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ANALYSIS OF DIFFERENCES IN THE SELF-CONCEPT OF SPORT DANCERS COMPARED TO OTHER TOP-LEVEL ATHLETES AND NON-ATHLETES OF BOTH GENDERS

ANALIZA RAZLIK V SAMOPODOBI PLESALK IN PLESALCEV ŠPORTNEGA PLESA TER PRIMERJAVA Z DRUGIMI ŠPORTNIKI IN NEŠPORTNIKI OBEH SPOLOV

Abstract

The psychological dimension of self-concept is one of the most important for achieving top sports results. The goal of the research was to analyse and compare the self-concept of female and male sport dancers in relation to other top-level athletes (track-and-field, skiing) and other non-athletes of both genders. The research included 283 individuals, with the data being analysed with one-way and two-way ANOVA. The self-concept comparisons were grounded on gender and inclusion in individual groups: athletes - dancers, other athletes and non-athletes of both genders. A significant difference was found in social ego in both female and male sport dancers, while most differences were identified between the groups of all athletes and non-athletes (social ego, identity, family ego, physical ego, personality ego, self-criticism). Both sport dancers and other top-level athletes of both genders have a higher general level of their self-concept and self-esteem compared with non-athletes of both genders.

Key words: dance, self-concept, top-level athletes, non-athletes

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Izvleček

Samopodoba predstavlja eno najpomembnejših psiholoških razsežnosti na poti doseganja vrhunskih rezultatov v športu. Cilj raziskave je bil analizirati in primerjati samopodobo plesalk in plesalcev športnega plesa, v odnosu do nekaterih drugih športnikov (atletika in smučanje) in nešportnikov obeh spolov. V raziskavo smo zajeli 283 oseb, ki smo jih z metodo eno in dvo-faktorske analize variance medsebojno primerjali v samopodobi, tako po spolu, kot tudi po vključenosti v posamezno skupino: športniki - plesalci, drugi športniki in nešportniki obeh spolov. Med plesalkami in plesalci je prišlo do razlike v socialnem jazu, medtem ko smo največ razlik ugotovili predvsem med skupinama vseh športnikov in nešportnikov (socialni jaz, identiteta, družinski jaz, osebnostni jaz, telesni jaz, samokritičnost). Obe skupini športnikov, plesalci in drugi vrhunski športniki obeh spolov imajo v primerjavi z nešportniki obeh spolov višje razvito splošno raven samopodobe oz. samospoštovanja.

Ključne besede: ples, samopodoba, vrhunski športniki, nešportniki

INTRODUCTION

Sport dancing in Slovenia has enjoyed both a long-standing tradition and many great international successes at competitions. In the past many researches were carried out that analysed the motor abilities of sport dancers. Compared to other dancers (acrobatic rock and roll, jazz dance, ballet) and other athletes sport dancers differ significantly only in the field of co-ordination in rhythm. So the question that often arises is what are the specific characteristics that make our sport dancers world champions? For this artistic discipline of sport we sought answers in other branches of science (psychological, sociological and other sciences) which intertwine with kinesiological science and study the possibilities of improving sport results.

In this paper we focus on the self-concept which for many authors forms an important part of the overall psychological profile of an athlete and thus complements the mosaic of psychological preparations of female and male sport dancers, which we have already attempted to partially define (Zagorc & Zaletel 1996; Zaletel, 1998; Zaletel Černoš 2002) as a superstructure of the technical and, respectively, physical preparation of top-level athletes. Attitudes to one's own body, the dancer's self-concept and its presentation in the social environment are one of the most important features of sport dancing, which is an aesthetic sport field.

The role and function of self-concept

Self-concept is the way we see ourselves in our minds (Waitley, 1990). Self-concept is the concept of images an individual makes in all fields of their participation. It involves a subjective experiential category which is the centre of our conscious experience of ourselves and the world around us. It consists of various ranges which the subject's consciousness integrates into a whole. Thus, self-concept represents the centre of the subject's consciousness as well as intra-personal and interpersonal communication (Musek, 1993a).

