

# Dance in Black and White: Examining the Stereotypes of Black and White Ballerinas and Hip-Hop Dancers

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Throughout the course of ballet dance history, White ballerinas have maintained the spotlight—subsequently leaving limited representation of Black ballerinas. However, other forms of dance, such as hip-hop, may yield greater representation of Black dancers due to hip-hop's origins during the Harlem Renaissance. The current work examined if perceivers stereotype ballet and hip-hop as dance forms more suited for White or Black dancers, respectively. Two hundred sixty-eight online participants completed explicit and implicit (implicit association test) stereotyping measures examining endorsement of the ballet = White and hip-hop = Black stereotypes. In step with predictions, results showed that individuals were more likely to explicitly and implicitly endorse White women as ballerinas and Black women as hip-hop dancers. In addition, participants with ballet and hip-hop dance experience were less likely to endorse the stereotype that ballet dancers are White and hip-hop dancers are Black. Moreover, less stereotype endorsement also predicted greater likelihood of seeing a ballet or hip-hop performance in the future. These findings suggest that perceivers hold expectations about racial identities of dancers in ballet and hip-hop dance. Future directions regarding the role of race and stereotyping in the world of dance and the performing arts are discussed.

**Keywords:** race, ballet, stereotyping, implicit, explicit

## Key Points

- This study is among the first to use implicit and explicit bias measurement tools to examine individuals' racial expectations of ballet and hip hop dancers.
- In general, participants stereotype White women as ballerinas and Black women as hip hop dancers, which has implications for understanding dance and movement as a racialized context.
- Individuals with experience in dance (from beginner to professional) are less likely to endorse restrictive racial stereotypes about dancers.

In John Martin's (1963) analysis of the history and innovation of dance, he praised the first ballet ever made in 1581 as an "unprecedented splendor." At the time of ballet's original debut in America in the 1930s, Black dancers in ballet were not often seen on stage. Martin (1963) refuted the idea that Black dancers held the aesthetic values and demeanor for the traditional European art, claiming that it is a matter of the length of limbs, spine curvature, and inborn pelvis limitations that separates Black and White dancers. As a form of art, ballet has been historically positioned as a tool that upholds elitist and Eurocentric values and beliefs, such as valuing thinness, pale skin, and cis-femininity (Baker, 2021). Yet, some scholars acknowledge that the movement form itself is not inherently exclusionary, and argue that it is the teachers, choreographers, directors, and viewers who impose hegemonic Whiteness in their experience and practice of ballet (Baker, 2021; DeFrantz, 2003).


For example, George Balanchine, a 20th century pioneer of American Ballet, drew inspiration from Black American movement styles (e.g., jazz) to inform his modern adaptation of ballet in the

United States (Banes, 2020; Kerr-Berry, 2004). Even so, Balanchine has been criticized for appropriation of Black American dance trends without due acknowledgment (Kerr-Berry, 2004). Despite modern American ballet's frequent incorporation of dancers of color (e.g., *Agon*, George Balanchine, Alvin Ailey, American Ballet Theatre), inclusion and representation of prominent Black dancers in ballet (e.g., Misty Copeland, Aesha Ash), and the creation of the first African American ballet company—the Dance Theatre of Harlem—in 1969, it is unclear if the historical perceptions of Black ballet dancers still impose restrictions on their place in ballet today. The current study examines if active and passive viewers of dance hold expectations toward the racial identities of ballet and hip-hop dancers.

Presently, there are gross discrepancies in racial representation in ballet training and careers in professional ballet. In 2017, universities in the United States offering a ballet degree reported that 62% of the ballet degrees were awarded to White dancers, 20.5% were awarded to Latinx dancers, 5.13% were awarded to Asian dancers, and only 2.56% were awarded to Black dancers (DataUSA, 2020). On the other hand, the data on racial demographics of hip-hop dance training at universities in the United States are not readily available. In professional ballet companies, White women made up over half the proportion of professional ballerinas in 2018, whereas, Black women comprised only 5% (Robinson, 2021; Zippia, 2018). Although the majority of professional ballet dancers are women

