

Artistic Abilities and General Self-Esteem of Students at Art Academies

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Abstract

The first aim of this paper was to examine the correlation between artistic ability and general self-esteem and the second was to examine gender differences in the self-perception of artistic ability among students at art academies. The study involved 215 students of art academies (140 female students; mean age 22.54) from Osijek and Zagreb. Students completed the adult version of the Arts Self-Perception Inventory (Vispoel, 1996) and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965). The results show that artistic abilities are significantly and positively related to self-esteem, with music, dance, and general skills having the highest correlation with a sense of self-worth. Male students rate themselves higher than female students in the field of music and drama, and female students compared to male students in the field of visual art skill. In the field of dance and general artistic ability, no gender differences were found.

Key words: *art; differences; female; male; self-perception.*

Introduction

It is known from the literature that there are three parts of self-concept: self-knowledge, which refers to factual knowledge about the self; self-expectation, or some goals and expectations a person has for himself or herself; and self-worth, which refers to an individual's evaluation of the self and own behaviors (Berk, 2018; Jelić, 2012; Vizek Vidović et al., 2014). The last component is also known as self-esteem, which can be defined as an individual's sense of self-worth, that is, the level to which an individual values or likes himself or herself (Lane et al., 2004) and it is made up of value judgments about oneself and self-worth (Hughes et al., 2011). The concept of self-esteem is widely known in the field of psychology and was debated for a long time – some theorists

postulated that it is a one-dimensional construct (Coopersmith, 1967; Rosenberg, 1965), while others stated it can be multidimensional (Jelić, 2012; Shavelson et al., 1976). Following the premise of multidimensionality of the construct, Shavelson et al. (1976) have made the theoretical model of self-esteem as hierarchically organized – there is general self-esteem as high order factor, but there are also low order factors which correspond to self-esteem in different life domains. Their model was confirmed and it was shown that people differently evaluate their academic success, physical appearance, physical fitness, mathematical abilities, verbal abilities, and many other domains of development and life in general (El-Anzi, 2005; Fleming & Courtney, 1984; Vizek Vidović et al., 2014). Nevertheless, it was confirmed that general self-esteem is, in fact, a higher-order factor that is built from lower-order factors and that there is a strong correlation between these two levels (Dutton & Brown, 1997; Jelić, 2012; Marsh, 1990; Vispoel, 1995). In that manner, researchers can now measure self-esteem as a general evaluation of someone's life (Diener & Diener, 1995; Jelić, 2012; Rosenberg, 1965) or they can measure self-evaluation in some specific domain, for example, academic self-esteem, physical self-esteem, etc. (Berk, 2018; El-Anzi, 2005; Harter, 1999; Jelić, 2012).

Exploring different populations and constructs related to self-esteem and expanding the previously mentioned Shavelson's and collaborators' (1976) hierarchical model, Vispoel (1995) linked art and the construct of self-esteem. In his paper (1995), he expanded Shavelson's et al. (1976) hierarchical model of self-esteem and presented that, as a lower-order factor, there is also a so-called "artistic self-esteem", i.e. individuals evaluate their artistic abilities in a certain way, and that domain of self-esteem positively correlates with global or general self-esteem (Vispoel, 1995). In other words, Vispoel (1995) showed that, in addition to the previously mentioned domains of academic performance, verbal abilities, physical appearance, and others, a person evaluates himself or herself in the field of art, i.e. "artistic self-esteem". To confirm his theses, Vispoel also constructed the Arts Self-Perception Inventory (ASPI; Vispoel, 1996), an inventory that examines how people perceive themselves in different artistic fields.

