

Governed and Liberated Bodies: Experiences of Young Female Competitive Dancers

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Dancers' bodies are governed by rules, training, and expectations, yet dancers often report dance to be liberating and a source of emotional expression. In this study, a document analysis of the rules associated with 15 Canadian competitions was combined with focus groups conducted with 15 female dancers. These dancers had transitioned from competitive dance studio contexts as girls to training and competing at a postsecondary level. Applying a multidisciplinary theoretical approach that drew from self-determination theory, Foucault, and Bourdieu, we discovered that collectively these theories provide insights into the complex and contradictory world of competitive dance.

Key words: *dance; self-determination theory; Foucault; habitus*

In this research we focused on dancers' experiences in studios and competitive dance contexts. Young dancers often spend between six and twenty hours in dance studios participating in acro, ballet, contemporary, hip hop, jazz, lyrical, musical theatre, and tap classes. Dancers are typically first enrolled between the ages of 3 and 8 and may start competing as early as age 5 or 6. We were specifically interested in how dancers would report experiences of their bodies as governed and liberated within these dance contexts. The dancers involved in this study had transitioned from studio contexts to dance at the university level and reflected on their past experiences as young dancers as well as current dancing experiences. We contend that competitive dancers' bodies are governed in many ways by external forces through the training they receive and the rules of the competitions in which they participate. The contexts and environments that dancers inhabit shape their identities and understandings of dance. In addition, we argue that the ways in which dancers experience their bodies as governed and liberated provide insights into how childhood is conceptualized. More specifically, the

studio and competition rules and expectations that govern bodily expression, the surveillance around training, and the levels of autonomy experienced by dancers are connected to a conceptualization of childhood as a time of protection and of children as needing guidance. However, while adults influence conceptualizations of childhood that enter into dance contexts, we also see dancers as active participants through their engagement in dance and particularly their submission to governance and their experiences of liberation within dance.

Theoretical framework

We employ a multidisciplinary approach to our theoretical framework by combining self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2000) with Foucault's (1977a, 1977b) work on docile bodies, surveillance, and power and Bourdieu's (1977, 1984) concept of habitus. We contend that individually each of these three theoretical approaches offers specific insights into the lived experiences of dancers and dance contexts but that collectively they offer more nuanced insights into the complexity of those experiences and contexts.

Self-determination theory (SDT) offers an approach to understanding individual aspects of how dancers' bodies are governed and the ways in which dancers exercise autonomy, experience competence, and achieve relatedness. Within SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2000), autonomy is distinct from independence and implies enacting behaviour and decisions with a sense of volition rather than doing so independently of others (Van Petegem, Beyers, Vansteenkiste, & Soenens, 2012). The central premise within SDT posits that all individuals have three innate needs associated with healthy development: autonomy (freedom to make one's own choices), competence (belief in one's own efficacy), and relatedness (feeling that one is part of caring relationships). When these psychological needs are met, individuals are motivated to take action that is fully consistent with their own values and leads to individuals experiencing enhanced well-being and greater life satisfaction (Meyer et al., 2007; Molix & Nichols, 2013). Many researchers have been applying SDT to understand various dance contexts, as well as dancers' motivations and engagement in dance (see Balaguer et al., 2001; Jago et al., 2013; Quedest & Duda, 2010, 2011a, 2011b; Sebire, Jago, et al., 2013; Sebire, Kesten, et al., 2016; Shannon, 2016). To date, SDT dance research has demonstrated that dancers who experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness in their dance contexts are more likely to continue to dance and derive positive psychological, emotional, physical, and social benefits from dance engagement. However, SDT does not fully address how autonomy, competence, and relatedness are achieved in dance contexts or how dancers might negotiate and navigate their lived realities to experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness. SDT offers a particular window into the world of dancers, but we argue that it only offers a partial or obstructed view.