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(roughly 56%), there are higher proportions of Black men in professional ballet companies in the United States compared with Black women (Brown, 2018; Robinson, 2021). These rates suggest that professional ballet companies have interest in racial diversification, yet their efforts to expand do not include Black women at the same rate as Black men or other racial groups (Brown, 2018). As one potential explanation of the dearth of Black women in ballet, McCarthy-Brown (2011) attributes W.E.B. Du Bois's concept of double-consciousness to the experience of Black ballerinas, highlighting the tension of Black ballerinas in striving to appeal to classical European aesthetics, while attempting to uphold their roots of Black experience. However, in 2015, one Black ballerina, Misty Copeland, made headlines and led campaigns to inspire dancers alike, due to her achievement as principal dancer of American Ballet Theatre. In her book, *Life in Motion: An Unlikely Ballerina*, Copeland (2014) describes her childhood experiences of dance as well as the tale of her success in this strictly Eurocentric division. Gregory's (2018) short TIME Magazine documentary of Copeland includes interview footage in which she explains how her purpose is to uproot the understanding of what ballerinas look like in contemporary settings. Copeland's story paved the way for Black ballerinas to be taken seriously; however, there is still limited representation of Black ballerinas on stage.

## Stereotypes of Black Women

Traditional "American" stereotypes denote men as strong, aggressive, and dominant, whereas women are perceived as weak, passive, and submissive (Donovan, 2011; Eagly, 1987). Despite the prevalence of these stereotypes, scholars suggest that Black women, in particular, are potential victims of discrimination due to the expectations that they may possess both masculine and feminine traits (Collins, 2011; Donovan, 2011). For example, Ghavami and Peplau (2013) found that masculine-gendered stereotype traits associated with a racial group are applied to all members of that racial group despite their gender. For instance, the attributes that are most common when stereotyping Black individuals across genders (e.g., "loud," "athletic," and "violent") more closely resemble frequent attributes stereotyped with "Black men," rather than "Black women" (Ghavami & Peplau, 2013).

Intersectional researchers have identified four main stereotypes assigned to Black women, based in historical and societal contexts, that highlight the perceptions that Black women possess both masculine and feminine traits. According to Donovan (2011), Black women can be labeled as a "Jezebel," the hypersexual, lustful music video dancer; a "Mammy," the selfless caregiver that lacks sexuality; a "Sapphire/Matriarch," the aggressive, loud, indignant Black woman; or a "Strong Black Woman" stereotype that encompasses both extreme selflessness and indestructible matriarchal qualities (see also Hodson et al., 2021). According to media and entertainment studies, popular media is abundant with representations of these stereotypes (Millard & Grant, 2006).

Although stereotypes are consistently present in popular shows, movies, and magazines, spaces within these domains have been created to more positively appeal to audiences that primarily consist of Black women. Research by Messineo (2008) found that increased representation of Black women in media has subsequently augmented both positive and negative portrayals of Black women. Yet, Messineo (2008) notes that while niche networks, such as Black Entertainment Television, that provide increased representation of Black women are watched by the in-group target members (i.e., Black men and women), the out-group (i.e., White

men and women) often have little interaction with these positive and diverse representations of Black individuals. A similar phenomenon is identified when dance and dance companies are examined through this lens. Germane to the world of dance, while Black ballet companies such as Dance Theatre of Harlem, have defined their own creative space in dance, these companies' achievements may not influence the larger—and predominantly White—companies' standards for balletic performance and increasing the representation of Black ballerinas on stage.

## Racial Stereotypes and Dance

Ballet dance has been identified as a Eurocentric form of art that limits its pursuers based on many types of aesthetics, including body shape (e.g., thinness, body perfectionism; Silverii et al., 2021), bone structure and natural alignment, and flexibility, as well as skin color (Brown, 2018; McCarthy-Brown, 2011; Swami & Harris, 2012). The avenues for Black ballet dancers are increasingly confined by adjacent stereotypes of Black women in media and entertainment (McCarthy-Brown, 2011). These characteristics are most prominently featured in the traditional Russian vanguard style of ballet, originating as a form of entertainment for royalty in the 19th century, that values storytelling with romantic themes (Scholl, 2003). The stereotypical White ballerina is slim, submissive, delicate, and meek which, as described by Donovan (2011), is the converse of stereotypes about Black women, such as "Strong Black Woman" or "Matriarch" characters (see also McCarthy-Brown, 2011). For instance, popular magazines (e.g., *Essence* or *Ebony*), uphold the "Strong Black Woman" stereotype by encouraging its readers to achieve a state of matriarchal and sexually powerful behavior (Reviere & Byerly, 2013). With these common tropes that place expectations for the roles of Black women in American society, viewers of dance may also be inclined to agree that ballet dancers should be White and not Black.

