

# Lighten Up - Postural Instructions Affect Connection, Confidence, and Enjoyment in Partner Dancing

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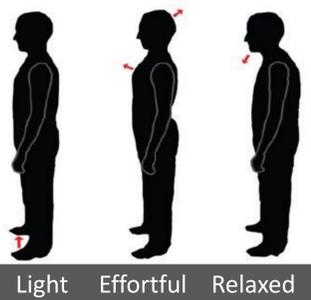
University of Idaho

## BACKGROUND

- Social dancing, including partner styles like ballroom, Latin, and swing, provides older adults with opportunities for socialization and physical activity, reducing risks of loneliness, depression, anxiety, dementia, and premature death. [1-2]
- Posture is emphasized in social dance instruction, but research regarding the effects of postural instruction on dance is limited. Previous studies with older adults found that postural instructions emphasizing lightness improved dynamic balance, whereas instructions emphasizing effort interfered with balance control. [3-4]

## PURPOSE

To investigate the impact of instructing dance Leads to embody different postural intentions on the experience of both Leads and Follows in older adults who are new to social swing dancing.



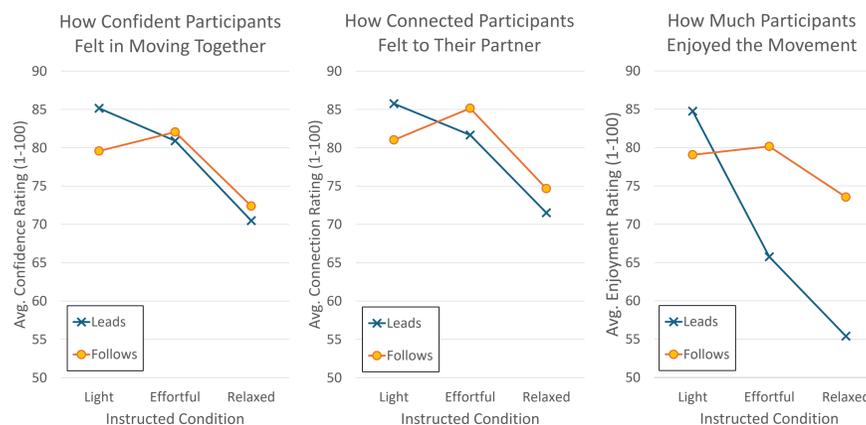
## METHOD

- **Design:** This study uses a repeated measures design with a baseline and 3 experimental conditions counterbalanced with a Latin Square.
- **Participants:** We are testing 30 dyads of healthy older adults (aged 60+) who have little to no partner dance experience. In each dyad, one participant is assigned as a Lead and one as a Follow.
- **Protocol:** The study comprises training and testing.

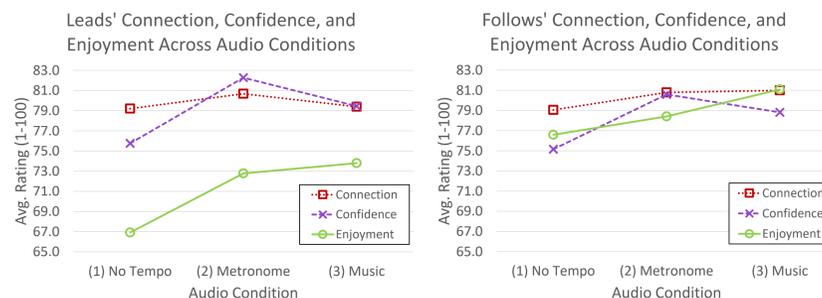


- **Training:** Participants learn a basic dance handhold and how to move with a partner across the floor, forward and backward, in different audio conditions. Leads are then taught to embody Light, Effortful, and Relaxed postural states while Follows practice balancing and stepping.
- **Testing:** Participants begin each audio condition with a baseline trial, which is followed by three counterbalanced trials using Light, Effortful, and Relaxed postural instructions. Follows wear vision obscuring goggles. Trials last 30 seconds each.
- **Outcomes:** Participants fill out surveys to evaluate their connection, confidence, and enjoyment after each trial.

## PRELIMINARY RESULTS



Preliminary findings from 11 dyads suggest that Leads prefer the Light instructions, while Relaxed instructions result in the lowest ratings from both Leads and Follows.



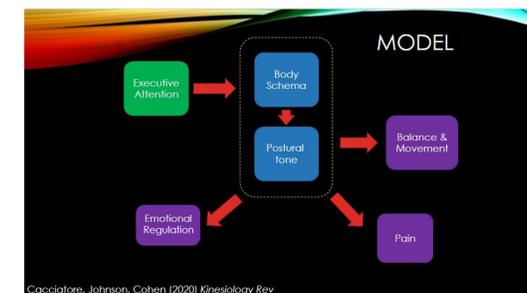
Preliminary findings suggest that enjoyment is highest in the Music condition, whereas confidence is highest with the Metronome.

## DISCUSSION

- To our knowledge, this is the first scientific study investigating the effects of postural instructions on dance experience.
- Our main interest was how the postural intentions of Leads would affect the experience of Follows.
- Our clearest initial result is that Follows experienced the least connection, confidence, and enjoyment when the Lead used an intentionally relaxed approach.
- A limitation of the study is the use of subjective self-report measures.
- Further results from this line of research will help discover if a dancer's poise – their state of balanced muscular tension and readiness – translates through touch, affecting the coordination and emotional state of their dance partner.
- The benefits from this line of work may extend to every interaction that involves touch, from parenting to coaching to medical care.

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Next steps include testing the remaining 19 dyads, analyzing the data using 4 x 4 ANOVAs, reviewing video footage of partner movement, and writing a research paper.
- Future studies in this line of research will include accelerometers to evaluate the effects of postural intentions on rhythmicity and synchronicity in experienced social dancers.
- Overall, our lab seeks to understand the complex web of relationships among behavior (including posture), thought, and emotion, using tools from biomechanics, psychology, and neuroscience.



Learn more about our research at the Mind in Movement Lab website:



## REFERENCES

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- Colby Hillend and Dr. Rajal Cohen analyzed the data.
- Colby Hillend created the poster.