Promoting Health and Well-Being in the Dance Unit

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Agenda

- Unpacking Issues
- Creating a Resilience Culture
- Addressing Needs
- Concluding Comments
Unpacking Issues
Common Psychological Problems

- Anxiety
- Depression
- ADD
  - Barrell & Terry, 2004; Lench et al., 2010; McIntyre & Campo, 2017; Ringham et al., 2006; Thomson & Jaque, 2015; Walker & Nordin-Bates, 2010; Yao et al., 2017
Common Psychological Problems

- PTSD
- Substance misuse
- Eating issues and eating disorders – true across dance forms and a big predictor is BMI
  - Anshel, 2004; Arcelus et al., 2014; Gorrell et al., 2021; Hamilton, et al., 1985; Szaszi & Szabo, 2021; Sekulic et al., 2010; Stracciolini et al., 2017; Thomas et al., 2000; Zolotic & Durakovic-Belko, 2009
Common Psychological Challenges

• Historical trauma
• Present day trauma
• Perfectionism
• Injury, often secondary to fatigue due to long hours and stress
  • Abergel et al., 2021; Air, 2013; Biernacki et al., 2021; Cahalan et al., 2015; Caine et al., 2015; Eusanio et al., 2014; Hamilton, 1998; 2003; Hamilton et al., 2006; Krasnow et al., 1999; Mainwaring et al., 2017; Nordin-Bates, 2011; 2017; Pollitt et al., 20221; Rip et al., 2006; Thomson & Jaque, 2015; Verulava et al., 2021
Common Social Challenges

- Competitiveness
- Peer pressure – physical accomplishments, body
- Peer criticism and gossip
- Romantic partnerships
- Ambivalence toward authority
- Social media
Pandemic

- Served as a major source of stress - 8/10 adults (78%)
- Led to increased stress - 2/3 adults (67%)
- Exacerbated by societal stressors pervasive in prior years
  - Health care
  - Mass shootings
  - Climate change/global warming
  - Immigration
  - Widespread sexual harassment/assault reports in the news
  - Opioid/heroine epidemic
  - Politics and the presidential election
  - APA, Stress in America, 2020
• Impacted behavior negatively – 49%
• Disrupted education and work, relationships, healthcare, and the economy
• Resulted in financial distress, job loss, and uncertainty about one’s future and the future of the nation and the world
• Led to devastating trauma, grief, and loss of life
• Impacted some groups more than others (e.g., BIPOC, Gen Z)
  • APA, Stress in America, 2020
Poll Question:

During the pandemic, have your dominant emotions been:

- Positive
- Negative
- Mixed
Pandemic and Artists: Psychological Well-Being

- Associated with
  - More distressing thoughts
  - Increased negative and reduced positive emotions
  - Lowered levels of “flow” – state of mind that brings together cognitive, physiological and affects aspects and corresponds to an optimal psychophysical state
    - Habe et al., 2021; Rosset et al., 2020
Pandemic and Artists: Psychological Well-Being

- Associated with
  - Complicated work-life synergy
  - Burnout
Poll Question

• Poll Question: Compared to prior years, are you personally
  • More burned out
  • Experiencing the same level of burnout
  • Less burned out
Pandemic and Artists: Psychological Well-Being

- Demonstrated resilience
- Were practical
- Experienced life beyond their art
- Grew personally and professionally
- Appreciated the time to be both consumers and producers of their art form
- Relished the pause
Concerned about the survival of the arts and artists
Found that losing time and being sidelined from the arts for a period was psychologically and physically brutal
Concerned about safety when returned to class, rehearsals, performances
Stressed by countless decisions to make to ensure safety and balance that with program requirements and solvency

Kahler & Hain, 2020
Pandemic and the Arts: Economic Challenges

• Have witnessed profound economic impacts on individuals
  • Lost income
  • Lack of eligibility for certain financial supports
  • Concerns about short- and longer-term job stability
• Have seen major impact on
  • Arts programs
  • Arts organizations
  • Audiences
    • Brunt & Nelligan, 2020; Ciurczak, 2020; Rosset et al., 2020
Pandemic and the Arts

• Experienced the countless ways in which the arts and culture have helped us cope with the crisis

