

# A TYPICAL BALLET DANCER IS... STEREOTYPED TRAITS OF DANCERS<sup>1</sup>

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Stereotypes have been traditionally defined as generalizations about the typical characteristics of members of a social group (Devine, 1989; Dovidio, Evans, & Tyler, 1986; Karlins, Coffman, & Walters, 1969; Katz & Braly, 1933). This definition of stereotypes reflects a perception that all members of a given group have the same characteristics and traits. It is also well-known that perception depends upon attitudes and employs prejudgment. Stereotypes make it possible for a person to rationalize his or her prejudice against any given group (Allport, 1954; La Violette & Silvert, 1951; 1953; Simpson & Yinger, 1965). Unfortunately, the most simple and convenient stereotypes are often inaccurate, and in many cases instead of «seeing is believing», people's behavior indicates that «believing is seeing» (Hamilton, 1981).

Many researchers have reported that group members tend to accentuate intergroup differences and intragroup similarities (Doise, Deschamps, & Meyer, 1978; Tajfel, 1969; Wilder, 1984) and perceive out-group members as more homogeneous and less variable than in-group members (Judd, Ryan, & Park, 1991; Linville, Fisher, & Salobey, 1989; Park & Judd, 1990; Simon & Brown, 1987; Simon & Pettigrew, 1990; Tajfel 1982). Individuals have also been found to assign more positive group characteristics to themselves than to out-group members (Turner, 1982).

While the use of social categories, such as ballet dancers or folk dancers, narrows the amount of information necessary for action, it also expands the scope of information about an object. Adapting Ehrlich's (1973) speculation; you may need very little information to decide that a person is a ballet dancer, but as soon as you have assigned an individual to this category you have much more information about her or him. Thus, people are willing to make rash inferences about outgroups even though they have very little information.

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Social stereotypes of dancers, as is the case with other objects, can be assumed to be hierarchically organized such that the category «dancers» can be broken into subtypes, such as folk dancers, ballroom dancers, ballet dancers and modern dancers. According to the literature on stereotypes it can be assumed that knowing that individuals are folk dancers implies that they will have certain physical characteristics and psychological traits which differentiate them from other subtypes of dancers.

**The aims:** Even though many studies of social stereotypes have investigated of the perceived characteristics of group members, a review of the literature revealed no research that has examined stereotypes in dance. This study was designed to investigate and compare the stereotype traits of the ingroup and outgroup for four subgroups of dancers; folk dancers, ballroom dancers, ballet dancers, and modern dancers, as perceived by the dancers themselves. The purposes of the research were to:

1. Determine dancers' perceptions of typical out-group stereotype traits.
2. Examine and compare the differences between out-group and in-group stereotypes among the four dance groups
3. Compare out-group and in-group stereotypes with the dancers' self-rated traits

It has been reported that subjects are much more likely to respond to individual differences when judging members of their own group than when judging outgroup members. Based on this premise and on earlier studies on stereotyping it was hypothesized that in-group stereotypes would be perceived as more favorable and more heterogeneous than out-group stereotypes.

*Adjective list.* According to Tajfel (1981) when subjects are presented with a list of traits and asked to mark those which they believe apply to a specific group, those traits chosen most frequently can be assumed to belong to the culturally held stereotype, and those selected least frequently not to be part of it. This method of determining stereotypes has been widely used (as Gilbert, 1951; Katz and Braly, 1933; Karlins, Coffman & Walters, 1969; Ryan, 1996; Tajfel, 1981). Based on this classic stereotype assessment technique, a stereotype assessment instrument was designed. The final list contained 28 psychological traits. Respondents were asked to select as many adjectives as were necessary to adequately describe the target group. Subjects also rated themselves on the same traits.

*Stereotype measures assessment.* The stereotype assessment instrument was designed to elicit respondents' personal beliefs about and knowledge of the stereotypes of folk, ballroom, ballet, and modern dancers as well as themselves. The instruction read as follows: «The following is a list of different traits. Even though in all dance forms there are many different kinds of people, try to think of a typical representative (dancer) of the target group and his or her typical traits and characteristics. Mark all the traits which you perceive to be typical for a dancer



in the group in question. After this mark all the traits which you perceive as being typical for yourself.»

## **Results**

Results are discussed more detailed during the presentation.

### **Summary of the typical and atypical traits of dancers**

The out-group stereotypes of ballroom dancers and ballet dancers were partly overlapping (they shared 4 typical traits), while folk dancers and modern dancers represented more unique dgroups. The four shared traits for ballroom and ballet dancers were improvement-oriented, performance-oriented, neat and self confident. The traits ordinary, messy, and natural did not describe either groups. Masochistic, critical, strong willed and conscientious were perceived to be typical only for ballet dancers, and superficial was seen to be typical only for ballroom dancers. Ordinary, natural and well-adjusted were assigned to the ballet dancer' out-group stereotype. Only modern dancers were perceived as creative, spontaneous, unique and bohemian, Both modern dancers and ballroom dancers were perceived as energetic. Folk dancers did not share any typical trait with any other group.

The similarity of the lists of the most frequently assigned traits between in-group and out-group indicated that the differences, even significant ones, often were relative or «more or less» differences, rather than absolute or «yes or no» differences indicating that ingroup stereotypes were perceived in general, as more favorable than were outgroup stereotypes, i.e., the favorable traits were assigned more often and unfavorable traits less often as typical for a dancer's in-group stereotype. It was also remarkable that in general, dancers assigned a larger number of traits to their own group than to the outgroups. The number of stereotyped outgroup to ingroup traits were 5 and 7 for folk dancers, 6 and 9 for ballroom dancers, 8 and 9 for ballet dancers, and 5 and 10 for modern dancers. This result confirms the original hypothesis and agrees with earlier results that «we» are individuals, more heterogeneous and posses more favorable traits while «they» are more homogenous and posses less favorable traits.

A survey of all 28 traits (not only those «typical or atypical» traits) showed that there were fewer significant (more-less) differences between the ingroup and outgroup traits of ballet and modern dancers than for those of folk and ballroom dancers. For both groups, ballet and modern dancers, there were significant differences on 11 traits, for ballroom dancers 15 traits, and for folk dancer there were significant differences on 21 traits.

Four separate discriminant analysis indicated that based on trait assignments 84% of the folk dancers (57% of ingroup and 94% of out-group

dancers), 82% of ballroom dancers (49% of the in-group, and 92% of the out-group dancers), 76% of the ballet dancers, and 76% of the modern dancers (66% of the in-group, and 79% of the out-group dancers) could be correctly classified into in- or out-groups. Discriminant analysis classified better out-group dancers and this also indicates the higher homogeneity of the out-group stereotypes.