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Exploring the Relationships of Autonomysupportive Climate, Psychological Need Satisfaction and Thwarting with Students' Self-talk in Physical Education

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. Author EB participated in the design of the study, organized and implemented the data collection and prepared the largest part of the first draft of the manuscript. Author CK was responsible for the data management and analysis and edited the first draft of the manuscript. Author EG prepared part of the manuscript and reviewed the final manuscript. Author AK assisted the data collection and analysis and reviewed the manuscript. Author IS assisted the data collection and helped the preparation of the manuscript. Author NC devised the study, guided the preparation of the manuscript and finalized the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

Aims: Based on the framework of the Self-determination Theory and focusing on the theory of Basic Psychological Needs, we explored the relationships between Physical Education (PE) teachers' autonomy-supportive behaviors and students' need satisfaction, need thwarting, and self-talk during the PE lesson.

Methodology: Participants were 544 primary and secondary education Greek students (aged from 12 to 15 years), from nine elementary schools (n = 259) and eight secondary schools (n = 285) in central Greece, who completed a multi-section questionnaire.

Results: Results revealed that PE teachers' autonomy-supportive climate and need satisfaction was positively associated with positive self-talk and negatively associated with negative self-talk, whereas need thwarting was positively related to negative self-talk and negatively related to positive self-talk. Regression analyses revealed that autonomy-supportive climate and competence need thwarting were significant predictors (positive and negative, respectively) of students' positive self-talk. Furthermore, autonomy and relatedness need satisfaction were negative predictors, whereas competence and relatedness need thwarting were positive predictors of students' negative self-talk.

Conclusion: Overall, the findings suggest that when PE teachers create a class environment that supports students' autonomy and the satisfaction of their BPN, while at the same prevents need thwarting, they can positively influence students' self-talk.

Keywords: Autonomy; competence; relatedness; organic self-talk; psychology.

1. INTRODUCTION

School Physical Education (PE) has been recognized as a major tool for health promotion by providing a framework in which the social, psychological and health benefits associated with PA can be promoted to a large number of children, adolescents and youth [1]. A significant amount of research, as well as various educational programs, point out the importance of PE, emphasizing that it helps students to be active in school [2]. In addition, students' positive motivation in PE has been linked to the adoption of a physically active lifestyle as adults [3]. Nevertheless, many students report negative experiences in PE lessons [4.5] and display minimal motivation for PA. Understanding motivation processes is vital to engaging students in activities that will benefit them physiologically and psychologically. Hence, it is imperative to continually develop teaching strategies in the PE context that enhance students' motivation to be physically active.

1.1 Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT)

Self-Determination Theory [6,7] is among the most popular motivational theories in PE research [8] attempting to understand "why" individuals do what they do [9], as well as to explain motivational processes. SDT outlines the processes through which motivation developing and the ways it influences human behavior [7,10]. Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT), one of the SDT's sub-theories, proposes that human behavior is triggered by the satisfaction of the three basic psychological needs; the need for autonomy (need to experience a sense of willingness in one's actions), the need for competence

(need to experience effectiveness in one's interactions with the world), and the need for relatedness (need for connectedness with others, satisfaction with the social environment, and feelings of acceptance) [7,10].

Previous studies [11,12] suggest that there are two parallel pathways regarding human existence, the "bright pathway" and the "dark pathway", and the three BPN. On the bright side, if BPN are satisfied, individuals feel more confident and are likely to adopt healthy motivational orientations that facilitate the development of enjoyment, effort, persistence, commitment, and lead to wellness [10]. Accordingly, the satisfaction of BPN's in within PA contexts has been linked with intention to engage in PA [13] and increased levels of PA [14].

On the dark side, [15] introduced the concept of need thwarting, that is the opposite of need satisfaction. Need thwarting defined as "the perception that need satisfactions are being obstructed or actively frustrated within a given context" [15] describes not only the absence of need satisfaction but also an active process which students experience in controlling In particular, teaching environments [12]. autonomy thwarting occurs when the individuals feel controlled through internal or external pressures. competence thwarting individuals' sense of ineffectiveness or even failure and helplessness, while relatedness thwarting comes with a sense of social isolation and loneliness [12]. Research has shown that when BPN are thwarted, people tend to regulate their behavior based on controlled motivations and experience negative affect [16], boredom and exhaustion [17,18] and low intention to be physically active [18].

