MATCHING OF PERSONALITY TRAITS, EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND SOCIAL SKILLS AMONG DANCE PARTNERS IN COMPETITIVE DANCING

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Abstract:

We investigated whether there was more matching in personality traits, emotional intelligence, and social skills in better performing dance couples than in their less successful counterparts and if better- and lower-performing dancers individually have more equivalent personality traits, emotional intelligence, and social skills. Twenty-four dance couples (i.e. 24 male and 24 female dancers), performing both the Latin and standard dances at a competitive level, were included in the study. Among the measured metrics were: personality traits (using the Big Five Questionnaire), social skills (using the Interpersonal Skills Questionnaire), and emotional intelligence (using the Emotional Competence Questionnaire). When comparing differences between couples, results showed that the better dance couples were more orderly, agreeable and conscientious than the lower-performing dance couples who seemed to be more open. When comparing differences between individual dancers, results showed that the better-performing dancers tended to be older, more experienced, with a higher "competitive mileage" and better-trained bodies, more diligent with a firm belief in their success, confident in attaining their goals, and more motivated. They were also more emotionally stable – a trait that stemmed from their maturity and many years of competing. Findings obtained by our study will certainly allow us to view competitive dancers from a different, as yet undiscovered and potentially deeper viewpoint of psychology. One of the practical aspects of our research lies in understanding how to keep dance couples together for a longer time, allowing dancers to perform in unison for longer periods than would be otherwise possible.

Key words*: competitive dancing, personality traits, emotional intelligence, social skills, dancers*

Introduction

Competitive dancing is a sporting discipline (Bria, et al., 2011) that combines sports and artistic components (Vermey, 1994). The ability to successfully perform at a dance competition requires not only physical but also excellent psychological preparation and training (Berndt, Strahler, Kirschbaum, & Rohleder, 2012). Dancers are required to carefully plan and set goals, to maintain their top form and constantly improve their dance techniques, whilst evaluating the success of their preparations, as well as remaining highly motivated, confident and open for the audience to maximize the impact of their performances (Liiv, Jürimäe, Klonova, & Cicchela, 2013). Mastery of the basic moves is essential for the development of special skills that dancers convey through their moves and the connection, both physical and psychological, with their partners (Klockare, Gustafsson, & Nordin–Bates, 2011). The latter trait seems crucial in competitive ballroom dancing performance where coordinated and refined movements are required and arrayed in a choreography of optimally compatible moves of both dancers (Tremayne & Ballinger, 2008).

According to Pistole (2003), elite performance in competitive dancing is based on the close relationship between two dancers and the way they affect each other and depend on one another, then on their ability to develop and arouse strong interpersonal feelings and cognition, as well as on taking jointly part in other spheres of life – be it common activities or even a romantic partnership. Social skills, personality traits and emotional intelligence all have a great impact on the formation of interpersonal relations (Fenning, Baker, & Juvonen, 2011) and enable individuals to understand themselves and their surroundings, allowing them to react to events in accordance with their own goal-oriented strategy at a given time (Z.A.P. Del Prette, Da Rocha, De Matos Silvares, & A. Del Prette, 2012). Ozer and Benet-Martinez (2006) found out that the disposition of each individual's personality bore a

strong correlation with their happiness and well-being, both physical and psychological, as well as with their spirituality and individual identity. Based on the latter findings (Furley, Bertrams, Englert, & Delphia, 2013) it has been proven that personality traits of each sportsperson play a key role in achieving their desired goals. Personality traits furthermore manifest themselves in the method and speed with which the sportsperson can focus on the optimal execution of their performance, both of which depend on the given situation and the athlete's ability to maintain self-control in given circumstances.