"Culture has helped us out of the crisis. Now we have to help culture and support the diversity to which culture owes its strength"
– UNESCO chief Audrey Azoulay
Poll Questions

- Poll Question: During the pandemic, have the arts been
  - Helped or valued
  - Hurt or devalued
  - Equal balance between the two

- Poll Question: During the pandemic, has dance been
  - Helped or valued
  - Hurt or devalued
  - Equal balance between the two
Racism

- Increased awareness that systemic racism plagues our nation
- Witnessed massive protests across the US
- Declared racism a public health problem
- Viewed police violence toward members of the BIPOC community as a significant source of stress (59% of adults)
- Cited discrimination on a personal level as a major form of stress (33% of all adults, 44% BIPOC individuals)
  - APA, Stress in America, 2020; CDC, April 2021
• Increased our recognition of how systemic racism shapes our access to art
• Acknowledged that a lack of opportunity for non-white artists and an undervaluing of their art are pervasive problems
• Brought attention to the ways in which the arts community perpetuates racism
• Recognized the ways in which the arts community can confront racism
Creating a Resilience Culture
• Adapt well in the face of significant sources of stress, adversity, trauma, tragedy, or threats
• Bounce back from difficult experiences
• Grow from challenging experiences and improve your life in response
Develop resilience through
• Fostering wellness
• Embracing healthy thoughts
• Finding purpose
• Building connections
• Seeking help
Create and sustain a resilience culture in dance schools that is
- Physically healthy
- Psychologically healthy
- Developmentally minded
- Culturally responsive
- Socially just
Create a Physically Healthy Culture

- Highlight acceptance of multiple body types and appreciation of developing an adult body
- Encourage body acceptance, which is linked to greater life satisfaction and positive emotions
- Capitalize on each dancer’s physical strengths and attributes
- Teach and support dancers in distinguishing between good and bad pain and listening and attending to their body
- Encourage adaptive coping with injuries
  - Faria et al., 2021; Mainwaring et al., 2001; Penniment & Egan, 2011; Pentith et al., 2021; Radell et al., 2017; Tarr & Thomas, 2021
Create a Physically Healthy Culture

- Provide dancers opportunities and resources to engage in supplementary physical training that helps them manage the physical demands and longitudinal training loads of dance
- Encourage and create schedules that support adequate rest and recovery, especially given the physical and psychological risks of fatigue and overtraining during high stress times
  - DiPasquale et al., 2021; Shaw et al., 2021
Create a Physically Healthy Culture

• Emphasize
  • Balance between energy taken into the body through nutrition and energy used by the body through exercise
  • Need for appropriate rest and nourishment
  • Value of physical well-being (menstruation, bone health)
  • Knowledge about body composition, stress and nutritional intake combined with energy balance
  • Link between perfectionism and eating issues and ways to have realistic expectations and praise self for persevering and doing one’s best

• Buffington et al., 2016
Create a Psychologically Healthy Culture

- Emphasize overall wellness
  - Determine necessary requirements and eliminate ones that lead to distress and burnout
  - Offer a health and wellness course
  - Provide opportunities for more ongoing conversation in classes, rehearsals, advising meetings, mentoring relationships

- Encourage and empower people to
  - Be their authentic selves
  - Voice their needs and perspectives
  - Partner in creating solutions
    - APA Stress in America, 2020; Mosley, 2020
Empower students to be creative and thrive
- Encourage improvisational dance to help dancers find flow and express themselves creatively
- Give all students ongoing, accurate corrective feedback in multiple ways (e.g., verbal, visual, kinesthetic) in a manner that builds confidence and self-efficacy
  - Biasutti & Habe, 2021; Buckroyd, 2001; Dou et al., 2021
Create a Psychologically Healthy Culture

- Give praise as well as constructive feedback
- Try to understand the reason for a mistake, accept and acknowledge why from the dancer’s perspective it happened, and invite the dancer to find a solution
  - Cheon et al., 2015
Create a Psychologically Healthy Culture

• Provide students with training in
  • Adaptive coping strategies
  • Positive self-talk
  • Anxiety management
  • Mindfulness, which is associated with positive affect and dance specific recovery
  • Acceptance
• Support dancers’ autonomy, which can protect them from burnout and increase their engagement in the face of perfection
• Encourage students to use an app to monitor their wellness (dance specific)
  • Blevins et al., 2021; Fogaca, 2021; Harrison et al., 2021; Jowett et al., 2021
Create a Developmentally Minded Culture