Similarly, Foucault's work on docile bodies, surveillance, and power has been applied to understand and explore dance, but we argue that it also offers a specific view of dancers and dancers' experiences that does not take into account the view offered by other theories, such as SDT or Bourdieu's habitus. There may be more connections between Foucault and SDT than one might expect. Foucauldian dance scholars have focused on the creation of docile bodies, arguing that the bodily discipline created through constant surveillance results in dancers internalizing their teachers' expectations, leading them to engage in self-regulation and self-critique (Dryburgh & Fortin, 2010; Fortin, Viera, & Tremblay, 2009; Green, 1999, 2001; Kleiner, 2009). Mirrors are seen to be key components in setting the stage for surveillance in dance studios (Berg, 2015; Clarke & Markula, 2017; Dryburgh & Fortin, 2010; Fortin et al., 2009; Green, 1999, 2001, 2003; Kleiner, 2009; Loch, 2015; Pickard, 2013; Shannon, 2016; Whiteside & Kelly, 2016). Kleiner (2009) linked the ballet studio with its mirrors and the constant watching of the ballet instructor and other dancers to Foucault's (1977a) panopticon. While Kleiner did recognize that in the panopticon the observer/inspector is not visible, she argued that the mirrors within a ballet studio stand in for the observational towers and instill a sense of visibility and exposure that mimic the panopticon, even if the dance

teacher is visible. Clarke and Markula (2017) have argued that while Foucault's concepts of power and surveillance can be applied to indicate that ballet produces docile bodies through surveillance, it is more representative of the dance experience to consider how dancers both embrace and resist the governance of their bodies.

Bourdieu's (1977, 1984) concept of habitus informs us that while bodies exist in the social world, they also contain the social world within, such that the body can reproduce cultural and social ideas and norms. Habitus can reflect the larger society in which one lives but can also be more specific to a smaller social group or context, because it is related to the way the body is both managed and perceived within a social group. Essentially, "when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product ... it takes the world about itself for granted" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 127). Pickard (2013) explored habitus in ballet dancers and argued that dancers developed an "unconscious ballet habitus" (p. 3) that was transmitted through dance contexts and informed dancers' understandings of the relationship between their bodies and identities. Foucault's work on docile bodies and Bourdieu's concept of habitus are both relevant to female athletes (Beckner & Record, 2015; Clarke & Markula, 2017; Harder & Theune, 2017; Rudd & Carter, 2006) and particularly to dancers (Alexias & Dimitropoulou, 2011; Clarke & Markula, 2017; Green, 2001; Kleiner, 2009; Pickard, 2013, 2015; Tai, 2014; Wainwright, Williams, & Turner, 2006).

Collectively, these theories offer an opportunity to understand the complexity and nuances within dancers' experiences and contexts. While Bourdieu's work on habitus addresses how the body both reproduces cultural and social norms while also being managed and perceived within a social group, it also offers potential insight into how a dance habitus contributes to dancers' understanding of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Foucault's conceptualization of surveillance and the production of docile bodies combines with the other two approaches to address some of the mechanisms by which dancers interact with habitus and come to understand autonomy, competence, and relatedness. We propose that if habitus is a reflection of the whole or of the specific dance context, then Foucault and SDT contribute to providing a more complex and nuanced understanding of how dancers navigate and negotiate various aspects of their experiences and contexts and how that contributes to habitus.

Method

We chose to explore the competitive experiences of dancers by examining the contexts within which they compete alongside the dancers' discussions of their competitive experiences. Specifically, we decided to conduct a document analysis (Bowen, 2009) of competition rules and to conduct focus groups with dancers who had finished competing with their studios and were currently competing at a university level. The document analysis of the rules provided information about the construction and nature of the competition contexts while the focus groups provided insights into how dancers experienced these contexts.

