



Essentials of Dance Psychology

Sanna Nordin-Bates. Human Kinetics, 2023. 339 pages; \$95.00 (paperback), \$57.60 (e-book).

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BOOK REVIEW

Essentials of Dance Psychology Sanna Nordin-Bates. Human Kinetics, 2023. 339 pages; \$95.00 (paperback), \$57.60 (e-book).

Essentials of Dance Psychology satisfies the promise of its title with an impressive, thoroughly researched, and meticulously organized volume that certainly could, as the author suggests, be (1) the foundation of a course in dance psychology, and (2) of great utility to dancers, dance teachers, dance psychologists, therapists, professors, and researchers.

The introduction offers an important definition of dance psychology as “the scientific study of mind and behavior as they pertain to dancers, teachers, and dance practice” (2), elaborating on the myriad ways that this general construct is conceptualized. Nordin-Bates defines the overall aim of dance psychology as “enhancement of a range of performance-related and well-being related outcomes” (3). She places dance psychology in a genre inclusive of sports and performance psychologies, thereby elevating the field to its rightful place. The author appropriately integrates evidence-based knowledge and research from disciplines of sports and performance psychology without subsuming dance psychology into fields that historically have had greater attention.

Nordin-Bates presents fourteen chapters organized into four parts for easy reference: Part I: Personality, Perfectionism, Self-Esteem and Self-Confidence, and Performance Anxiety; Part II: Motivation, Attentional Focus, and Creativity; Part III: Mindfulness, Goal Setting, Self-Regulation, and Imagery; and Part IV: Motivational Climates, Talent, Injury, and Body Image and Disordered Eating. The introduction and each chapter start with clearly articulated objectives that outline what the reader will be able to describe, understand, and use in practice. Each concludes with key points and recommendations as well as critical aspects of research on the chapter’s topic. Each of these offerings contributes to the excellence of this book as a graceful guide for learners and teachers. The section which discusses critical aspects of research succeeds at guiding, elegantly advocating for, and supporting the growth of the field. The writing is stellar, filling gaps of decades of marginalization or absence of any significant research belonging fully to the field of dance psychology.

Adding to the readability and flow of the book is the inclusion of charts, quotes, illustrative black-and-white photos, case studies, and tables with dance- and dance research-specific examples. For example, in a SMART

Goals table, the S stands for the specificity of a goal, such as “to be able to perform a complex movement sequence while staying on the beat all the way through” (177). Other tables offer practical exercises and ways to measure constructs such as creativity, stress, and talent development. The book also contains a glossary of terms, chapter-by-chapter references, and a comprehensive index for easy location of topics.

Although *Essentials of Dance Psychology* provides a wealth of extremely well-grounded, well-researched, and organized information, it is not, nor does it profess to be, exhaustive. It deserves mention, for example, that there is an absence of any discussion of disability, race, gender, or other cultural considerations that affect and influence dance teaching, training, performance, and—certainly—dance psychology. Nordin-Bates writes in her introduction, “Research in dance psychology and consequently the studies and examples represented in this book, mostly represents Western-English-language populations. . . . The field would benefit immensely from more research with other dance populations” (15).

Nordin-Bates presents expertise in the theories and constructs of evidence-based cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). As a child and family psychologist, I have significant knowledge of CBT as it applies to individuals and groups and as it is used for various psychiatric disorders. I have not, until this text, seen it so thoroughly applied to dancers, dance teaching, and dance performance; frankly, it made my heart soar. The profoundly complex realm of dance experiences (including dance psychology) is given language that has potential for meaningful understanding, intervention, and empirical study.

To borrow from Nordin-Bates’s chapter on perfectionism, this book is not perfect, nor does it or should it strive for perfectionism. It strives for excellence, in the same way we are encouraged to strive for excellence in our dancing, our teaching, and our research studies. If we set a very high bar of excellence in writing, research, and advancing the field of dance psychology, Nordin-Bates has vaulted over it and gives us the opportunity to do the same with her guidance in *Essentials of Dance Psychology*.

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