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The Mental Side-Effects of Commercial Dance

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Abstract

This research evaluates the spectrum between mental adversities and mental triumphs that commercial dancers face within the four professional settings of auditions, training, rehearsals, and performances. As a senior commercial dance major at Pace University, I have found myself in many facets of the dance industry within my four years of higher education wondering how certain environments either took away or fueled my love for dance. I sought to conduct a Qualtrics survey that was completed by college dance majors and professional dancers expressing their experiences of the positive and negative connotations of the mental grit that is required of this art form. This study aims to initiate a conversation about what is truly asked of professional dancers in their industry and how it affects their passion and love for dance. Responses from the survey illustrate personal experiences within the settings of auditions, training, rehearsals, and performances as well as acknowledging the presence of stress that accompanies this profession. It is valuable knowledge that needs to be shared to contribute to the transparency of a career in the performing arts.

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Introduction

As a commercial dance major at Pace University, I have had the opportunity to experience eight semesters that each consisted of training, auditions, rehearsals, and performing which I have found to be the four core environments in a professional dancer's career. Each environment tore me down and built me up in different ways. As my four years in college come to an end, I can see the bigger picture that these four environments make up. Each one compliments one another, each one has pulled out a different side in me, and each one has scared me at one point or another, but all four of them together have made me more adaptable to change, strengthened my work ethic, taught me to be more confident in what I bring to the table, and brought me back to my joy for dance that I found so many years ago when I decided to pursue this career path.

I set out to find how the four core environments of commercial dance can affect a dancer. Through a survey I conducted, I was able to label the feelings, emotions, and states that are a result of these different environments. I set out to see what are the best and worst parts of each one as well as the presence of stress within them. The consolidation of these responses has therapeutically made me feel less alone while navigating this hardcore industry. It has inspired me to get back in touch with my adoration for this art form and shift my perspective to see opportunities during the harder times.

First, it was important to define what commercial dance is and how a dancer is expected to show up with mind, body, and spirit aligned to be a leader, a team player, and feel secure within themselves. To understand the research I conducted, I found it important to discuss how a person's self-worth can be interconnected to their success or failure within a dance room. The stakes we, as dancers, voluntarily put ourselves through require a person with grit and one that

has the tools to stay highly motivated. I hope that an analysis of these four environments sparks a conversation amongst dancers to start talking about the coping mechanisms they use to grow from and thrive because of high-stress situations.

Literature Review

Defining Dance

Dance in and of itself encompasses and embodies a lot of different variables, such as emotion, physicality, and innovation, and transmutes them into an experience. Behera and Rangaiah (2014) explain that dance “is by its nature the expression of different emotions, feelings, and opinions through movement and manipulation of the body, its need in everyday life to evaluate their ideas, creativity, positive relationship, communication and social interaction in society and to create new things or images for new generation as coming living life is more satisfactory” (p. 239). The capability dance has to express feelings that could never be spoken by word is what makes this art form so unique and valuable to the entertainment industry. It is a visual experience that combines athleticism with intimate delicacy and offers the audience an opportunity to connect with the performers in whichever way resonates with them. What is left out of the definition, however, is the medium dance has to go through to be shared with the world. This medium is a human being who serves as the creative bridge between movement and art. From a performer’s perspective the objective when dancing is “striving and longing for flow, a state they described as when their bodies just delivered the task, let go of their mind, and became totally absorbed in the performance” (Haraldsen et al., 2020, p. 117). To achieve this state of flow there does have to be an extensive level of training and a degree of muscle memory to be able to think less and let the body take over. From personal experience, this state occurs when I feel like my mind, body, and spirit are aligned. This is accomplished when I feel

confident in myself, when I have put in the work of practicing the choreography to feel secure physically, and when I genuinely love what I am doing.

