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## Mind Over Matter: How a Dancer's Mind Affects the Physical Body

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Mind Over Matter: How a Dancer's Mind Affects the Physical Body

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Commercial Dance

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## Abstract

This thesis is an exploration of how a dancer's mind can affect its physical body. Undoubtedly, there is a strong connection in every human between their mind and their body, but for an artist whose entire career depends on the ability of their body to create movement, there must be extra emphasis placed on their mental health care. Dance is just as mentally demanding as it is physically. To begin this project I collected research articles relating to injury, anxiety, self-confidence, body image and eating disorders performed on dancers. I noticed throughout my research that there was a lack of ownership on behalf of the dance community on the reality of how poor mental health can place dancers at high risk. After reviewing the literature, I then further explored the subject by conducting personal interviews with volunteers regarding their own experience on the topics included in the literature review. I recorded their stories and experiences and then took all eight interviews and condensed it into one consistent track of music. To compliment the music, I then took videos of them each executing structured, improvisational movement phrases to be shown while their voice is playing in the background. Together these video and audio components will complete a full visual to accompany and support this paper. The goal of the creative component is to provoke thought and emotion regarding the importance of mental wellbeing among dancers and the need for more awareness and attention to the topic. By the end of this thesis I intend to connect a link between the lack of mental health care provided to dancers and the many physical ailments that may result from this shortcoming.

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## Introduction

Twenty-one years ago, my mom got me dressed for my first dance class in my pink tights, black leotard, and pink ballet slippers. At that moment, neither one of us knew she was getting me ready for the first day of what would become the most important thing in my life. Neither one of us knew that the smile that I had on my face while I stood in first position would blossom into a passion and love for movement that would be the pure source of my everyday happiness. Neither one of us knew that dance, the thing that brought me more joy and excitement than anything else in the world, could also be what would bring me some of the biggest heartache and pain in the world.

Dance has truly shaped me into the person I am today. I, as many other dancers do, fell in love with the artform at a very young age. Dance was my first love. And just like anyone's first love, from this I have learned so many important life lessons such as commitment, work ethic, community, love, passion, mental and physical strength. Growing up, I often spent more time at the dance studio than I did at home, and to this day, that is still often the case. If the four walls that create a dance studio could speak, they could share countless stories of me about happiness, sadness, love, heartbreak, success, failure, achievement, and devastation.

Dance is an emotional art form, and for that reason I wanted to emphasize a topic that I feel is often left out of the dance conversation: mental health. We have all heard and felt the expression 'I was worried sick.' This simple expression directly informs and implies that your mental state can directly affect your physical state, so the question I wanted to answer was, "What are the implications that a dancer's mental

health can have on their physical health?” A dancer’s body is their instrument, their tool, their ‘money maker,’ but what about their mind? The dance community has made several strides and advances in recent years to bring awareness and attention to injury prevention, but little to nothing has been done to recognize the need for mental health support. During my time as a college student, I have heard time and time again my classmates expressing examples of poor mental health, however we have never all just sat down in a room together to talk about it. The topic is usually just brushed off, laughed about, and accepted as a part of our dance culture.

For this reason, I decided to use my thesis as a means to give students the opportunity to have those discussions. I wanted to explore the reality of how mental health is impacting dancers in the current day. While the literature does provide much evidence to support the connection between the mind and the body, the research findings are merely statistics and conclusions that don’t give you an inside look into the emotional aspect of it. I wanted to go deeper, beyond the facts and statistics to create something that would truly leave my audience with a lasting impact and thoughts. It is one thing to read that a dancer is three times more susceptible to an eating disorder than the average person, and it is another to hear the stories of how certain stigmas, microaggressions, and anxieties can actually lead a person to believe that an eating disorder is the only way to book a job. I hope by the end of this thesis to use the literature I have reviewed as a guideline of facts, statistics and evidence and then expand those ideas beyond concrete findings to create something authentic, genuine and emotional to demonstrate how a dancer’s mental health can directly affect their physical health.