Vispoel conducted a series of studies with students of the arts, but also students of other fields and showed how it is possible to single out part of the "artistic self-esteem" as a lower order factor of global self-esteem (Vispoel, 1993; Vispoel, 1995; Vispoel, 1996; Vispoel, 2000). His theses were confirmed by many researchers (Draugelis et al., 2014; Marsh & Roche, 1996; Sanders & Browne, 1998; Vispoel, 2003; Zimmerman, 2005), all of who showed that self-perception in different artistic fields is positively correlated with general self-esteem, i.e. the better someone perceives themselves in some artistic field, their general self-esteem will be higher, and all this research corresponds with Vispoel's (1995) assumptions. The research has found that all specific domains of the Art Self-Perception Inventory (Vispoel, 1996) – music, art, drama, and dance – are highly correlated with the general artistic ability factor, although they do not necessarily correlate with each other (Marsh & Roche, 1996; Vispoel, 1995). Also, each factor is related to global self-esteem, as noted earlier.

Research in gender differences in self-perception of artistic abilities is still rare (Mawang et al., 2018; Vispoel, 2003; Wehr-Flowers, 2006). The focus of existing research is domain importance, i.e. how domain importance influence self-perception and performance of male and female art students (Vispoel 2000; Vispoel, 2003). Wehr-Flowers (2006) showed that female jazz artists are less fond to perform in jazz improvisation due to different socio-psychological factors, one of them being their self-evaluation. In this manner, it is important to examine if there is any difference between male and female art students in their self-perceptions of artistic abilities. These differences are important to examine not only to expand theoretical knowledge in this specific field but to give guidance to professionals who work with art students. Knowledge in this field can help in understanding how and why male and female students differ and in which way it can be seen in practical work. This study in that manner has high importance – there is an small body of research in Croatia (Begić, 2016; Gavrić, 2014; Milinović, 2015) that examined students of art academies in general, not just their self-esteem and self-perceptions of artistic abilities.

The first aim of this paper was to examine the correlation between artistic ability and general self-esteem, and the second aim of the study was to examine gender differences in the self-perception of artistic ability among students at art academies. It was expected that correlations between the self-perception of artistic abilities and general self-esteem would be positive, i.e. perceiving oneself as more able in some artistic field would be correlated with higher general self-esteem. It was also expected that there would be a difference between male and female students in their self-perception of artistic abilities, but because of the lack of previous research, we could not clearly define in which domains gender differences would be shown.

Method

Participants

In this study, there was a total of 215 students of art academies from Osijek (N=153) and Zagreb (N=62), who were between 18 and 44 years old (M=22.40; SD=3.42). There was a total of 140 female students in this study. In the artistic field, most of the students were music (33.5%) and art students (30.7%), followed by students of acting (20.9%), students of directing and dramaturgy (10.2%), and dance students (4.7%). The participants at art academies were engaged in their artistic domain for, on average, 8.96 (SD=5.44) years, and their average grade during the academy was 4.50 (SD=.41). Students that participated in this study were mostly in their first (26.5%) and second (26.0%) year of the academy, followed by students of the fourth (14.4%), fifth (14.9%), and third (14.4%) year of the academy. Most of the students that participated in this study enrolled in the academy in their first attempt (80.5%), while there were also students who enrolled after two (13.5%), three (2.8%), or four or more (3.4%) attempts.

Instruments

Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale

To determine the self-esteem of art academy students, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale was used (Rosenberg, 1965). The scale consists of 10 statements (e.g. *Generally speaking, I'm happy with ..myself*), where students rated their agreement with each statement on a scale from 1 - *I do not agree at all* to 4 - *I completely agree*. The total result on the scale is formed as a simple linear combination of answers on all statements. The total score on the scale can be between 10 and 40, and a higher score indicates higher self-esteem. The Croatian sample shows good internal consistency of the scale ranging between Cronbach $\alpha = 0.74$ and Cronbach $\alpha = 0.89$ (Bezinović, 1988), while in this sample the reliability of the scale is high, with Cronbach $\alpha = 0.82$. In this study, the overall score on the scale was formed as a simple linear combination of answers on all statements, and the higher score was interpreted as a reflection of higher student self-esteem.

