

Narcissism and conflict in male female dyads in ballroom dance

Abstract

Key words: narcissism, conflict, athlete-athlete dyads, ballroom dance, communication, satisfaction

Introduction

Researchers from several disciplines have paid considerable attention to personal and social relationships (e.g., Cappella, 1988, Neziek, 1995) and coach - athlete relationships (e.g., Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007; Jowett & Nezelek, 2011), however athlete-athlete dyads and ballroom dance generally has very little theoretical background. Ballroom dance or dance sport is a unique sport discipline that requires absolute cooperation based on communication and trust within a dance couple (Chu & Wang, 2012). Same as in different sports, success can be achieved only through long-lasting, physically and mentally demanding training sessions. During these sessions, disagreements resulting in deteriorated performance or, in serious cases, split-up of the couple can occur (Tremayne & Ballinger, 2008). The purpose of this study is to find out whether there is a correlation between narcissism and frequency and intensity of conflict within dance couple.

Ballroom dance

Ballroom dance has gained a lot of popularity over last two decades leading to tendencies to add ballroom dance on the list of Olympics sports (Tremayne & Ballinger, 2008), however chances are slim due to a subjective nature of marking system. Ballroom dance represents sport-type art discipline as training comprises technique, choreography, partnering skills and athletic training. Ballroom dance consists of five standard and five Latin American dances (Nieminen, 1998). Ballroom dance environment is highly competitive. During competitions, dance couples are judged based on their technical skills and presentation skills (Rohleder, Beulen, Chen, Wolf & Kirschbaum, 2007). Dance couple communicates through movement and puts great emphasis on aesthetics. To create the movement, dancers project the energy and put pressure at various points of the body. Inherent part of the performance is to create the mood of each dance and express feelings and emotions. Training sessions can take up to

several hours every day a week plus competitions. Ballroom dance is mentally and physically demanding; dancers fight with pain, exhaustion, and together with their partner they share success the same way as failure (Picart, 2006). Ballroom dance greatly contributes to forming social relationships and improves physical fitness and mental well-being (Chu & Wang, 2012).

Narcissism

The construct of narcissism has historically generated a lot of interest, both theoretically (Freud, 1914/1957; Kernberg, 1975; Kohut, 1971) and empirically (Emmons, 1987; Raskin & Hall, 1981; Raskin & Shaw, 1988; Raskin & Terry, 1988). Narcissism can be described from clinical or social-personality psychology perspective (Miller & Campbell, 2008). In clinical settings, narcissism is defined as "a pervasive pattern of grandiosity, need for admiration, and a lack of empathy" (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, American Psychiatric Association, 2000, p. 714). Narcissism was classified as an official mental disorder less than 40 years ago in the publication of the DSM-III (American Psychiatric Association, 1980), however as of 2011 narcissism has been declared to be no longer a mental disorder (American Psychological Association, 2011). In social-personality settings, narcissism, sometimes referred to as "normal" narcissism (Campbell, Goodie & Foster, 2004), is associated with a grandiose sense of self-importance (Roberts, Woodman, Hardy, Davis, & Wallace, 2013), entitlement and uniqueness (Brown, Budzek & Tamborski, 2009). In the present research, the term narcissism will be used in the social-personality context. Based on valid self-reported measure score, such as Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Hall, 1979), we distinguish between low narcissists (non-narcissists) and high narcissists (narcissists; Campbell, Goodie & Foster, 2004).

We all know somebody who is self-absorbed, self-aggrandising, yet easily threatened by negative feedback (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). Why study narcissism when it is not an appealing personality trait for society? Research about narcissism has emerged in development psychology, sport psychology or organizational behaviour over last few decades (Campbell & Miller, 2011) and demonstrated connection between e.g., narcissism and performance (Wallace & Baumeister, 2002), or narcissism and positive well-being (e.g., Sedikides, Rudich, Gregg, Kumashiro & Rusbult, 2004).

Narcissists believe to be extraordinary and superior to others (Gabriel, Critelli, & Ee, 1994). Narcissists rely on themselves, they feel to be more competent and enjoy power and prestige (Buss & Chiodo, 1991). They thrive for attention, admiration and they expect special treatment (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). Narcissism is linked to unusually high self-expectations and an excessive sense of control over their world (Wallace & Baumeister, 2012). Narcissists are over confident, they value poorly close relationships (Twenge & Campbell, 2013) and they lack empathy (Jones et al., 2017). Combining the traits listed above, narcissists do not make warm, caring partners (Keller et al., 2014).