Our document analysis (Bowen, 2009) explored the content communicated on the websites of 15 Canadian dance competitions around the rules and procedures that apply to the operation of their dance competitions. The 15 competitions were selected according to the following criteria: their prevalence in Ontario (number of events); their popularity among studios (roster of studios attending); and their representation across competitive levels (intensity of competition / level of studio). Engaging with a document requires iterative and recursive reading with attunement. A document is read for the whole to get a sense of the document in its entirety; it is read with attention to idiom, word choice, notable revelatory terms and phrases and notable nonoccurrences; and it is read with attention to literal content, particularly how the literal content (e.g., number of pages, font size charts, graphics) contributes to the explicit purpose of the document. It also involves reading with attention to plausible deductive interpretations guided by a theory or model, and reading with attention to pattern. In effect, the reader makes the

obvious, obvious, makes the obvious dubious, and makes the hidden obvious (Patton, 2015). We conducted a two-stage document analysis that involved an initial analysis to identify overall patterns across the competition websites, then we conducted a superordinate level of thematic coding wherein we applied our theoretical framework to themes that emerged out of the pattern analysis.

We conducted two focus groups with 15 competitive dancers between the ages of 18 and 24 who were involved in one of the competitive dance teams at a university in southern Ontario. In the focus groups, we focused broadly on the dancers' competitive experiences and more specifically on their experiences of competition rules, studio experiences, autonomy in dance, transition to postsecondary dance contexts, and being governed by rules and expectations. Focus groups were conducted at the university where the dancers were going to school and training. One focus group (n= 8) was conducted with students new to the dance team and the other focus group was conducted with returning students (n= 7). Dancers ranged from first to fourth year of postsecondary school. We modelled the focus group coding on the two-stage document analysis by first analyzing for common patterns and second exploring superordinate themes that emerged out of the document analysis and the focus groups.

Findings

In the document analysis of the dance rules, we met as a team and collectively identified the common patterns across all of the dance competition websites. We identified the following 12 patterns, which are listed in order of most common to least common: registration; dance performance; judging; prizes; finance; photography; scheduling; backstage etiquette; liability; family friendly; theatre etiquette; attitude/sportsmanship. The first level of analysis is not reported in detail, but several of the key patterns are captured in Table 1.

Table 1. Patterns Within the Document Analysis, in Order of Prevalence

Name of Pattern	Description	Competitions
Dance performance	Listing of styles of dance, categorization, number of dancers, number of acrobatic tricks and tumbling passes allowed outside of acro, length of music, penalties, recategorization of dances, divisions (novice, precompetitive, competitive), time limits.	14/15
Judging	Scoring categories, scoring criteria, judicial decisions, tie breaking, dancer placement, re-dancing rules, adjudications, qualification for divisional and overall awards.	14/15
Photography	Prohibition of photography and videography due to dancer safety, integrity of choreography, possible “questionable”-nature attendees at public event.	11/15
Scheduling	Allowable props, time limits for setup/takedown of props, holding numbers, numbers allowed for costume changes, and dancing out of order.	11/15
Backstage etiquette	Rules about backstage and rehearsal areas (e.g., being quiet backstage, staying out of the wings) being on time, being ready 30–60 minutes prior to a performance, dressing room behaviour.	10/15
Liability	Not liable for damages, loss, injury, or stolen property; dancers compete at their own risk; teachers responsible for ensuring dancers are competing at a technically appropriate level for their abilities; video and photo rules are repeated often.	9/15
Family friendly	“Appropriateness” of choreography, themes, song lyrics, and costuming of the dancers on stage. Performances lacking sensitivity are not tolerated, including dances that portray rape, suicide, murder, sex, domestic violence, eating disorders, and other themes with dark undertones.	8/15
Attitude /sportsmanship	Rules instructing dancers, teachers, and parents to behave in a respectful and professional manner and to demonstrate fairness, ethics, sense of fellowship, and good sportsmanship. No tolerance for harassment or bullying behaviours.	6/16

The eight patterns reported in Table 1 all had elements that contributed to governing dancers’ bodies through rules and expectations placed on dancers. *Dance performance* governed dancers’ bodies in terms of defining dance styles, skills, length of music, and categorization of dancer, while *family friendly*, *etiquette*, and *attitude/sportsmanship* governed specific behaviours and defined what was “appropriate.” *Judging*, *scheduling*, and *liability* all offered more technical ways of defining and governing dancers’ bodies. Collectively, these patterns created a competition habitus that had to be reconciled with dancers’ dance or studio habitus. Similarly, Wainwright,