## Literature Review

### No Pain, No Gain

A dancer pushes their body to its limits each and every day. Training can range anywhere from 10-40 hours per week for a professional dancer, and that is often on top of other responsibilities such as school, part-time jobs, etc. It is a commonly accepted belief in the dance world that “if no pain is felt, then the dancers are not pushing themselves hard enough” (Arcelus et al., 2004). This belief creates a mental barrier that puts dancers at a higher risk for injury. Nordin-Bates et al. (2011) conducted a national survey of dancer health and injury in the UK and found that “80% of the dancers...reported having at least one injury in the past year” (p. 81). To further add to this problem, studies have indicated that many dancers that become injured continue to still dance on the injury. This study also concluded that “as many as 53% of those who suspected an injury continued to dance...carefully” (p. 76) and “one in seven of those dancers continued to dance normally” (p. 82). As part of Turner and Wainwright’s study (2003), they interviewed a former professional ballerina of The Royal Ballet, and she explained that “the ballet injury is socially constructed because a ballet dancer may be expected to dance with a certain level of strain or injury” (p. 282). Furthering this idea that pain is commonplace for dancers, she goes even further to say that “part of the discipline is to have pain” (p. 284). This suggests that dancers are encultured into a mentality of toxic perseverance early on in their training and often value how they will be perceived by the other dancers and teachers over their own physical health. A study conducted on the Netherlands Dance Theater by a dance fitness therapist found that 50% of the working dancers were injured past what they should be dancing on (Brinson

& Dick, 1996). As Turner and Wainwright (2003) put it, “accident and injury are systematic and permanent features of ballet dancing, and they constantly threaten to terminate young vocations” (p. 272). Despite this direct correlation between mental health and physical health, Nordin-Bates et al. (2011) study reported that “in this study no dancers sought help from psychologists despite the many psychological factors that may have brought them to this injury” (p. 81). This indicates a major problem because dancers are so susceptible to a variety of mental illnesses, as I will discuss later on in this review. This finding could potentially open up new opportunities for dancers and psychiatric collaboration in order to better care for the dancer’s body.

### **Common Mental Illnesses Among Dancers**

Dance is as much a high-stress as it is a high-impact athletic activity. By its naturally competitive nature, dance can create an environment that may provoke emotions such as fear, doubt, and anxiety even while a dancer is physically healthy. The two mental health disorders that I will be focusing on among dancers are anxiety and anorexia. Nordin-Bates et al. (2011) suggest that anxiety is so common among dancers due to the “culture of tolerance” that dance creates (p. 76). This then translates to the commonality of injury in dance which “may indicate that some dancers feel pressure to continue dancing even when injured, or fear losing work due to injury”(p. 82). On the other hand, *The Report of the National Inquiry Dancers Health and Injury* conducted by Brinson and Dick (1996) argued that injury does not always have negative psychological effects on dancers. Some dancers actually reported being injured to be a positive experience commenting things such as: “I felt I could live my life for the first time,’ ‘I learned to care for myself,’ ‘I actually felt happier and able to relax”’( p. 79). Meanwhile,

healthy dancers reported that they often "suffered from anxiety, depression or a sudden drop in self-esteem when they were not cast in a particular role, with no reason given" (p. 79.) There also appeared to be a correlation between a dancer's success and cognitive anxiety. Monsma and Overby (2004) concluded that "successful dancers experienced less cognitive anxiety than unsuccessful dancers" (p. 11). This correlation Monsma and Overby (2004) illustrated is highly important because it has been proven that anxiety causes an increase in muscular tension. This means that a dancer suffering from high anxiety is being put at a higher risk for injury.

Because the body is "socially constructed," as Turner and Wainwright (2003) put it, the dancer is by default put at a place of high risk for eating disorders, specifically anorexia. A meta-analysis of over 30 studies on the topic concluded that 12% of all dancers were affected by eating disorders, which is slightly below the percentage of ballet dancers affected (16.4%) (Arcelus et al., 2014, p. 97). Comparatively speaking, Arcules et al. (2014) also found that dancers are more than three times at risk for developing an eating disorder than non-dancers. These findings once again correspond to the environment in which a dancer is training. A quote from Foucault (1997, as cited by Turner & Wainwright, 2003) best resonated with me in explaining this unfortunate statistic stating that "Classical ballet is a vocation or a 'technology of the self' requiring asceticism through which the truth of one's body can be apprehended" (p. 272). Turner & Wainwright (2003) suggest that it is the mentality of having to train and constantly push harder in order to achieve a "dancer's body" that may factor most into the higher reports of eating disorders observed in ballet dancers. In addition, a dancer spends all day in front of a mirror constantly tweaking and adjusting themselves. The dancer's

body is their instrument. The same way a pianist would want to fine-tune their piano, a dancer is constantly trying to fine-tune their body, sometimes to an unhealthy measure that can tear away at the dancer's most powerful tool: self-confidence.