Personality traits research with dancers has been conducted mainly with ballet dancers, with Bakker (1991) confirming typical personality profiles of ballet dancers, who are considered to be introverted, strongly emotionally dependent on good performance, and tend to strive to be the best whilst maintaining a less-than-optimal attitude towards themselves. R. Salomon, J. Salomon, Michaeli, Sounders, and Zurakowski (2001) have since proven the diametrically opposite – according to their work: dancers demonstrate increased extraversion, impulsiveness, and ambivalence in their dealings with authority as a manifestation of increased vulnerability. Alexias and Dimitripopoulou (2011) discovered ballet dancers considered their bodies to be investments – increasing stock will result in a higher quality of life. They maintain an extremely ascetic attitude towards their bodies, constantly pushing the limits of their biological "hardware" and the range of motion it is capable to perform. Others (Radell, Adame, Cole, & Blumenkehl, 2011) have also proven that the striving for perfection and an ascetically lean body may lead to anger, depression, eating disorders and a distorted self-image. Klockare et al. (2011) found out that dancers did not hesitate to risk terrible pain and severe injury in order to be socially accepted and thus confirm their own worth. Hugill, Fink, Neave, and Seydel (2009) state that every sportsperson, dancers included, combines multiple roles. The first role is defined by their gender (e.g. male, female), the second is their role within the family (e.g. son, brother, husband, father), followed by numerous social and professional roles (friend, acquaintance, schoolmate, employee, etc.), and their ultimate defining role is a sportsperson, performing at the highest possible level. Raftery and Bizar (2009) have proven that each of the afore-mentioned roles comes with an independent set of requirements and expectations, set by the individual, by those close to them, and by the society as a whole. Rohleder, Beulen, Chen, Wolf, and Kirschbaum (2009) discovered that the competitive nature of their profession subjected dancers to intense stress, mainly due to unrealistically high expectations regarding results and the reaction to the performance by the audience, coaches, and other competitors. Some researchers (Fenning, et al., 2011) consider that the lack of social skills and the inability to modulate one's emotional intelligence prevents dancers from comprehending and accepting one another, as well as from improving their knowledge of themselves and others, which would allow them to better adapt to society's requirements and expectations.

The goal of our research was to investigate whether there were differences between better- and lower-performing dance couples in regard to the three domains of psychological space: namely, the domains of personality, emotional intelligence, and social skills. Those aspects were measured using the existing and well-established psychological instruments, thus ensuring full methodological integrity of the study. We investigated if two individuals, a woman and a man, who danced together, were a good/favourable match, and if the bond between them was forged through dance. Also, we investigated dancers individually seeking for any match between the better and the not-so-good dancers regarding their personality, emotional intelligence, and social skills.

Two hypotheses were formed to investigate the differences between groups of male and female ballroom dancers within the sample as regarded their personality traits, emotional intelligence, and social skills.

H1: Better-performing dance couples have closer-matching personality traits, emotional intelligence, and social skills than those found in lower-performing couples.

H2: Better-performing dance couples' personality traits, emotional intelligence, and social skills differ from those of lower-performing couples.

Methods

Participants

Twenty-four couples were included in the study. Couples consisted of a man and a woman (totalling 24 women and 24 men) who performed both the Latin and classic ballroom or standard dances. Participants were aged between 16 and 34 years and were members of the Slovene national dance team. The average age of all dancers was 21.32 years (SD = 5.26) with the average age of 20.63 years (SD = 5,08) for female dancers and 22.00 years (SD = 5,42) for male dancers. The performance assessing criteria of the dancers were taken from the quality classes defined by the PZS (Plesna zveza Slovenije; *Dance Union of Slovenia*) based on the qualifier scores and the rating system used by the IDSF (International Dance Sport Federation). Better dancers (n = 24; 12 couples) were those competing in the first class (the highest attainable international competitive dance class in the field of Latin and standard dance), whereas those dancers (n = 24; 12

couples) competing in the A, B and C-classes were considered to be lower-performing dancers.

Instruments

Big Five Questionnaire (BFQ, Slovene edition; Caprara, Barbaranelli, Borgogni, Bucik, & Boben, 1997) evaluates the five capital domains of personality along with ten facets: Energy (subcategories Activity and Dominance), Acceptability (subcategories Cooperation and Kindness), Consciousness (subcategories Precision and Perseverance), Emotional Stability (subcategories Emotion Control and Impulse Control) and Openness (subcategories Openness for Culture and Openness for Experience). The questionnaire has 132 items with a 5-point scale for self-assessment.

Social Skills Inventory (SSI; Riggio & Trockmorton, 1986, as cited in Lamovec, 1994), also known as the Self-Description Inventory, assesses basic social skills that underlie social competence. It evaluates verbal and non-verbal communication skills and identifies person's strengths and weaknesses. The questionnaire has 105 items where examinee self-evaluates his/her core social skills on a 9-point scale.