Arts Self-Perception Inventory

The Arts Self-Perception Inventory for Adults (ASPI; Vispoel, 1996) was used to measure the self-perception of artistic abilities among students. The inventory examines self-perception of artistic abilities in four artistic areas (music, art, acting, and dance) and self-perception of artistic abilities in general. In its original form, the Inventory consists of 60 statements that are divided according to the above-mentioned areas and every area consists of 12 statements. The Inventory shows a high coefficient of internal consistency (Cronbach $\alpha \geq 0.95$; Vispoel, 1996). The task of the participants was to assess their artistic abilities in certain artistic areas on a scale from 1 - *completely incorrect* to 8 - *completely correct*. For the field of fine arts, an example of a statement is *In school, art was one of my best subjects*; for the field of musical art *People admire my musical ability*; for the field of dramatic art *People think I have good dramatic skills*; for the field of dance *I learn new dances quickly*; for artistic abilities in general *If I set my mind to it, I could master skills in any artistic domain (music, art, dance, drama)*. The total result is formed as a simple linear combination of statements for each of the areas separately. The lowest score on each subscale is 12, while the highest is 96, and the higher score on each subscale represents a higher artistic ability in the area. Factor analysis of the Croatian translation was made using *Principal Axis Factoring* as the extraction method and oblique rotation (*Direct Oblimin*), with five fixed factors. Factor analysis confirmed the original factor structure with 62,78% of variance explained and all retrieved factors showed high-reliability coefficients (Acting - Cronbach $\alpha=0,90$; Art - Cronbach $\alpha=0,90$; Music - Cronbach $\alpha=0,91$; Dance - Cronbach $\alpha=0,91$; General - Cronbach $\alpha=0,66$). In this study, the total result on the Inventory was formed as a simple linear combination of answers on all items, and simple linear combinations of statements for each of the areas separately.

Procedure

Before the conduction of the research, a positive evaluation of the ethical aspects of the research was obtained from the Commission for Resolving Ethical Issues of the Department of Psychology of the Catholic University of Croatia. Online (*Google forms*) and paper-pencil methods of data collection were used. Before completing the questionnaire, the purpose of the research was explained to the students, and they agreed to participate in the research. Data were collected in May 2019.

Results

Means and standard deviations of the study variables are presented in Table 1 as well as the results of testing gender differences in the study variables. As can be seen from Table 1, students of art academies in general rate their self-esteem highly, and this high rating of their self-esteem is present both in male and female students. Students of art academies also generally perceive their artistic abilities in every domain of art as high, while the perception of general artistic abilities is the highest. Both male and female students perceive their artistic abilities in every domain as high and their general artistic ability as the highest.

Table 1
Means and standard deviations of the study variables and the results the of t-test

		N	M	SD	t	sig
Self-esteem	male	70	32.91	4.08	2.595	.010
	female	138	31.16	4.85		
	total	208	31.75	4.67		
Self-perception of art abilities	male	75	30.40	11.54	-3.797	.000
	female	137	36.28	10.36		
	total	212	34.20	11.13		
Self-perception of musical abilities	male	71	35.82	10.69	2.566	.011
	female	136	31.43	12.17		
	total	207	32.93	11.84		
Self-perception of acting abilities	male	75	33.72	10.69	3.048	.003
	female	136	29.01	10.78		
	total	211	30.68	10.96		
Self-perception of dance abilities	male	73	29.89	10.91	.165	.869
	female	137	29.63	11.05		
	total	210	29.72	10.98		
Self-perception of general artistic abilities	male	73	40.10	5.25	-.765	.445
	female	136	40.67	5.12		
	total	209	40.47	5.16		
	total	209	40.47	5.16		

To examine correlations between general self-esteem and self-perception of artistic abilities, which was the first goal of the study, Pearson's correlation coefficients were

calculated and analyzed. General self-esteem is significantly and positively correlated with the self-perception of musical abilities, dance abilities, and general artistic abilities; however, it did not show a significant correlation with the self-perception of art abilities and acting abilities (Table 2). It can also be seen in Table 2 that self-perception of general artistic abilities is significantly and positively correlated to self-perception in all artistic domains. Also, almost all self-perceptions of different artistic abilities are significantly positively correlated. The only exception is the correlation between self-perception of art abilities and self-perception of musical abilities – these two self-perceptions are significantly negatively correlated.

