

A Brief Overview of Male Group's Social Status Change over the Professional Career Lifecycle of Ballet Dancers

Introduction: *In this reaction memo, we will try to answer why female dancers are dominated at the early stages of their careers, but unable to grow into higher-status positions. First, we discussed a scenario where no discrimination exists and true capabilities are observable. Female dance professionals as minorities persist in statistically sticky disadvantages. Second, we used the Polya urn schema to model the growing disadvantages of females as the minority group. And we introduced Casella's "Role model" and Rivera's "Cultural Matching" to interpret the mechanism. In the end, we integrated the Polya urn schema in a social hierarchy framework.*

Is classical ballet feminine?

When we are talking about a ballet dancer, people will mostly associate the professional profile with very feminine attributes: elegance, delicacy, ballerinas in their pointe shoes, and pink tutus. On the other hand, male dancers, who appear in all classical ballet repertoire, are often overlooked. In addition, male dancers quite often face bias toward their masculinity and sexual orientation.

Is classical ballet a feminine art form? The answers to this question may vary, but most likely to fall on the affirmative side, especially after what classical ballet evolved into, in the 20th century. George Balanchine, the most influential choreographer of the 20th century, father of American ballet, and the founder of the renowned New York City Ballet company, once said, "Ballet is definitely feminine... female dancers are supposed to be flowers and male dancers are their gardeners". This account quite accurately summarizes the gender-based performance expectations in classical ballet.

There is more to explore about how the public eventually perceived ballet as feminine. In conclusion: nowadays, within the scope of public recognition (from a third-order view, Ridgeway, 2020), "professional ballet dancer" as an occupation grants women more status than men.

Nested nature of status hierarchy in the ballet community:

A ballet performance is not just about the dancers. Stepping back from the front stage, there are other positions that consist of another hierarchy: choreographers, stage directors, and ballet company leaders. These positions are regarded to be at the top of the hierarchy.

Becoming a choreographer was often seen as a promotion path for retired dancers, which requires dancing experience, artistic perception, and most importantly, leadership skills to execute the difficult task of bringing the design of the dance to the stage. The next steps for a successful choreographer often point to becoming the artistic director of a ballet company. These roles, which are beyond the most accomplished dancers in the hierarchy, are mostly male in the most highly regarded dance companies worldwide.

Within this nested hierarchy structure, males are of a lower status than women in one circle (front stage as dancers), but of a higher status in another circle (backstage in managerial roles).

The upward mobility of male dancers' status:

If we take a closer look at a male dancer's status change over the course of his professional life, we can find an upward status change. When they were young boys in ballet school, they were often the minority in the classroom. Young boys may be judged (made fun of) by peers and by other adults for pursuing ballet, and in general, highly dissuaded from continuing, as compared to young girls. At this stage, they have lower status than girls in this activity.

However, when getting into the professional track, being a male starts to have some advantages. Most ballet schools and professional companies have a target ratio of males to females; the low supply and high demand of males enable them a less competitive entrance to this profession.

At the career stage when most dancers retire, around 30 years old on average, more male dancers step into leadership roles as choreographers and directors, thus making a more direct impact. On the other hand, female dancers are more prone to move on to roles like teachers. Females are more likely to succeed as well-known prima ballerinas or ballet educators.

Over the course of their whole career cycle, male ballet dancers have easier access to higher career achievements, and more direct influence, and end up with higher social status.

Where are the female choreographers? What stops them from expressing their artistic voices?

First, we need to address the fact that there was more male choreographer than women from the beginning. Tracing back to history, males established classical ballet as a

profession in early 17th-century Europe. Both choreographers and performers were all males until female dancers were allowed on the stage in the late 17th century. It was also a historical period in that women were under severe patriarchal oppression. Their activities were constrained within households and away from the public space.

