Scholars LITERATURE

Neurological Sciences and Neurosurgery

Literature Review

DOI: https://doi.org/10.47275/2692-093X-128
Volume 3 Issue 2

Improving Attitudes towards Male Ballet Dancers

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Abstract

The study tested if a lecture on male ballet by a male - engineer - amateur ballet dancer would be related to a change in attitudes on male ballet after the lecture. The lecturer held a lecture on male ballet to 68 male and female students of Faculty of Kinesiology in Zagreb. Their attitude on male ballet was tested a day before and a day after the lecture with the Attitude towards male ballet dancer's questionnaire (AMBQ). The average attitude of 21 students who filled in AMBQ at both time points was statistically significantly more positive after the lecture than before the lecture (F (1.20)=7.7, p=0.012). It is possible that this was caused by an increase in attitude positivity in males only, as there seemed to be no change in females. It may be concluded that the lecture on male ballet by a male - engineer - amateur ballet dancer is related to a change towards more positive attitudes on male ballet.

Keywords: Male Ballet; Attitudes; Lecture

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Citation: Pale P, Furjan-Mandić G, Radaš J, et al. (2022) Improving Attitudes towards Male Ballet Dancers. Neurol Sci Neurosurg, Volume 3:2. 128. DOI: https://doi.org/10.47275/2692-093X-128

Received: September 28, 2022; **Accepted:** October 12, 2022; **Published:** October 18, 2022

Introduction

In available literature, there is a number of studies about attitudes towards stereotypically "female" and stereotypically "male" sports. According to Đurkić (2000) [1], females are more interested in dance and reject sports such as weight lifting, box and wrestling. On the other hand, males reject sports with dance elements and show more interest in football.

Podvalej L, et al. (2000) [2], conducted a study on attitudes of male students of Faculty of Food technology and biotechnology, University of Zagreb towards "male" and "female" sports. According to the authors it is inaccurate to view women with "male" interests as tomboyish and males with "female" interests as effeminate. They found that it was not easy to predict attitude towards sport in subjects with non-stereotypical professional interests. On average, students expressed the most negative attitude towards rhythmical gymnastics and synchronized (artistic) swimming.

On a sample of 2511 adolescent boys and 1887 adolescent girls, Prot F, et al. (2007) [3], found that hierarchical organization and interests' structure towards sport is substantially different in men and in women.

Research Objective and Hypotheses

Research Objective

The main objective of this research is to identify attitude changes in kinesiology students after the lecture about ballet held by a male lecturer with a vocation in the field of engineering. Besides that, differences in attitudes between male and female kinesiology students before and after the lecture will be analyzed.

Hypotheses

Before the lecture female students of kinesiology will have statistically significantly more positive attitudes about male ballet dancers than male students of kinesiology.

After the lecture on male ballet by a distinguished male engineer who also recreationally teaches classical ballet the attitude towards male ballet dancers in students of kinesiology of both genders will be statistically significantly more positive than before that lecture.

Research Methods

Sample

A convenience sample, 68 students of a third year of Faculty of Kinesiology in Zagreb, Croatia attending a course in rhythmical gymnastics. Nfemales=25 (37%).

Instruments

Attitude towards male ballet dancer's questionnaire (AMBQ, Pale, Furjan-Mandić, Radaš, Kincaid, 2022). The questionnaire was developed for the purposes of this study and it consists of 10 items measuring a single factor, attitude toward male ballet dancers. Factor loadings of the 10 items are in range from 0.681 to 0.908. Questionnaire reliability was satisfactory (Cronbach α=0.929). Response to the questions was expressed on a 5 point scale, where 1 corresponds to "completely incorrect" and 5 corresponds to "completely correct". The result on the questionnaire is a simple sum of responses to 10 items with a theoretical range from 10 to 50. Responses to negatively phrased questions are reversed and therefore higher total score corresponds to

a more positive attitude towards male ballet dancers [4-7].

Ballet workshop satisfaction questionnaire (BWSQ, Pale, Furjan-Mandić, Radaš, Kincaid, 2022). The questionnaire was developed for the purposes of this study and it consists of 8 items intended to measure a single factor, satisfaction with the ballet workshop and 1 item about the potential changes of the attitude towards male ballet and male ballet dancers after the workshop. Due to small number of respondents who filled in the questionnaire (n=10) it was not possible to check questionnaire's psychometric characteristics. Response to the first 8 questions was expressed on a 5 point scale, where 1 corresponds to "completely incorrect" and 5 corresponds to "completely correct". The result on that part of the BWSQ is a simple sum of responses to 8 items with a theoretical range from 8 to 40. All 8 questions are positively phrased and therefore higher total score corresponds to a higher satisfaction with the workshop. The response to the question about the potential attitude change was expressed by selecting one of three response options (attitude did not change, attitude improved, attitude worsened).