Perceptions of the race of ballerinas may be convoluted by the hyposexuality of the role, which favors a submissive White character, whereas hypersexuality is commonly encouraged for Black female viewers in adjacent forms of entertainment (e.g., Black Entertainment Television, *Essence* magazine, *Ebony* magazine). Unjustly, Black ballerinas are often not judged based only on technical abilities like the rest of the ensemble members (Debonneville, 2021; McCarthy-Brown, 2011). The color of their skin has been associated with traits and behaviors that historically oppose the qualities of a ballerina (Messineo, 2008; Reviere & Byerly, 2013), and Black ballerinas are regularly told to paint their skin lighter (McCarthy-Brown, 2011). In opposition to the hyposexuality of ballet, many anti-Black ballerina arguments emphasize a predisposition of hypersexuality in Black women (Collins, 2011; Donovan, 2011; Martin, 1963). Current dance trends that predominantly feature Black women as dancers, such as music videos, are often hypersexualized. One such dance form, twerking, is commonly centered around the hip thrusting and pelvic gyrating that grew out of traditional forms of African dance. The nature of twerking, however, is not inherently sexual, as such movements were used in traditional celebratory and religious ceremonies (Dombia, 2013). These movements, however, are in opposition to the restricted use of the pelvis and elongated spine commonly found in ballet (Bakersville, 2014; Martin, 1963). When White women attempt the twerking style of dance, they only possess the same hypersexuality for the extent of time that they are performing the twerking; whereas the same dance performed by Black women has been associated with essentialized hypersexuality (Campbell,

2004, Debonneville, 2021). Viewers of dance may be less likely to expect a Black dancer in a ballet role.

In popularized and mainstream dance in the United States, twerking can be most commonly seen in hip-hop dance, or a polyrhythmic and percussive form of modern dance that emphasizes syncopated, isolated, and grounded movement (Durden, 2019). Hip-hop dance has its roots in New York City in the late 1960s, where the hip-hop well known today evolved from traditional African-diasporic dance forms, much like jazz dance. It quickly gained popularity as a social dance performed in night clubs and party venues across the United States (BBC, 2015). Accordingly, hip-hop dance is taught and practiced in a variety of professional and recreational settings around the world.

There are explicit historical ties to hip-hop dance and the Black American community, yet hip-hop does not present as racially restrictive as does ballet. With its mainstream popularity, dancers of a variety of racial backgrounds perform hip-hop dance professionally, and recreationally participate in hip-hop dance in local studios and national stages such as popular television shows like Fox's *So You Think You Can Dance*, NBC's *World of Dance*, and MTV's *America's Best Dance Crew*. For some beginner-level dancers seeking hip-hop classes, essentialist assumptions about "inherent" or "innate" rhythmic ability of Black instructors have intimidated White novices, such that they report avoiding classes led by Black dancers (Ghandnoosh, 2010). Alternatively, advanced dancers and instructors themselves do not necessarily attribute skill to racialized patterns of ability, but more so to level of comfort, freedom, and passion (Ghandnoosh, 2010). Yet, innate abilities have been cited as a reason to *exclude* Black dancers from ballet (see Bourne, 2017; Martin, 1963; McCarthy-Brown, 2018; Rodriguez, 2021). Given that expectations of the racial identities of participants are more restrictive for ballet than hip-hop, Black women are expected to be less frequently associated with ballet and more frequently associated with hip-hop dance, despite their rising participation rate in ballet dance forms.

## Social Role Theory in Dance

Social role theory (SRT; Eagly, 1987) can explain why Black women have been left in the margins of the ballet world. According to SRT, perceptions and stereotypes about group members stem from perceiver's experiences with overrepresented and abundant qualities that are linked to typical behaviors of a certain group (Diekmann et al., 2000; Eagly, 1987). SRT posits that gender-specific roles are perpetuated by the socialization of men and women into seeking out and possessing specific traits and behaviors that are specific to their role requirements as a man or a woman (Diekmann et al., 2000). These actions are then reinforced by society in a way that synchronously approves gender role-consistent behaviors and disapproves gender-inconsistent behaviors. Stereotypes develop in this context as perceivers' associations about social groups are confirmed by visible traits and behaviors that the majority of these social groups have been reinforced to possess (Koenig & Eagly, 2019). Recently, more work has identified the intersectional aspects within the experiences of individuals in their coexisting social groups, meaning the influence of several social identities on an individual. Ghavami and Peplau (2013) found that the experience of Black women in America is particularly unique due to the interplay of restrictive stereotypes about both race and gender. Indeed, Black women go unrecognized in American culture as the experience of a woman is defined by the White woman, and the experience of being Black is

defined by the Black male (Ghavami & Peplau, 2013; Sesko & Biernat, 2010).

