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Teacher-created social environment, basic psychological needs, and dancers' affective states during class: A diary study☆

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ABSTRACT

Grounded in Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT; Deci & Ryan, 2000) and drawing from Duda's (2013) conceptualisation of the teacher-created social environment as a multidimensional construct, this study examined, at the within-personal level, the interrelations between dancers' perceptions of teacher-created empowering and disempowering social environments, basic psychological needs and changes in dancers' affective states during class. Vocational dancers (n = 135) completed self-report measures before (affective states) and after (affective states, teacher-created social environment, basic need satisfaction/thwarting) dance technique classes for 5 consecutive days. Multivariate multilevel modelling analyses revealed basic need satisfaction to mediate the relation between dancers' perceptions of empowering environments and dancers' changes in positive affect during class. Basic need thwarting mediated the relation between disempowering environments and changes in dancers' negative affect during class. Findings support the tenets of BPNT at the inter-individual level, advancing current understanding of the social–psychological mechanisms that may underpin dancers' optimal and compromised functioning within classes.

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1. Introduction

Changes in affective (emotional) states are a part of students' everyday life. The extent to which affective states vary above and below a person's typical level is considered an essential component of subjective well-being (Diener, 2000). Taking a hedonic perspective, Diener (2000) denotes that individuals who experience higher levels of positive affect and lower levels of negative affect, are likely to have a higher level of subjective well-being. Furthermore, students' affective states have been found to be related to quality of learning and achievement in education contexts (Pekrun, Elliot, & Maier, 2009; Villavicencio & Bernardo, 2013), with higher levels of positive affect and lower levels of negative affect being related to more adaptive outcomes. An achievement context in which motivation and affective states has important implications in terms of individuals' performance and well-being, but which has received scant attention, is dance.

Dance is an increasingly popular vocational pursuit with approximately 17,000 young people studying GCSE dance and around 10,000 students pursuing dance in higher education in any one year (Arts Council England, 2009). A vocational dancer is a student dancer training to be a professional. Starting as young as 11 years of age, vocational dancers attend a specialised dance school in which they train for approximately 9 h a day, 5 or 6 days a week. These dancers take a variety of classes, have a number of different teachers, and have to master various styles/genres. Despite the potential physical and psychological benefits of dance, concerns regarding vocational dancers' health and welfare have been recognised anecdotally and documented in research for many years. For example, a nationwide survey by Dance UK (Laws, 2005) revealed elite dance students to be highly susceptible to a number of undesirable psychological and emotional states including, general anxiety, low self-confidence, depression and burnout.

Elite dance education environments have typically been regarded as characterised by rivalry and control (Van Rossum, 2004). Former professional dancers have described teachers as often exerting control and humiliating dancers (Hamilton, 1997). A survey of 1000 dancers revealed 48% to have been unjustly humiliated during class (Hamilton, Hamilton, Warren, Keller, & Molnar, 1997). Thus, insights into the mechanisms underlying within-person fluctuations in dancers' affective states could contribute towards the development of dance education environments which foster day-to-day wellbeing and are conducive to high quality learning and achievement.

1.1. Theoretical underpinnings

Contemporary theories of motivation, namely achievement goal theory (AGT; Ames, 1992; Nicholls, 1989) and self-determination theory

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(SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000) have focused on the role of significant others, such as the teacher, in creating a social environment that is conducive to the enhancement of individuals' optimal engagement and psychological well-being. Duda (2013) proposed a framework that allows theoretical integration regarding key concepts within AGT and SDT. Duda (2013) posits that the social environment can be more or less 'empowering' and/or 'disempowering' depending on which social–environmental characteristics are emphasised. An empowering environment is one that is more autonomy supportive (teachers provide rationale, promote meaningful choice, and solicit input; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003), task-involving (teachers positively reinforce student development, encourage co-operation, and emphasise self-referenced competence; Ames, 1992; Newton, Duda, & Yin, 2000), and socially supportive (teachers value their students as individuals; Reinboth, Duda, & Ntoumanis, 2004; Sarason, Sarason, Shearin, & Pierce, 1987). In contrast, a disempowering environment is more controlling (teachers exhibit coercive behaviours and pressurise students into performing certain behaviours; Bartholomew, Ntoumanis, & Thøgersen-Ntoumani, 2009) and highly ego-involving (teachers may punish mistakes, give unequal recognition, and encourage normative comparisons of ability (Ames, 1992; Newton et al., 2000).

According to Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT; Deci & Ryan, 2000), a mini-theory of SDT, particular aspects of the teacher-created social environment (i.e., autonomy support, social support, and control) influence individuals' affective, cognitive, and behavioural outcomes via the satisfaction and/or thwarting of three basic psychological needs: autonomy (feeling that behaviours are self-initiated and volitional), competence (feeling capable of meeting environmental demands), and relatedness (feeling meaningfully connected and cared for by significant others; Deci & Ryan, 2000). A critical component of Deci and Ryan's (2000) BPNT is that the basic needs are proposed to mediate the relation between social–environmental factors and individual's subjective well-being and/or experienced ill-being.