I was captivated to study commercial dance in college due to its entertaining appeal to the public, the wide range of styles it embodies, and this specific corner of the dance industry that is always evolving with popular trends in our society. Commercial dance more specifically “occurs on video, on stage, and in social media; it is used to market a product or connect a product or person to a larger audience; is entertaining and for show; and is a venue for professional dance” (Schupp, 2019, p. 60). This kind of dancing is evident behind musical artists, on television shows, in movies, selling products or experiences on commercials, or embedded into live shows. As opposed to ballet or concert dance, Schupp (2019) discovered through an interview that “commercial dance has blended so many styles together--there is no one “technique” to follow. [Commercial dancers] need to be trained in multiple forms of dance and need to be able to adapt quickly, as dance is becoming more global, and less restricted to one codified form” (p. 61). Commercial dance encompasses a broad range of dance styles, and oftentimes these performances are a fusion of various genres developed by directors, producers, and creative directors with multiple points of view. As a result, the dancers need to be diverse, versatile, and unique but also able to conform to the overall vision that their choreographer or production team is trying to fulfill. The commercial dance industry is fast-paced, and can be cutthroat, but also provides the opportunity to perform on the biggest stages in the world.

Self-Determination Theory

The self-determination theory states that three basic human needs must be met for a person to function healthily. Those are autonomy (control of oneself), competence (the capability of completing tasks efficiently), and having a sense of belonging within the world and relating

successfully to others (Nordin-Bates, 2022, p. 27). Perfectionism and toxicity within dance culture can distort a person's ability to have adequate autonomy and competence. Professional dancers are constantly being put into high-stress environments like auditions or rehearsals with the expectation of perfection from their choreographer or themselves. As a result, it is common for dancers to begin to feel inadequate or second-guess themselves while being in a high-strung state of mind. Additionally, if a dancer does not have an uplifting community of friends, family, or fellow artists around them, then they will fall short of the third need which is having a sense of belonging in this world. Haraldsen et al. (2020) also incorporated self-determination theory and its connection to perfectionism within dance (p. 110). One of the common threads within a series of interviews Haraldsen et al., (2020) conducted was the obsession dancers had with becoming perfect. The interviews highlighted that dancers are hard on themselves when they fail, and instead of using failure as an opportunity to strive for mastery, dancers can get stuck. As a result, the artist could strive to master authenticity and individuality, which is more subjective, allowing space to be more than just perfect (p. 118). Perfection is the biggest roadblock to attaining self-determination because as humans we are guaranteed to make mistakes and fail. If a dancer does not have a sense of humor, enough grace to forgive themselves, or a belief that they are more than just the steps, then they will be stuck trying to achieve the impossible and subsequently feel like they are failing.

Roots of Motivation

The ability a dancer has to motivate themselves can set them apart from other peers they are working alongside. Motivation and effort need to be present on a job when they are in the rehearsal process remembering the choreography. It also needs to be present when they are unemployed but are still actively working to improve their ability by going to the gym, taking

extra classes, committing to mindfulness practices, or making extra income to support their dreams. Artists could be motivated intrinsically with their passion and adoration for their craft or extrinsically motivated to prove something to their audience. (Haraldsen et al., 2020, p. 117).

Depending on the task at hand there are going to be different goals for performers and therefore, different ways to motivate themselves. For example, in an audition setting, dancers may be more inclined to be extrinsically motivated because they want to please the casting directors, choreographers, assistants, etc.

Conversely, when a dancer is training and honing in on their technique they would be more inclined to be intrinsically motivated because they would be working on themselves for their future career. Nordin-Bates and Jowett (2022) expressed from a recent study that people in authority were giving less support to performers that prioritized perfection either from themselves, from their peers, or as an expectation from the audience. The idea of perfection was found to be a common end goal in various sports and as an aesthetic within dance (p. 32). This is refreshing to hear that leading educators are beginning to reward authenticity and passion rather than perfection. Nobody wants to watch a show with perfect robots on stage; they would rather see a performer pushing the limits of what we thought was humanly possible, expressing a feeling that makes each person unique, and embodying the choreography that can heighten a person's individuality. The rapid progression of artificial intelligence and technology in our world threatens many jobs but those of a performer will always be safe due to the human inability to be perfect because that is what people pay to see. Chou et al., (2019) conducted a study that found "that the relationship between multidimensional perfectionism and creative thinking was affected by self-esteem. Self-esteem was found to increase the effect of multidimensional perfectionism and creative thinking" (p. 195). That is, higher self-esteem leads

to enhanced creative thinking (p. 188). When a person has more security in themselves and confidence in how they show up for their craft, they are more likely to take risks and not spiral into a self-defeating headspace when mistakes are made. Instead, they often find the motivation to utilize mistakes to create something new.