Narcissism in sport

Davis (1992) described exercise as a medium for narcissists leading to increased participation to enhance their self-worth, therefore individuals high in narcissism engage more in physical activity (Jackson, Ervin & Hodge, 1992).

Even though narcissists score high in confidence and self-believe (Campbell, Goodie, & Foster, 2004), their performance is not often better compared to non-narcissistic individuals (Roberts, Woodman, Hardy, Davis, & Wallace, 2013). However, narcissists performed better when self-enhancement opportunity (e.g. performing in front of an audience, performing

under pressure, performing difficult task) is high as opposed to low (Wallace & Baumeister, 2002).

Interpersonal relationships

Relationship is a process shared between two people (Jowett, 2005). Extensive research has been conducted on people's close relationships as quality of relationships has a great effect on their physical and emotional well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Dance partnership is similar to a marital relationship regarding the amount of time spent together during training and close relationship and trust needed to perform at the highest level. Many dance couples are involved not only professionally but romantically as well. The foundation of relationships lies in communication (LaVoi, 2007). Interpersonal communication is a dynamic, interdependent process between two people (Gouran, Wiethoff & Doelger, 1994) that underpins initiation, maintenance, negotiation or dissolving of relationships (Hargie & Tourish, 2017). The ability to communicate, including ability to manage conflict, is fundamental for successful, functional relationships (LaVoi, 2006). Interpersonal communication comprises a content component and a relational component (DeVito, 1986). The content component includes technical, strategical skills that are important to achieve the goal (Jowett & Cockerill, 2002). Not least important relational component is related to gaining mutual trust, respect, understanding or support (LaVoi, 2006). However, the nature of relationships changes over time as a response to human cognitions, emotions and behaviour (Poczwardowski, Barrot & Jowett, 2006).

Interpersonal relationships in sport

Research in sport settings was non-existent until the beginning of 20th century (Wylleman, 2000). Several studies have been conducted about coach-athlete relationship as coach-athlete

dyad is considered the most important one for sport performance (Lyle, 2002). Butler (1997) claims that quality of coach-athlete relationship is crucial for successful performance and interpersonal satisfaction, however none of the research was focused on athlete-athlete dyad such as in ballroom dance. The most important components that contribute to successful performance and satisfied relationships are mutual trust, respect, belief, support, communication and understanding (Jowett & Cockerill, 2002). On the other side, lack of trust, respect, mental or physical abuse can seriously undermine the coach-athlete relationship (Jowett, 2003). Two major issues that influence interactions within relationships are friendliness or hostility displayed to each other and tendency to manipulate the relationship (Kiesler & Auerbach, 2003). Interpersonal relationships in sport are dependent on transactions between athletes or between coach - athlete (e.g. communication, attention paid to each other), and perception of the relationship (e.g. formal or intimate, democratic or autocratic; Shepherd et al., 2006).

Narcissism and relationships

Based on Kernberg's theory (1974), narcissism is developed as a defence against feelings of abandonment during childhood, especially before 3 years of age, as a result of the lack of adequate love from a caregiver. This defensive attitude plays a significant role in relationships during adulthood (Campbell, 1999). Underneath the confident shell, narcissists are constantly scared of loss, abandonment and they have strong doubts about themselves (Greenberg & Mitchell, 2003; Kernberg, 1974). Despite their insecurities, narcissists seek relationships for their self-enhancement (Kohut, 1977).

The construct of self-enhancement (e.g., self-love, self-esteem) has been strongly linked to narcissism. Self-enhancement enables good feeling and ability to perform well but also brings more complex outcomes for close relationships (Neff & Karney, 2005). Narcissists seek out

relationships to feed the desire of being admired, they fantasize about this admiration later and receive further enhancement (Campbell & Campbell, 2009) as there is no limit for narcissists' admiration strivings (Campbell & Green, 2007).

Narcissistic behaviour in relationships has been described mostly in romantic settings.