In general, self-concept can be defined as an organised entity of characteristics, features, standpoints, emotions, images, abilities etc. that the subject ascribes to him/herself. These psychic entities form the so-called referential frame with which an individual co-ordinates and orientates their behaviour (Musek, 1988). They are thus closely connected to the existing value system of the individual as well as the value systems of both the narrower and broader social environments. They are also constantly influenced by defence mechanisms – a sort of membrane between the conscious and the unconscious which only yields to those contents acceptable to the individual's ego (Kobal Palčič, 1996).

Social ego is the 'inane inclination' to comprehend oneself in a way marked by others; we have as many social egos as there are individuals that know us and which form an image of ourselves in their mind. Next to mirror-inverted messages, there is much other essential information which we carry in ourselves and which is completely ours and thus inaccessible to others that lead to the formation and development of our self-concept. These are our intimate wishes, thoughts, emotions etc. all our private, own experience about which others have never had any knowledge. A very important part of our self-concept originates from our memory capabilities. Our memory confirms the continuity and identity of our experience and of our self-concept (Musek, 1993b).

The standard assumption of the last twenty years of contemporary researches in the field of the ego is that the individual's self-concept not only reflects current behaviour but is also the

agent and regulator of that behaviour (Gazvoda, 1996). The individual is supposed to feel the constant presence of a wish to develop a positive self-concept, a motive which relates to self-respect. At the same time, the individual wishes to hold on to the feeling of coherence and continuity but to improve the motive of consistency. Self-actualisation (Maslow, 1970) also represents the motive which relates to the aspiration to improve or change oneself, the aspiration to grow, to develop and to fulfil one's potential.

Self-concept in sports

Over the last two decades the physical self-concept has become the principal aspect of successfulness models in sports as it forms one of the most important components of self-concept (Fox & Corbin, 1989; Sonstroem & Morgan, 1989). Marsh (1998) ascertained that top-level athletes have a statistically higher physical self-concept than non-athletes while, at the same time, he noted this advantage is greater in the male than the female population during adolescence. The relationship between the physical activity and psychological dimensions of the physical self-concept, that is the image of the body (body-image), has been the subject of many other studies (Cash, Novy, & Grant, 1994; Davis & Cowles, 1991; Fox, Corbin, & Couldry, 1985; Marsh & Readmayne, 1994; Sallusso-Deonier & Schwartzkopf, 1991; Sonstroem, Harlow, & Josephs, 1994). The individual starts training or a dietary programme when they wish to control their body, make it stronger, firmer and more beautiful (Yates, 1991).

Some authors study the positive effects of regular exercise on the physical self-concept (Ben-Shlomo & Short, 1986; Fisher & Thompson, 1994). On the other hand, other authors have sought to prove the opposite effects. For example, individuals with eating disorders often exaggerate in their physical activity by trying to compensate for the loss of body mass or to prevent gains in body mass and seeking to self-control their physical self-concept and anxiety (Huddy & Cash, 1997). Silberstein, Streigel-Moore, Timko and Rodin (1988) ascertained that, compared to women without eating disorders, women with an eating disorder prefer physical activity for reasons connected to regulation of their weight. This motive is also connected to more frequent physical activity and greater dissatisfaction with one's own body (Cash, Novy, & Grant, 1994; Crawford & Eklund, 1994).

Cash and colleagues (1994) concluded that the most important reasons male students participate in sports were physical fitness and medical, coupled with reasons connected to physical appearance and body weight. In both genders, they determined a strong connection between the motivation to exercise (principal motives: physical appearance and body weight) and a negative self-concept. Thompson's (1990) summaries of several studies show that dissatisfaction with one's body in runners of both genders is similar to the dissatisfaction seen with one's body in people suffering from bulimia. On the contrary, Brownell, Rodin and Wilmore (1988) found that male and female runners covering forty to fifty kilometres a week experienced an exaggerated concern connected to their body weight. Yates (1991) tried to find psychological parallels between exaggerated running and eating disorders.

