

ABSTRACT

Research has shown that dancers discriminated more strongly between happy and sad videos than non-dancers, which had been considered as a representation of higher emotional sensitivity. However, little is known about why dancers showed higher emotional sensitivity than non-dancers. The present study investigated the intricate relationship between dance expertise, emotional sensitivity and empathy. In Study 1, 25 female non-dancers watched 84 dance videos and rated emotional valence and arousal of the videos. Fifty videos, half expressing happy emotions and half expressing sad emotions, were selected for use in Study 2. In Study 2, 54 female dancers and 52 female non-dancers rated their subjective affective reactions to the 50 dance videos and completed questionnaire on dance expertise and trait empathy. Results showed that dancers and non-dancers did not differ in their subjective affect ratings to happy and sad videos, implying no difference in emotional sensitivity. There was no significant group difference concerning total empathy score, but dancers had higher scores on one of the subscales - Perspective Taking. More interestingly, higher perspective taking was correlated with happier ratings for sad videos, and dance expertise moderated this relationship, in that dancers with higher perspective taking gave higher ratings for sad videos. The present study not only generated and validated two categories of emotionally expressive videos, but it also shed light on future investigations about dance and emotion.

Keyword: dance, emotion, empathy, emotional sensitivity