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Psychology of Personality: Real and Virtual Context

THE IMAGE OF THE BODY IN PERSONS WITH THE SPECIFIC BODY EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

The present article describes an empirical study of the body image in the persons with a specific body experience who are trained professionally in the classical dance. This training system develops a specific physical body: turnout, certain positions of the arms, legs, head and torso. According to the authors, it also forms a specific psychological body. The study involves 149 adolescents training professionally in the classical dance in grades 3-7 of the Vaganova Ballet Academy. The image of the body is studied through a complex of the body parts marked by the participants. We analyse the most frequent and high-ranked body parts in each grade. We observe a link between the most frequent, high-ranked parts of the body in the students of every grade and the requirements of the curriculum for classical dance. During the trainee program, subjective significance (rank) of body parts changes. The trained parts of the body, i.e. legs, arms and head become the most frequent and significant parts. Teaching the classical dance contributes to accenting some certain parts in the body image and their "objectification". The trained parts of the body are highly differentiated and rearranged according to their significance and the degree of the teacher's attention to them. In case of less attention to some body parts, they become or stay "transparent" in the body image and low-frequency in the group. The obtained data provide a new understanding of the body image formation under the influence of the psychosocial factors of training physical skills.

Keywords: Adolescents, ballet, the body experience, the image of the body, parts of the body, professional training.

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1. Introduction

One of the fields in the Russian clinical psychology is the psychology of corporeality (Tkhostov, 2020). This course is based on the cultural and historical concept according to L.S. Vygotsky, A.N. Leontiev and A.R. Luria. Like higher mental functions (HMF), the person's corporeality undergoes cultural and historical development, i.e. it becomes mediated culturally, regulated voluntarily and conscious. The socialization of corporeality in ontogeny is realized in mastering symbolic forms of regulation: bodily functions lose their natural character and become mediated culturally. The development of corporeality in ontogeny begins with jointly-shared bodily actions together with the mother who signifies them and fills them with meaning. In this mother-child dyad, bodily actions of the child are embedded in the psychological system of "the image of the world". One of the early forms of meaning exists in the language of sensations (sensory and emotional) – as an initial link of the process of the development of the body image. In ontogeny, the next stage of the development of corporeality is associated with the organizing role of the system of meanings at the level of representation and a symbolic manipulation. A verbalized image of the body receives a variety of meanings in the context of "the image of the world" and becomes the main mediator of bodily actions (Tkhostov, 2020).

The image of the body is a psychological structure and a part of the corporeal self-consciousness. It exerts a significant impact on the development of personality and its self-estimation. It is constantly changing under the influence of sociocultural factors, such as: comparing oneself with other persons, following the ideal images translated by culture, mastering new physical skills, etc.

Within this approach, features of the development and transformation of the psychological body are studied in case of illness (in patients with mental and somatic pathology), in the normal and abnormal ontogenesis, in the virtual reality and in persons who regularly engage in various physical activities and have specific bodily experience (sports, dance, yoga, etc.). One of these is classical dance.

2. Problem Statement

Classical dance is a complex-coordination, musical-scenic type of motor activity that appeals to specific motor stereotypes. It originates in the age of Antiquity. The modern period of development begins in the XV century in Italy, then through France, spreads throughout Europe. It reaches the greatest development in the XIX century in Russia where one of the first professional choreographic training schools started in 1738. Classical dance is distinguished by turnout (legs from hips to soles are turned outward, i.e. supinated) and certain positions of hands, feet, head and torso. These require a proper technical training during the professional choreographic education. Training in the classical dance is a special type of the professional education that takes 8 years. The training begins at the age of 10-11 years old when a child enters the 5th grade of a comprehensive school that corresponds to the 1st year of the ballet education, and it continues till the age of 18-19 years old. As a result, a specific physical body of the dancer forms that differs significantly from the body development in normal ontogenesis.

