Impact of Appearance-Related Language on Dancers’ Body Image

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Introduction

• Dancers are at an increased risk of body dissatisfaction and disordered eating (Anshel, 2004).
• The types of cues that instructors give when correcting dancers may contribute to body image disturbance.
• Appearance body-related talk is associated with decreased body appreciation, whereas exercise-related talk is associated with increased body appreciation (Wasylkiw & Butler, 2014).
• Research indicates that focusing on body functionality in writing assignments improves body image (Alleva et al., 2018).
• A preoccupation with body appearance is associated with decreased motor performance (Frederickson & Harris, 2005).
• Experience in ballet is associated with lower body appreciation (Swami & Harris).

Methods and Materials

• Participants were 15 undergraduate students from Chapman University ages 18-21 (M = 19.8), 86.7% female, 6.7% male, and 6.7% identified as “other group not listed.”
• All participants were majoring or minoring in dance and/or enrolled in a dance course.
• Participants completed an online survey in which they were told to read instructions for a simple dance exercise and then perform the exercise once.
• Appearance-related cues and function-related cues were included in the instructions depending on assigned condition. The control group had no additional cues.
• Participants completed the Body Image States Scale (Cash et al., 2002), rated their performance level, and reported their dancer identity (ballet, modern/contemporary, jazz, or “other dancer identity”).

Hypotheses

1. Appearance-related language worsens dancers’ body image.
2. Function-related language improves dancers’ body image.
3. Appearance-related language decreases dancers’ performance levels.
4. Ballet dancers have poorer body image than dancers of other styles.

Results

• A t-test revealed that there was not a significant difference between the appearance-related language group and control group in terms of body image scores (p = .432).
• A t-test revealed that there was not a significant difference between the function-related language group and control group in terms of body image scores (p = .704).
• A t-test revealed that there was not a significant difference between the appearance-related language group and control group in terms of performance scores (p = .749).
• An analysis of variance showed that there was not a significant effect of dancer identity on body image scores (p = .887).

Conclusion

• There was no impact of language-type or dancer identity on body image scores or on performance levels.
• Factors to consider:
  • Environment: performing an exercise in private compared to the typical dance setting with mirrors, fitted dance attire, and dance peers.
  • Reading vs. hearing cues: dancers normally receive feedback and corrections verbally rather than written.
  • Exercise difficulty: the dance exercise given may have been too simple and easy.
  • Strength of cues: comments on appearance that are familiar and impersonal may not be impactful.
• Future Research:
  • Live dance classes in which instructors give cues to individual students verbally to better understand the impact of language in dance pedagogy.

References