Table 2

Correlations between the self-perception of artistic abilities and general self-esteem of students at art academies

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
1. Self-esteem	1	-0.027	.359**	0.137	.154*	.402**
2. Self-perception of art abilities		1	-.181**	-0.039	-0.055	.325**
3. Self-perception of musical abilities			1	.298**	.240**	.280**
4. Self-perception of acting abilities				1	.474**	.414**
5. Self-perception of dance abilities					1	.359**
6. Self-perception of general artistic abilities						1

*p<.05; **<.01; Male=0, Female=1

Gender differences in self-perception of artistic abilities

To examine the differences between male and female students in self-perception of artistic abilities, which was the second goal of this study, we used the t-test, and the results can be seen in Table 1. As can be seen from the Table, there is a significant difference in self-perception of art abilities, where female students (M=36.28; SD=10.36) perceive their art abilities better than male students (M=30.40; SD=11.54). A significant difference was also shown in self-perception of musical abilities, where male students (M=35.81; SD=10.69) perceive their musical abilities better than female students (M=31.43; SD=12.17). Lastly, significant difference between male and female students was shown in self-perception of acting abilities, wherein male students (M=33.72; SD=10.69) perceive their acting abilities better than female students (M=29.01; SD=10.78). Because of the large discrepancy in the number of male and female students in this study, we conducted the Mann-Whitney U non-parametric test to confirm the obtained results. The results of the Mann-Whitney U test confirmed the results obtained from .t-test: female students perceive their art abilities significantly better than male students (U=3628.50, p=.000), and male students perceive their musical abilities (U=3802.50, p=.012) and acting abilities (U=3774.50, p=.002) significantly better than female students.

Discussion

The first aim of this paper was to examine the correlation between artistic ability and general self-esteem, and the second aim of the study was to examine gender differences in the self-perception of artistic ability among students at art academies.

It was found that self-perceptions of musical, dancing and general artistic abilities are significantly positively associated with general self-esteem, while self-perception of art and acting abilities haven't shown significant correlation with general self-esteem. In other words, if students of art academies perceive themselves as capable and competent in the musical or dancing field or art in general, they also report a higher sense of self-esteem. All self-perceptions of individual artistic abilities showed a positive correlation with the self-perception of general artistic abilities, which confirms the findings of Vispoel (1993; 1995; 1996) and also the assumptions of this research. Students of art academies largely base their image of themselves on self-perception of themselves as competent in the artistic field they are engaged in, but also in art in general. In other words, students who rate their artistic abilities as high at the same time rate their general sense of competence in the field of art as higher. Therefore, the obtained results, which correspond to the findings of previous research (Draugelis et al., 2014; Marsh & Roche, 1996; Sanders & Browne, 1998; Vispoel, 1995; Vispoel, 1996; Vispoel, 2000; Zimmerman, 2005), mostly confirmed the expectations about the positive relation of self-esteem to self-perception of individual artistic abilities. Also, research has shown that self-perception of general artistic abilities is related to the self-esteem of art academies students. The findings are consistent with the findings of many researchers (Costa-Giomi, 2004; Marsh & Roche, 1996; Trusty & Oliva, 1994; Vispoel, 1995; Vispoel, 2003; Zimmerman, 2005), as well as the assumptions of this study, and we can therefore conclude that self-perception of general artistic abilities is important for the self-esteem of students at art academies, and that students who have a higher sense of self-esteem perceive their musical, dancing and general artistic abilities better.