Huddy and Cash (1997) compared male top-level athletes marathon runners with educated non-athletes of the same ages and races, namely in their physical self-concept and attitudes to their bodies. Their results show that athletes (marathon runners) assess their physical appearance, their general fitness and health better than non-athletes. Even though athletes put more into their physical fitness and health than the control group, they devote less attention to

their physical appearance and are thus comparable to their peers (in the control group) in their attention to their body weight.

Waalder Loland (1999) examined certain tensions which arise in the physical perception of one's body in top-level athletes – bodybuilders, ski-jumpers and football players. Ski-jumpers and football players revealed a functional orientation to their bodies while, at the same time, ski-jumpers strove towards slim and lightweight bodies which would improve the length of their jumps. Football players also had various physical, body ideals. Bodybuilders were primarily concerned with their physical appearance, above all with the largeness of their bodies. The author also observed a connection between physical appearance anxiety and physical dissatisfaction. She further determined that ski-jumpers were less burdened by their social image than bodybuilders and are therefore more satisfied with their physical appearance. The research also showed that the athlete's perception of their body depends on the contents of the individual sport discipline, and that the main tensions arise in an athlete's perception of their body and cultural notions connected to 'large', athletically-built male bodies.

Many theoreticians, researchers and experts (e.g. Marsh, 1998; Vealey, Hayashi, Garner-Holman, & Giacobbi, 1998) recognise self-confidence as one of the most critical psychological characteristics that influence sports performance. The dramatic influence on sports performance as a consequence of a loss of self-confidence is very interesting, as is the commonly unstable and unpredictable nature of self-confidence within a certain period of time.

The research results of Vealey et al. (1998) pointed to seven sources of self-confidence in sports: physical and mental preparation, social support, mastery and enhancement of one's own abilities, abilities demonstration, luck and superstition, parallel experiences and a comfortable environment. The strongest source of self-confidence in athletes proved to be the first factor of physical and mental preparation. This conclusion firmly emphasises the importance of successfully carrying out physical training and the need for productive mental work since this builds confidence for successfully competing in the unique subculture of competitive sports. The pressures connected to demanding physical abilities are highly valued by our society as they, in the social context, call for enhanced physical and mental preparation to build the athlete's self-confidence (Vealey et al., 1998).

The main purpose of this paper is to research into the self-concept field of sport dancers, other top-level athletes – track-and-field and skiing – and non-athletes of both genders and to compare them. We mainly focus on sport dancers to determine the role of self-concept in their training and sport results. The decision to compare sport dancers with other individual top-level athletes (in the fields of track-and-field and skiing) was also based on the fact of the known similarities of their achievements on the world scale and the fact that dance is an aesthetic sport where especially the physical concept would probably differ from other top-level non-aesthetic sports.

From the given problem evidence we determined the principal goals by which we wish: (a) to determine the principal differences in the self-concept of sport dancers (with regards to their gender); and (b) to determine the main differences in the self-concept of sport dancers, other top-level athletes (in the fields of athletics and skiing) and non-athletes of both genders.

METHOD

Participants

The sample consisted of three groups of 283 individuals; the first group comprised 115 sport dancers (66 female and 49 male dancers: ballroom and latin-american dance, acrobatic rock-and-roll and show dance). A group of other athletes represented the second group, which consisted of 43 female and male skiers and 20 female and male athletes, that is 25 other top-level female athletes and 38 other male athletes. The third, control group of 105 non-athletes was divided into 65 female and 40 male non-athletes, aged 18 to 28 years; ($M = 23$ yrs, $SD = 5$ yrs). In 1999 all the top-level athletes were members of respective (junior and/or senior) national teams or they are in a highly perspective class, while some of them are also World Champions.

Instruments

The Tennessee self-concept scale (author Fitts) was used to determine the self-concept of the individual subjects (Lamovec, 1994). It is a compound of 100 statements in response to which the subject used 5-point Likert scales where 1=not agree at all and 5=strongly agree. Half the statements are negative and the other half are positive. The scale consists of 10 subscales described below.