Figure 1: Classical ballet workshop.

Procedure

In June 2022 68 students of kinesiology and attendants of course on rhythmical gymnastics (nfemales=25) filled in online the AMBQ for the first time (time point 1). The next day a male lecturer who is an engineer, amateur ballet dancer and a recreational ballet teacher held a lecture on his experiences with dancing and teaching ballet to the same group of students. The day after the lecture 21 out of original group of 68 students filled in the AMBQ online again (nfemales=11) (time point 2). A day later, a group of 16 students (who also attended the lecture) had a ballet workshop with the same teacher (aforementioned male lecturer). After the workshop, out of 16 students who attended the workshop 10 students filled in the BWSQ (nfemales=4). Students filled in the questionnaires anonymously, but in order to match their results in different questionnaires they were asked to use a pseudonym. During the mandatory course Rhythmical gymnastics (October to June 2022) all students had 10 class sessions in theory and practice of classical ballet, which facilitated their understanding of this experimental lecture.

Data Analysis Methods

Statistical analyses used in this paper are two types of analysis of variance (ANOVA): one way ANOVA with gender as predictor and attitude towards male ballet dancers before the lecture as criterion and ANOVA for mixed designs with gender and time point (before and after the lecture) as predictors and attitude towards male ballet dancers as criterion.

Results

The Relationship of Gender and Attitude towards Male Ballet Dancers before the Lecture

At time point 1 (before the lecture) the average result of female students (M=43.7, n=25) was statistically significantly more positive than the average result of male students (M=32.8, n=43; F(1.66)=25.3, p=000).

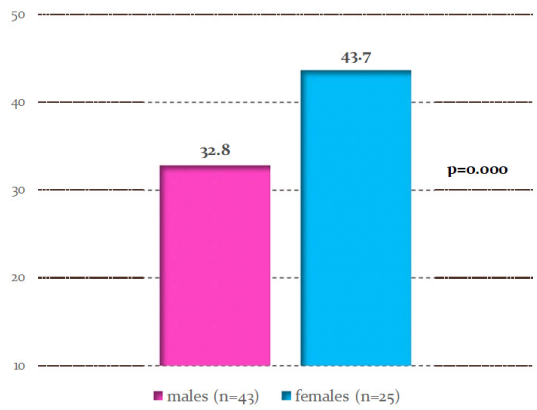

Figure 2: Attitude towards male ballet dancers before the lecture and gender.

The average result of male students on AMBQ at time point 1 (before the lecture) (M=32.8) indicates that on average their attitude towards male ballet dancers was neutral. A substantial part of the male subsample (37%, n=16) had a result lower than 30 which indicates that the attitude of these students tends to be negative.

The average result of female students on AMBQ at time point 1 (before the lecture) (M=43.7) indicates that on average their attitude towards male ballet dancers tends to be positive. None of the students in the female subsample at the time point 1 had a result lower than 30, i.e., a result that indicates the negative attitude.

The Relationship of the Lecture and Attitude towards Male Ballet Dancers

Attitude towards male ballet dancers in the group of 21 students who filled in the AMBQ at both time points (including students of both genders) was statistically significantly more positive after the lecture (M=40.2) than before the lecture (M=36.7; F(1.20)=7.7, p=0.012).

Average attitude (average of attitudes before and after the lecture) towards male ballet dancers in a group of 21 students who filled in the AMBQ at both time points was statistically significantly more positive in females (Mestimate=45.0, n=11) than in males (Mestimate=31.9, n=10; F(1.20)=18.4, p=0.000).