AGT proposes that an important prerequisite for motivated behaviour is a desire to feel competent. When judgements of ability are self-referenced and mastery and improvement considered criteria for success, success will always be possible, as long as effort is exerted. In contrast, when ability is other-referenced, individuals compare their performance to others and feel successful only when their performance is superior (Nicholls, 1989).

1.2. Empowering environments, basic need satisfaction and affective states

Duda (2013) proposed that an empowering environment would promote individuals' optimal engagement and psychological well-being via satisfaction of the three basic psychological needs. The predictive utility of conjointly considering facets of the social environment underscored by SDT and AGT has been supported in research at the cross-sectional level (e.g. Reinboth et al., 2004; Standage, Duda, & Ntoumanis, 2003). However, cross-sectional designs are limited by their ability to only capture a snap shot in time and tend to be used to examine whether social–environmental factors predict variation *between individuals* in terms of certain affective, behavioural, and/or cognitive outcomes. Less research (e.g. Bartholomew, Ntoumanis, Ryan, Bosch, & Thøgersen-Ntoumani, 2011; Gagne, Ryan, & Bargmann, 2003; Quested, Duda, Ntoumanis, & Maxwell, 2013) has explored the social–environmental factors that may underlie *within-person* variability in reported indices of well- and ill-being over time. Examination of within-person variation can determine the antecedents and consequences of individuals' dynamic experiences, such as fluctuations in affective states. Furthermore, within-person analyses reduce errors associated with between-person confounds, such as, the effect of *individual differences* (Singer & Willet, 2003).

The only feature of an empowering environment that has been previously examined at the within-person level is autonomy support (Bartholomew, Ntoumanis, Ryan, Bosch et al., 2011; Quested et al., 2013), a dimension of the teacher/coach-created social environment emphasised in SDT. Bartholomew et al. (2011a) and Quested et al. (2013) found coach/teacher autonomy support provided in training/class to predict athletes'/dancers' basic need satisfaction and, changes in positive affect during training/class. Thus, based on Duda's (2013) proposal and building on the findings of Bartholomew et al. (2011a) and Quested et al. (2013), the current study makes a unique contribution to the literature by examining whether dancers' perceptions of an empowering teacher-created social environment (i.e., autonomy support, social support and task-involvement) in class would positively predict changes *over time* in dancers' positive affect from the beginning to the end of the class.

To date, only one study (Quested, 2010) has specifically examined the mediating role of need satisfaction at the within-person level. Quested (2010) found relatedness and competence satisfaction to mediate the relation between dancers' perceptions of autonomy support in class and changes in positive affect realised during the class. Building on the findings of Quested (2010) the current study will examine whether basic need satisfaction mediates the relation between dancers' perceptions of an empowering environment in class and changes in dancers' positive affect during class.

1.3. Disempowering climates, basic need thwarting and affective states

Duda (2013) posits that a disempowering environment will be predictive of maladaptive psychological functioning via the thwarting of the basic psychological needs. To date, no research has examined the 'darker side' of dance (i.e., dancers' perceptions of disempowering facets of the motivational environment) at the within-individual level. One study within the context of sport (Bartholomew et al., 2011a), has investigated coaches' controlling behaviours on a daily basis. Bartholomew et al. (2011a) reported coach controlling behaviours to positively predict athletes' basic need thwarting (as opposed to need satisfaction) during training and, in turn, predict changes in athletes' negative affect pre- to post-training. Building on the findings of Bartholomew et al. (2011a) and drawing from Duda's (2013) proposal that a disempowering environment will be predictive of maladaptive psychological functioning, the current study will examine the relation between dancers' perceptions of a disempowering teacher-created social environment (i.e., control and ego-involvement) during class and changes in dancers' negative affect from the beginning to the end of the class.

Bartholomew et al. (2011a) did not test the theoretically assumed mediating role of athletes' basic need satisfaction and/or thwarting in the social environment to affective states relation. Cross-sectional research with physical education teachers (Bartholomew, Ntoumanis, Cuevas, & Lonsdale, 2014) has supported the mediating role of basic need thwarting between job pressure and burnout. However, this is the first study to examine the mediating role of individuals' perceptions of basic need thwarting at the within-person level, thus testing a unique model and adding to the SDT literature.

1.4. Hypotheses

It was hypothesised that:

1. Dancers' perceptions of an empowering teacher-created social environment in class would positively predict changes in dancers' positive affect during class.
2. Dancers' perceptions of a disempowering teacher-created social environment would positively predict changes in dancers' negative affect during class.
3. Dancers' basic need satisfaction would mediate the relation between dancers' perceptions of an empowering teacher-created social environment in class and changes in positive affect during class.

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