Regarding ballet, a field historically dominated by White women, the marginalization of Black women can be understood using the intersectionality and SRT framework. The stereotypes ("Mammy," "Matriarch," "Jezebel," and the "Strong Black Woman") posited by Donovan (2011) have, in part, restricted Black women's presence and visibility within ballet such that the overwhelming majority of ballerinas on professional stages are White. Consequently, viewers of ballet may perpetuate stereotypes about the racial identities of dancers where White women are perceived to possess the qualities preferred in ballet. As a result, polarizing beliefs about the characteristics that White (Black) women (do not) possess may reinforce the continual marginalization of Black women in ballet. SRT and intersectional analyses suggest that restrictive social roles limit Black women's pursuit of this style of performing arts and eliminate their presence on national and global stages. Furthermore, hypersexuality in some dance contexts (e.g., hip-hop), coupled with general masculinity stereotyped to be associated with Black women may add to viewers' beliefs on the racial expectations of dancers. Perceivers of dance may be less likely to associate Black dancers with ballet due to roles prescribed by social hierarchies, as well as an overrepresentation of White women in this form of dance (Diekmann et al., 2000; Eagly, 1987). Alternatively, perceivers may be more likely to associate Black dancers with hip-hop due to the reinforcement of Black women and hypersexuality in history, art, and media (Collins, 2011; Donovan, 2011; Reviere & Byerly, 2013).

However, research on stereotypes and stereotype change suggests that individuals who participate in ballet and hip-hop dance may be less likely to hold strict expectations about the racial identities of dancers. Particularly in the domain of dance, hip-hop novices expressed more hesitancy in taking a class with a Black instructor, compared with advanced hip-hop dancers who did not indicate a racial bias (Ghandnoosh, 2010). Individuals presented with information that disproves a widely held stereotype can incite stereotype change (Weber & Crocker, 1983), and individuals within a marginalized group who are exposed to the success of same-group others in a nonstereotypical domain decrease bias (Klein et al., 2019). On the other hand, those who may not have any experience with ballet or hip-hop may be less aware of diversity within the domain, or may overestimate the lack of racial diversity based on stereotyping and social role expectations. Thus, being exposed to varying representations of racial identities in many forms of dance can provide disconfirming stereotype information and models for participants of dance and reduce stereotyping and viewer expectation of the racial identity of ballet and hip-hop dancers.

## The Current Study

The current study examined how White and Black women may be explicitly and implicitly stereotyped as ballerinas and hip-hop dancers, respectively. Whereas explicit biases reflect stereotypes and attitudes that individuals are consciously aware of and use to navigate their social environment, implicit biases may reflect stereotypes and attitudes that are unable to be accessed through direct reflection and cognition (Greenwald et al., 1998). When applied, intersectional and social role theories suggest that individuals may have strict expectations of the race of ballet and hip-hop dancers, shaped not only by historical trends, but also upheld by associations between race, gender, and hyper- and hyposexuality



within ballet and hip-hop roles. This study predicted that individuals would be more likely to both explicitly and implicitly endorse the stereotype that ballerinas are White (ballet = White) and hip-hop dancers are Black (hip-hop = Black). We also hypothesized that individuals with dance experience may be less likely to endorse the ballet = White and hip-hop = Black stereotypes.

## Method

### Participants

A total of 268 online participants age ranged 18–82 ( $M = 36.79$ ,  $SD = 10.91$ ) were recruited through Amazon's Mechanical Turk. One hundred forty-four participants identified as male (53.7%) and 122 as female (45.5%). The sample was predominantly White ( $n = 197$ , 73.5%), with 38 (14.2%) Black, 14 (5.2%) Latinx, 10 (3.7%) East Asian, two (0.74%) Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, two (0.74%) South Asian, one (0.38%) American Indian/Alaskan Native, and four (1.49%) "other" racially identified participants, respectively. Forty-two (15.7%) participants had ballet experience, 226 (84.3%) did not have ballet experience, and 48 (17.9%) had hip-hop experience and 220 (82.1%) did not have hip-hop experience. Of those with experience, seven (2.6%) participants reported being professional ballet dancers, and six (2.2%) reported being a professional hip-hop dancer.

### Procedures

The study was approved by the State University of New York at Geneseo's Institutional Review Board. Participants completed a study on attitudes toward dancers through the Inquisit 5 software program (2016). After consenting to participate, participants completed an implicit bias measure that assessed their automatic associations toward White and Black women ballet and hip-hop dancers. Participants then completed an explicit measure assessing their associations toward White and Black women ballet and hip-hop dancers and a demographics questionnaire which measured their experience with dance. At the end of the study, participants were debriefed and compensated \$1.50 for their participation based on typical rates of compensation for Amazon mTurk.