Questionnaire of emotional competence (VEK 45; Taksić, 1998). The questionnaire evaluates the individual on three scales; the ability to recognise and understand one's own feelings denotes a good ability to recognise other people's emotions as well as those shown in works of art. It is also linked with the ability to recognise genuine emotion and to express one's own emotions accurately. Ahe short version of the questionnaire has 45 items.

Procedure

Data collection was done between February and September in 2009. After giving a signed informed participation consent, every participant filled in the questionnaires individually in full anonymity (for any other person than the researchers) in the dancers' own clubs' facilities. Participants were offered feedback in case they had requested it and could individually inspect their own results exclusively. The obtained data were analysed using SPSS Version 15.0 and Excel. For hypotheses testing, descriptive statistics and independent samples *t*-test were used.

Results

To evaluate if there were differences in matching between the better- and lower-performing dance couples in personality, emotional intelligence, and social skills, the independent samples *t*-test was used. In the following table the differences are presented that were significant and those with a trend towards significance.

As seen in Table 1, statistically significant differences were found in the category of Openness with a large size effect (r = 0.55) and Orderliness also with a large size effect (r = 0.60). We also presented results for two other facets where p-values for the differences between the better- and lower-performing dance couples were close to the level of significance – Agreeableness with a small size effect (r = 0.15) and Conscientiousness with a large size effect (*r* = 0.73). The dance couples categorised as either better- or lower-performing seem to have some matching personality traits. The higher-ranked dance couples seem to be more orderly, agreeable, and conscientious than their lower-ranked counterparts, whereas the lower-ranked dance couples seem to be more open.

To test our second hypothesis, we investigated participants individually, not regarding their dance partners. The independent samples *t*-test was used to evaluate if there were any differences in personality, emotional stability, and social skills between the higher-ranked dancers and those ranked lower.

As seen in Table 2, the better dancers had more training and competition experience and were older, more persevering (r = 0.46), more open to culture (r = 0.74), more conscientious (r = 0.54), more open (r = 0.51), and more emotionally stable (r = 0.90) than the lower-performing dancers. All the reported differences also represented a large size effect, as seen in the brackets.

Table 1. Matching in personality, emotional intelligence, and social skills among better- and lower-performing dance couples

CATEGORIES	DOMAIN	QUALITY	M	SD	F	p
PERSONALITY	Orderliness	lower	5.08	4.85	4.17	0.05
		better	9.00	7.92		
	Agreeableness	lower	8.33	5.02	2.99	0.09
		better	9.33	7.62		
	Conscientiousness	lower	7.83	6.67	3.01	0.09
		better	14.17	10.36		
	Openness	worse	9.06	9.60	9.90	0.00
		better	13.33	5.33		

Table 2. Differences in personality traits, emotional intelligence, and social skills between the better- and lower-performing dancers

CATEGORY	DOMAIN	QUALITY	M	SD	T	p
	Age	better	24.71	4.74	5.15	0.00
		lower	18.78	4.11		
PERSONALITY	Perseverance	better	48.54	4.71	1.70	0.10
		lower	45.92	6.53		
	Openness to culture	better	41.67	5.46	2.77	0.01
		lower	37.42	6.04		
	Conscientiousness	better	89.58	9.34	2.00	0.05
		lower	84.08	11.12		
	Openness	better	83.50	10.52	1.95	0.06
		lower	78.47	9.27		
SOCIAL SKILLS	Emotional sensibility	better	102.04	8.74	3.33	0.00
		lower	92.61	11.88		

Discussion and conclusions

Differences in matching between the better- and lower-performing dance couples

In order to discover what gives an edge to winning dance couples at international competitions, we analysed the data sets where there was the most mismatch between the better- and lower-performing dance couples.

