the stability of the Big Five personality traits in adulthood from age 33 to 42. The research also showed both gender differences and similarities in the rank-order stability of the Big Five: Neuroticism and Extraversion were more stable in men than in women, whereas Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness were as stable in men as in women. The highest gender-equal stability was found for Openness to Experience and the lowest for Conscientiousness (Rantanen, Metsäpelto, Feldt, Pulkkinen & Kokko 2007).

Another research (Chapman, Duberstein, Sörensen & Lyness 2007) in college and adult samples, showed that women score higher than men on the Five Factor Model personality traits of Neuroticism and Agreeableness. Authors also added that gender differences on these traits should be considered in personality research among older, as well as middle age and younger adults. Data received by Weisberg, DeYoung & Hirsh (2011) also show that women reported higher Big Five Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism scores than men. However, more extensive gender differences were found at the level of the aspects, with significant gender differences appearing in both aspects of every Big Five trait. For Extraversion, Openness, and Conscientiousness, the gender differences were found to diverge at the aspect level, rendering them either small or undetectable at the Big Five level (Weisberg, DeYoung & Hirsh 2011).

Later research also confirmed the issue of gender in Big Five personality traits as well as in occupational preferences. Studying swimmers Cavallera, Passerini & Pepe (2013) found that gender plays a role in the measurement of personality traits as gender has a statistically significant effect on Extraversion. In the sample of swimmers the personality traits distributed within moderate middle scores in personality factors, contributing to well-being and satisfaction with life. They also found correlations within factors and subfactors, showing a close relationship among personality traits.

Lippa (2010) came to the conclusion that only sex predicted means for Extraversion, Agreeableness, Neuroticism, and Male-versus-female-typical occupational preferences, and sex predicted trait means much more strongly than did gender equality or the interaction between sex and gender equality. These results suggest that biological factors may contribute to sex differences in personality and that culture plays a negligible to small role in moderating sex differences in personality.

Most of the researches agree that the average personalities of men and women are systematically different. *“Although the mean differences in personality between genders may be important in shaping human experience and human culture, they are probably not so large as to preclude effective communication between men and women. Unlike Bill Cosby, we are optimistic that any difficulties in communication between men and women are due primarily to cultural norms that are amenable to change, rather than to differences in basic personality traits, which are much more difficult to change.”* (Weisberg, DeYoung & Hirsh 2011).

4. Instruments and Methods

4.1 Sample

The research was conducted for the period 2004-2014. During this period a group of 198 ballet dancers participated in our study (see table 1). The dancers from the following ballet groups took part in this research: the Comprehensive Ballet School in Gdansk (CBS), Gdansk, Poland (105 dancers); the Belarusian Ballet College (BBC), Minsk, Belarus (59 dancers); the Belarusian National Theatre of Opera and Ballet (BNTOB), Minsk, Belarus (2 dancers); the Polish Dance Theatre (PDT), Poznań, Poland (10 dancers); the Eijfman Ballet Group (EBG), St. Petersburg, Russia (15 dancers); and the Dance Group Berezka (DGB), Moscow, Russia (7 dancers).

From these groups 134 persons (23 Russian speaking dancers: 13 females and 10 males; 111 Polish speaking dancers: 56 females and 55 males) fulfilled the NEO-Five Factor Inventory, NEO-FFI and these data were used for the purpose of this study. In our research the questionnaires were administered individually or in small groups. Participation in the study was anonymous and voluntary.

4.2 Instruments

In our research for the study of the personality traits the NEO-Five Factor Inventory, NEO-FFI, (Costa & McCare, 1990) was used. The statistical analysis of the data was done using Microsoft Excel and STATISTICA 6.0. (mean, standart deviation and standart error).

5. Results discussion

In our research the received data allowed us to compare gender differences in Big Five traits (NEU, EXT, OPE, AGR, CON) among female (F) and male (M) dances from Russian and Polish ballet groups. The main results of the comparison you can see on the fig. 1:

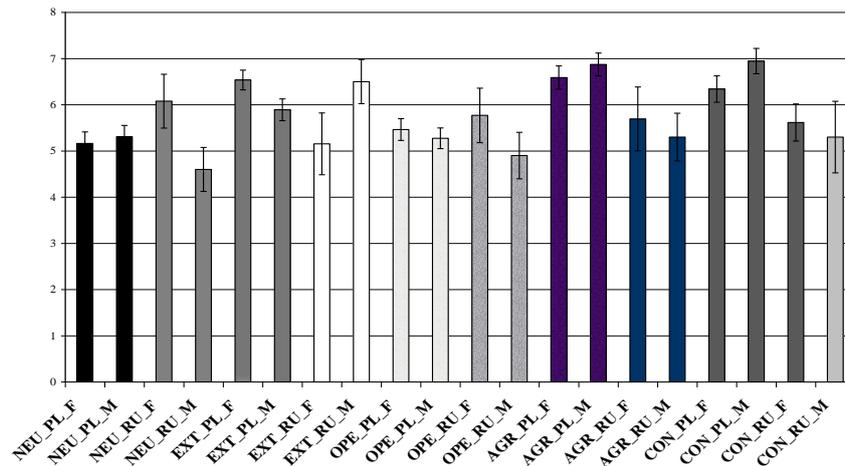


Figure 1. Randomness of Big Five traits in the group of Polish (N=111) and Russian (N=23) ballet dancers

Neuroticism. In our research in the group of Polish dancers there are no statistical gender differences in Big Five traits. In the group of Russian dancers we found out that female dancers have higher results on Neuroticism, then Russian males and then Polish males and females. These findings support the previous data by Costa, Terracciano & McCrae (2001) and Weisberg, DeYoung & Hirsh (2011), that women reported themselves to be higher in Neuroticism.

Extraversion. In this trait there are gender differences in the both groups. So, in the group of Polish dancers females are higher on Extraversion then males. In the group of Russian dancers men are higher in Extraversion then women. There are no statistically significant differences between Polish and Russian male dancers, while there are differences among the female dancers. Russian ballerinas have lower results on Extraversion, then Polish ones. Professional activity of ballet dancers attracts persons with high Extraversion and also this trait also develops during performances. Dancers have to be always full of energy, enthusiastic, action-oriented individuals with high group visibility and well-developed wish to assert and to attract attention to themselves.

Openness. In our research we did not find any statistically significant gender differences on Openness in the both of the groups. Choreographers underline, that Openness for new experiences is important for professional dancer for further successful professional development (Aleksandrovich 2010).

Agreeableness. On this trait we did not find statistically significant gender differences in the separate cultural groups. At the same time Polish male dancers have higher Agreeableness then Russian male and female dancers. This result is in confrontation with previous research and can be explain so, that in Polish group the participants were mostly students, who were in the process of study and had to demonstrate features of good students of ballet school: to be considerate, kind, generous, helpful, and willing to compromise their interests with others.

Conscientiousness. This trait did not show statistically significant gender differences in the group of Russian dancers. The Polish male dancers have higher Conscientiousness then Polish female dancers and then Russian male and female dancers together.

Slight statistically significant gender differences in both groups could be explained, on one hand, with size of the group (Russian group had 23 participants), on the other hand, with specific situation of professional activities of ballet dancers.

5. Conclusion

Our findings clarify the nature of gender differences in personality among the ballet dancers in Russia and Poland. Investigating the interplay between the personality traits among the male and female

ballet dancers in two cultural groups of ballet dancers we hope to come closer to understanding of forming of gender roles and gender identities of ballet dancers. In our research we confirm the previous data, that women reported themselves to be higher in Neuroticism (Russian female dancers showed the highest Neuroticism) whereas men were higher results in Agreeableness and Conscientiousness (Polish male dancers have the highest results than Russian male and female dancers).

Summing up, it is possible to say that ballet started as a masculine art, turned into a feminine romantic art, feminine occupation and nowadays become creative form choreography for men and women. The study of gender differences in personality traits of modern *danseur* and *danseuse* on the one hand, partly confirms the data received by other scientists in the groups of non-dancing people; on the other hand, ballet subculture attracts persons, men and women, who possess particular combination of and level of the development of personality traits. The results of the study will also contribute to the ruining of the stereotype that nowadays the public performance of dance is predominantly a feminine activity.

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Author

Maria ALEKSANDROVICH – PhD, Doctor of Psychology, Associate Professor and the Head of the Department of Psychology at Pomeranian University, Slupsk, Poland and the Guest Professor at the Finnmark University College, Alta, Norway. Member of such scientific societies as: ISSBD, ECHA, APA. Author of 3 books and over 50 scientific articles. Contact: maria.aleksandrovich@apsl.edu.pl