- Recognize that adolescence and young adulthood focuses on separation, autonomy, creating peer relationships and developing sexual identity and awareness
- Facilitate dancers’ growth related to these developmental challenges
Create a Culturally Responsive Culture

- Establish inclusive policies in training and hiring
- Have role models for diverse dance students to emulate
- Strive to have your dance program mirror the demographics of the community (local area, school/university population)
- Engage in community outreach efforts to increase the diversity of the pipeline
Create a Socially Just Culture

- Be attuned to the impact of the societal challenges on dancer’s functioning and address this with compassion
- Ensure a value driven culture, that values
  - Open dialogue
  - Hope
  - Connections with family, peers, culture, community
  - Creativity and innovation
  - Anti-racism
    - APA Stress in America, 2020; Brutn & Nelligan, 2020; Giordano et al., 2020; Mastnak, 2020; Molyneux et al., 2020; Rendell, 2020; Sternbach, 1993
Poll Question: How effective and systematic are your organization/department/program efforts to actively address structural racism, oppression, and bias as relevant to your art(s)

- Very effective
- Somewhat effective
- Not at all effective
Addressing Needs
Build Resilience

• Encourage wellness and self-care strategies
  • Have a self-care routine to facilitate coping with life challenges
  • Include different ways to relax and de-stress
  • Free mind – meditate or journal
  • Make time for self each day - 15–30-minute increments throughout the day
    • APA, Stress in America 2020; Penniment & Egan, 2011; Radell et al., 2017
• Encourage mindfulness
  • Highlight value of mindfulness (being conscious of something and present in the moment) for emotional stability, optimal performance, injury prevention, and creativity
  • Recommend regular mindfulness practice, which may involve apps (CALM; Headspace; Stop, Breathe, and Think)
  • Encourage mindfulness phrases for dancers
    • I trust my body
    • I am getting stronger/more flexible…. everyday
    • I am physically healthy
    • Blevins et al., 2021
• Encourage and model self-compassion
  • Teach/encourage dancers to be kind toward themselves and accept their limitations, open-hearted, appreciate that their own imperfections are connected to the experience of imperfection shared by all humanity, and mindful attention to uncomfortable emotions
  • Link self-compassion to resilience, positive psychological well-being, improved body satisfaction and body appreciation, reductions in eating disorder symptoms and pain
  • Albertson et al., 2015; Bluth & Neff, 2018; Kelly & Carter, 2014; Neff 2017
• Encourage and model self-compassion in the context of the pandemic, social injustice, etc.
  • Recommend daily reflection on three good things that happened, large or small
  • Acknowledge this is a completely new situation that no one was prepared for and thus feelings of uncertainty are understandable
  • Inspire everyone to do their best, but give people space when they don’t have energy or motivation
  • Allow people to tap in and tap out as needed
    • APA, Stress in America 2020
Build Resilience

• Teach techniques to increase confidence
  • Self-reflect accurately and with compassion/kindness
  • Avoid comparisons unless to self
  • Define own success
  • Control what can and accept what cannot control (radical acceptance)
    • Barrell & Terry, 2004; Buckroyd, 2001; Fish et al., 2004; Garcia-Dantas & Quested, 2015; Gordon & Gruzelier, 2003; Monsma & Overby, 2004; Pavlik & Nordin-Bates, 2016; Thomas & Jaque, 2018; Walker & Nordin-Bates, 2010
• Offer programming designed to bolster self-esteem and reduce the negative impact of shame and perfectionism

• Focus on striving for excellence rather than striving for perfection – counter the harmful culture of perfectionism

• Help people accept their strengths and challenges and make dance related decisions accordingly

  • Eusanio et al., 2014; Hamilton et al., 1997; Jowett et al., 2021
• Encourage meditation practice
  • Rest the mind
  • Attain a state of conscious awareness of the present moment
  • Offer opportunities for mindful meditation
• Recommend participation in yoga
  • Channel the power of breathing
  • Find peace of mind through accepting your body
  • Listen to your body
  • Sano, 2021
Build Resilience