Williams, and Turner (2006) argue that dancers have multiple forms of habitus. They argue that each dancer has an individual habitus that is unique, an institutional habitus that is shared and formed by their training and ballet culture, and a choreographic habitus that is informed by the roles they are given in dances. Further, they state that there is an interconnectivity and reciprocity among the different forms of habitus. For example, a dancer must form a habitus related to competition, but this is not in isolation from their studio habitus as each informs the other to a certain extent. Until competition, dancers have no experience with backstage behaviours, onstage behaviours, and interaction with judges (e.g., scores, critiques), which will come to form a competition habitus, but they do have a sense of dance styles and technique in their studio habitus that may be shifted and informed by judges citing the broader dance world and observations of other dancers. We also found that the competition rules spoke to Foucault's (1977a, 1977b) work on surveillance, docile bodies, and associated relations of power in which power is both constraining and productive. Dancers were expected to conform to the competition rules, and the rules were frequently written in ways that governed dancers' actions and bodies. Inherent in underlying assumptions associated with the rules, as well as their expression and impact on the competition contexts, was engagement with dancers' levels of autonomy, competency, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Furthermore, adult conceptualizations of childhood were evident in most of the rules, particularly those that dealt with governance and protection.

The relevance of habitus, complexity, and nuances around SDT and the emphasis on surveillance and the production of docile bodies that were present in the document analysis also emerged in the first-level analysis of the focus groups. Overall, all dancers strongly associated their identity with dance and saw dance as an integral part of their world. This was evidenced by dancers' claims such as "Dance is who I am" and "When I was injured and could not dance, I felt as if I had lost a core part of myself." Dancers exhibited strong motivations associated with dance engagement regardless of specific dance style. They reported great enjoyment from dance, particularly in connection with the ability to engage in creative and emotional expression. While they recognized that their bodies were often governed by outside forces, such as teachers, studio expectations, parental expectations, competition rules, and judges, they also reported experiencing freedom, emotional expression, and power in dance. For example, one dancer stated, "Sure, there are rules, but it's me out on the stage dancing" and another said, "When I dance I am free and I can express my emotions." In their conversations they also exhibited an awareness of how many of the ways that they were governed were associated with adults' conceptions of childhood and of themselves as children or young people. One dancer explained, contrasting assumptions about children with those of university students: "Now that we compete at a university level, our sexuality is welcome on the stage and seen as empowering when we embrace it in dance."

In applying theory in the second superordinate thematic analysis, we identified four emergent themes that were present across both the document analysis and the focus groups. Each of these themes engaged with SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2000), Foucault's (1977a, 1977b) work on surveillance and docile bodies, and Bourdieu's (1977, 1984) concept of habitus. Woven within the themes was evidence of how adults were conceptualizing childhood and children. These themes are as follows: policing the boundaries and borders; surveillance and regulation; misuse and exploitation; living contradictions.

Policing the boundaries and borders

Policing the boundaries and borders takes into account how porous the borders are among dance forms/styles, between "family friendly" and what is considered too erotic or evocative, and between what can be considered an artistic social justice approach to an issue and what is considered too dark or in poor taste. Frequently, the boundaries and borders followed adult views of what was deemed appropriate given a child's age. This theme also

linked to body shapes and body ideals, excellence versus perfectionism, and how some dancers are showcased in group numbers. There were some commonalities and some distinctions in how this theme emerged in the document analysis and in the focus groups. The document analysis revealed that judging at competitions and competition rules involve a lot of policing around dance styles, while dancers discussed experiencing this policing of boundaries and borders at competition and also in how styles of dance were taught in a studio. More specifically, they talked about how these rules and their experiences of being taught defined how they understood that style in terms of boundaries. As one dancer put it, “Studios differ in how they think about forms of dance. In some studios you don’t have an arial [cartwheel without hands] in jazz but in others, arials are part of jazz choreography.”