The Different Relationships Between Dance and Self-Image

Interestingly enough there is a large difference between the way dance can make novice, recreational dancers feel versus how it can make professional or collegiate dancers feel. The effects of dance as a means of exercise were tested on a group of middle-aged women, and it was found that one year of aerobic dance training had positive self-image effects. It boosted their body image, as well as enhanced the way they thought of themselves personally, socially, and morally (Hös 2005). Not only did dance physically change these women but it shifted them to think more positively of themselves. By using the term “aerobic dance”, it is assumed that the actual exercises were simple, easy to pick up, and focused mostly on finding the joy within the cardio aspect of dance. Additionally, the group setting allowed participants to experience a sense of community without the pressures that professional dancers experience. Another novice dance experiment was done on fifth and sixth graders in their physical education class. It was discovered that “the traditional dance PE program presented higher results in perceived HRQoL (higher quality of life) in six out of the eight dimensions.” These dimensions included “‘Health’, ‘General Mood’, ‘Self’, ‘Friends’, ‘School - Learning,’ and ‘Self and Others’” and in particular, there was “a statistically significant difference in the ‘Health’ dimension” (Georgios, 2018, p. 100). Similar to the middle-aged study, dancers experienced physical and mental health improvements when they were in a low-stress environment that emphasized exercise. This drives

home the point that there are remarkable health benefits when dance is used as a vessel to simply move and exercise for fun.

Professional dance, on the other hand, has a more complicated relationship with self-image and overall well-being. In an interview with a male dancer, he explained how dance increased his self-esteem because of his feeling of accomplishment when he mastered technical dance elements (Haraldsen, 2020). His sense of pride was carried into his daily life making him feel capable of accomplishing and overcoming hard things. He began to link his success in a dance room with his identity and confidence as a human being. Although dance improved his confidence, it also harmed his self-esteem. He explained that “it brought me down a lot of times. I was in a bad circle of development, it was and is really hard” (Haraldsen, 2020, p. 114). The daily demands of dance can be frustrating and can cause a dancer to feel defeated by their physical limitations. When a dancer begins to believe that their worth is only as good as their execution of steps, they may develop a negative self-image and relationship to dance. This example proves that the same person can feel both empowered by and paralyzed by dance at the same time. Dance educators also have a responsibility with molding the thought patterns of these talented artists because the “quality of life within dance is dependent on their teacher and how they are fostering the environment that dance is taking place in. Consistent negative evaluations and drilled-in expectations of perfection can have negative effects on the dancer” (Chou, 2019, p. 196). Oftentimes the teacher’s intention is not to negatively hurt the dancer but rather to push them to achieve their fullest potential. Teachers can always choose to speak to dancers in kind ways by offering encouragement when they do well and by consistently communicating expectations of ways dancers can accomplish their goals. In terms of collegiate dance programs, educators should aim toward “body satisfaction, body awareness, self-discipline, and confidence

as well as dance-related self-esteem” (Chou, 2019, p. 196). The opportunity to dance in a college setting is unique because it acts as a bridge between an advanced high school level and a professional caliber of dancing. Along with college dancers filling in gaps in their technical training, they are also learning life skills of time management, being accountable for professional-type responsibilities, building relationships, and having the opportunity to be celebrated for their unique skills through performances and projects.

Methodology

After obtaining IRB approval, I conducted a study on Pace BFA Commercial Dance Majors and current professional dancers through a Qualtrics survey. The study intended to determine the spectrum between mental adversities and mental triumphs that dancers face as a result of auditions, training sessions, rehearsals, and performances. This research is important because it will initiate a conversation about the realities of our lives as dancers that are very rarely shared in a formally published matter.