- Educate dancers about anxiety and teach them adaptive strategies for coping with stress (e.g., performing)
  - Preparing
  - Visualizing and engaging in facilitative imagery
  - Focusing on positive thoughts
  - Using rituals
  - Breathing
  - Practicing mindfulness meditation
  - Being self-compassionate
  - Connecting with others
• Teach dancers to
  • Take constructive feedback well – graceful acceptance of feedback
  • Resist shame
  • Be kind to themselves in their self-evaluations; it is the self-critical component of perfectionism not the high standards that causes performance anxiety and burn-out
  • Barrell & Terry, 2004; Garcia-Dantas & Quested, 2015; Nordin-Bates et al., 2017; Thomas & Jaque, 2018
• Prevent eating disorders by incorporating a healthy lifestyle intervention that reduces eating pathology and body dissatisfaction
  • Define and compare the traditional thin-ideal, dance-specific thin-ideal, and dance-specific health-ideal
  • Increase nutritional density (i.e., eat foods that yield increase nutrients relevant to calories)
  • Attend to factors (e.g., sleep, appropriate rest time, other behavioral health domains) that might influence performance other than weight
    • Gorrell et al., 2020
• Prevent injuries
  • Implement a wellness program that includes physical and psychological screening to establish baselines and take action when problems are identified
  • Highlight value of individual activity-rest schedules especially during stressful periods
  • Help dancers learn adaptive ways to cope with pain
    • Notice pain and engage in appropriate self-care
    • Reduce catastrophizing
      • Clark et al., 2014; Encarnacion et al., 2000; Fietze et al., 2006; Twitchett et al., 2010
• Use psychological tools to aid injury recovery – reduce pain and fear of re-injury, enhance perseverance and adherence, foster hope and sense of purpose, and bolster self-esteem
  • Embrace a holistic physical-psychological approach that may include both types of therapy
  • Accept (radical acceptance) injury
  • Set appropriate goals based on injury realities
  • Utilize relaxation techniques and healing imagery
  • Engage in related activities (e.g., assist teachers)
  • Participate in meaningful alternative activities
    • Air et al., 2013; Butler et al., 2005; Christakou et al., 2007; Cupal & Brewer, 2001; Evans & Hardy, 2002; Mainwaring et al., 2003; Pollett et al., 2021; Walker, 2009
Respond to Psychological Symptoms

- Notice and take seriously range of symptoms
- Be attuned to difficulties that negatively impact a dancer’s functioning
- Ask dancers who are injured about their psychological distress
- Never feel it is your responsibility to assess the seriousness of the situation or determine the right cause of action
• Talk directly to the dancer about concerns in a compassionate and timely manner
• Connect dancers to appropriate behavioral health resources in your community
• Involve interdisciplinary teams to help dancers with specific problems, such as eating disorders
• Participate in the treatment and recovery process for dancers, along with the members of the interdisciplinary team, the dancer, the family, and the peers, etc.
Respond to Psychological Symptoms

• Make accommodations for dancers with psychological difficulties (time for appointments, extra time to learn choreography)
• Be sure all members of your dance school are educated about identifying, treating, and making decisions about psychological problems that require attention
• Implement a “return to dance policy” (e.g., for eating disorders)
  • Mountjoy et al., 2014
Respond to Common Psychological Challenges

- Mitigate against psychological trauma in the dance environment (e.g., humiliation)
- Encourage dancers to strive for excellence rather than perfection
- Shift the culture away from one that embraces injury and pain tolerance to one that supports self-care, rest, modified training, and the receipt of social support so that damage to the body and psyche are minimized
Respond to Common Social Challenges

- Find ways to be humanistic and connected, even in virtual and digital spaces
- Encourage students to use social support and provide such support to them
  - APA Stress in American, 2020; Blevins et al., 2021; Mosley, 2020
Respond to Common Social Challenges

• Empower dancers to view dance as a common language through which they can be understood, embraced, and empathized with so they can engage in more self care and support one another