As part of policing the boundaries, bodily shape and ideals were expressed within the document analysis in terms of family-friendly rules around costuming and were prevalent in focus-group discussions. According to the document analysis, many of the dance performance and family-friendly rules serve to police the boundaries and borders of dance. Some of the rules include an acknowledgement that there will be push back because tension around borders and boundaries is inevitable and it is what drives the emergence of new dance forms, new rules, new procedures, and so forth. Dancers spoke of being trained to understand the specific body ideal that a studio was looking for and being positioned in dances according to body size or form. Several dancers spoke of experiences with body dysmorphia and the strategies they still use to deal with it. One dancer described how she still carried scars from her studio: “We were expected to show our ribs when dancing and have a certain body shape. Sometimes I still have to run my hands down my body to convince myself of my size.” These borders and boundaries about body image stayed with dancers, and they continued to struggle with what they had internalized. Bourdieu (1977, 1984) proposes that class habitus leaves traces and legacies, thus the hidden injuries of class make themselves known in unconscious enactments of previous behaviours grounded in penury or poverty. This was clearly present in how dancers exhibited traces and legacies of the habitus of their studios, just like hidden injuries of class. Dancers had hidden injuries around the borders and boundaries of gendered body image that continued to be expressed years after leaving the studio.

The policing of boundaries and borders connects with autonomy (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2000), because autonomy is allowed within certain borders and boundaries but can be challenged and revoked when a dancer is seen to be crossing those borders and boundaries identified within the rules. Dancers spoke about how teachers and parents could both be supportive and withdraw support depending on whether or not dancers were remaining within the expected borders and boundaries. As one dancer stated, “If my solo did not meet my teacher’s expectations, she would be gone from the wing when I got off stage.” Foucault’s (1977b) contention that individuals are at once both vehicles and recipients of relations of power is also at play in that dancers are governed by rules which exert power on them, yet in their performances, they are also vehicles of power. Once entering performance, it is the dancer(s) who bring the choreography to life—on the stage they are enacting power through their embodiment of the movements and emotional expression. Dancers’ discussions reflected relations of power as dancers spoke about how at times they were constrained through discipline associated with training but also enabled through their embodiment of the choreography and emotional expression. Aspects of habitus (Bourdieu, 1977, 1984) are also influenced by these borders and boundaries in terms of how dancers take them in and make sense of them in connection with other forms of habitus they have gained from dance contexts. It was clear throughout the focus groups that while dancers shared many of these boundaries and barriers, their studio-specific experiences resulted in distinct differences. One dancer put it best when she said, “I resonate with a lot of what is being said, but my experiences [at my studio] did not involve having to be a certain size or meet a certain image to dance.”

Surveillance and regulation

Surveillance and regulation was the second emergent subordinate theme. It is closely aligned with the policing of borders and boundaries but is more focused on the regulation of the body and its behaviours. This element was common across almost all the documented rules to some degree. The fine details of dance performance, such as the amount of time and the number of tricks, could be connected to the regulation of the body, while the etiquette and sportsmanship rules focused more on regulation of behaviour as well as the body in terms of who is allowed to do what with whom and where. There were strong echoes of adult conceptualizations of childhood in this theme, where surveillance and identification of dancers were frequently tied to age expectations and protectiveness. Judging provided the details for both regulation and surveillance as it defined how dancers would be surveilled on stage and for what purposes. Photography rules focused on who takes photos and videos and for what purpose, again detailing a level of surveillance. Finance, scheduling, and registration included elements of surveillance and regulation in terms of how dancers were defined and categorized (regulated), as well as how these regulations were adhered to and, in several cases, supported by documentary evidence (i.e., confirmation of birth date).

