



## A dancer's well-being: The influence of the social psychological climate during adolescence



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### ABSTRACT

**Objectives:** Research suggests promoting task-involving dance climates is beneficial to well-being (Quested & Duda, 2009, 2010). Likewise, caring climates are integral to optimizing well-being (Fry et al., 2012). However, perceptions of a caring climate have not been examined in dance studios and little is known about the relationship between perceptions of a broader climate and aspects of psychological well-being. This study examined the relationship between perceptions of the social psychological climate (task-involving, ego-involving, and caring) and aspects of psychological well-being (positive and negative affect, body-esteem, and teacher and peer friendship quality) in adolescent dancers.

**Design:** Cross-sectional correlational design.

**Method:** Eighty-three female dancers ( $M$  age =  $16.28 \pm .93$ ) self-reported well-being and perceptions of their studio's dance climate.

**Results:** Perceptions of task-involving and caring climates were related to better positive affect, body-esteem, and relationships with teachers and peers ( $r$  range:  $.33-.68$ ). Two climate cluster profiles emerged: a *Positive Climate* ( $n = 57$ ) with lower ego-involving and greater task-involving and caring climate perceptions and a *Mixed Climate* ( $n = 26$ ) with higher ego-involving and lesser task-involving and caring climate perceptions. MANOVA revealed significant differences ( $V = 0.266$ ,  $F(6, 76) = 4.59$ ,  $p < .001$ ) between the profiles on well-being. Discriminant function analysis showed dancers in the *Positive Climate* cluster reported greater body esteem, more friends, and less negative affect than dancers in the *Mixed Climate* cluster.

**Conclusions:** Promoting a task-involving and caring climate and de-emphasizing an ego-involving climate is an effective strategy for promoting well-being in dancers.

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According to the National Dance Education Organization (2013), there are approximately 32,000 dance studios in the United States. Given this number, there are potentially hundreds of thousands of teenage dancers training at such studios. Thus, the dance studio is potentially an important context for optimizing lifelong physical activity and psychological well-being of adolescent dancers. Unfortunately, an extensive body of literature highlights various psychological issues relating to dancers. In this literature, anxiety and perfectionism in dancers is related to a number of characteristics associated with ill-being including heightened anger, lower body satisfaction, lower self-esteem, poorer mood, excessive self-criticism, higher levels of stress, and a greater risk for physical injury (Ackard, Henderson, & Wonderlich, 2004; Anshel, 2004; de

Bruin, Bakker, & Oudejans, 2009; Hewitt, Flett, & Ediger, 1995; Noh, Morris, & Andersen, 2007; van Staden, Myburgh, & Poggenpoel, 2009). These qualities support a general perception that dancers routinely fall short of optimal well-being. Furthermore, the tradition in some dance studios is to have an authoritarian-type structure in which the teacher takes on the role of dictator and instructs the students in a military-like fashion (Hamilton, 1997). There is growing concern that this type of training environment may be detrimental to a dancer's well-being and that teachers need to create a more positive environment, or social psychological climate, with the aim of fostering the psychological well-being of their students (Hamilton, 1997; Mainwaring & Krasnow, 2010).

The social psychological climate consists of the social and psychological features within a given setting that influence perceptions of what is emphasized and valued. In dance and sport settings, the social psychological climate is created by teachers and coaches, parents, and participants (Gano-Overway et al., 2009; Lee, 2001;

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Smith, Smoll, & Cumming, 2007). Three trends are evident in the social psychological climate research. First, although the social psychological climate is multidimensional, research has been narrow, focusing mainly on a single dimension, namely the motivational climate (Newton, Duda, & Yin, 2000; Walling, Duda, & Chi, 1993). Second, most of this research has examined the motivational climate in sport settings (Duda, 2001; Fry & Newton, 2003; Gano-Overway, Guivernau, Magyar, Waldron, & Ewing, 2005; Olympiou, Jowett, & Duda, 2008; Seifriz, Duda, & Chi, 1992) and research in other performance settings such as dance remains deficient. Only a few studies, most outside of the United States with professional or full-time dancers, have examined the motivational climate in dance settings (Carr & Wyon, 2003; Nordin-Bates, Quested, Walker, & Redding, 2012; Quested & Duda, 2009, 2010). Finally, of the motivational climate research in dance, inquiries into psychological well-being have focused on negative psychological characteristics such as neurotic perfectionism, anxiety, and burnout (Carr & Wyon, 2003; Nordin-Bates et al., 2012; Quested & Duda, 2009, 2010). Little is known about the relationship between the more inclusive social psychological climate and positive aspects of psychological well-being in pre-professional adolescent dancers in the United States. Furthermore, given the potentially negative well-being consequences of dance participation (e.g., anxiety, burnout), it is evident that understanding how to influence the training environment in a positive way may provide dance teachers with the means to discourage ill-being and promote overall health, happiness, and enjoyment in their dancers.