Our research has shown two important differences between the better- and lower-performing dance couples in the domains of Openness and Orderliness (Table 1). Openness is a complex and heterogeneous trait (Ashton, Lee, & Vries, 2014) and is one of the five domains of personality, also known as culture or openness to new experience. High scorers in this domain considered themselves educated, well-informed and full of interest for novelties. Newer research also links openness with intellect (DeYoung, Grazioplene, & Peterson, 2012), an acute aesthetic sense, curiosity, creativity, and nonconventionality. It is precisely those traits that might be linked to the findings of our study and can elucidate what gives the better dancers their edge in performing. These dancers belong among the elite of the competitive world and compete at the highest levels of European and international competitions. They are driven by the desire to improve further, hoping to achieve aesthetic perfection, flawless technique, and optimal control of their bodies' movements no matter how complex the choreography. The branch of psychology examining art and aesthetics has for many years considered openness to culture to be the capital domain in the psychological milieu. A refined aesthetic sense affects people through different mechanisms; the striving to bring oneself in the vicinity of as much art as possible tends to result in the acquisition of art-related knowledge, as well as in the awakening of a more non-conventional take-on of all aspects of life, making these individuals more prone to find added value in controversial and peculiar experiences and to perceive their surroundings in a radically different manner. Individuals with a keen aesthetic sense also seem to perceive an added depth in their everyday activities (Silvia, Fayn, Nusbaum, & Beaty, 2015; Terracciano, McCrae, Hagemann, & Costa, 2003). It is also worth noting that high scorers in the Openness domain tend to be more emotional; they are capable to process complex emotions and in turn accept them (Terracciano, et al., 2003). These findings give a valid viewpoint for our expectations regarding a higher rate of matching among the better-performing dancers. The latter statement can be confirmed with the newly discovered statistically relevant difference in the subdomain of Orderliness used to depict how organised, reliable, morally staunch, motivated, and level-headed an individual is. It is of little surprise that better dancers develop better organisational skills, in no small part due to the hectic schedule imparted by numerous international competitions, performances, training sessions, and periods of much-deserved rest. Their high level of reliability and moral responsibility is linked to the satisfaction they derive from their partnership, since according to Robins, Caspi, and Moffitt (2000) the latter is directly linked to the former.

Better-performing dance partners tend to have a higher rate of matching in the Conscientiousness domain as well. As seen in Table 1, there was a trend towards significance in this domain of personality. Previous studies (Potop, Grigore, Timnea, & Moraru, 2015) have shown that individual sports athletes score higher than their group-oriented counterparts in the domain of achievement-striving that enables them to remain motivated and successfully achieve set goals in no small part due to the fact that the victory is theirs alone. This enables

them to remain more concentrated and thus perform required tasks optimally. Two additional crucial traits, found predominantly in performers of individualistic sports, are orderliness and discipline. Orderliness was another domain of personality where the statistically significant difference between the better- and lower-performing dance couples was found. As seen in Table 1, the better dance couples are more orderly as well. All the afore-mentioned traits and tendencies lead to the development of an individual who is more conscientious, independent, persistent, and disciplined, relying on nobody but him-/herself. High scorers in the conscientiousness domain can safely be assumed to be rational, orderly, precise, persistent, and capable of successfully finishing a given task (Kajtna, 2006). Good results in any given sports discipline are definitely linked to persistent shaping of one's own body to perfection. Tomori (1990) reasons that since the perception of one's own body stems from our sense of self-worth and aptness, it can be further said that appropriate physical activity gives the individual a direct insight into his/her capabilities and it indirectly leads him/her to general well-being and satisfaction. Hall and Hill (2012) believe that perfectionism is among the most important personality traits among elite sportspeople, especially in sports with a dominant aesthetical component. The striving for perfection is the ultimate level of devotion, allowing the performer to seamlessly meld different elements into a single flawless performance, thus often achieving winning scores. According to the authors, it is perfectionism itself that separates the winning individuals from the rest and allows them to overcome their boundaries time and again. Stoeber, Uphill and Hotham (2009) have shown that perfectionism positively affects motivation and the regulation thereof, it increases an individual's efficacy and allows him/her to attain pre-set goals and, ultimately, to achieve well-being. Stoeber et al. (2009) add to the previous studies that it is specifically the normal subset of perfectionism (as opposed to the neurotic subtype) that has the afore-mentioned traits. The two subtypes of perfectionism differ from one another in regard to their attitude towards mistakes and their level of personal standards, with the normal perfectionists having a higher level of personal standards and a lower level of worries about potential mistakes than their neurotic counterparts. The lack of debilitating fear and overwhelming stress that is absent from the normal subset certainly affects the end result. Flett and Hewitt (2006) and Hall (2006) have all raised the question whether elite dancers are really perfectionists or if that facet simply reflects the nature of their sports discipline.