- a) *Self-criticism* describes fairly non-desirable characteristics acknowledged by the majority of people. People with high self-criticism are supposed to be defensive and prone to creating a favourable impression on other people.
- b) *Identity* describes the way an individual perceives themselves (who am I).
- c) *Self-concept* is the way an individual feels about him/herself.
- d) *Behaviour* is the way an individual perceives their own behaviour.
- e) *Physical ego* encompasses how an individual perceives their own health, body and physical appearance.
- f) *Moral ethical ego* is the way an individual perceives their moral worth).
- g) *Personal ego* subscale measures how an individual assesses their value as a human being.
- h) *Family ego* describes the way an individual perceives themselves in relation to the significant others.
- i) *Social ego* is the way an individual perceives their value in broader social relations.
- j) *General self-concept* level describes the general level of self-respect, how much an individual appreciates themselves and how much they trust themselves.

The standardisation of the Tennessee scale of self-concept was carried out on 626 people aged between 12 and 68. Both genders were equally represented, as were different ethnic and socio-economic groups from the USA. The test-retest of reliability in a period of two weeks was 0.75 for self-criticism and 0.92 for the other subscales (Lamovec, 1994).

Procedure

One-way ANOVA was then used to determine the differences in self-concepts of female and male dancers (with regard to their gender), whereas two-way ANOVA was used to determine the differences between the various groups of athletes and non-athletes (female and male dancers, other female and male athletes and female and male non-athletes).

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the differences in self-concept in both genders of dancers. Female and male dancers differ significantly in their self-concept from the aspect of their social ego.

Table 1: The mean and standard deviation in self-concept between female and male dancers

| SELF-CONCEPT | Female dancers | | Male dancers | | F | p |
|-----------------|----------------|-------|--------------|-------|------|--------|
| | M | SD | M | SD | | |
| Self-criticism | 33.35 | 5.11 | 34.86 | 4.70 | 2.72 | 0.10 |
| Physical ego | 72.98 | 7.30 | 70.91 | 8.49 | 1.88 | 0.17 |
| Moral ego | 67.02 | 7.40 | 69.38 | 6.21 | 3.44 | 0.07 |
| Personality ego | 67.92 | 5.56 | 68.45 | 6.57 | 0.21 | 0.65 |
| Family ego | 69.63 | 7.17 | 71.30 | 7.24 | 1.51 | 0.22 |
| Social ego | 67.82 | 6.11 | 70.33 | 7.02 | 4.03 | 0.04 * |
| Identity | 122.02 | 9.60 | 124.64 | 9.47 | 2.12 | 0.15 |
| Self-concept | 112.55 | 11.10 | 113.73 | 13.41 | 0.25 | 0.62 |
| Behaviour | 110.80 | 8.93 | 111.88 | 8.78 | 0.42 | 0.52 |
| General | 345.37 | 25.13 | 348.73 | 31.53 | 0.38 | 0.54 |

Legend:

M Mean

SD standard deviation

F F relations

* p<0.05

Table 2 shows a comparison in self-concept between the different groups in the sample. The first nine columns indicate the means for all subgroups (dancers together, male dancers, female dancers, athletes together, male athletes, female athletes etc.).

Table 2: Differences in self-concept between dancers, other athletes and non-athletes of both genders; by gender, sport discipline and interaction