1.2 Autonomy-supportive Motivational Climate in PE

PE can be an ideal environment for acquiring knowledge and developing the attitudes and skills needed to integrate physical exercise in life [19]. In line with this, PE teachers play a vital role, as they contribute to the creation of educational environments that support the needs of students and encourage them [20]. In the same vein, [21] pointed out that the learning environment created by PE teacher can significantly affect students' motivation to participate in PE and leisure-time contexts. Research has shown that the teaching style used by the teacher to communicate with students, can affect their perceptions of choice, skill level, and relationships with others, which in turn affects their motivation [22].

Although the existing literature in PE emphasizes the importance of satisfaction of all three basic psychological needs [23], a plethora of research studies highlight strong support for autonomy as the most obvious factor in achieving selfdetermined motivation [24,20]. The PE teacher who uses a more autonomous-supportive teaching style gives students the opportunity to play a basic role in the teaching-learning process. More specifically, results from previous studies have shown that students become more responsible when making decisions, focusing on the process rather than the result, and choosing tasks that align with their interests, motivating them more towards physical activity [25,26]. In essence, behaviors that support autonomy, such as offering choices to students, as well as understanding students' perspectives, play a decisive role in promoting learning outcomes [27]. Similarly, [28] found that when the PE teacher supports autonomy, students' BPN are satisfied and intrinsic motivation is increased. Finally, supporting autonomy has been found to help students to have positive feelings and thoughts about themselves, while enhancing their intention for PA in their free time and their future behavior regarding sports [29]

1.3 Organic Self-Talk and the Social Environment

Self-talk has been described as "verbalizations addressed to the self, overtly or covertly, characterized by interpretative elements associated to their content; and it also either (a) reflects dynamic interplays between organic, spontaneous and goal-directed cognitive processes or (b) conveys messages to activate

responses through the use of predetermined cues developed strategically, to achieve performance-related outcomes" [30]. As evident in this definition, self-talk refers to inherent thoughts individuals experience but also the strategic use of cue words to enhance performance and facilitate learning. The present study concerns the former, organic self-talk, that has been described as verbalizations, addressed to the self, reflecting spontaneous and goaldirected psychological events [31]. Research on organic self-talk in physical activity context, mostly sport, but also PE, is still limited; nevertheless, some has examined the role of the social environment in shaping individuals' organic self-talk.

In the sport context [32], attested for the important role of the coach. In a combination of correlational and experimental studies they reported that supportive coaching behaviours were positively related to positive-goal-directed self-talk and negatively related to negativespontaneous self-talk. Accordingly, unsupportive coaching behaviours were negatively related to positive-goal-directed and positively related to negative-spontaneous self-talk. Furthermore, [33] in another cross-sectional study found that perceived social support was positively related to athletes' positive-goal-directed self-talk and negatively related to athletes' negativespontaneous self-talk. Finally, in a study exploring the role of the motivational environment, [34] found that autonomy supportive climate, positively predicted athletes' positive self-talk, whereas controlling climate positively predicted athletes' negative self-talk.

In the PE context, there are only two recent studies that have investigated the relationship between the climate created by the PE teacher and students' self-talk. More specifically, [35] highlighted that mastery climate was positively and directly related to students' positive self-talk in PE, while avoidance climate was positively related to students' negative self-talk. Finally, [36] reported that students' learning orientation positively predicted students' positive self-talk dimensions and negatively the negative self-talk dimensions. On the contrary, students' worry about mistakes positively predicted their negative self-talk.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

Based on the aforementioned literature the purpose of the present study was to examine the links between teacher-initiated autonomy-supportive climate, satisfaction and thwarting of

BPN (autonomy, competence, relatedness), and students' positive and negative self-talk in PE class.