### Social psychological climate

Although there may be many unexplored dimensions, we consider the core components of the social psychological climate to be the motivational climate and the caring climate. A preponderance of the research has focused on the motivational climate. The motivational climate, from an achievement goal theory (AGT) perspective, refers to the perceived evaluative structure and other aspects within a given context that influences goal-directed behavior (Ames, 1992; Nicholls, 1984). Two primary situational goal structures within AGT are characterized as ego-involving and task-involving climates. Ego-involving climates are ones in which the focus is placed on showing greater competence in comparison to others performing within the same context whereas task-involving climates are ones in which the focus is placed on mastery, effort, and personal progression without comparison to others (Ames, 1992; Nicholls, 1984).

The literature suggests that ego-involving climates, with an emphasis on objective performance, are linked to the development of maladaptive dispositions and response patterns characterized by high cognitive trait anxiety, neurotic perfectionism, low self-esteem, low relatedness to others, and negative affect (Anshel & Mansouri, 2005; de Bruin et al., 2009; Carr & Wyon, 2003; Quested & Duda, 2009, 2010; Smith et al., 2007; van Staden et al., 2009). On the other hand, the same literature suggests that task-involving climates, with an emphasis on mastery, are associated with low anxiety, lower perfectionist tendencies, higher self-esteem, greater perceived competence and relatedness to others, positive affect, less perceived peer pressure, and less tendency for dieting or disordered eating.

The other core component of the psychosocial climate is the caring climate (Newton et al., 2007). While the motivational climate captures how displays of competence, namely effort and ability, are valued and emphasized in a particular setting, the caring climate taps into more social and emotional elements of the setting and characterizes the degree to which participants feel cared about and connected to those around them. Caring climates are described

as climates perceived as safe and supportive, in which participants feel valued and respected (Newton et al., 2007). Empirical research has begun to explore the psychological relevance of a caring context. In a youth sport context, a caring climate helps to develop youths' ability to monitor, manage, and control positive affect (Gano-Overway et al., 2009). Further research within youth sports related caring to higher levels of enjoyment and commitment (Fry & Gano-Overway, 2010) and to more hope and happiness and less sadness and depression (Fry et al., 2012). The latter findings suggest that a caring climate relates to better psychological well-being. Although initial results suggest a caring climate is related to psychological well-being in youth sport participants, the research remains narrow, having examined only a few markers of psychological well-being. It remains unknown whether the caring climate is related to any aspects of well-being in dancers.

Altogether, the social psychological climate research in dance is limited. Only minimal research has examined the relationship between the motivational climate and psychological well-being of dancers. Of this research, none has examined pre-professional adolescent dancers training at studios. Moreover, no research has examined caring climate in dance settings. Consequently, a greater understanding of the climate features in dance settings is needed as it may serve to inform efforts to improve dance pedagogy.

### Psychological well-being

In most definitions, mental or psychological well-being is included as one of the multiple dimensions of overall well-being. Myers and Diener (1995) stated psychological investigations of well-being complement measures of physical well-being. In addition, a newly emerging focus on positive psychology contends that psychological well-being is comprised not only of an absence of pathology such as depression or sadness, but the presence of positive qualities and strengths (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Historically, two approaches have been taken in conceptualizing psychological well-being: hedonic and eudaimonic (Ryan & Deci, 2001). The hedonic approach focuses on the attainment of happiness and life satisfaction whereas the eudaimonic approach focuses on the realization of one's potential through factors such as self-acceptance, mastery, and positive relatedness. Both of these approaches have value in defining psychological well-being and Ryan and Deci (2001) suggest well-being is a multidimensional construct that should include both the hedonic and eudaimonic conceptions of well-being. Therefore, any investigation of well-being would benefit from examining psychological well-being determinants that represent both approaches. Consequently, this study incorporated measures of happiness, self-acceptance, and positive relatedness. These included positive and negative affect, body-esteem, and friendships.

#### *Positive and negative affect*

Positive and negative affect are two separate factors related to mood. High positive affect produces a state of high energy and full concentration whereas low positive affect is characterized by sadness and lethargy (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). Positive affect descriptors include words such as happy, pleased, joyful, and fun whereas negative affect descriptors include words such as unhappy, angry, frustrated, anxious, and depressed (Adie, Duda, & Ntoumanis, 2008). In terms of well-being, people who report more positive affect and less negative affect are more loving, trusting, energetic, decisive, creative, helpful, sociable, and satisfied with life (Myers & Diener, 1995). They are also less self-focused, hostile, abusive, and vulnerable to disease. In young adult dancers, perceptions of a task-involving dance climate positively

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