The Workshop and Attitude towards Male Ballet Dancers

Average result of 10 workshop attendees ($n_{females}$=4) on BWSQ was 32.1 which indicates that on average students perceived the ballet workshop as fun. None of the 6 males and 2 of the 4 females reported

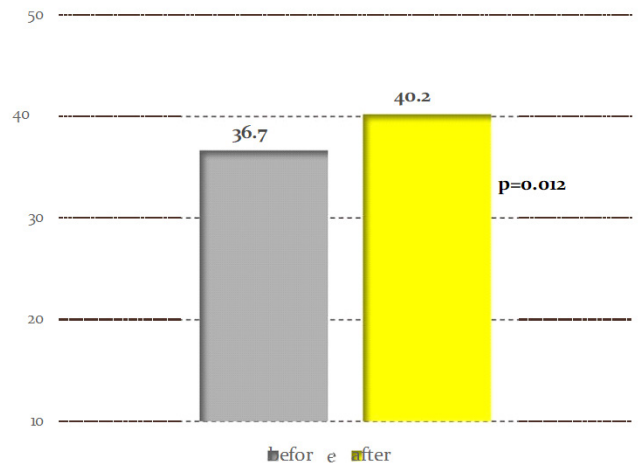

Figure 3: Attitude towards male ballet dancers in all students, male and female (n=21), before and after the lecture.

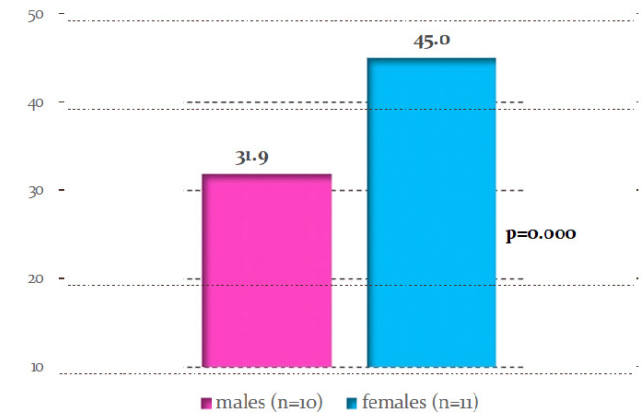

Figure 4: Attitude towards male ballet dancers (average before and after the lecture) and gender.
There was a trend toward an increase in the positivity of an attitude after the lecture in males and seemingly no change in females. This trend, i.e. interaction of gender and time point, approached but did not reach statistical significance (F(1.20)=3.3, p=0.086).

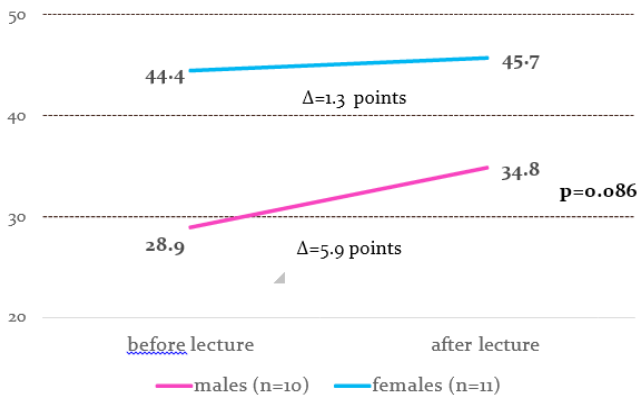

Figure 5: Interaction of gender and time point (before and after the lecture) and attitude towards male ballet dancers.

that their attitude on male ballet and male ballet dancers improved after the workshop. The rest (6 males and 2 females) felt that their attitude remained the same.

Discussion

Who Is More Positive About Male Ballet, Girls or Boys?

Similar to our result that female students had a more positive attitude towards male ballet (dancers) before the lecture than male students, Sanderson P (2001) [8], reports that female adolescents have a more positive attitude towards classical ballet and male dancers than male adolescents do. Ožegović M (2001) [4] and Tatarević S (2001) [5], reported that women prefer sports with emphasized esthetical structure while men prefer football, box, heavy lifting, moto sports and the like. Ballet is in general perceived as a "feminine" performing art and it is possible that females can more easily identify with the practice of ballet dancing. We may speculate that if ballet was perceived more "androgynously" than it currently is, and/or if perception of masculinity in general population expanded towards inclusion of more elements currently perceived as exclusively or predominantly feminine, that the proportion of men who (dare to confess to themselves and others that they) like ballet would increase. According to Risner D (2007) [9], male youth in dance confront heterocentric bias, gender norms, gendered bodies, peer pressure, social stigma, narrow definitions of masculinity and internalized homophobia. Haltom TM, et al. (2014) [10], found that male ballet dancers develop and use specific stigma- management techniques. These findings illustrate how high is the price to be paid for those males who dare to dance and explain why many would rather choose not to pay it. Ostracism is painful: it threatens psychological needs (e.g., belonging) and unleashes a variety of physiological, affective, cognitive, and behavioral responses [11]. Pain caused by social rejection and physical pain share a common neural system [12].