1.5 Hypotheses

It was hypothesized that perceived autonomysupportive climate and satisfaction of the three BPNs would be positively linked to pupils' positive self-talk and negatively related to their negative self-talk. In contrast, it was hypothesized that the BPNs thwarting would be positively related to pupils' negative self-talk. Furthermore, the relative contribution of the independent variables (autonomy-supportive climate, satisfaction and thwarting BPN) in the prediction of self-talk was examined.

2. METHODS

2.1 Design and Study Population

2.1.1 Participants

Five hundred and forty-four students (287 boys and 257 girls), aged 12 to 15 years old ($M_{\rm age}$: 13.03 ± 1.15 years), from nine elementary schools (n = 259) and eight secondary schools (n = 285) in central Greece, voluntarily enrolled in the present study.

2.1.2 Procedure

Prior to conducting the study, ethical approval was obtained from the Greek Institute of Education (Ref. $160970/\Delta5$) and the Ethics Committee of the Department of Physical Education and Sport Science, University of Thessaly (Ref: 1104). Then, consent forms were delivered to each pupil and signed by their parents/guardians. In a quiet classroom, students completed an anonymous multi-section survey in print form. The whole process lasted about 20 minutes. During the completion of the surveys, one person of the research staff member was always present in the classroom and was responsible for assisting the participants.

2.2 Data Collection and Measurements

2.2.1 Measures

Self-talk. Students' self-talk was measured with the Automatic Self-talk Questionnaire for Sports (ASTQS), as adapted for the PE domain [37,38]. This scale consists of 40 items assessing students' positive (19 items; e.g., "I feel strong" or "I can make it") and negative thoughts (21 items; e.g., "I am going to lose" or "I think I'll stop trying"). Participants answered on a 5-point Likert

scale from 1 (never) to 5 (very often). The reliability and validity of the ASTQS have been previously demonstrated with Greek samples [33,38].

Psychological Needs Satisfaction. Participants' BPNs in PE was assessed with the Basic Psychological Needs in Exercise Scale [39]. This scale contains 12 items assessing perceptions of autonomy (4 items; e.g., "The exercise program I follow is highly compatible with my choices and interests"), competence (4 items; e.g., "I feel that I execute very effectively the exercises of my training program") and their relatedness (4 items; e.g., "I feel very much at ease with the other exercise participants"). All responses were given on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The Basic Psychological Needs in Exercise Scale has been previously used in studies with Greek participants [40,41].

Psychological Need Thwarting. Students' psychological need thwarting was measured with the Psychological Need Thwarting Scale (PNTS) [15]. It consists of 12 items measuring students' autonomy thwarting (4 items; e.g., "I feel pushed to behave in certain ways"), competence thwarting (4 items; e.g., "There are situations where I am made to feel inadequate"), and relatedness (4 items; e.g., "I feel other people dislike me"). All answers were given on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Also, the psychometric properties of the Psychological Need Thwarting Scale have been previously tested in Greece with satisfactory results [42].

Autonomy-supportive Climate. The Perceived Autonomy Support Scale in PE [13,24] was used to assess students' perceptions of the extent to which significant others, in this case the PE teachers, provide an autonomy-supportive climate during PE lesson. This questionnaire consists of 15 items (e.g., "I feel that PE teacher provides me with choices and options" or "I feel that my PE teacher understands me"). All items were scored on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The Perceived Autonomy Support Scale in PE has been previously used in research with Greek samples and had satisfactory psychometric properties [24].

2.3 Statistical Analysis

First, descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation), reliability coefficients (Cronbach's α),

and correlations (Pearson's r coefficient) among the examined variables were calculated. Then, two separate standard regression analyses were conducted using the positive and negative self-talk as dependent variables, while autonomy-supportive climate and BPNs satisfaction and thwarting of autonomy, competence and relatedness were used as independent variables. The statistical analyses were conducted by using the PASW Statistics software (IBM; version 21.0 for Windows). The level of significance was set at p < .05.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Descriptive Statistics, Reliability and Correlation Analyses

Reliability analysis showed that Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged from .61 to .82, except for competence need satisfaction (α = .50) and autonomy need thwarting (α = .45); these variables were excluded from further analyses. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation). Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients and correlations of the examined variables are presented in Table 1. Analysis of correlations showed that PE teachers' autonomy-supportive climate and students' satisfaction of the psychological needs for autonomy relatedness were positively linked with students' positive self-talk and negatively linked with negative self-talk. In contrast, need thwarting of the needs for competence and relatedness, was positively related with students' negative self-talk and negatively related to positive selftalk.