### Measures

#### Implicit Association Test

Participants completed an adapted version of the implicit association test (IAT) that measured implicit race and dance type associations (Greenwald et al., 1998). Participants used the "E" and "I" keys on a computer keyboard to categorize images of the faces of White women and Black women with words that related to ballet (e.g., *classical*, *delicate*, *graceful*, *exquisite*, *dainty*) or hip-hop (e.g., *urban*, *break-dance*, *aggressive*, *strong*, *freestyle*) dance. Implicit bias was measured by the speed at which participants categorized compatible associations (ballet + White/hip-hop + Black) versus incompatible associations (ballet + Black/hip-hop + White) associations.

The improved scoring algorithm was used to calculate a score on the IAT ( $D$  score; Greenwald et al., 2003). Racial associations with ballet and hip-hop were assessed together, such that positive  $D$  score indicated faster categorization of compatible associations (ballet + White/hip-hop + Black) and slower categorization of incompatible associations (ballet + Black/hip-hop + White). Negative  $D$  scores indicated faster categorization of incompatible associations and slower categorization of compatible associations.

### Semantic Differential Pairs

Participants completed a collection of 16 semantic differential pairs (eight items regarding ballerinas and eight items regarding hip-hop dancers) using a 7-point scale (Osgood et al., 1957). For example, participants answered whether ballerinas/hip-hop dancers are good/bad, strong/weak, beautiful/ugly, and so on.

To assess explicit associations between race and dance type, one of the semantic differential pairs asked participants if ballerinas were more likely to be Black or White using a 7-point scale where a higher rating on this item indicated greater stereotype endorsement of the stereotype that ballerinas are White. Another semantic differential pairs asked participants if hip-hop dancers were more likely to be Black or White, also using a 7-point scale. Lower ratings on this item indicated greater endorsement of the stereotype that hip-hop dancers are Black.

### Dance Experience

Participants noted if they had any previous dance experience in ballet, hip-hop, and other forms by choosing "none," "beginner," "intermediate," "advanced," or "professional." For analyses, experience with dance was transformed into a dichotomous variable with 0 = no dance experience, and 1 = dance experience (*beginner* to *professional*<sup>1</sup>). We also included measurement of dance performance attendance as an exploratory variable to assess participants' general interest in dance performances. Participants answered if they saw a ballet or hip-hop show in the past 12 months (yes or no), and how willing they were to see a ballet or hip-hop performance in the next 12 months using a 7-point scale (1 = *very unlikely*, 7 = *very likely*).

## Results

### Explicit and Implicit Stereotype Endorsement

To assess explicit endorsement of race and dance stereotypes, the average explicit endorsement score for ballet and hip-hop dance was tested against the middle number of the scale (4) in a one sample  $t$  test using SPSS (version 27). Results showed that participants were more likely to explicitly endorse the stereotyped association of ballet dancers with White,  $M = 5.20$ ,  $SD = 1.26$ ,  $t(267) = 15.62$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cohen  $d = 1.26$ , 95% confidence interval [CI] [1.05, 1.35]), and hip-hop dancers with Black,  $M = 3.10$ ,  $SD = 1.38$ ,  $t(267) = -10.74$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cohen  $d = 1.38$ , 95% CI [-0.79, -0.52]. Also in line with predictions, the overall  $D$  score on the IAT ( $M = 0.48$ ,  $SD = 0.40$ ) was significantly greater than zero,  $t(268) = 19.47$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [0.43, 0.53]. Taken together, these results indicate that participants explicitly and implicitly associate White women with ballet and Black women with hip-hop. Correlations for the implicit and explicit stereotype endorsement scores can be found in Table 1.

Additionally, analyses of variance were conducted to assess if explicit and implicit stereotype endorsement varied by participant race and gender. For explicit stereotype endorsement, a significant main effect for race,  $F(1, 229) = 8.47$ ,  $p < .001$ , revealed that White participants were more likely to explicitly endorse the stereotype that ballerinas are White and hip-hop dancers are Black ( $M = 2.27$ ,  $SD = 1.83$ ) than Black participants ( $M = 1.24$ ,  $SD = 1.97$ ,  $p < .01$ , CI [0.32, 1.67]). No main effect of gender or interaction effects emerged. Similarly, a significant main effect of race for implicit associations,  $F(1, 229) = 12.55$ ,  $p < .001$ , found that White participants showed quicker associations between compatible groups (White/ballet and Black/hip-hop;  $M = 0.51$ ,  $SD = 0.38$ ,  $p < .001$ , CI

[0.12, 0.41]), compared to Black participants ( $M=0.24$ ,  $SD=0.51$ ). However, no main effect of gender or an interaction between race and gender emerged when examining implicit associations.