Narcissists initiate relationships easily because of their charm and talent to persuade others about their qualities (Brunell & Campbell, 2011). However, these relationships do not usually last long as described in the Agency Model (Campbell, Brunch, & Finkel, 2006) and the Chocolate Cake Model (Campbell, 2005). The Agency Model assumes that narcissists use relationships to fuel their self-esteem (Campbell & Green, 2007). Narcissists seek public competition as an opportunity for glory, however the blame others when they fail (Campbell, Reeder, Sedikides & Elliot, 2000). The Chocolate Cake Model is based on others' perspective and similarity with a chocolate cake: irresistible at the beginning, but its richness can make you nauseous after some time (Campbell, 2005).

Interpersonal conflict

Despite the substantial research of conflict, the concept remains unclear and complicated (Wachsmuth, Jowett & Harwood, 2016), therefore the comparison of results becomes difficult and prevents the development of deeper knowledge about conflict (Barki & Hartwick, 2004).

Conflict is a multidimensional concept that involves disagreement between people, strong emotional reactions (e.g. anger) and interfering behaviours (e.g. confrontation; Paradis, Carron, & Martin, 2014a).

We distinguish between intrapersonal (within a person), interpersonal (between two people), intragroup (between members of a group), intergroups (between groups) and situational (between a person and situational factors) conflict (LaVoi, 2009).

Conflict can be seen as an opportunity to express perspectives, feelings and willingness to respond to other's individual ways of engaging in the relationship (Jordan, 1997). Conflict can be beneficial to increase effectiveness through *power-with* conflict model: "one's success is not achieved at the expense of others" (Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver & Surrey, 1991) and the goal keeps the relationship intact (LaVoi, 2004). Interpersonal and relational outcomes are not determined by frequency of conflict, but by the process of negotiating disagreements. The quality of communication is crucial to maintain healthy relationships (Collins & Laursen, 1992), good communication skills can help to lessen the frequency, intensity and duration of the conflict (LaVoi, 2004).

Only couple studies have been conducted about conflict in sports environment. Research within highest level of competitive sports environment revealed that any kind of conflict was experienced nearly by 75% of participants including athletes, coaches, managers and others (Mellalieu, Shearer & Shearer, 2013). Teams and individuals described negative effects of conflict on performance. A study about coach-athlete dyads showed that 35% of athletes experienced conflict with a coach, while 100% coaches experienced conflict with athletes (LaVoi, 2004).

Methods

Participants

Ballroom dancers representing 60 male - female dyads ($M_{\text{age}} = 25.19$, $SD = 8.80$) volunteered to participate, 12 participants were excluded because of missing information in the questionnaires. Participants came from competitive and preparation for competitive environment from around the world, mostly from the United Kingdom, the United States and the Czech Republic. Participants competed on all levels of national (E, D,

C, B, A, S), international (world championships, continental championships, Grand Slams) and collegiate levels (bronze, silver, gold).

Procedure

Dance organizations were contacted through emails or personal meetings to briefly provide information about the purpose of the study and participation criteria (i.e. dance dyads, older than 18 years old). The confidentiality was assured. Informed consent was obtained, and participants were provided with the link to online questionnaires. They were debriefed and thanked for the participation.

Measures

Demographic and general questions about the dance partnership

At the beginning we asked participants about their age, nationality and gender. We collected basic data about the dance partnership such as length of the dance partnership, competitive level and whether they are romantically involved with the dance partner.

Narcissism

40-item Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Hall, 1979; Raskin & Terry, 1988) was used to determine the level of narcissism. The NPI is a commonly used self-measure of narcissism in normal population (Raskin & Terry, 1988) as it exhibits good internal consistency, reliability and construct and factorial validity (Rhodewalt & Morf, 1995). The NPI contains 40 forced-choice items. A point is assigned for each narcissism item, 0 for non-narcissism item (e.g. A: I will be a success; B: I am not too concerned about success.). The total narcissism is calculated by summing all points on a scale 0-40.

Dance partnership aspects questions

Questions on a scale 1-5 were created to find out more information about the dance partnership. The purpose of the questions was to collect information about satisfaction with

the dance partnership, doubts about the partnership, frequency of conflict, intensity of conflict and expectations about the dance partnership.

Results

The descriptive results revealed that mean NPI score ($M=16.39$, $SD=6.69$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .83$) in the current study was higher than the mean reported in the previous research ($M=13.87$, $SD=6.85$; Donnellan, Trzesniewski, & Robins, 2009). Previous research also showed gender differences for NPI score; males generally score higher on the NPI than females (Tschanz, Morf, & Turner, 1998). Results from current study among dancers showed discrepancy with previous statement as an independent samples t-test showed no significant differences between males ($M=16.60$, $SD=6.64$) and females ($M=16.18$, $SD=6.79$) scores.