• Address envy and competition so they are not so destructive
  • Encourage synchronized and coordinated dance performances in highly competitive contexts
    • Roncaglia, 2021; Shimizu & Okada, 2021
• Encourage people to seek mental health services if emotionally overwhelmed, burned out, or struggling to cope effectively
• Facilitate access to services
  • Connect people to resources in the university or local area
  • Recommend free or low costs services specific to the arts community
• Form linkages with mental health professionals who work with artists, like performance psychologists, or with common challenges (e.g., eating disorders)
• Advocate for funding for mental health services in colleges/universities or with health plans
• Make a commitment to anti-racism
• Review resources in the arts and dance (Dance/NYC)
• Refocus teaching methods to affirm and celebrate the diversity of people’s experiences and cultures
  • Employ anti-racist dance pedagogy
• Engage actively in anti-racist efforts to make progress toward equitable communities across the arts – do not be complacent
• Acknowledge ways racism permeates the arts
• Remember, the process will be challenging and take time, but current and future artists deserve better than the current racist structures
• Make a public statement about racial justice commitment and action plan
  • Gottschild, 1998; Kraehe et al., 2018; McCarthy-Brown, 2017; Mullikin, 2020
Prioritize Racial Justice

• Encourage everyone in the community to confront racism and implicit bias
  • Use voice - speak from own perspective exclusively and express how you feel
  • Use art to speak truth to power
  • Find a place where voice is valued
  • Find allies and be an ally
    • Mosley, 2020; Spears, 2020

How Dance Students Can Confront Racism and Implicit Bias in the Studio
Prioritize Racial Justice

- Protect own mental health as confront racism and implicit bias
  - Be sensitive to the impact of the racial/ethnic trauma in everyday life compounded by the practices of the arts community on BIPOC artists and the psychological effects of confronting racism and implicit bias
    - Stress and anxiety
    - Lower self-esteem
    - Problems with practice, productivity, performance
    - Mental health difficulties
  - Mosley, 2020; Turner, 2019
Prioritize Racial Justice

• Move from microaggressions to microprogressions
  • Engage in self-reflection
  • Be aware of stereotypes
  • Mitigate bias in choices of what to perform/display and who will perform/have their work displayed
• Encourage diverse people to create and develop their personal voices
  • Wakamatsu, 2020
Prioritize Racial Justice

• Move from microaggressions to microprogressions
  • Be intentional about small, regular, and common acts or experiences that serve to challenge and/or dismantle bias, stereotypes, discrimination, and oppression
  • Use the classroom and performance space to pursue microprogressions and challenge microaggressions
  • Infuse classrooms and performance spaces with compassion, connection, and anti-racism through daily, deliberate microaffirmations
  • Strunk et al., 2017; Wakamatsu, 2020
• Secure anti-racism consultations

Why Former Dancer Erica Lynette Edwards Launched an Anti-Racism Consulting Business
Prioritize Racial Justice

- Hold multicultural arts events in a safe manner
- Call for changes at the top due to lack of diversity in leadership
- Stand in solidarity with protestors across the nation committed to breaking the systems that create and maintain racism, oppression, bigotry and inequity
  - King et al., 2020
Prioritize Racial Justice

• Create work honoring specific communities
  • Black victims of police brutality
  • Black queer community
  • Transgender people of color
• Show support for the BLM movement
• # StopAsianHate

How Is the Art World Responding to the Black Lives Matter Movement Now?
• Ensure availability of programming that prepares dancers to transition after their dance career ends by emphasizing
  • Capitalizing on what they learned from dance and generalizing it to other situations
  • Contemplating the role of more formal college education (and possibly beyond)
  • Making career choices and preparing for them
  • Determining creative ways to integrate dance throughout their life
  • Utilizing advisory papers on various transitions from NASD
    • Harrison & Ruddock-Hudson, 2017
Concluding Comments
• Be guided by your values and the values of your organization/program/institution
• Emphasize activities that bring a sense of meaning and purpose in your life and the lives of your students and colleagues
• Be proactive and innovative in supporting creativity and well-being
• Make an intentional commitment to anti-racism through the use of microprogressions, which empower people with multidimensional social identities, strong voices, creative capacity, and leadership skills
  • Brunt & Nelligan, 2020; Wakamatsu, 2020
• Use the pandemic and active social justice movement to showcase the arts and their connecting and healing value
• Recognize that we are facing a national mental health crisis that could yield serious health and social consequences for years to come, especially among vulnerable groups such as artists and arts educators and administrators
• Act NOW to help those who need it and prevent a more serious and widespread mental health crisis
Questions