However, there is another price to be paid when one gives up on one's own authentic needs and characteristics in order to "adapt" to prevailing societal expectations, norms and values. That what we call a "personality" is probably almost always, at least to a certain degree, a defensive structure that we develop as a way of dealing with our pain and actually an overlay upon our true self [13]. Fitting in/adapting and belonging are not synonyms: to belong means to be accepted as we truly are, and to fit in/adapt entails assessing a situation and becoming who you need to be to be accepted [14].

In some, if not many cases the process of "socialization" may be more accurately described as taming, inhibiting, disfiguring, thwarting etc. with the desired outcome of making the object of the socialization "well adjusted". The fact that such a perspective on socialization was seen as desirable even by the mainstream psychology may be illustrated by a following quote from Diana Baumrind, a developmental psychologist known for her research on parenting styles: "The parent who expresses love unconditionally is encouraging the child to be selfish and demanding" [15].

The results of this study do not reveal how the male students would feel should they find *themselves* in a role of a ballet dancer. The reason is that AMBQ measures the attitude on male ballet *in general.* On one side, one might argue that an attitude towards male ballet dancers is highly correlated with such feelings. On the other side, it is possible that one feels neutral towards other males performing ballet and non-neutral towards performing ballet on his own.

Also, it should be noted that it is quite possible that the attitude of the general Croatian male population is much more negative, i.e.,

it can be speculated that the neutral male students' attitude is a result of a combination of factors such as their (future) vocation, lessons in rhythmical gymnastics and their sociodemographic characteristics (more urban and young).

Can a Single Lecture on Male Ballet by a Male - Engineer - Recreational Ballet Teacher Make a Difference?

Our results show that a single lecture on male ballet by a male - engineer - recreational ballet teacher was related to a positive change in attitude towards male ballet dancers. This finding has two important limitations. One of them is a small sample size (n=21) and the other is that because of the non-experimental design of this study we may only speculate, but not prove, that the attitude change was a *consequence* of the lecture. Having this in mind, if the attitude was influenced by a lecture, it is possible that factors which contributed to an attitude change are male gender and "masculine" vocation of the lecturer.

We also tested if there was an interaction between the gender and the time point (before and after the lecture) as predictors of the attitude towards male ballet dancers. This interaction was not significant, but it did approach significance (p=0.086) which indicates that perhaps on a larger sample this interaction would turn out to be significant. Presuming that this is so, it may be speculated that perhaps male students were more influenced because the lecturer was male (identification) and/or that perhaps there was simply no room for the improvement of females' attitudes as they were already very positive even before the lecture to begin with.

According to Howard DR, et al. (1990) [7] and Bosnar K, et al. (2006) [6] parents have an utmost importance in making a first decision on choosing a sport, as well as in the quality of sports involvement. Still, as results of this study demonstrate, besides parents, numerous other factors influence involvement in sports.

Finally, besides the lecture, some students also attended the ballet workshop held by the same lecturer and they perceived it as a fun experience which in their opinion, for a vast majority of them, did not change their attitude towards male ballet.

Study Advantages and Limitations

Advantages

1. Study originality.
2. Excellent psychometric properties of AMBQ.

Limitations

1. Small sample.
2. Non-representative sample.
3. Non-experimental design.
4. Subjects could guess the study hypotheses.
5. Repeated use of AMBQ on two consequent days, subjects could recall their responses to AMBQ at time point 1 while filling in AMBQ at time point 2.

Conclusion

This study, although limited by a small sample size, demonstrated that is possible to change the attitude towards male ballet and male ballet dancers with a one-time intervention, lecture about the male ballet held by a male with a vocation traditionally perceived as "masculine" (engineering). We have also shown that, as predicted, females had a more positive attitude towards male ballet dancers before the lecture.

Authors believe that the attitude towards "male" and "female" sports may be changed through acquiring knowledge and through practical experience. They also think that when teaching activities which general population either infrequently has experience with and/or rejects due to traditional belief that some sports are "male" or "female", the teachers' expertise, presentation model and selected teaching methods may have an important effect.

In future studies it would be interesting and important to use a similar design on much larger samples and to check the potential attitude changes after repeated interventions, i.e., several lectures, workshops etc.

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