

University of Wales Trinity Saint David
HPDA5002
Dance and Psychological Wellbeing
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Component 1: Essay (2000 words)

Throughout this Essay, I will be analysing a range of behaviours, personalities and attitudes and how they affect a dancer's physical and mental wellbeing. I will then test a number of mental skills training strategies for supporting and enhancing physical and mental wellbeing, and how these strategies impact a dancer and their psychological well-being. These can be in different contexts such as in class, performance, rehearsals and the dancers daily life.

We all have different personality types and traits, and dancers can be a totally different person to what they are inside the studio or performance space to what they are during their day to day life. For dancers, the common personality traits are high achievers, perfectionists, having a low self esteem and they can also be highly emotional.

A dancers psychological wellbeing is extremely important to their life as a dancer, and also their daily life. As a choreographer, knowing a dancers mental state can support them in their training, future career and to limit the negative impact that the dance environment might include. Dancers get examined on a daily basis, from teachers and choreographers and also from the dancer themselves. Dancers examine themselves emotionally, physically and psychologically. This can be either positive or negative, and most dancers examine themselves in a negative way. This may be because they are a perfectionist and want to push themselves to get a certain movement perfect for example. The saying 'practice makes perfect' is well

known to us dancers. To a certain amount this can be true, as the more you do practise the better your skills and technique will get. Despite this, training and working on something too much can cause a lot of stress and may end up in the dancer having a breakdown. Perfectionism is broken down into three fields, self orientated perfectionism, other orientated perfectionism and socially prescribed perfectionism. Self orientated dancers tend to be fastidious and want to achieve high standards of performance. This Trait is typical in dancers as we all wish to accomplish the best in our training and future careers. For example, a self orientated dancer would say that they set high expectations for themselves and find it uneasy to hear negative feedback from their teacher or choreographer. This can then affect their psychological wellbeing by thinking that they are not good enough and then going back and perfecting it over and over again which can be extremely draining.

Dancers also suffer with low self-esteem. For example, women are proclaimed to have higher self-esteem than men, within a behavioural conduct. But are reported to have lower self-esteem than men regarding their physical appearance, and their self-satisfaction. General self-esteem is, a lot more apparent within teenagers under the age of 18. Which is usually when the dancer is well underway with their dance training. Dancers are prone to comparing themselves to other dances and the way that other men and women look, and social media has become extremely dangerous for this matter. To overcome this, the dancer has to find their own strengths which can include the skills that they already have as dancer and their appearance this will then build the dancers self-esteem and feel less self-conscious.

Motivation is key within a dancer's life, without that you're more likely going to fail and not get given the opportunities that you wish to have. A dancer who has good motivation would attend extra classes, put a lot of effort into their practice and on a whole they are passionate about dance and simply want to succeed in it. There are also downsides to a dancer that carry a high amount of motivation such as overworking their bodies to the point of burnout, and they can over try which could possibly cause their bodies to tighten up and then result in having a bad performance. Not having motivation can also affect the other students within the class. For example, if a dancer had no motivation and was late to classes and sometimes not turning up, it would have a knock affect on the whole class, especially if there was a performance coming up, without that person there it could possibly mean that the choreographer would have to change the plans for the practice or even have to change the performance piece. There are three approaches to motivation, trait centred, situation-centred and the interactional view. Dancers who have a trait centred view have the characteristics to succeed in life and have very high levels of motivation. Students who are situation centred are dependent on the situation that's in hand for their motivation, for example a dancer who is studying dance in university might have less motivation for the theory side of the course but then they will have higher levels of motivation for the practical sessions. The interactional view is how the personal factors, e.g personalities and goals and the situational factors interact. Dancers feel the need to achieve success and to avoid failure. They are motivated to avoid the feeling of humiliation and shame. 'A person who has high levels of achievement motivation would have the tendency to strive for

success, persist in the face of failure and experience pride in accomplishments.' (D. Gill 1986).

There are many ways that mental health impacts a dancer, and this can be shown in many ways, such as anxiety and depression, eating disorders, substance abuse, panic attacks and it can increase stress and arousal. There is a list of ways that a dancer be helped through these mental health issues. Firstly the dancer needs to help herself/himself through self-care devices and tools, this is extremely important within substance abuse as it's the dancers themselves that are putting these substances in their bodies. Another way of helping the dancer would be to make sure that they are equipped with coping strategies through mental skills training. Dancers also just need someone to talk to, whether it's their lecturer, choreographer or the other students within their classes. Anxiety, stress and arousal play a big role in the wellbeing of a dancer. These can be caused by theory deadlines within the dancer's university course, performance anxiety and sometimes new jobs/ auditions can cause anxiety and stress too.