### **Defining Self-Confidence**

For the purpose of this literature review, self-confidence has been defined as the trust a dancer has in one's abilities. Since dance, as an art form, is so subjective, positive self-confidence is key to creating a successful dancer. In fact, Monsma and Overby (2004) were able to create a direct correlation between a dancer's success level and self-confidence. During their experiment they concluded that "successful dancers reported higher self-confidence, lower cognitive anxiety, and higher somatic anxiety compared to those who did not secure a part with a dance company" (p. 16). They also studied and interviewed dancers who were about to partake in an audition to see how they were feeling and mentally preparing. Their survey showed that "successful dancers with prior audition success were more confident than those without prior success and unsuccessful dancers with, and without, prior success" (p. 11). This shows that dancers who struggle mentally may actually get in their own way of their success. However, as Turner and Wainwright (2003) point out, it is not their fault that "the habitus of classical ballet generates dispositions or tastes towards the body that establish norms of beauty, youthfulness and athleticism, and hence ageing and injury and retirement are deeply problematic for identity within the field of classical ballet" (p. 274). For the purpose of this review, habitus is being defined as "the ensemble of attitudes, dispositions, expectations and taste that individuals share as members of a field" (Turner and Wainwright, 2003, p. 273). In tandem with this statement, Arcelus et al. (2014) suggest

that “the high levels of perfectionism and low self-esteem found among dancers may explain why they appear to be more prevalent among this group of people.” In fact Nordin and Cumming (2006) reported in the latest national injury into dancers’ health and injury in the UK that “half of the 1,056 professional and pre-professional dancers surveyed reported low self-confidence in the last year” (p. 85). This is an extremely alarming statistic that must be addressed in order to keep the dance community healthy. Later I will attempt to shed some light on a technique called “Imagery” and how it can be used as a helpful coping mechanism to combat this problem.

### **Environmental/Social Pressures**

All of my sources also confirmed that a dancer’s environment and social pressures have a large impact on the artists’ mental health, physical body, and performance. In congruence with Turner and Wainwright’s (2003) interviews, the *Report of the Second National Inquiry into Dancers’ Health and Injury in the UK*, concluded that a dancer’s recovery from injury is directly affected by the atmosphere in which that recovery takes place (Brinson & Dick, 1996). Further expanding on this idea, Nordin-Bates et al.’s (2011) study involved 216 UK dancers from eight different dance styles and was able to draw a correlation between negative stress and injury duration. The study explicitly stated that “dancers reporting more stress also reported longer injury durations, and dancers with greater freedom from worry reported shorter durations” (p. 77). There are many reasons as to why this correlation exists, but I felt that Monsma and Overly (2004) put it best by explaining that “perceptions of the physiological responses to stress such as an increase in heart rate, feeling muscular tension, nausea, or having butterflies in the stomach” put the body at a higher risk for

injury (p. 11). Unfortunately, these injured dancers often fail to report their injuries to management because they feel unable to approach management and fear how it might impact their career and status within the company (Nordin-bates et al., 2011). This fear only decreases a dancer's chances of fully recovering properly in a timely manner. Dr. William Hamilton, the orthopedist for the NYC Ballet, explains that "many musculoskeletal problems are resolved during the first month with proper diagnosis and treatment" (2009, p. 6). He likes to consider this time period a "magic healing period." Unfortunately, as the studies discussed prior have shown, more often than not, a dancer waits too long to acknowledge their injuries and allows this window to disappear. If dancers felt supported and encouraged to be honest about how their bodies are feeling, perhaps the commonality of severe, career-ending injuries could decrease. Collaboratively, these studies show a need for better communication and support for the injured dancer.