3.2 Standard Regression Analyses

Separate regression analyses were conducted using students' positive and negative self-talk as dependent variables, while teacher-initiated autonomy-supportive climate and satisfaction and thwarting as independent variables. Regarding positive self-talk, the analysis yielded a significant effect, F (5, 543) = 8.52, p < .001; $R^2 = .07$). Autonomy supportive climate (β = .18, p < .001) and competence need thwarting (β =-.12, p = .02), were significant predictors of positive self-talk. Regarding, negative self-talk, the analysis yielded a significant effect, F(5, 543) = 36.16, p < .001; $R^2 =$.25). Autonomy need satisfaction (β = -.11, p = .01), relatedness need satisfaction (β = -.12, p= .001), competence need thwarting (β = .31, p < .001), and relatedness need thwarting (β = .15, p

< .001) were significant predictors of negative self-talk. The results from the regression analyses are presented in Table 2.

4. DISCUSSION

The focus of the present study was to explore the relationships between PE teachers' autonomy-supportive behaviors with students' need satisfaction, need thwarting and self-talk during the PE lesson. Based on the literature review, scant attention has been given to this topic from previous researchers in the area of school PE [35,36].

A first important finding was that perceived autonomy-supportive class climate was positively linked with the satisfaction of the needs for autonomy and relatedness, and in contrast, negatively with the thwarting of the needs for competence and relatedness. Such findings are in accordance with the previous literature in education in general [12] and in PE in particular [43], thus reinforcing the importance of autonomy supportive class climate.

The key objective of the study was however to examine the relationships of the motivational variables with self-talk. The results revealed that students' perceptions of an autonomy-supportive climate and students' satisfaction of the psychological needs were positively linked with their positive self-talk and negatively related to negative self-talk. In addition, need thwarting was negatively related to positive self-talk and positively related to negative self-talk. Moreover, the results of the regression analysis further stressed the predictive strength of competence need thwarting for positive self-talk and of all dimensions of need satisfaction and need thwarting for negative self-talk.

With regard to the motivational climate, similar results have been reported in a study that showed that PE teacher-initiated mastery climate was positively linked with students' positive selftalk and negatively linked with their negative selftalk [35]. In addition, it has been supported [36] that a learning-oriented motivational climate can positively predict students' positive self-talk, performance-oriented motivational while a climate can positively predict negative self-talk. It is important to mention here that the previous studies [35,36] did not capture the PE teachers' autonomy-supportive aspect of the climate when measuring students' perceptions. This appears as a novelty of the present study.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation), Cronbach's α reliability index and correlation analysis of the examined variables

Variables	М	SD	α	1	2	3	4	5	7	8
Positive Self-talk	3.06	.59	.82	-						
2. Negative Self-talk	1.16	.51	.81	29**	-					
3. Competence Need Thwarting	3.34	1.37	.65	17**	.42**	-				
4. Relatedness Need Thwarting	3.11	1.30	.66	13**	.34**	.50**	-			
5. Autonomy Need Satisfaction	3.61	.78	.61	.14**	21**	08	05	-		
6. Relatedness Need Satisfaction	3.87	.88	.64	.10*	26**	14**	13**	.37**	-	
7.Autonomy-Supportive Climate	5.08	.96	.77	.23**	23**	19**	15**	.46**	.40**	-