The specific nature of competitive dancing obviates the need for goal-oriented planning. Kajtna (2006) claims that most progress in sports stems from a long-term process. Eysenck (1981) claimed that more successful sportspeople tended to be more extraverted with lower baseline levels of stimulation, a trait that led them to obtain more stimuli from their surroundings. Sports are often linked with a higher rate of stimulation, thus becoming a natural gathering ground for extroverts. It is safe to say that the modern competitive dancing scene is an extremely well-thought-out system that requires the performers to outdo themselves in order to become great (Eysenck, 1981). Winkelhuis (2001) adds that success or victory in elite sports nowadays represents personal worth, prestige and material gains. No matter how open or capable of connecting with a wider social environment a dancer is, he/she will still feel fear of failure, a phantom that prevents many from reaching perfection. The key to success might lie in certain personality traits that protect a person from that crippling emotion.

Differences between the better- and lower-performing dancers

As seen in Table 2, statistically significant differences were found to exist in certain personality traits, namely in the domains of openness to culture, age, and emotional sensibility. Analysis of the obtained data showed us a higher rate of matching among the better couples in their Openness to Culture and New Experiences than the rate found among the lower-performing couples who appeared to be less homogenous in their results regarding their attitude towards new knowledge. Better dancers tend to be more inquisitive and willing to accept different personal viewpoints and cultures in order to learn from them (Tremayne & Ballinger, 2008). They tend to know what they want, setting well-defined goals and meticulously planning out training sessions and competition schedules. Unlike their lower-performing counterparts, they are decisive from the start of their careers, adhering to pre-set plans whilst keeping their goals in sight. It seems both groups of dancers share some of the traits covered in the two domains, with the older and more experienced better dancers being more aware of how self-reliant they are in their careers (Table 1). Better dancers tend to be more emotionally stable, another trait stemming from experience and maturity. A statistically relevant higher score in the domain of emotional sensibility lends an additional edge to better dancers, allowing them to perceive and relay emotional messages. Our participants' emotional stability allows them to attain more satisfaction from their relationship by achieving better interpersonal communication. Emotions play a key role in the creative process, resulting in the close link between the domains of openness and emotional sensibility. Some authors (Ivcevic & Brackett, 2015) believe that the creative process requires the interplay of

varying emotions ranging from curiosity to frustration and as such requires the ability to regulate one's emotions based on the unwanted consequences of a rash emotional reaction in complex situations. Russ (2014) believes in the absolute importance of control over potentially performance-crippling negative emotions such as stage fright, as well as the control of overly positive emotions. Ivcevic and Brackett (2015) believe that regulation of one's emotions is necessary to successfully navigate the social aspects of creativity, be it in response to critique or in the form of efficient communication with a dance partner or coach. Lopes, Cote, and Salovey (2006) have proven that the regulation of one's emotions leads to myriad positive interactions with others, including more efficient communication and the ability to operate in stressful situations. Another interesting fact (Ivcevic & Brackett, 2015) stems from the finding that the regulation of emotions breeds creativity in individuals who have a well-developed openness domain. Brackett and Mayer (2003) consider the regulation of emotions to be an advantage in professional dealings with other people, especially from the viewpoint of aggression, which tends to be diminished in these individuals. It can therefore be said in conclusion that years of accumulated experience and knowledge give better dancers the required social tools that allow them to better regulate their emotions and thus remain open and honest in their relationship with their partner, leading to an enrichment of the creative aspect of their calling.

Purpose of our research was to expand the ever-growing pool of knowledge of sports-related psychology. The findings obtained by our study will certainly allow us to view competitive dancers from a different as yet undiscovered and potentially deeper viewpoint of psychology. One of the practical aspects of our research lies in understanding how to keep dance couples together for a longer period, allowing dancers to perform in unison for longer periods than would be otherwise possible. Persistence and conscientiousness were proven to be two important traits of good dancers and considering the cooperative nature of competitive dance, the encouraged development of these two domains might lead to more resilient and long-lived dance couples. It is based on these findings that we advocate an added emphasis on the development of personality traits, emotional intelligence, and social skills in young dancers. The main flaw of our research stems from the small sample size that arose from only analysing the strict core of elite dance couples in Slovenia. The next stage might lie in the incorporation of international dance couples or different dance styles into the study. An increased sample size might thus allow us to compare different psychological profiles of dancers and further improve our knowledge and understanding of the psychological aspects of professional dancer.

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