### **Coping Mechanisms/Injury Prevention**

Now understanding the direct correlation that a dancer's mind has on its physical body, we must turn to solutions as to how this problem can be resolved. It is important to know that when applied correctly, all authors agree that imagery and good self-confidence can lead to positive performance outcomes. First and foremost, imagery is used as an artistic tool to inspire creativity. Imagery has been shown to be very helpful in both the learning and teaching processes in order to convey ideas with words between different artists to achieve the same result aesthetically. In this case, imagery will relate directly to how the dancer invisions oneself rather than how a dancer is perceived by others. I think it is important to highlight the self-analysis aspect of this

term in order to truly understand the effect that a dancer's mind has on its physical being. In the next section I will attempt to explain the positive correlation between imagery and self-esteem in dancers.

Monsma and Overby (2004) suggest that "dancers able to harness specific image content (such as motivational mastery imagery) will experience less anxiety, more confidence, and enhanced performance" (p. 12). Another interesting correlation their study presented is that "dancers with previous audition success...and dancers with higher imagery ability may be able to generate specific image content with ease (e.g., heightened confidence from mastery imagery)" (p. 12). This suggests that dance is just as much of a mental game as it is physical. Nordin-Bates et al. 's (2011) results showed that "training in these psychological skills (imagery) significantly improved dancers' coping skills and decreased the time spent injured" (p. 77). Interestingly enough, other experiments were able to make a connection showing that dancers with lower self-esteem tended to also have underdeveloped imagery skills. However, dancers who had better use of imagery showed that they were better able to manage anxiety (Nordin & Cumming, 2006). While there is definitely more research to be done on specifically connecting imagery to a dancer's body, the overall synopsis that Nordin and Cumming's study displayed is that "significant and positive relationships were found between imagery frequencies, cognitive anxiety intensity, somatic anxiety direction, self-confidence intensity and direction, and visual as well as kinesthetic imagery ability" (p. 93). They also suggested that the imagery that dancer's use is comparable to the imagery used by athletes in other sports but emphasizes that it has not yet been studied

in enough detail to dictate exactly what method of imagery needs to be implemented to heighten a dancer's performance ability (p. 96).

Perhaps one of the best examples of how to prevent injury for dancers is the program instituted by Linda Hamilton, Ph.D., at the New York City Ballet. In 2001, the company developed a wellness program in an attempt to decrease the number of injuries within the company as the physical demands continue to rise (Hamilton, 2009). It is important to acknowledge that the team responsible for creating this program addresses not just the dancer's physical health, but their overall mental health, nutrition, fitness and well being. The work of psychologist Linda Hamilton, orthopedist William Hamilton, physical therapist Marika Molnar, chiropractor Lawrence DeMann Jr., and nutritionist Joy Bauer in just three years has cut down disability rates in NYCB by 46% (Hamilton, 2009, p. xv). Through the use of cross-training, pilates, and therapeutic resources, this team has built up a support system that works for the dancers and encourages the ballerinas to properly care for their bodies.

## Methodology

Creativity is a key element in dance; therefore, I wanted to use my thesis as an opportunity to explore my own creativity and create something completely from the ground up. The goal of my creative presentation is to share the experiences that dancers have had throughout their time training with mental health and the serious implications that the mind can have on the body. As a dancer, your body is your instrument. It must be treated with respect, care and mindful attention. Dancers are incredible storytellers—however, this storytelling is almost always done with the body's movement and never with words. I want to challenge the dancers that participate in my research to explore this method of storytelling and bring attention to a topic that is often discouraged from being openly discussed in the classroom. I want to encourage my participants to be authentic, vulnerable, and honest with their words. My goal is not to make a blanket statement on what every single dancer goes through, but rather to encourage people to bring their attention to the topic, bring more validation to the real effects that a poor mental health state can have on a dancer, and to leave the audience thinking, what we can do to prevent these common issues from continuing in the dance society.