As can be seen in Table 1 the correlation analysis revealed that narcissism was significantly correlated with problems in the dance partnership, $r = .30$, $p < 0.01$; number of arguments in the dance partnership, $r = .30$, $p < 0.01$; dance level, $r = .19$, $p < 0.05$ and doubts about the partnership, $r = .19$, $p < 0.05$.

Gender differences

Even though results did not show significant relationship between narcissism and gender, previous research showed differences between males and females, therefore bivariate correlational analyses were conducted for each gender separately.

Results for females, as shown in Table 2, revealed a relationship between narcissism and dance level $r = .28$, $p < 0.05$; and narcissism and intensity of argument $r = .42$, $p < 0.01$.

Results for males, as shown in Table 3, indicated positive relationship between narcissism and doubts about the dance partnership $r = .29$, $p < 0.05$; narcissism

and perception of deterioration of performance based on conflict, $r = -.35, p < 0.01$; narcissism and intensity of the argument $r = .47, p < 0.01$; and narcissism and number of arguments, $r = .41, p < 0.01$.

Dyads

For hypothesis 1, 2 and 3 we used moderated hierarchical regression to examine whether narcissism level of males and females within dyads predicted number of arguments, intensity of fight and satisfaction with the dance partnership.

Hypothesis 1

There will be significance within dyad interaction for narcissism predicting number of arguments.

Moderated hierarchical regression was undertaken to assess interaction between narcissism and number of arguments. No main effect was found for female narcissism ($\beta = .154, p > 0.05$) and male narcissism ($\beta = .529, p < 0.05$), the interaction term was also not significant ($\beta = -.172, p > 0.05$), therefore the hypothesis was not supported.

Hypothesis 2

There will be significance within dyad interaction for narcissism predicting intensity of fight.

Moderated hierarchical regression revealed that there was a main effect for female narcissism ($B = 0.591, p < 0.01$) and male narcissism ($\beta = 0.655, p < 0.01$) were both significant. Furthermore, the interaction term was also significant ($\beta = -0.276; p < 0.05$). Consequently, hypothesis is accepted, intensity of argument is combination of male and female narcissism as shown in Figure 1. The interaction term was plotted at 1 standard deviation for the high and the low conditions.

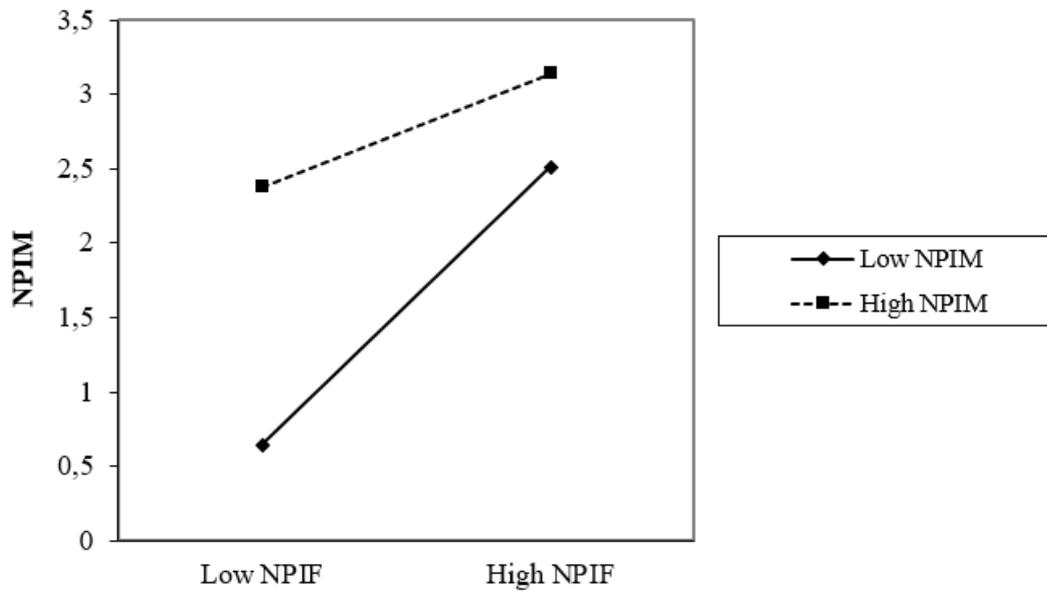


Figure 1: The intensity of conflict, interaction between male and female levels of narcissism

Hypothesis 3

There will be significance within dyad interaction for narcissism predicting satisfaction with the dance partnership.