### Participant Experience With Dance

Results also showed a significant difference in the explicit endorsement scores by participants' dance experience. Participants who had some form of ballet experience ( $M=4.36$ ,  $SD=1.79$ ) were less likely to endorse the ballet = White stereotype than were participants with no ballet dance experience ( $M=5.35$ ,  $SD=1.06$ ),  $t(266)=4.93$ ,  $p<.001$ , Cohen's  $d=1.20$ , 95% CI [0.60, 1.40]. Moreover, participants with some form of hip-hop experience ( $M=3.71$ ,  $SD=1.69$ ) were less likely to endorse the hip-hop = Black stereotype than were participants who had no hip-hop dance experience ( $M=2.96$ ,  $SD=1.26$ ),  $t(266)=-3.47$ ,  $p=.001$ , Cohen's  $d=1.35$ , 95% CI [-1.17, -0.32]. Results from the IAT also showed that those with ballet experience ( $M=0.17$ ,  $SD=4.74$ ) reported less implicit stereotype endorsement than did participants who had none ( $M=0.53$ ,  $SD=0.37$ ),  $t(266)=5.21$ ,  $p<.001$ , Cohen's  $d=0.87$ , 95% CI [0.21, 0.46]. Similarly, participants who had hip-hop experience ( $M=0.19$ ,  $SD=0.44$ ) implicitly endorsed the race and dance stereotypes less than did participants who had no hip-hop dance experience ( $M=0.52$ ,  $SD=0.37$ ),  $t(266)=5.87$ ,  $p<.001$ , Cohen's  $d=0.94$ , 95% CI [0.24, 0.47]. These findings suggest that individuals who partake in ballet and hip-hop themselves are less likely to implicitly and explicitly associate ballet with White women and hip-hop with Black women.

### Likelihood of Attending a Dance Performance in the Future

Simple linear regression models were used to predict the likelihood of seeing a ballet performance in the future based on implicit and explicit stereotype endorsement. These results showed that decreases in implicit ( $B=-0.05$ ,  $SE=0.01$ ,  $p<.001$ ) and explicit ( $B=-0.35$ ,  $SE=0.09$ ,  $p<.001$ ) stereotyping predicted increased

likelihood of seeing ballet performance in the future (see Table 2). In addition, decreased implicit ( $B=-0.06$ ,  $SE=0.01$ ,  $p<.001$ ), but not explicit ( $B=0.10$ ,  $SE=0.08$ ,  $p>.20$ ), dance stereotyping predicted increased likelihood of seeing a hip-hop performance in the future.

## Discussion

The current study examined individual's explicit and implicit associations of ballet dance with White women and hip-hop dance with Black women. In support of the predictions, individuals were more likely to both explicitly and implicitly associate White women with ballet and Black women with hip-hop dance. However, this effect was moderated by dance experience such that those who have danced ballet or hip-hop were less likely to implicitly and explicitly endorse the ballet = White and hip-hop = Black stereotypes. In addition, individuals who implicitly and explicitly associated White women with ballet were less likely to report interest in seeing a ballet performance in the future, whereas individuals who implicitly associated Black women with hip-hop dance reported more interest in seeing a hip-hop performance in the future. The combination of these findings suggests that perceivers have expectations about the racial identities of specific types of dancers, however, those with experience within the dance domain are less likely to endorse specific racial identities of those in dance roles.

The findings of the current study provide an extension to SRT under the context of roles in dance and the performing arts. Despite the popularity of ballet and other forms of dance in mainstream America, viewers and participants of dance maintain ideals pertaining to the role requirements of dancers based on traditional perceptions that ballet is an activity for White elite aristocrats (Garafola, 1985; McCarthy-Brown, 2018). Yet, under the SRT framework, Black women are not stereotyped to possess the qualities (i.e., submissiveness, delicacy, hyperfemininity) necessary for ballet. The presence of Black women in ballet does not seem to align with perceivers cognitions about Black women, which is consistent with the literature, such that Black women's experience is silenced by viewer's salient Black male stereotypes that oppose seemingly necessary traits (e.g. daintiness, grace, etc.) for ballet (Debonneville, 2021; Ghavami & Peplau, 2013; Sesko & Biernat, 2010). Meanwhile, the persistent hypersexualization of Black women in art and culture since the Middle Ages, and the traditional African roots of hip-hop have reinforced an association between Black women and dancing hip-hop (Gilman, 1985; McCarthy-Brown, 2018). Endorsement of the stereotype that ballerinas are White and hip-hop dancers are Black highlights perceiver's categorizations of racial identities and dance and may

**Table 1 Correlation Matrix of Implicit and Explicit Stereotype Endorsement**

|                   | 1     | 2     | 3 |
|-------------------|-------|-------|---|
| 1. Ballet SDP     | —     |       |   |
| 2. Hip-hop SDP    | -.06  | —     |   |
| 3. <i>D</i> score | .29** | -.21* | — |

Note. SDP = semantic differential pairs; *D* score = implicit association test score.