When learning classical dance, the development of the professional body image may be described according to P.Ya. Galperin's concept about the gradual formation of mental actions (also based on the cultural-historical approach). According to this, the formation of a skill consists of a number of stages and

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a gradual interiorization of external actions. Generally speaking, the latter is about pronouncing the sequence of actions and fixing the attention of a student on the control points which help the student check the accuracy of the action performance. Teaching the classical dance involves control points in body positions according to the curriculum which becomes more complicated from grade to grade. The accuracy of performance (of poses and positions of classical dance) are controlled before the mirror (Radell, 2012), by means of the feedback from the teacher and comparing one's body with the bodies of the classmates (Tsiskaridze et al., 2016). Moreover, keeping physical capabilities in accordance with the accepted standards (the ratio of the leg length to the torso length, height, a certain constitution, the length of limbs, etc.) and a necessary physical shape are important parameters in the success of mastering the profession of a classical dancer. This fact explains an increased attention of the student to his body and to its advantages and disadvantages in terms of classical dance.

The investigations of the body image in adolescence and youth concentrate on studying the satisfaction with body (Dantas et al., 2018; Radell et al., 2017). They also aim at identifying the factors that mediate the human behaviour in terms of the change of one's own body. A major part of the studies of the body image in the ballet and sports in adolescence and youth is about eating disorders and their underlying distorted body image which is associated with perfectionism and a tough competitive environment (for instance, Arcelus et al., 2014, 2015; Diogo et al., 2016; Ilyina & Egorenko, 2014; Liu et al., 2016; Robbeson et al., 2015; Ziazina & Nikolaeva, 2016). Graduating from the educational institution, yet a teenager begins the professional activity as a ballet artist. The specificity of this profession is about the extremely limited age-related career. Most ballet dancers finish their career by the age of 37-40 years old. And a dancer must succeed in solo roles by the age of 23-25 years old to qualify for status positions in the theatre. But a heavy physical load and a high probability of the injury may contribute to an early termination of employment. These circumstances produce a high competition and the desire for an accelerated development of the ballet artist's career.

In the psychology of corporeality, the following variants of the objectification of corporeality and the accentuation of certain parts of the holistic image of the body are described: 1) the sickness or the deformation of body parts; 2) the accentuation of a part of the body due to its emotional evaluation (positive or negative), when comparing oneself with other people or with the ideal model; 3) objectification as a result of training (the teacher accents the parts in the body image that need correction and sets the control points necessary for the development of a physical skill). We think that all the three reasons for the objectification might be present in our sample. Thus, training in the classical dance may be a model for studying the socialization of corporeality and for turning an "ordinary" psychological body into the "professional ballet" body.

3. Research Questions

The questions in our research are how the training system of classical dance forms the professional psychological body, and what changes the body image (its cognitive component) undergoes during the educational program. What "control points" are there: the points to control the accuracy of the movement and position which the teacher accents in different classes. We choose different grades of training to answer those questions: junior school (grade 3), middle (4 and 5) and high school (6 and 7).

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When explaining the accuracy of movements, setting the control points and making up combinations of movements, the teacher employs professional metaphors and names the trained parts of the body (primarily, the legs and arms). For instance, the hip gets turned out, and the leg becomes “side”, "supporting" and “back” (in a position or a combination of movements). According to the concept of the psychology of corporeality, the body is “transparent”, and it is not perceived in the normal state. But when mastering new movements and being unable to perform certain actions, a person faces the bounds of his or her own capabilities. Then, the body becomes objectified, that is a perceived object. The present study should answer the question of how the training system of classical dance forms the professional psychological body. Why do some parts of the body “disappear” from the image of the body, become “transparent”, while others are differentiated and divided into a lot of subparts. When does the “ordinary” psychological body become professional, and is this process the same to all students? We assume that training in the classical dance mediates the development of the body image. The trained parts of the body that change from grade to grade according to the curriculum are going to be the most significant in the body image of adolescents training in ballet in contrast to their peers without any specific bodily experience.

4. Purpose of the Study

The present study aims at identifying differences in the composition and structure of the body image (the subjective significance of particular parts of the body) in the students of the classical dance according to the educational grade.

5. Research Methods

The study involved 149 ballet students (104 girls, 45 boys) of the Vaganova Ballet Academy in Saint-Petersburg receiving secondary special (ballet) education in grades 3 to 7 (table 01).