Surveillance and regulation was one of the strongest themes emerging from the focus groups. Dancers spoke about how surveillance and regulation were foundational through the presence of mirrors in the classroom, corrections in class, and teaching styles. Studio-specific norms were also cited in terms of performance expectations, bodily form, technique, and teacher expectations. Some studios regulated weight loss and food intake. Surveillance also included who was featured in dances and how often featured dancers practiced or were in class. Constant display and evaluation by teachers, peers, judges, parents, and themselves placed dancers in a constant state of surveillance, associated with the training of the body (Foucault, 1977a). Similarly, the regulation of the body reflects Bourdieu's habitus (1977, 1984) and informs dancers how their behaviours and movements are to be regulated. While autonomy has a minor role in this theme through dancers' adherence or resistance to surveillance and regulation, competence (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2000) has a more primary role. A focus on competence was evident through the focus on the quality of movement, skill difficulty, timing, and precision, as those who can meet the defined expectations are seen as competent and these expectations provide dancers with a metric of competence. Dancers spoke about how this metric of competence could be studio or competition specific. Relatedness (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2000) is also connected to this theme, as there are implied relationships within the etiquette rules, particularly around who is allowed to go where and with whom. In addition, dancers specifically spoke about having to negotiate their relationships with other dancers within the contested contexts of surveillance and regulation and the implications of the metric of competence that provided a measure of comparison to other dancers' abilities. Dancers explained these negotiations in the following ways: "My studio did not allow contact with other dancers during a competition. I would be in trouble if I spoke to a dancer from another studio"; "A dancer in my studio would be so supportive when the teachers were watching, but if they were not [watching] she would try to throw me off my game before I went on stage, especially if we were competing"; "We spend hours together in class and at competitions. Some dancers are as supportive as they look and work hard to balance friendship and competition, but others are all about winning and appearances in front of the adults."

Misuse and exploitation

The third theme, misuse and exploitation, focused on anticipating and regulating potential misuse and/or exploitation of dancers, rules, photos, and registration and were particularly associated with studio expectations, such as required hours of dance, importance of academics, treatment of illness or other absences, bodily form and image, and costuming. In terms of photos, the competitions often positioned rules as protecting dancers from

unwanted and inappropriate surveillance and exploitation by unauthorized photos and videos. This theme also applied to dance performance and family-friendly rules, as there was an implication that dancers did not have choice around costuming, choreography, or the theme of a dance and therefore could be exploited in those areas by their studios and/or teachers, particularly in regard to what was deemed as appropriate and not appropriate. Dancers reported that some studios exhibited protective behaviours toward their dancers by putting academics first, having realistic expectations around illness and injury, having reasonable and appropriate costumes, and accepting all body types. In most of these studios, winning was less associated with excellence than at other studios: Dancers were taught to assess their own progression towards excellence throughout their development as a dancer, independent of competitive scores. Other studios were reported to put dance and winning first before any other concerns around the dancers' health and well-being. Dancers in these studios spoke of facing intense pressures to get their bodies to fit an "ideal" shape and form, and at times felt exploited in terms of their costumes. In reflecting back, one dancer said, "I wore things on stage at 14 that I would never wear now. I don't know what they were thinking." Misuse and exploitation revealed competing and contradictory understandings of childhood. Competition rules largely focused on protecting dancers from exploitation and studios showing mixed results, with some studios identified as protective and others as much less protective. Dancers identified disconnections between various contexts. At times they felt they were treated as children and protected by adults (at times overprotected), and yet in other contexts "we were dancers, not children, and expected to meet the expectations set before us as professionals—balancing school work, illness, family was on us."

The pattern within studios and competitions that dancers lack choice and need protection undermines dancers' autonomy (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2000), illustrating areas in which dancers are not autonomous or not allowed to be autonomous. Dancers reported being expected to be independent and responsible and yet also follow rules and not make their own decisions. Similarly, dancers reported being pushed to bring expression and feeling to dance and yet docilely follow the choreography exactly. Dancers' relationships with teachers and fellow dancers involved negotiating ideas around protection and autonomy. Foucault's (1977a, 1977b) focus on governance and surveillance is particularly relevant in terms of what dancers are thought to need protection from, as well as who has the authority/power to protect them in specific contexts. For example, in a training context a teacher controls what a dancer is able to do in terms of movements, such that if a skill is deemed too advanced, a dancer does not have permission to try it or work on it. In this context, a dancer may be protected from herself. In competition contexts, protection is more frequently expressed around the theme of the music and costuming to ensure that both are age appropriate. Dancers are encouraged to be autonomous and responsible, and yet have little input into their training or competition numbers. Teachers exert power both in training and in selecting competition numbers; dancers have the choice to participate or not.