Table 2. Regression analyses of students' positive and negative self-talk

Dependent variables	Predictor(s) entered	R	R^2	F	В	SE B	β	t	P
Positive Self-talk		.27	.07	8.52, p< .001					
	Autonomy-Supportive Climate				.11	.03	.18	3.10	<.001
	Autonomy Need Satisfaction				.04	.04	.05	1.06	.29
	Relatedness Need Satisfaction				01	.031	01	19	.85
	Competence Need Thwarting				05	.02	11	-2.39	.02
	Relatedness Need Thwarting				02	.02	04	88	.38
Negative Self-talk		.50	.25	36.16, p< .001					
	Autonomy-Supportive Climate				02	.02	04	792	.43
	Autonomy Need Satisfaction				07	.03	11	-2.50	.01
	Relatedness Need Satisfaction				08	.02	12	-3.46	.001
	Competence Need Thwarting				.12	.02	.31	7.15	<.001
	Relatedness Need Thwarting				.06	.02	.15	3.52	<.001

Furthermore, the results showed that the satisfaction of the needs for autonomy and relatedness were positively related to positive self-talk and negatively related to negative selftalk; whereas the thwarting of the needs for competence and relatedness was positively associated with students' negative self-talk and negatively related to positive self-talk. Regarding need satisfaction, the above results are in line with the previous research examining the links between self-talk and BPNs' satisfaction [44]. Regarding need thwarting, to our knowledge, there is no other study that has examined its links with self-talk. Therefore, the above results appear to be a second novelty of the present research.

In the literature, it is well established that PE teacher's autonomy-supportive behaviors affect significantly the satisfaction of the three BPN [25. 45]. On the other hand, it is also clear that PE teacher's controlling behaviors increase the frustration of these BPN [25]. It seems that PE teacher's behaviors affect students' self-talk directly or indirectly through the satisfaction or thwarting of their BPN. Therefore, PE teachers are encouraged to emphasize the development of autonomy-supportive climate, and through that the satisfaction of pupils' psychological needs, to sligug positive self-talk respectively, to reduce negative self-talk. The main reason would be that positive self-talk has been associated with positive outcomes in PE such as increased confidence, promotion of selfregulated learning [46,47] and positive selfesteem [48]. On the contrary, negative self-talk related to increased levels of stress [49]. Such objectives can be achieved from PE teachers by offering their students the opportunity to have choices during PE lesson, taking providing positive perspectives, feedback. focusing on learning and personal improvement, and using more student-centered teaching styles, such as reciprocal or self-check style [25,50,51, 52,53]. On the contrary, PE teachers should avoid comparing pupils' with their classmates, ignoring their pupils' perspectives and using controlling behaviors such as punishment, directive commands, and shouts during class [25,50].

4.1 Limitations and Future Directions

A first limitation of this study is the less than optimal Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the need satisfaction and need thwarting scales in general, and in particular, for competence need

satisfaction and autonomy need thwarting that had to be dropped. Even though the scales have been validated [15,40,41,42], it seems that revising the scales through the addition of items may help improving its reliability. Moreover, to complement the use of self-report instruments for the assessment of the motivational climate, future researchers are encouraged to use systematic observation during PE lesson, thus promoting a multi-method approach for studying the impact of motivational climate on outcome measures. Finally, the cross-sectional design of the study does not allow any causal inferences. Thus, it would be useful that future studies endorse longitudinal designs to explore the long term effects of autonomy-supportive climate on students' BPN satisfaction or thwarting and their self-talk. In addition to the above propositions, and considering the relevant lack of studies, it would be of interest that future research examines the possible mechanisms under which psychological need thwarting affects students' self-talk in PE.

5. CONCLUSION

Overall, the findings suggest that when PE teachers create a class environment that supports students' autonomy and the satisfaction of their BPN, while at the same time prevents their BPN from thwarting, they can positively affect students' self-talk.

CONSENT

Prior to conducting the study, informed consent forms were delivered to each pupil and signed by their parents/guardians.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

Prior to conducting the study, ethical approval was obtained from the Greek Institute of Education (Ref. $160970/\Delta5$) and the Ethics Committee of the Department of Physical Education and Sport Science, University of Thessaly (Ref.: 1104).

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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