Table 01. Participants

Grade	Quantity of students	Girls	Boys	Mean age
3	54	17	37	13,3
4	29	9	20	14,5
5	21	9	12	15
6	24	8	16	16,4
7	21	2	19	17

The obtained empirical data were compared with the data about the adolescents learning in the ordinary school (14-17 years old) (published by the author of the method – Zhelatelev, 1999).

The present research studied a cognitive aspect of the body image. The phenomenon of the body image was operationalized through parts of the body (which parts of the body were accented and in what quantity, and which of them were considered to be the most significant by a teenager).

We used the body image test by Zhelatelev (1999) in two stages:

1) the participants had to name all the body parts they knew within two minutes;

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2) the participants should have ranked all the recorded body parts according to their significance. The instruction was the following: “Please, rank the recorded body parts according to their significance to you”.

The results processing included the following parameters: 1) the average volume of the vocabulary of body parts in each class (the number of named body parts); 2) the most frequent body parts in each class; 3) high-ranked body parts in each class.

The volume of the vocabulary was calculated for each student, the average – per class and separately for gender groups in the class. The frequency analysis identified the most frequent (chosen by more than 50% of students) body parts in each class and high-ranked (from 1 to 10) body parts in each class.

The statistical data processing included the following: calculating the arithmetic mean, identifying correlations with the Spearman ρ-criterion between the academic performance (a mark at the final exam in classical dance at the end of the year) and the volume of the vocabulary of body parts and the statistical program STATISTICA 10.0.

6. Findings

Our study resulted in identifying generalised images of the body in the students in each grade. There was no division of adolescence into the junior and senior age, since the younger teenagers train in grades 3 and 4. But according to the division rule accepted in the Academy, grade 3 is referred to junior school, and grade 4 – to middle school, that is why, we consider them separately.

6.1. Junior school

The average volume of the vocabulary of body parts in grade 3 is 15.1±4.5; on the average, it is larger for the girls (16.1) than for boys (13.2). In contrast to the ordinary children who almost always rank “head” first, the ballet children do not rank “head” first. Moreover, some children (11%) do not include “head” in the five high-ranking body parts, and in three participants, “head” is missing in their body image, at all. It is noteworthy that in this sample, almost 20% of the students accent such part of the body as “the brain”. In the vast majority of cases, this part of the body is chosen at the same time as the head. Probably, this is due to a peculiar verbalization of instructions by the teacher.

In the students of grade 3, the body image is strongly differentiated in comparison with the ordinary children. It is confirmed by a large volume of the vocabulary of body parts ($p \leq 0.05$). The absence of legs or arms in the body image in a number of the students is associated with a high differentiation. They are not chosen as a separate part of the body and are presented as a complex of the parts: hips, knees, legs and feet. From the standpoint of teaching methods, it is explained by the fact that hips, knees and feet take part in the turnout. Besides, when jumping, the dancer lands on the toes, and children are trained to step onto the toe (Bazarova & Mey, 2020; Vaganova, 2014). After acquiring the knowledge and skills in the first two grades, the task shifts from mastering the basic positions of classical dance. In the 3rd grade, they master certain movements and special techniques both in certain poses and in rotations; therefore, the attention is concentrated on the legs (especially, on the feet) (Bazarova & Mey, 2020; Tsiskaridze et al., 2016). Thus, the rank of the feet is higher than, for instance, that of sense organs. The task of senior grades is a comprehensive work with arms as a narrative element. So, at this stage, although differentiated, the hands

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are consciously ranked lower than the feet. In the ballet student group, the classical dance also causes a frequent differentiation of fingers between the fingers and toes (40%) and the differentiation of the trained parts of the body (arms and feet) between the right and the left. It is not observed in the ordinary students.

The internal body is widely represented in the body image of the ballet students (20%) in contrast to the ordinary adolescents. It is associated with some diseases of the internal organs, due to which the latter are objectified and accented by the person in the body image (for instance, with gastritis, they set apart stomach) (table 02). But in this case, the internal body contains many organs of various systems including muscles and bones. The boundary between the external and internal body is like blurred. It is noteworthy that these students have not yet learned the basics of anatomy, and another explanation for this phenomenon should be found. Their accent on the digestive system may be connected with two factors. First, keeping to certain aesthetic criteria at the expense of food restrictions, and as a consequence, accompanying health problems. Second, in the training method of the classical dance, the stomach is a starting point to measure the level of arms height in the first position. No correlations between the final performance in the classical dance and the volume of the vocabulary of body parts are detected.