I recruited subjects by sending out an email to all of the Pace Commercial Dance Majors graduating between 2023 and 2026. I also promoted the survey on my personal Instagram account by posting on my story. In the Instagram story, I included a text box where my followers could write their email if they were interested in participating so that I could reach out to them with a brief explanation and a link to the Qualtrics Survey. All participants viewed an exempt research information sheet at the beginning of the survey which stated that participation was completely voluntary, and their answers are secure due to the privacy settings of the Qualtrics website. However, because I am reaching out to personal emails, confidentiality and anonymity are not completely guaranteed.

Ultimately, my goal behind this methodology was to discover how various dance environments can either increase or decrease the level of stress, pressure, or motivation that dancers experience and to be able to document it so that more research on commercial dance can be studied in the future. I wanted to explore the risk/reward that comes with the alternating settings of auditions, rehearsals, classes, and performances. I allowed space in the survey for each participant to elaborate on their favorite environment within this passionate career option as well as their least favorite and why that is. I also wanted to explore the ways dancers can continuously stay motivated, how they manage stress, and if they feel like being able to multitask well is an important attribute as a dancer. I found it to be really important that the questions also incorporated the positive attributes associated with dance and not just the negative attributes. Within the survey, I asked participants to rank each of the four environments from most stressful to least stressful to determine if one setting was especially popular in one way or the other. I also asked what their least and their favorite parts were about each environment as well as which one made them fall in love with dance in the first place. Additionally, I asked their opinion on the importance of being able to multitask as a dancer, if they deal with stress daily as a dancer, and how much a teacher/choreographer contributes to the stress or ease of an environment.

Discussion

First, I investigated how prominent stress is within commercial dance (see Figure 1 in the figures list). When asked if the survey participants deal with stress daily, 92% either strongly agree or somewhat agree and 2% neither agree nor disagree. After acknowledging the presence of stress, I asked follow-up questions on what may add to dancers' stress levels. All survey participants agreed that the way a teacher or choreographer leads a room is a strong factor in determining how stressful a dance environment may be. Participants rated the different dance

environments of auditions, rehearsals, training, and performing from most to least stressful (see Figure 2 in the figures list). About 84% indicated auditions being the most stressful, the second most stressful being performing at about 41%, rehearsals were the third most stressful environment at 51%, and training/class had 55% of participants agreeing that it was the least stressful.

Auditions

It is not very surprising that auditions ranked number one due to the high stakes, the quick turnover, and the number of dancers competing for a limited number of spots. A typical audition consists of a choreographer teaching a combination ranging from thirty seconds to a minute and thirty seconds that is expected to be picked up in about forty-five minutes or less. These combinations are then performed in small groups of four or five for the choreographer, assistants, producers, directors, casting directors, and possibly other creatives. After they learn that initial combo, there are cuts and sometimes callback rounds where you are either asked to learn more choreography, sing, read sides to showcase acting abilities, or you could be asked to freestyle in a specific dance specialty. There are a lot of unknown variables that come with auditioning and almost every time dancers leave the room with no feedback on how their performance was that day. They either have to self-evaluate or wait for the validation of either booking the job or not booking the job.

The survey participants were asked what was expected of them within the audition setting. One person said that they are “being asked to present the best version of ourselves within the time frame of being evaluated...As dancers, we find it easier to self-critique and lean towards the negative self-talk than allowing ourselves to give grace to our bodies and mind for their strength in stamina.” This type of awareness in dancers is very significant because while it is

easier said than done, we need to reward ourselves for getting outside of our comfort zones and realize that it is impressive to just make it through the day. Another response expressed, “You have to figure out what the auditioners are looking for and see how you can fit into their style of dance and performance.” As dancers, we are also asked to portray a certain character that fits the overall creative vision; however, it is also important to stay true to ourselves so that our unique spark may capture the eyes of the people behind the table. This concept was also expressed by another response which said that in auditions, “you are usually asked to be unique but also give the casting directors exactly what they want when most of the time you have no clue what it is they want.” Sure, there is an audition breakdown your agent may send you of the role you are coming in for but due to the variety of personalities in the room, each project you go in for could be asking for completely different things that you typically learn through trial and error. For example, one choreographer may love to see crazy tricks in your freestyle and want you to show off as many talents as you can, whereas another choreographer may want minimal movement and more acting-based story-telling through gestures. Creatives often love bold choices with intentions but there is a risk behind choosing to commit to those as a dancer because if it is completely missing the mark of what they are looking for, you may automatically get cut.