To begin my work, I posted a message requesting the participation of dancers who felt they could relate to my thesis topic with the intention to not to generalize about dancers as a whole, but rather to get an inside view on personal experiences which I can draw upon for my creative piece. This message was posted to the Pace Commercial Dance Facebook page, which is accessible to all current and past Pace Commercial Dance faculty and students. Participating dancers will vary in age, height,

weight, race, ethnicity, genre, and financial status. Participants will be asked these questions during pre-screening, but ethically will not be required to disclose this information. Once the volunteers had been chosen, I began creating a list of questions specific to the topics discussed in my literature review that would hopefully encourage the dancers to share their own memories and experiences on the topic. I then began conducting one-on-one interviews with the dancers about how their mental health has affected their physical health throughout their collegiate and professional training. I used the questions as a guideline, but encouraged the participants to treat the interview as a conversation rather than a strict question and answer. The interviews were voice recorded and participants were encouraged to speak freely about the topics and spend as much or as little time on each question as they felt comfortable. Participants were also notified that if they later decided they did not want a specific topic to be included in the final product, that they would be protected, and the segment would be deleted immediately. Once all of the interviews had been recorded, I imported all of the voice tracks into GarageBand to begin editing. The editing process consisted of individually chopping and keeping sections of each conversation that were relevant, effective and clearly spoken. This part of the process turned out to be extremely tedious and time consuming.

While editing I began to notice patterns of similar topics that were consistently appearing in each participants' interviews. I strategically placed each topic so that when one dancer began a thought, another one could finish it. In order to make the track effective and easy to follow, I had to organize and structure each individual fragment so that there were no gaps, delays or pauses between one dancer's statement to the next.

This also meant adjusting automation levels and using precision editing to keep the listener engaged and not distracted by the transitions. Once I had the conversation organized in a cohesive structure, I then overlaid a ninth instrumental track to complete the piece of music for the creative visual. I chose to have these conversations shared aloud for the purpose of giving dancers the opportunity to express their feelings in a way that we, as dancers, often do not: words. The interviews will serve as independent anecdotes regarding their own experience and are used only to inform and for the sake of my own artwork. As I mentioned before, my intention was to share their stories and experiences in a way that highlights and not generalizes the struggles that these artists have faced with their mental health. In order to protect the confidentiality and comfort of my participants, I asked each dancer to approve the content of their own track before any final submissions were made or shared.

Once the music was created, I then took each dancer individually to different areas within NYC to film movement phrases that would be viewed while the audience listened to their stories. Dancers were given framework and specific notes for each phrase that was filmed, but were encouraged to improvise the movement and allow it to be genuine and vulnerable. The goal of incorporating the dance videos was to capture the essence and individualistic energy of each dancer so that viewers felt that they could better connect and understand the experiences the dancers were sharing. I felt that it was important for viewers to have a face to match the voices because it helps an audience member better relate to the dancers. It will only enhance the vulnerability and impact that the film will have on the audience for the same reason that a news story has a more severe impact on an audience when they show the faces of the victims as

opposed to just reading about it. Upon completion of all of the recordings, I then imported all of the videos into iMovie and began trimming the videos to match their voices. Once again I asked each dancer to approve the content of the videos before any final submissions were made or shared.

In the end, my methodology will be presented as a fully filmed and edited dance excerpt. I hope to bring light to a sensitive topic in a way that spreads awareness and sensitivity to the severity of the topic. In my field, this is absolutely a conventional methodology. As artists we are amazing storytellers with our bodies, but I hope to also challenge these dancers to tell their stories through their own words. By allowing the dancers to be vulnerable, I hope they can have a cathartic experience and be proud of the awareness they are raising.

## Discussion

Initially, I had the idea of this creative presentation being a 5-10 minute video that followed each dancer through an experience of their daily life. My final product is very different from my initial outline, but once I began my methodology, I realized that my initial idea was far from complete and would not have been nearly as impactful as my final product. Prior to conducting my interviews, I did not expect all of my participants to be able to thoroughly relate and share experiences to each question that was asked. Upon starting the interview process, I also realized that I had underestimated how long each individual conversation would be. Each conversation lasted roughly 30 minutes, totaling four hours of recorded audio for me to then sort through and edit. Some conversations lasted even longer and I found it really hard for me to not interject and share my own experiences throughout the process. The stories that the dancers shared truly impacted me and led me to multiple consistent throughlines and realizations.