Table 02. The most frequent and high-ranked body parts in grade 3

Body parts	Average rank in the grade	Percentage of the body parts in the grade
Head	2,4	94,4
Legs	3	92,6
Arms	4,8	96,3
Torso	6,4	53,7
Feet	6,6	72,2
Neck	8,2	75,9
Knees	8,5	50
Eyes	9,1	50
Hands	9,7	61,1
Fingers	10	79,6
Shoulders	10,4	51,9
Nose	11,2	57,4
Ears	11,9	51,9

6.2. Middle school

In grade 4, the average volume of the vocabulary of body parts is less and amounts to 11.1±4.7. Grade 5 is also referred to the middle school in which boys are several times fewer than girls. We have combined the data of grades 4 and 5 to estimate gender differences. In this sample, the average volume of the vocabulary of body parts is 10.4 for boys and 12.3 for girls (table 03). No correlations between the academic performance and the volume of the vocabulary of body parts are found. In comparison with the previous grade, the number of the parts in the body image decreases significantly, the body image “folds itself”. This process is also observed in norm by the age of 15 years old. The number of high-frequency parts of the body decreases by almost a half ($p \leq 0.05$). The representation in the image of the inner body also reduces. The torso (body) and feet rank high, since they are the main focus in the training (Bazarova & Mey, 2020; Safronova, 2019; Tsiskaridze et al., 2016; Vaganova, 2014) in this grade.

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Table 03. The most frequent and high-ranked body parts in grade 4

Body parts	Average rank in the grade	Percentage of the body parts in the grade
Head	2	96,6
Legs	3	100
Arms	3,4	100
Torso	5,3	55,2
Neck	6,1	51,7
Feet	7	65,5
Fingers	9,3	65,5

In grade 5, the average volume of the vocabulary is 12.3±3.4. No correlations between the academic performance and the volume of the vocabulary of body parts are found. In grade 5 in contrast to grades 3 and 4, arms (and their segments) come to the forefront after the head, and parts of the leg get out of the high-frequency parts of the body. At this stage of stage of the training, the accent shifts to setting arms (Safronova, 2019; Tsiskaridze et al., 2016; Vaganova, 2014). Arms are a non-verbal narrative element of the classical dance (Bazarova & Mey, 2020; Safronova, 2019; Vaganova, 2014). By the 5th grade, children already master the technical elements for a complex performance; they are required for more consciousness and expressiveness (Safronova, 2019; Vaganova, 2014). So, in addition to the development of technique and patience, the main task of the teacher is, in particular, to teach dance as an expressive means (Tsiskaridze et al., 2016; Vaganova, 2014). In comparison with the junior grades, the head begins approaching the highest rank that corresponds to the distribution in the ordinary population. The inner body is almost not represented.

The volume of the vocabulary of body parts and the number of the high-ranked parts in the group is almost not changed in comparison with grade (table 04).

Table 04. The most frequent and high-ranked body parts in grade 5

Body parts	Average rank in the grade	Percentage of the body parts in the grade
Head	1,7	95,2
Arms	2,6	81
Legs	2,8	85,7
Hands	6,8	57
Fingers	7	52
Ears	7,3	52
Shoulders	7,4	62
Nose	8,1	52

6.3. High school

The average volume of the vocabulary of body parts in grade 6 is 14.1±5.8 (boys=11.3, girls=14.4). No correlations between the academic performance and the volume of the vocabulary of body parts are detected. Legs are the highest-ranked body part in the group (in contrast to the other grades and the ordinary children). The head ranks second. In three persons (12.5%), the body image has no head or its substituting parts (for instance, “skull” and “face”). In six participants (25%), there is no head in the five highest-ranking parts of the body. In comparison with the middle school, the volume of the vocabulary of body parts

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increases again on average for the group. The number of high-frequency body parts remains the same, i.e. eight. It is noteworthy that knees appear among the high-ranked parts in the image of the body (table 05). This may be due to the fact that in high school, the knees and ankles are most injured.