| SELF-CONCEPT | DANCERS | | | ATHLETES | | | NON-ATHLETES | | | differences | | | | | |
|-----------------|---------|--------|--------|----------|--------|--------|--------------|--------|--------|--------------|-------------|--------------|--------|------|--------|
| | total | male | female | total | male | female | total | male | female | GENDER (all) | DISCIPLINES | INTER-ACTION | | | |
| | M | M | M | M | M | M | M | M | M | F | p | F | p | F | p |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Self-criticism | 34.11 | 33.35 | 34.86 | 34.11 | 33.11 | 35.12 | 36.17 | 37.68 | 34.66 | 0.09 | 0.77 | 6.05 | 0.00 * | 7.94 | 0.00 * |
| Physical ego | 71.94 | 72.98 | 70.91 | 71.58 | 74.16 | 69.00 | 65.27 | 67.60 | 62.94 | 13.67 | 0.00 | 18.48 | 0.00 * | 0.89 | 0.41 |
| Moral ego | 68.20 | 67.02 | 69.38 | 67.76 | 68.92 | 66.60 | 66.54 | 65.30 | 67.77 | 0.98 | 0.32 | 1.65 | 0.19 | 2.91 | 0.06 |
| Personality ego | 68.19 | 67.92 | 68.45 | 68.12 | 69.45 | 66.80 | 65.86 | 67.23 | 64.50 | 3.01 | 0.08 | 0.03 | 0.04* | 1.58 | 0.21 |
| Family ego | 70.47 | 69.63 | 71.30 | 70.68 | 72.16 | 69.20 | 66.75 | 65.60 | 67.90 | 0.12 | 0.73 | 0.72 | 0.00 * | 2.33 | 0.10 |
| Social ego | 69.08 | 67.82 | 70.33 | 67.57 | 68.29 | 66.84 | 65.70 | 65.82 | 65.56 | 0.09 | 0.76 | 6.01 | 0.00 * | 1.86 | 0.16 |
| Identity | 123.33 | 122.02 | 124.64 | 121.88 | 123.45 | 120.32 | 116.97 | 116.27 | 117.66 | 0.05 | 0.83 | 9.99 | 0.00 * | 1.50 | 0.23 |
| Self-concept | 113.14 | 112.55 | 113.73 | 113.45 | 118.11 | 108.80 | 108.42 | 110.35 | 106.48 | 5.70 | 0.02 | 4.13 | 0.02 * | 3.14 | 0.04* |
| Behaviour | 111.34 | 110.80 | 111.88 | 110.37 | 111.42 | 109.32 | 104.73 | 104.93 | 104.53 | 0.14 | 0.70 | 12.86 | 0.00 * | 0.53 | 0.59 |
| General | 347.05 | 345.37 | 348.73 | 345.71 | 352.97 | 338.44 | 330.11 | 331.55 | 328.68 | 1.53 | 0.22 | 9.38 | 0.00 * | 1.74 | 0.18 |

Legend:

M Mean

total males and females together

F F relations

* p<0.05

The last six columns of Table 2 show the F relations and levels of significance of the F relations according to gender and sport discipline, as well as the interaction between the gender and the discipline. A post-hoc analysis is not included because our main focus is on existing differences, not specifically between certain groups. Significant differences between the groups (dancers, other athletes and non-athletes) appear in almost all variables, except the moral ethical ego variable.

By studying the interactive effect of gender and group on differences in self-concept, we sought to determine whether the influence of the group (dancers, other athletes and non-athletes) is the same for females and males within a particular group. In other words, we wanted to discover whether the trends or effects brought about by an individual sport discipline or non-athletes in relation to other groups are equally expressed in the female and male samples. We established several gender and group interaction effects on self-concept (Table 2).

The differences reveal that the most self-critical are male non-athletes for they are less satisfied with their physical appearance compared to male athletes (dancers and other athletes). Other male athletes and female dancers have the highest values of all for self-satisfaction.

DISCUSSION

The interpretation of results mainly focuses on the differences between the groups and the interaction between gender and disciplines. The most self-critical group proved to be the group of non-athletes. Non-athletes therefore admit most of their unwanted characteristics – this is the way they perceive themselves. The least self-critical group is the group of other athletes. Further, they also have the most positive concept of their own bodies, their health and physical appearance, as well as self-satisfaction – the way they feel about themselves.

The group of dancers of both genders significantly and most positively of all perceives their own value in broader social relations (social ego). They also have the most pronounced identity (who they are) and behaviour, that is the strongest perception of their own behaviour. The influence of the family (family ego) is most important for both groups of athletes, and the least for non-athletes.

A general level of self-respect is most obvious in both groups of athletes – dancers and other athletes of both genders. Compared to non-athletes, top-level athletes have a higher self esteem, they feel that others see them in the same way, and they behave accordingly. Apart from the general level of self-concept, other characteristics common to both groups of athletes – dancers and other athletes are evident in comparison to non-athletes, namely in physical ego, family ego and personality ego. However, there are also some peculiarities and differences between both groups of athletes, especially in social ego which is more important for both female and male dancers. Non-athletes probably poorly assess their own worth, their personal value and their personality in relation to others.