How these elements are negotiated in specific studio contexts contributes to dancers' habitus (Bourdieu, 1977, 1984). In the focus groups, dancers displayed shared habitus emerging from their dance experiences but also distinct habitus associated with their specific studio culture. Dancers spoke about the marked differences between studio competitive experiences and university competitive experiences: Studio experiences were associated with lower levels of autonomy and heightened protection, whereas university experiences were associated with heightened autonomy and lower levels of protection. As one dancer described the university context, "It has been an amazing experience. I am not always conforming to someone's choreography. I get to bring my vision to life." This shift seemed to be associated to dance contexts and adult conceptualizations of childhood as dancers in university contexts were seen to be emerging adults. The rules within competitions reflect a broader understanding of how surveillance, autonomy, and protection are understood and practiced by the adults governing these spaces, while dancers' actions within these contexts reflect how dancers are navigating and negotiating their own compliance and resistance.

Living contradictions

The final theme addresses how living contradictions make the dance experience simultaneously exciting and frustrating. The purpose of the rules is to provide a safe and (for some competitions) family-friendly atmosphere, and yet the rules themselves can increase tensions, provoke challenge, and often result in overregulation, heightened anxiety, and high surveillance, leading to highly charged atmospheres at competition. Dancers spent a lot of their time discussing living contradictions. They spoke at length about both negative and positive aspects of dance. Dance was seen to have the ability to impact dancers deeply such that they continue to carry the emotional scars from emotional/psychological wounds they experienced during dancing. Dance had left some with anxieties and other difficulties. One dancer spoke of what she called “performance PTSD,” while others reported body dysmorphia that left them unable to face the mirror some days. Dancers also spoke of how surveillance had become part of how they related to others and to themselves and involved a level of comparison between the self and the other that had become part of how they evaluated the world. Yet dance was also credited with being an amazing and life-affirming experience that was intimately tied to dancers’ identities and provided them with an outlet to creatively express as well as work through their emotions.

The conversations with dancers revealed that the dancers had to reconcile these living contradictions in some way and that in reflecting on past experiences dancers became aware that they had integrated these contradictions, consciously and unconsciously, into their habitus (Bourdieu, 1977, 1984). SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2000) also offers an important contribution to understanding dancers’ experiences, since some elements of the reconciliation process were mediated by dancers’ perceptions of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Dancers’ ability to reconcile these living contradictions was reported by the dancers as being associated with their levels of engagement, motivation, and other positive benefits associated with dance. Dancers’ experiences also suggested that difficulties in reconciling these contradictions and/or a disconnect between studio culture and dancer autonomy, competence, and relatedness was associated by dancers with negative mental health outcomes. Sometimes dancers reported changing studios to find a context that resonated with them and supported autonomy, competence, and relatedness, while in other cases dancers persisted in the studio but felt that they paid an emotional and psychological price for that persistence. The contexts of dance inhabited by dancers are complex and messy. These contexts are constantly shifting, highly influenced by surveillance and associated relations of power, and result in a multiplicity of habitus.