Anxiety is when the individual feels uneasy, and are likely to worry and feel fear. Throughout life, everyone goes through anxiety which can be mild or severe. For example, sitting an exam or sitting their driving theory or test. We get anxious through times like this only because we want to succeed and do well in what we are taking part in. In a dance context, dancers would go through stages of anxiety during a performance, last week of rehearsal situation and auditions. If a dancer has anxiety about a performance or an upcoming competition, the performance of the dancer doesn't have to end badly, and in some cases anxiety does not affect the overall performance of the dancer. There are two parts to anxiety, which are state anxiety

and trait anxiety. State anxiety is when a person is confronted with a situation or an event that makes them feel an unpleasant feeling. The individual would then form a mental assessment of some sort of threat that he/she feels towards the situation that's in hand. An example of state anxiety would be that people experience anxiety before having to speak in front of hundreds of people, or in a dance context performing in front of a crowd in a big performance space. Trait anxiety associates the differences between individuals towards their tendency to experience trait anxiety in return to the anticipation of a threat.

Arousal is the mix of physiological and psychological activity in a person and it refers to the intense measurements of motivation at a certain moment. The intensity of arousal can range from low, medium and high. Highly aroused students are physically and mentally activated. An individual who suffers with arousal has an increased heart rate, respiration and sweating. When an individual becomes highly aroused they feel the need for soothing activities, for example meditation and relaxation methods. On the other hand when the individual becomes bored they will seek energising activities that will get their heart rate going. It is important to balance the state of arousal, but the balance would be different in any individual. Increased arousal can better a dancer's performance by keeping you alert and focussed at all times.

There are many circumstances that can trigger stress, such as new experiences, for example, a new job, finance situations, injury resulting in the dancer not being able to dance and body image. And usually the more important the situation is the more stressful it becomes. Within dancers, stress doesn't always come across to others, usually dancers keep their thoughts and problems inside and

not open up about it as they might think that the problem is small and there isn't much point in speaking about it whereas if they did speak out about it they might feel a lot better and the person may also be able to help them out and relieve their stress. For dancers, stress can cause muscle tension and they will often feel drained which could result in injuries. Stress can also affect the dancers coordination skills if there is something on their mind that they can't forget about during practise. This would then cause the dancers arousal levels to fall low, as they are not focussed and their attention field is poor. The main ways to identify stress would be feeling nervous, the need to urinate often and negative self-talk. A dancer's life can be stressful, and by the help of different coping strategies and the dancer being aware of the different mental skills would benefit them a lot in the long run.

Goal setting is when the dancer would set a number of aims and targets that they want to achieve. Dancers are more likely to set long-term goals, for example being successful at an audition or even setting a life goal of where they'd like to be in 10 years. Long-term aims and goals are also set to maintain the dancer's motivation, so that they have something to work hard for to achieve the goal. Short term goals help energise the dancer's efforts to better themselves. For example, when a dancer is struggling to get a certain technique phrase or a movement phrase in a performance, they would set a goal to ensure that the phrase would be practised and performed correctly.

Another mental skill that is often used in dance is imagery. Imagery is when the dancer's experiences or re-experiences a performance in their mind. It also

enables students to manipulate within their minds the actions and outcomes to carry themselves to a successful conclusion whilst enhancing the preparation, execution, and overview the process that's involved in skilled performances. Most of the time performers use imagery in relation to their dance or performance. Imagery can be useful for enhancing skill development and to enhance the dancer's movement quality.

Self-talk is a mental skill that is common within dancers. For a dancer, self-talk can be something positive or negative. You can either praise yourself and let yourself know that you're doing well and succeeding or put yourself down and tell yourself that you're not good enough. In a positive effect, what the dancer says to themselves can influence many important performance aspects, such as increasing motivation, building self confidence and controlling their emotions. For example, if a dancer had a series of pirouettes to perform, they would tell themselves to "stay calm, focus and spot". But dancers can be very hard on themselves, and in other cases they push themselves until they are exhausted to make sure that they are up to their best ability.

To conclude, there are many implications to a dancer's life and training, and a dancer's mental health is extremely important to their careers as dancers. Every dancer goes through anxiety, arousal and stress everyday during their training, but knowing the different coping strategies that there are to be had is key to control these matters before they can get any worse. It might only be as small as taking half an hour out of their day to perform relaxation methods to calm and de-stress themselves. Self-care is also important, as the dancer needs to be able to help

themselves before anyone else can. Overall I think it is important for every dancer to be educated with different coping strategies and mental skills training in order to better themselves and to be aware of the implications mental health has on their life and training.

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