Moderated hierarchical regression was conducted, and no significance was found for female narcissism ($\beta = .047, p > 0.05$) and male narcissism ($\beta = -.447, p < 0.05$), the interaction term was also not significant ($\beta = .226, p > 0.05$), therefore the hypothesis was rejected.

Table 1 All Participants Individual Level Means, Standard Deviations, and Zero-Order Correlations for All Variables, Alpha Coefficients Are Displayed on the Diagonal.

	Mean	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1 Narcissism	16.39	6.69	(.83)									
2 Dance level	2.30	.86	.19*									
3 Satisfaction with dance partnership	3.84	1.04	-.08	.05								
4 Doubts about the dance partnership	1.95	.96	.19*	-.00	-.79**							
5 Problems in the dance partnership	2.32	1.22	.30**	.07	-.70**	.72						
6 Number of fights	2.62	2.31	.26**	-.03	-.35**	.35**	.59**					
7 Intensity of conflict	2.15	1.47	.11	.13	-.00	-.05	-.02	-.03				
8 Does conflict deteriorate performance?	1.31	.46	-.15	-.28**	-.46	-.46**	-.40**	-.31**	-.01			
9 Age	25.19	8.80	-.05	.14	-.06	-.06	-.04	-.07	.16	-.06		
10 Gender	1.50	.50	-.03	-.04	.09	.09	.01	-.04	.18*	-.05	-.09	
11 Romantic relationship	1.58	.50	-.08	-.22	.19*	.19*	.03	-.04	-.06	.20*	-.19*	.00

Note. $N=120$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Table 2 Females Individual Level Means, Standard Deviations, and Zero-Order Correlations for All Variables.

		Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	Narcissism	16.12	6.80									
2	Dance level	2.42	.79	.28*								
3	Satisfaction with dance partnership	3.80	1.09	.06	.00							
4	Doubts about the dance partnership	2.03	.96	.09	.07	-.79**						
5	Problems in the dance partnership	2.33	1.30	.21	.16	-.70**	.76**					
6	Number of arguments	2.53	2.12	.12	.03	-.42**	.48**	.67**				
7	Intensity of conflict	2.30	1.50	.42**	.35**	-.48**	.63**	.70**	.46**			
8	Does the conflict deteriorate performance?	1.27	.45	.01	-.32*	.39**	-.50**	-.36**	-.12	-.38**		
9	Age	25.13	8.69	.05	.19	.00	.00	-.06	-.10	.07	-.06	
10	Romantic relationship	1.58	.50	-.13	-.24	.00	.07	-.02	.01	-.04	.36**	-.24

Note. $N=60$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Table 2 Males Individual Level Means, Standard Deviations, and Zero-Order Correlations for All Variables.

		Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	Narcissism	16.60	6.60									
2	Dance level	2.42	.79	.14								
3	Satisfaction with dance partnership	3.88	.99	-.24	.11							
4	Doubts about the dance partnership	1.87	.97	.29*	-.13	-.80**						
5	Problems in the dance partnership	2.30	1.15	.39**	.05	-.71**	.69**					
6	Number of arguments	2.75	2.47	.41**	.19	-.30*	.23	.54**				
7	Intensity of conflict	2.00	1.44	.47**	.12	-.54**	.55**	.74**	.56**			
8	Does the conflict deteriorate performance?	1.33	.47	-.36**	-.24	.30*	-.38**	-.40**	-.49**	-.46**		
9	Age	25.98	9.23	-.15	.14	-.035	.01	.06	-.03	.00	-.12	
10	Romantic relationship	1.58	.50	-.03	-.24	-.203	.31*	.07	-.10	.02	.10	-.23

Note. $N=60$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Discussion

The central purpose of this study was to further examine the correlation between narcissism and conflict in male - female dyads. Overall findings of this study were consistent with the hypothesis that a correlation between narcissism and conflict exists.