It seems that female dancers perceive their value in social relations better than their male counterparts, equally well within a dancing pair – in relation to their dancing partner – as in the narrow circle (coach, partner, family) and the broader circle of people. Female dancers find it important that society recognises them, approves of their behaviour and they readily form contacts with their environment. These characteristics are extremely important for dancing

performances at competitions since in the category of dance interpretation judges also assess audience communication, partner communication and the behavioural appropriateness of the dancing pair in general.

A female dancer's self-concept is strongly influenced by her convictions regarding other people's opinions. Respectively, the control of the social community influences the assimilation of her social processes and cultural patterns and thus forms her image of herself. In addition, the role expectations of the social environment influence female dancers more than male dancers as they tend to behave accordingly and thus affirm their 'ideal' self in the reality of their social relations. Female dancers form their identity through performing nucleus roles (e.g., sexual, being a good friend, being an athlete).

Male dancers find social ego much less important than their female counterparts, partly because in a pair they carry the role of the 'stronger' one, the one who is 'allowed', that is the one who has more behavioural forms that are socially acknowledged. Therefore, male dancers are not burdened by the appropriateness of their behaviour in their social relations as is typical of female dancers.

Female dancers' higher self-criticism points to the fact that the standards set by their self-concept are extremely high, namely they are higher than those of their male counterparts. The comparison of information about themselves and their behaviour in female dancers is therefore on a higher level and it is probable that their self-concept more strongly affects their behaviour than that of their partners. Female dancers also probably have a higher tendency to maintain a high level of their self-worth or self-respect as determined by the abovementioned high self-concept standards. Further, female dancers (much more than their male counterparts) examine their own output, abilities and characteristics according to their personal scale and values adopted from society.

Perhaps cognitive control is one of the main functions of self-concept that is much more strongly accentuated in female dancers than in male dancers. Thus, out of all possible reactions to a certain situation female dancers automatically pick out the one that enables them the best social interaction and which is, at the same time, compatible with their self-concept. In this case, female dancers should be ideal persons with whom their partners, coaches and other sports experts should be able to work easily and 'create' top-level achievements. However, the experience to date shows this is not so. On the contrary, most often it is probably female dancers who have more complex personalities as they demand a very methodical and often an individual approach. Female dancers are probably well aware of the expectations of their social environment and try to take on various roles, play them out to perfection in accordance with their abilities only to be often contradicted by their own 'private' and 'ideal' ego. That is why with them it is often more difficult than with their partners to understand their nature, their various responses to similar situations (their reactions) as well as their behaviour, especially as they tend to transmit their vocational, professional behaviour into their private relationships.

It appears that the social ego, moral ego and self-criticism are organised as an entity of the personal characteristics and viewpoints of a female dancer, which then influence their behaviour and goings-on, and which the female dancers attribute to themselves. More than male dancers, female dancers regulate their behaviour in accordance with the contents and nature of the images they hold of themselves as moral, ethical, open and very socialised personalities.

This is what female dancers think they are, that is what they want to appear to be within their social environment.

Female and male dancers differ only in one variable of their self-concept – the social ego – which is much more pronounced in female than in male dancers. We thus conclude that self-concept from the viewpoints of self-respect and self-worth is quite similar in female and male dancers. Perhaps we may conclude that it is people with similar personal characteristics who decide to dance (and who persevere at it and prosper).

The comparison between the different groups of participants shows that confidence in one's own abilities (which athletes have for many years worked for), little self-criticism and primarily a high level of self-respect can lead most athletes to their goals and influence the shaping of their personalities. Athletes also value themselves higher in their relations with their social environment which, with their acknowledgement and approval, consolidates their positive self-concept. Non-athletes who do not have such an opportunity are more self-critical and seek ways to establish and prove themselves in fields other than sports.