Discussion/Conclusion

The data analysis produced some very intriguing results. In both the document analysis and the focus groups, there was clear evidence of specific ways that dancers’ bodies are being governed by the rules and regulations of competitions, their studios, their teachers, and their training. Furthermore, these rules and regulations, as well as the studio context, frequently reflected adults’ conceptualizations of childhood. Additionally, there was clear evidence that dancers experience high levels of autonomy of bodily expression and liberation within dance. While there were some differences between competitions’ rules and regulations and dancers’ experiences, clear patterns and themes emerged. Dancers’ experiences of having their bodies governed were strongly influenced by how they understood the dance context and the role of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in both the ways their bodies were governed and the ways they experienced freedom within dance. Dancers’ lived experience illustrated complex relationships and balancing between freedom of expression and movement and governance of their bodies by external influences. Similar to Pickard (2015), who found that dancers experienced freedom through emotional expression, we also found that, despite the rules and the surveillance, dancers experienced freedom and autonomy in their performances. Essentially, the process of training and development provided challenges for the

dancers, but the end product—the dancing—provided liberation and satisfaction. Thus while the dancers might be governed by rules and expectations, they also felt liberated and empowered.

The experiences and contexts we describe in this paper offer an intriguing set of resonances and contradictions, as well as opportunities to interrelate and interrogate the associations between and across the premises of SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2000) and the claims of both Foucault and Bourdieu. Overall, using SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2000), Foucault's (1977a, 1977b) conceptions of power and surveillance, and Bourdieu's (1977, 1984) habitus as a collective approach to analyzing competitive dance contexts provided a more nuanced and detailed understanding of the lived experiences of competitive dancers and their competitive contexts. Considered through SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2000) dancers live in a world of contradiction where they have autonomy and no autonomy, where they experience competence and incompetence, and where relatedness is often negotiated with complex and tangled expectations, borders, and boundaries. Yet some of those relationships were incredibly strong and supported dancers through difficult times. Central to these experiences was the constancy of surveillance and its associated effects (Foucault, 1977a, 1977b), which dancers negotiated and navigated, often in ways that were intricately connected to their understandings of their own autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Furthermore, Foucault's (1977a, 1977b, 1990) assertions that power is productive (as opposed to interpreting it as an either/or value system yielding positive or negative outcomes) has important implications for the development of dancers' identities. While dancers eloquently described how integral being a dancer was to their sense of identity, their descriptions of navigating and negotiating studio norms, expectations, and rules provided a tracing of how that identity as a dancer was developed. In addition, their descriptions of the transition to university-level competitions and how they had to reconsider and reconfigure their identities as dancers demonstrated their continued development.

In many ways, habitus (Bourdieu, 1977, 1984) pulled everything together. The similarities and differences in the habitus exhibited by dancers indicated that habitus was central in how dancers made sense of the complex and contradictory world of dance. Dance contexts certainly have similar potential for the formation of habitus as the class contexts that gave rise to Bourdieu's (1984) notion of habitus. Bourdieu proposes that "even when a person moves from a lower SES to a higher one; there remain 'tells' of the previously inhabited class" (p. 466). Likewise, a dancer's comportment often "tells" (or reveals) the values, ideology, and guiding principles of specific dance forms or dance instructors/masters or studios/regions. Dancers spoke of the hidden injuries around body image, competence, and the need for perfection that they continued to carry with them. We found that dancers exhibited multiple forms of habitus, such as a dance habitus and unique studio habitus. Dancers also demonstrated how habitus can shift and evolve through changes in context and environment. Many of the older dancers spoke about renegotiating their dance identity and the expansion of their studio habitus to more of an overall dance habitus as they moved from the studio scene to PSE competition. They were reimagining themselves and interrogating the things they carried with them, such as surveillance of self and other. Further, group behaviours and rituals at competitions and studios reflect both adherence and resistance to the rules and regulations of a given dance form or event. Thus, reproduction and reimagining coexist in dance contexts. In addition, the analysis of competition rules and dancers' competitive experiences revealed how adults' conceptualizations of childhood influenced how dancers governed their bodies. Dancers also spoke about how, as they got older, particularly in university dance contexts, they were more effective at pushing back against these boundaries and found more points of liberation in dance. The complexity of dancers' contexts and their experiences of those contexts were effectively revealed through the combined theoretical framework of SDT, Foucault, and Bourdieu, as well as the methods that were used, offering an insightful view into how adults' understandings of childhood influence the training and performing contexts of young female dancers and how dancers find liberation in those spaces.

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