The first consistency that I noticed among all of my participants during the interview process was that they trained at minimum 15 hours a week. This did not include all of the added rehearsal time that fluctuates week to week. All of my participants also reported having outside responsibilities that included academic courses, work, and/or personal hobbies. All eight dancers were also able to report at least one account of injury throughout their collegiate or pre-professional training, many of them being long term injuries that they will likely deal with throughout the entirety of their career. Many dancers also reported that there was a fear of having to admit to their physical ailments which led to a more compromised and weak mental state. In turn this fear commonly led to dancers continuing to dance on an injury beyond healthy limits.

This overuse and mindset of “pushing through” so they did not look weak led many of my participants to more severe injuries. This was just one of the many stigmas within the dance world that was revealed through the interviews and that I chose to highlight within the final audio track.

Dancers who ultimately were able to get over the fear of admitting their pain also admitted that they did not feel like they had the time to recover properly and felt pressured to return to dance before their given return date. This fear is not isolated to just dance and extends to nearly any athletic sport, however the main difference that was brought to my attention is that for dancers there is no off season. NFL, MLB, NBA and NHL players all have an off-season during which they are allowed to rest and recover and treat all of the damage that was taken during the season. In the life of a professional dancer, there is no off-season. A dancer is expected to have their body in top shape at all times and be ready to be sent out on a job and perform to their maximum capacity year-round. Holidays are not even an off-time for many professional dancers and are even sometimes busier as many families gather and swarm to watch live performances or entertainment during the holiday season.

One positive observation I was able to draw is that all of my participants acknowledged and were aware that they are usually not able to perform physically to their maximum capacity when their mental health is not ideal. This sense of awareness of the mind-body connection is essential in perpetuating change in how we view mental health. I think that this awareness is also the first step in motivating dance educators to normalize mental health struggles and open up conversations regarding how to take care of their minds during times of intense training. I also believe that if we were able to

normalize mental health being a topic of discussion in a classroom, more dancers would feel comfortable expressing their need for help. Many participants also expressed that dance is not always a detriment to their mental health and that it can often be a source of release and be a healthy coping mechanism. However, in order for dance to become a source of relieving anxiety, the pressures of grades and jobs needed to be removed. As one dancer puts it, "it is the biggest cause of my anxiety and the biggest release I can get." Despite this positive observation, all eight dancers reported that they have never sought psychological help to cope with an injury.

Prior to beginning my interviews I did not expect all of the dancers to have such similar experiences and perspectives. Considering that my participants varied in age, race, ethnicity and geographic "home" locations, it was eye opening to hear that even though each of their home studios were different and completely independently owned from each other, the same issues and struggles were occurring at each one. Seven of my eight dancers shared that at their home studio they never felt that they could talk to their teachers about their mental health and all of them shared that they did not feel that having a bad mental health day was a valid excuse to not go to class that day. The dance world encourages a leave your attitude and problems at the door philosophy and this is something that was ingrained in all of my participants at an early age.

Despite the artistic freedom and creativity that dance naturally presents, all of the dancers also reported feeling a sense of needing to fit a mold and at times even feeling like a robot in class. One dancer even said that "dance taught [her] that [her] voice was not wanted" and in regards to expressing their concerns with what was occurring in the classroom, "it was almost wrong to talk." Dance creates a sense of needing to please

others and be perfect which in turn causes many dancers to experience a lot of stress and anxiety throughout their training. For all of my participants, this pressure of trying to be perfect extended beyond just the dance steps and led them to struggle with their body image and self-confidence and even led some to suffer from severe disordered eating.

One aspect of my creative piece that I am very pleased to be able to highlight and share is the role that gender plays into a dancer's body dysmorphia. Among my participants, I had four females, three males and one trans non-binary indentifying dancer. The females in my study all reported feeling a need to be thin, graceful and flexible. The males in my study all reported feeling a need to be strong, muscular and built. These body standards are exploited by not just the fact of constantly having a mirror, but also by microaggressions that were shared in the classroom by instructors. Kailin brought up a really interesting point as well that there truly is no place yet in the dance world for trans non-binary dancers. Because Kailin appears to most as a woman, they are most likely to be cast in a woman's role and is expected to fit the female body criteria despite the fact that they do not feel that way about themselves.