Table 05. The most frequent and high-ranked body parts in grade 6

Body parts	Average rank in the grade	Percentage of the body parts in the grade
Legs	1,7	95,8
Head	2,1	83,3
Arms	4,9	100
Neck	6	62,5
Feet	6,8	70,8
Knees	7,9	62,5
Fingers	10,2	70,8
Hands	12,6	50

In grade 7, the average volume of the vocabulary of body parts is 13.2±6.8. One should note the largest standard deviation from the average for a group in this sample. This means that there are students with a very large vocabulary of body parts and those with an extremely narrow one. Besides, this group finds a positive correlation between the educational performance in classical dance and the volume of the vocabulary of body parts. The more body parts in the image, the higher the mark ($p \leq 0.05$). Head and legs are the most significant parts in the sample (table 06). Torso "returns" to the body image, and high-ranked tips of the limbs (feet and fingers) stay in the trained parts (arms and legs). Moreover, 8 individuals (38%) differentiate fingers and toes in their vocabularies.

Table 06. The most frequent and high-ranked body parts in grade 7

Body parts	Average rank in the grade	Percentage of the body parts in the grade
Head	2,4	100
Legs	2,5	100
Arms	3,6	95,2
Torso	3,8	61,9
Feet	7,2	61,8
Neck	7,2	66,7
Finger	10,4	76,2
Nose	11	52,4

In comparison with the ordinary adolescents, the ballet students highly differentiate the trained parts of the body (arms and legs) but the segments of those parts are distributed differently in different grades. Either hands and fingers, or knees and feet come to the forefront. From the standpoint of teaching methods, the toes must always be "extended" (so outstretched as possible), and the fingers are the end of any pose and any gesture. Accordingly, teachers pay a special attention to those parts of the body (Safronova, 2019; Tsiskaridze et al., 2016; Vaganova, 2014). It is also noteworthy that in high school, nose ranks high among the body parts. That indicates the need to control the breath or, probably, the aesthetic experiences of the older adolescents.

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7. Conclusion

At the beginning of training, the image of the body contains a great number of parts because the child is just starting to train, and he or she needs to control a lot of different parts of the body. When training, this controlled body "folds itself" (as it occurs during the development of a motor skill and its automation: control over the entire process is no longer required but only over the so-called control points). Accordingly, those control points are the parts of the body that the teacher accents. They are changing when ballet students move from grade to grade. In choreography, they consider that it is more difficult to develop ("teach") legs than anything else. Therefore, the legs are first, then the hands, the body, and the head that completes the emotional and expressive colouring of poses and movements. Speaking generally, we see that this educational trajectory is connected with the image of the body in the students. By the end of the training, the volume of the vocabulary of body parts again unfolds and rearrange. It forms a "professional" body in the successful students who have had an excellent mark in the classic dance and have not been expelled from high school.

The objectification of corporeality, the accent on certain parts of the holistic image of the body and the increase in their subjective significance in ballet adolescents is due to a number of factors: the training process itself in the classical dance, injuries to body parts and the comparison of their body with their classmates.

The structure of the body of ballet teenagers differs from ordinary children in that fact that the trained parts of the body come to the forefront: legs, arms and head (the head is not always ranked first). During the educational program, the trained parts of the body are strongly differentiated and rearranged according to their significance and the degree of the teacher's attention to them. A more differentiated understanding of one's own body can contribute to a more accurate and competent performance of movements (the economy of efforts, the accuracy of performance, and as a result, the minimum risk of injury).

The present investigations can be continued by increasing the number of subjects in all the grades, comparing the ranks of body parts in a conscious and unconscious body image. The limitations of the research should include its design: it is not a longitudinal study. And probably, monitoring the same students during their full education at the Academy would give somewhat different results than a cross-section comparison of students of different grades. Yet, teachers of the same educational institution following the general curriculum verbalize body parts in their own manner. The teacher's image of the body can be an additional variable that influences the formation of the body images of their students. The limitations of the study should also include gender inequality – the majority of the persons in the present study are females.

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