The results revealed that ballroom dancers both males and females are higher in narcissism than general population. It is not surprising, narcissists believe to be superior performers and they enjoy showing their talents (Raskin et al., 1991). A significant positive (moderate) relationship was found between narcissism and the dance level, that showed that the higher the dance level, the more narcissistic dancers are. A history of success enhances one's self-regards, which can lead to fostering of narcissism (Felson, 1993). Narcissists perform well in high-pressure and potentially glorious situations as a reflection of their desire to be admired and respected by others (Wallace and Baumeister, 2002).

Researchers highlighted gender differences in previous investigations (e.g., Tschanz, Morf, & Turner, 1998). In the current study among dancers, the examination of gender differences seemed fruitful as female narcissism appeared to be connected only to intensity of conflict, whereas male narcissism was strongly linked to intensity of conflict, doubts about the partnership and number of arguments. Narcissistic male dancers had more doubts about their dance partnership and they perceived the conflict as more intense and more frequent.

Results showed that intensity of conflict is related to the level of narcissism. When both dance partners were non-narcissists the intensity of conflict was very low, adding just one narcissistic dance partner was sufficient enough to raise the intensity by many points. In the combination of both dance partners being narcissistic, the intensity of conflict was extremely high. These findings confirm narcissists' tendency to control their world, their struggle with relationships and their lack of the ability to cope with negative feedback.

Narcissists become angry, hostile and aggressive towards negative feedback (Rhodewalt & Morf, 1998). In summary, narcissists believe they are better than others and do not like have their views challenged as they assume they are always right. This area may have implications for interventions and educational programs that focus on how evaluations from dance partners, dance teachers and family members are delivered and how the recipient, in this case a narcissistic dancer interprets and responds to them.

The centre of attention of educational programs should be focused on communication as it is the primary source of satisfied needs or frustration in the relationship (Heitler, 2001). Conflict can occur when communication is not mutual. The most effective way to resolve conflict is through conflict management. Conflict management serves to soothe disagreements and minimize the dysfunctions of conflict (Rahim, 2003). The contingency approach of conflict management is comprised of five distinct styles of handling conflict (integrating, compromising, obliging, dominating and avoiding). The most appropriate styles for handling conflict within dance dyad would be integrating and compromising style. Integrating style balances concern for self as well as for others and involves open exchange of information. Compromising style is based on both parties giving up something (Rahim, 2003).

Educating dancers about communication and handling the conflict could result in higher satisfaction with their dance partnership and greater well-being. Based on the result of this study, satisfaction with the dance partnership was strongly connected to conflict. Dancers were less satisfied with their dance partnership when frequency and intensity of conflict is high. Subsequently, conflict leads to deterioration of performance and doubts about the dance partnership.

Limitations

Even though this study is the first one of a kind to introduce narcissism and conflict in dyads in sport settings and the topic in general has much to offer to the field, there are several potential limitations we need to consider. The sample could be larger and more diverse (e.g. more dance couples from senior category, more dance couples from Top 100 in the rank list, culturally diverse population). When possible, participants should be given an option to answer scale/rank questions instead of closed (yes/no) questions (e.g. Rank the deterioration of performance based on conflict on a scale instead of Does the conflict deteriorate your performance?). Adding measure about relationship commitment, such as a modified version of the sport commitment questionnaire (Scanlan, Carpenter, Schmidt, Simons, and Keeler, 1993) previously used in similar research about relationships in coach-athletes dyads (Jackson, Dimmock, Gucciardi & Grove, 2010) would be beneficial to determine whether narcissism is related to dance partnership commitment. Questions about previous partnerships and reasons for split-up could help to determine whether there is a pattern in behaviour.

Future directions

The present study despite its limitations, meaningfully presents the topic and provides many possible directions for future research. Further studies should address methodological limitations of the current study by providing a larger and more diverse sample or by adjusting questions to be more precise. Moreover, because the narcissism – conflict relationship appeared more applicable to males, further exploration of the gender differences should be considered.

Further study using qualitative methods could help to explain origin of conflict. Current study established the presence of conflict within a dance couple, but not specific reasons preceding the conflict.

Based on recommendation for educating dancers in communication and conflict management, future research about effectiveness of these interventions would help to determine the successfulness of the method.

Studying athlete – athlete dyads could further enhance the field with awareness how to establish and maintain healthy relationships.

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