In this study, it was also determined that there is a difference between male and female students in the self-perception of art abilities, musical abilities, and acting abilities. The results have shown that female students perceive fine arts abilities (i.e. drawing, painting, etc.) better, while male students perceive their musical and acting abilities better. In other words, female students perceive themselves better in the domain of fine arts, while male students perceive themselves better in domains of music and acting. Interestingly, there is no difference in the self-perception of general artistic abilities between male and female students – both groups perceive their general artistic abilities as equally good. All these findings suggest that male students perceive themselves better in artistic domains that require some kind of group activities and possibly group comparison, while female students perceive themselves better in domains which do not require group activity. These findings are partially in line with Wehr-Flowers's (2006) findings – female students perceived their musical abilities significantly lower than male students. Also, Mawange et al. (2018) have shown that

male musical students showed higher musical creativity than female students and that creativity was predicted by the musical self-concept. Considering their results, it would be interesting in future research to include questions about the tendency to compare with others to determine if that tendency is some underlying factor for differences obtained with this research. Also, it is possible that male students give more importance to the artistic domains which require group activity and therefore perceive themselves better in these domains, which is in correspondence with Vispoels's (2000; 2003) previous findings. Also, it is possible that male and female students are in general attracted to different artistic fields, which is yet undiscovered, and it is an interesting path for future research.

The main disadvantage of this research is certainly the use of a correlational research design which contains a major flaw - the inability to establish a cause-and-effect relationship between self-esteem and self-perception of artistic abilities. With this research, it is not possible to determine whether a certain level of self-esteem of at art academies is a cause or a consequence of self-perception of artistic abilities. One of the disadvantages of this research is certainly the difference in the number of male and female participants, and in future research, it would be good to equalize the sample regarding gender as much as possible.

Considering the results obtained by this research, professors at academies and experts working with students of the arts should support their students developing their skills and acquiring knowledge, as was shown in some previous researche in Croatia (Gavrić, 2014; Milinović, 2015). Also, professors and associates at academies, who work and communicate with students daily, should pay attention to the way they perceive their own abilities in a particular field and how these abilities are reflected in their approach to work.

Although there is some research on the impact of art education on self-esteem and self-image, it mainly focuses on children or adolescents (Burton et al., 2000; Costa-Giomi, 2004; Trusty & Oliva, 1994). In future research, it would be interesting to include students of other art academies in Croatia, but it would also be interesting to include students of other studies and determine whether there are certain differences in individual constructs (i.e. self-esteem and self-perception of artistic abilities) between students of the arts and students of other fields, as it has been done in some foreign studies (Furnham et al., 2011; Furnham & Crump, 2013; van Broekhoven et al., 2020). Future research with this population of students could group the sample according to the field of study and compare students of different artistic orientations. Given this, it is possible to expect the existence of certain differences in the self-perception of individual artistic abilities depending on the artistic field.

Conclusion

The results of this study have shown that students who have higher general self-esteem also perceive their musical and dance abilities better, as well as their general

artistic abilities. The results have also shown a significant difference between male and female students in their self-perception of artistic abilities – female students perceive their art abilities better than male students, while male students perceive their musical and acting abilities better than female students.

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Umjetničke sposobnosti i opće samopoštovanje studenata umjetničkih akademija

Sažetak

Prvi je cilj ovoga rada istražiti korelacije između umjetničkih sposobnosti i općega samopoštovanja, dok je drugi cilj studije istražiti spolne razlike u percepciji vlastitih umjetničkih sposobnosti kod studenata umjetničkih akademija. U istraživanju je sudjelovalo 215 studenata umjetničkih akademija (140 studentica, prosječne dobi 22,54) iz Osijeka i Zagreba. Studenti su ispunili Inventar samoprocjene umjetničkih sposobnosti (Vispoel, 1996) i Rosenbergovu skalu samopoštovanja (Rosenberg, 1965). Rezultati su pokazali kako su umjetničke sposobnosti značajno pozitivno povezane sa samopoštovanjem, pri čemu glazbene i opće umjetničke sposobnosti pokazuju najviše korelacije s osjećajem vlastite vrijednosti. Studenti su percipirali svoje glazbene i glumačke sposobnosti boljima od studentica, dok su studentice percipirale svoje likovne sposobnosti boljima u odnosu na studente. U područjima plesa i općih umjetničkih sposobnosti nisu pronađene spolne razlike.

Ključne riječi: muškarci; razlike; samoprocjena; umjetnost; žene.