\* $p<.05$ . \*\* $p<.001$ .

**Table 2 Relationship Between Explicit and Implicit Stereotype Endorsement and Likelihood of Seeing a Ballet or Hip-Hop Performance in the Future**

| Variable                                   | <i>B</i> | <i>SE</i> | $\beta$ | <i>t</i> | <i>p</i> |
|--|----------|-----------|---------|----------|----------|
| SDP  |          |           |         |          |          |
| Likelihood of seeing a ballet performance  | -0.35    | 0.09      | -0.25   | -4.11    | <.001    |
| Likelihood of seeing a hip-hop performance | 0.10     | 0.08      | 0.08    | 1.28     | .201     |
| <i>D</i> score                             |          |           |         |          |          |
| Likelihood of seeing a ballet performance  | -0.05    | 0.01      | -0.24   | -4.03    | <.001    |
| Likelihood of seeing a hip-hop performance | -0.06    | 0.01      | -0.24   | -4.02    | <.001    |

Note. SDP = semantic differential pairs; *D* score = implicit association test score.

subsequently limit opportunities for women in dance and the performing arts in general.

More broadly, restrictive expectations about the racial identities of dancers extend beyond the scope of ballet and hip-hop. What perceivers consider to be the prototypical “ballerina” or “hip-hop dancer” may also reflect perceivers’ associations and biases of White and Black women, as the traits associated with ballet and hip-hop highly correspond with social role expectations for White and Black women, respectively (Ghavami et al., 2012; McCarthy-Brown, 2018). This is problematic because increased negative sex-related beliefs (i.e., acceptance of interpersonal violence, and delegitimizing sexual harassment experiences) have been associated with viewing hypersexuality and objectification in popular hip-hop dance performances (e.g., music videos; Aubrey et al., 2011). If audiences believe and expect hip-hop dancers to be Black, and their beliefs about sex and sexuality are shaped in part by the hip-hop music videos they watch, Black women are particularly vulnerable to becoming victims to these negative sexual beliefs, on or off the stage. On the other hand, the aesthetics of ballet are often considered to represent ultimate beauty, grace, tradition, and self-control (Bourne, 2017; Martin, 1963; Rodriguez, 2021). Yet, the embedded racialization of ballet, “is part of a larger historical imaginary that positions Black bodies and others outside the normalized constructs of Whiteness” (Rodriguez, 2021, p. 54), further restricting Black women from inclusion in conceptualizations of beauty. Indeed, ballet companies are seeking diversification by introducing more Black and other male dancers of color to their stages (Brown, 2018). Albeit, they are doing so by augmenting their definition of femininity and Whiteness, rather than welcoming non-White bodies as they are (Debonneville, 2021; McCarthy-Brown, 2018; Rodriguez, 2021).

In the 21st century, interest in traditional ballet performances has decreased (Homans, 2010a, 2010b), despite many companies’ efforts to reinvent classic ballets and engineer choreographic innovation (Rodriguez, 2021). Prominent artists at the turn of the century (e.g., Balanchine, Stravinsky, Kirstein, etc.), have retired or passed, and their successors have been unable to captivate audiences in the same way (Homans, 2010b). Some scholars have argued that this decline in appreciation reflects efforts to decolonize the arts, and move away from prioritizing White elitism in dance (Bourne, 2017; Rodriguez, 2021). Simultaneously, dancers and dance historians of color grapple with their love of the art form and the ways it has oppressed them (see Baker, 2021; Copeland, 2021; Rodriguez, 2021). Ballet continues to be a topic of discussion in the dance literature because of its prominent trajectory in dance history, and dancers’ adaptive outcomes, such as, increased emotional intelligence (Petrides et al., 2006), harmonious passion (Padham & Aujla, 2014), satisfactory sense of mastery and accomplishment (Bartholomew & Miller, 2002), and connectedness and social affiliation (Cook & Ledger, 2004). As such, it is unnecessary for ballet choreographers, directors, and donors at local, national, and global stages to exclude dancers due to race. The findings of the current study shed light on how historical knowledge of dance and endorsement of stereotypes contribute to the racialized barriers that obstruct access to various forms of dance.