The primary challenge for women is to overcome the disadvantages as a minority. Imagine a world with no discrimination: the true capability is observable, and true talents are distributed evenly in both the majority and minority groups. If we take a random sample, there is a higher probability that we will find the true talent individual in the majority group. Mathematically, this probability is very sticky (Casella et al., 2021). To interpret these mathematical attributes into reality: even though we looked into the underrepresentativeness of the female groups and the artistry of choreography work could be objectively valued, just simply for the fact that men outnumber women, the chance of encountering better male choreography candidates is perpetually higher than a female one.

In the simplified version of the Polya Urn model: an urn contains a batch of balls in two different colors and in different quantities. Suppose we sample a ball (with replacement) and put another ball of the same color into the urn. Assuming the capacity of the urn is unlimited and we can repeat the process infinitely, the sampling model will result in growing discrepancies between the total count of one color (majority) over the other (minority). In real-world hiring scenarios, the process of putting a ball of the same color back into the urn could interpret from different perspectives.

Casella (2021) proposed the “Role-model effect” from the prospective potential candidates. The success of previous male choreographers encourages the young male to pursue this profession. We ended up with more male candidates in the sample pool and higher chances of selecting those with true talents. On the other hand, Rivera’s “cultural matching theory” provided some insights from the perspective of those who made the selection decisions. If there are already successful male candidates, the decision maker (man or woman) will tend to select a candidate that shares similarities with the previous successful candidates. Considering the evaluation of artwork could be very subjective, the matching tendency might be more potent than in other fields where relatively objective standards could measure skills.

Arguably, not all ballet dancers want to become choreographers. We want to discuss here that for those who are committed to this career path, the obstacles for women are significantly more robust than for men, which is a form of systematized inequality in dance. There is a categorical boundary set between dancers and choreographers that is thicker for females than for males. Without any intervention to the selection biases, upward mobility is still blocked even if we increase the number of female participants at the lower level. In the 18th century, more female ballet dancers obtained great success and gradually possessed a seemingly more dominant status on stage. However, true creative power was never really granted to women. Even nowadays, female

choreographers, if they are committed to the professions, always have to diligently crave their careers, while their male colleagues are easily given big commissions (Jennings, 2013).

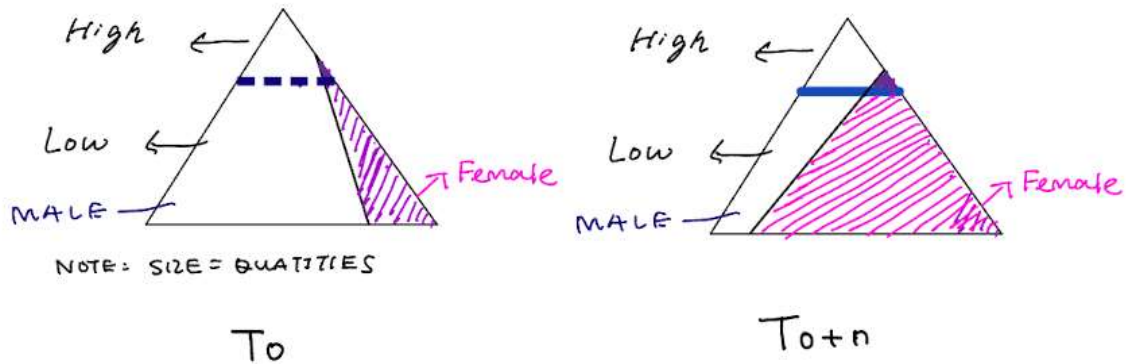


Figure 1. Change of distribution over time without intervention

This phenomenon has proved the existence of a belief that men have more reliable artistic opinions than women. It's not just choreographers in ballet. We can see evidence for this belief from other classical and modern art disciplines. Early British female writers needed to use male pseudonyms to get published. Being able to play an instrument will be regarded as a symbol of social capital for a lady, but orchestras have proven to discriminate against female musicians. And we can seldom see female composers. Even though women are the bigger consumer group for fashion, the most influential designers are men. In the art world, there is an overriding prevalent expression: "male artists and their muses," which is an analogy to Balanchine's account: "gardeners and their flowers". Females are permitted credits for inspiring males to express their artistic voice instead of the acknowledgment of being another collaborating artist.