We may claim that gaining in body mass and certain physical failures (aesthetically speaking) in dancers of both genders influence their aesthetic appearance, which plays a major role in their competitive results. Therefore, it can be expected that female and male dancers are more worried and 'burdened' by their physical appearance than other athletes, who mainly reveal a functional orientation to their bodies. The biggest tensions in an athlete's conceptions of their bodies and cultural ideas are connected to 'large', athletically-built male bodies. Such 'bodies' are not welcomed by male dancers as they would, due to the nature of the dance involved – agility, swift movements round the floor, a multitude of turns, elements of liteness and softness – inhibit the aesthetic appearance, not only the aesthetic appearance of the individual but also the movement in dancing itself and, consequently, competition success.

Positive self-awareness of one's body raises an athlete's self-esteem and thereby the feeling of power they need to achieve top-level results. A positive physical self-concept also means that they are unencumbered by their physical appearance and are as such more concentrated on their activity. With strong self confidence and self-trust athletes can therefore enter the most important competitions since their positive physical self-concept, personality and personal concept in general reduce pre-competition anxiety and give them a feeling of power and the hope of a top-level result.

Compared to other athletes and non-athletes of both genders, both female and male dancers are more social and open, meaning they have a positive relation to the outside world but are also more dependent on it, and they can in extreme cases be ready to comply with it. Audience demands for the beauty and graciousness of female dancers and the masculinity, power and dominance of male dancers also influence the behaviour and manner of female and male dancers. Many authors ascertain that female and male dancers are the most extraverted top-level athletes, followed by other top-level athletes and then non-athletes (Horga, 1993; Tušak, 1997). Social ego was also the least accentuated in the non-athletes in our research.

Many authors determine the influence of dancing on changes and improvements in an individual's self-concept, self-trust and self-awareness (e.g. Pappalardo, 1980). It seems that female and male dancers, with their sociability and openness as well as their communication with the social environment, gain a positive self-concept and thus acknowledge and prove themselves.

That is why the egocentricity of female and male dancers is often spoken about, nevertheless it is probably only ultimately about the fulfilment and satisfaction of their need to be accepted, socially approved and thus self-acknowledged as a positive person in relation to others.

Non-athletes do not perceive their value in the broader environment as well as athletes do, which is connected to their higher level of self-criticism. They also have a negative perception of their own bodies. Non-athletes are more self-critical and are more sensitive to failures in their physical appearance, like in their communication with the narrower and broader environments. They also have a low self-concept and behave accordingly. In addition, they have no possibility to prove their characteristics and abilities in the way athletes do, which results in them not receiving the same feedback information from their environment which would help them create a more positive self-concept and provide a feeling of 'being a better person'. For non-athletes, competitiveness (namely motives of power and influence, productivity) is not as accentuated as in athletes. If they are extroverted then this is only expressed in the sense of making contacts with people, while in athletes it is also expressed in the sense of competing, comparing oneself to others, achieving success and respect in society.

Further, athletes often find emotional support from their families in the case of failure, strenuous training sessions, and arguments with their coaches or fellow competitors. It seems that in most cases the family 'breathes' with the athletes, encourages them during competitions and in moments of crisis, as well as being proud of their achievements. The emotional attachment of athletes to their significant others, who represent the most important emotional, physical and material support during their professional careers, when there is no time for peers and friends outside of the team, cannot be distinguished from that of non-athletes. Non-athletes, especially male non-athletes – who are generally a little less attached to their families – feel mainly in the period of their adolescence, a much greater attachment to their peers, sexual partners and friendships. Moral worth is most accentuated in female dancers who, significantly, value the most other social motives and influences in relation to male dancers of various sport disciplines (Zaletel, 1998).

The most significant differences in self-concept, primarily due to the differences between all athletes and non-athletes of both genders, were discovered among the various groups of participants (dancers, other athletes and non-athletes). Differences were established among them in 90% of the self-concept space.

When examining the gender and group interaction effect on differences in self-concept, it is noticed that the group of female and male dancers is by far the most uniform for all variables of self-concept. It cannot be argued that the nature of dance is partly responsible for the above-mentioned uniformity of the dancers from the self-concept viewpoint – despite being of the opposite gender and being two different personalities the female and male dancers nevertheless perform as one, as a single entity formed out of their movement and expression, their dance. The same does not apply to other athletes and non-athletes of both genders – female and male skiers – as well as those female and male athletes who do not need anybody but themselves to achieve their goals.

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