More recently, scholars have considered the role that dance and dance therapies can play in antibias interventions (see Jorden, 2022; O’Dowd, 2021; White & Bennicoff Yundt, 2021). Movement and reflection on the positionality of the White body in society can be used as a tool to reckon with internalized White supremacy in ballet and other art forms (White & Bennicoff Yundt, 2021). O’Dowd (2021) maps the ways that movement and dance

therapy can address gaps in early antibias interventions. In dance spaces, self-awareness and nonverbal communication are valued; both of which are central tenets of social and emotional development and are influential in developing empathy and compassion (O’Dowd, 2021). Dancers also are constantly analyzing their body, and that of others, which can necessitate a critical awareness and reflection on problematic body-centered judgments (O’Dowd, 2021), if accompanied by education on systemic body- and race-related discrimination in dance spaces (Golden & Byrd, 2022).

## Limitations and Future Research

One limitation to this study is that the sample was largely White (78%). A more racial diverse sample will allow for examining participant race as a moderator of explicit and implicit endorsement of the racial identities of ballerinas and hip-hop dancers. Similarly, although the sample included participants with some degree of ballet and hip-hop dance experience, the sample was restricted in the number of professional dancers. Many dance professionals and critics may hold specific expectations for what the prima ballerinas of the company should look like, which may be yielding the opposite effect that we found in this study (Brown, 2018; Jennings, 2013; Martin, 1963). Future research should further examine potential differences between those with novice dance experience compared with professional dance experience.

In addition, this study was limited to the examination of stereotypes of White and Black dancers. There is a large gap in both dance and social science literature examining the perceptions of Latinx dancers, Asian dancers, and dancers from other racial/ethnic groups. Moreover, there have been few empirical studies examining racial stereotypes about dancers outside of ballet and hip-hop dance. Ballet is typically viewed as the foundation in dance training and the technique that allows dancers to tackle any other dance form, however, ballet was not the first dance form to exist (McCarthy-Brown, 2018). Indeed, dances specific to African, Latin, and Asian cultures developed centuries before ballet and have facilitated the development of many popular and contemporary forms of dance (e.g., jazz, hip-hop, tap, club dance, ballroom). Future research should continue to consider the stereotypes of women from different racial/ethnic backgrounds across different forms of dance, and the impact these stereotypes have on the widespread social roles of women from various racial and ethnic backgrounds.

An additional topic for future research is to examine potential generational and/or age differences in these findings. The current sample and subsample sizes did not warrant sufficient statistical power to conduct such analyses. However, across generations, individuals are exposed to changing demographics of dancers (e.g., via popular music videos and social media) and prominence of ballet and hip-hop within the field of dance—both potential influences on their implicit and explicit stereotypes about race and dance.

In terms of the explicit and implicit measures developed specifically for this study, there are a few limitations that pose a threat to the internal validity of the study. First, the words used to describe ballet in the IAT (i.e., classical, delicate, graceful, exquisite, dainty) may have elicited responders’ stereotypes about White women in general, regardless of dance style. Although the study potentially provides a novel gender race IAT, the relevant association between race and dance could have been supported by an expanded selection of stimuli (e.g., including more ballet-related terms to accompany the adjectives, the use of silhouettes, or images that are highly related to body shape). In the explicit measure, it



may be difficult to distinguish between participants' stereotype endorsement and stereotype knowledge. Since ballet is historically predominantly White, participants' beliefs about racial identities of dancers may reflect an accurate understanding of the world. In this case, a measure of stereotype knowledge versus endorsement would have been beneficial. For instance, our measure asked participants if ballerinas or hip-hop dancers are more likely to be Black or White, rather than assessing whether participants' beliefs about innate ability or skill as it relates to the style of dance and the race of the dancer. In the future, questions regarding participants' beliefs on who is more suitable for a ballet or hip-hop role may aid in parsing knowledge as opposed to endorsement.

## Conclusion

This empirical study provides initial reasoning for the underrepresentation of Black dancers in ballet. Indeed, it is possible that expectations for the racial identities of dancers may impact Black and White women's opportunities in dance. While racism, classism, and other structural barriers may result in the misrepresentation of Black dancers in ballet (e.g., Brown, 2018), the current research serves as a call for future research to continue to study the role racist ideology and stereotyping plays in dance and the performing arts.

## Note

1. Due a limited number of participants with dance experience, all participants with any level of ballet dance experience were combined for the ballet dance experience variable and all participants with and level of hip-hop dance experience were combined for the hip-hop dance experience variable.

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