The main goal of my creative presentation is to leave the audience with new thoughts and ideas and to have the stories my participants share inspire them to think differently about mental health. While it is extremely vulnerable and disheartening to hear the struggles that they have experienced, I want it to have a positive impact on my audience and be inspiring that these dancers are brave enough to acknowledge their struggles and still choose to continue to pursue their life passion. The resilience that is displayed by these eight dancers was extremely inspirational and just shows the mental

and physical strength that dance bestows on a person.

## Conclusion

At its root, any dancer that chooses to pursue dance professionally once fell in love with the art form. It is the freeing sense of being able to express yourself however you want to and being able to share that experience with others who have the same love, drive, and passion. Unfortunately for most dancers, this love for the art gets lost or stifled at some point or another. Even the dancers who pursue dance seriously for 20+ years have times of doubt, fear, and anxiety. However, fear and anxiety do not ever exist without love and passion. I truly believe that the anxiety, fears and emotional hardships that my participants experienced are a true testament to their love and passion for the artform. These dancers put their blood, sweat, and tears into their craft day in and day out ,365 days a year. Speaking from my own experience, there is not a day that goes by in my life that dance does not play a role. Even on my days off I am consuming dance content on social media, reading articles about what is happening in the dance world, or even just casually dancing around the house while doing everyday tasks. Dance is not just a hobby for these dancers, dance is an integral part of their being. For this reason, times of injury can be absolutely devastating and life changing. I cannot imagine a life for myself that does not relate to dance in some way and I am sure that my dancers who participated in this study can say the same. It is integral to the survival of our industry for dancers to keep up with their mental health the same way we do our physical health. As the artform continues to become more physically demanding, we must also stay mentally well and healthy. I hope in the future of dance, we as a society can continue to normalize the conversation of mental health and put just as much time and attention into our mental health as we do our physical health.

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## Appendix

### *Interview Questions*

The following questions were asked to each of the dancers who volunteered their time and story to my creative thesis. The questions were sent out in advance to my participants as it is a highly sensitive topic and the point of the interview is not to trigger but rather to allow the dancers an opportunity to share their story comfortably and confidently. The participants were each given 30 minute interview sessions during which the conversations were voice recorded. The questions were a general guide, but participants were encouraged to share as much as they were comfortable with regarding each discussion topic. The responses shared by the participants were used to create the track to which their choreography was done. Participants were not present while others were being interviewed and granted permission to be recorded. The questions included:

1. How many hours a week do you train?
2. On top of your training, what do your other responsibilities look like?
3. Have you ever been injured during your collegiate/pre/professional training career?
4. How did you handle the injury recovery? (Did you keep dancing or did you take time off?)
5. Have you recovered from those injuries?
6. During the time of your injury did you seek any psychological help or assistance?
7. When injured did you feel that your mental health increased, decreased or was not affected?

8. When injured did you feel you were able to seek proper physical help and treatment without fear?
9. Have you ever suffered from anxiety?
10. If you have not personally, do you know someone who has? (anonymity is encouraged)
11. Have you ever faced other challenges regarding your mental health?
  - a. If yes, please explain what these challenges have been for you to your comfort level.
12. Have you ever been in therapy for these challenges?
13. During these times of challenge were you still training?
14. How often were you training?
15. Do you feel that your physical health was ever compromised by your mental health?
16. Have you ever suffered from anorexia?
17. If you have not personally, do you know someone who has? (anonymity is encouraged)
18. How would you rate your self-confidence? (1-10)
19. On a scale of 1-10, how strongly do you feel that having a mirror in front of you at all times influences your perception of body image?
  - a. Please feel free to elaborate.
20. What coping mechanisms do you turn to?
21. Have you ever used imagery as a coping mechanism?
22. If not, after understanding what imagery is, do you feel that this could be useful to you in the future?
23. Do you participate in cross training?

24. Is there anything else relating to this topic that you would like to speak about?

*Participants*

- Brendan Moran
- Bradley Garcia
- Josh Lyda
- Kailin Brown
- Nicolette Flavo
- Anna Bermudez
- Ali Stevens
- Nat Conn