How a dancer measures success after an audition can be an emotional roller coaster. There is a clear success/failure in either booking or not booking the job. The reality is, however, that not everyone is right for every job, and the majority of the time as artists when auditioning, we will be told “no.” But, receiving a “no” could be for a multitude of reasons that have nothing to do with how talented a dancer is. Just to list a few instances, they may be the wrong height, the project may already have too many of the same ethnicities, the budget may be cut in half and they can only hire four dancers instead of eight now, or they may need the opposite gender as

you. It was refreshing to hear that the survey responses were measuring their success after auditions based on factors that they could control. According to one participant, they feel that “success by many is viewed as being called out, seen, and cast.” This is the external validation from others that may fuel a person’s ego. “Yes that is nice but when that doesn’t happen, I feel like we should measure ourselves on the way we felt in that, the way we experienced this opportunity with a guest choreographer. That is a gift in itself.” Shifting the mentality to view an audition as an opportunity to take a free class in front of an incredible choreographer and feeling gratitude for being in the room will not only exude more positive energy but will also alleviate some of the stress. Another participant shared that they “measure success based on how well I presented my strengths and personality while demonstrating hard work, dedication, and originality.” That is still a fairly subjective approach but the difference is that that person is placing the power within themselves to be their advocate for how well they did.

Participants were also asked about their favorite part about auditioning. A lot of the answers had to do with the camaraderie of the dance community. People loved being able to dance with their peers, see old friends again, meet new people, and feed off of the inspiring energy in the room. This is an incredible perspective because every dancer will agree to go to an audition for the common goal of booking a job. But, if they are too caught up in the end goal of either booking it or not, they miss out on the process to get there which is arguably the most important. This process consists of being able to share the room with sometimes hundreds of dancers where you have the opportunity to network by simply complimenting someone, or cheering on a friend who is doing their absolute best. You never know if the person standing next to you auditioning is the next Emmy-award-winning choreographer in ten years so it pays off to be kind to everyone without expecting anything in return. That kind and supportive energy are

nearly impossible to do if you are spiraling in stress and only zeroed in on yourself in an audition. Conversely, participants' least favorite parts of the auditions were waiting on the results, the pressure or stress of the unknown, the competitive nature, and feeling judged. Similarly enough, all of those factors are beyond a dancer's control. It has to do with other people's decisions, opinions, and energies. Therefore, if a dancer can acknowledge the fact that almost everyone else is stressed (including the casting directors who are hoping to find the right people for the role), then they can focus on being grateful to be in the room, have the opportunity to dance, and be in the middle of a community that can be beautiful.

Rehearsals

Each project or job has a different timeline therefore the amount of rehearsal time varies. Common stressors that have to do with rehearsals include learning a lot of choreography in a short amount of time, memorizing formations, managing a choreographer's expectations of you, and being able to adapt to changes. One dancer shared that "a rehearsal setting can be very stressful. To me, it's still an audition even after you get the part. You must be efficient, fast at picking up, responsive, flexible, and easy to work with. I know I've done my job as a dancer when I've worked extremely hard in a rehearsal setting meaning I've given all I can to the dance both physically and mentally." Once dancers are in a rehearsal setting, the choreographer's vision is only as good as the dancers can execute it. Frequently a director or producer above the choreographer is changing their minds about how a dance section may be implemented into the show or scene. Hence, everyone has to be able to roll with the punches and positively switch things up if necessary. Another response expressed that in a rehearsal it is expected of dancers to, "show up warmed up and ready to take in a lot of information as well as potential changes from prior rehearsals. (We) need to be constantly actively listening or observant even if you aren't

being physically active which can be mentally draining.” If the choreographer is not working with you, you may have an unofficial break but in that downtime, it is expected to be reviewing the material you have already been taught and to be prepared to go from any section at a moment's notice with little to no mistakes. This is why rehearsals are both mentally and physically exhausting. One dancer said that “rehearsals are the most important in my opinion because it allows you to grow and work together in a safe environment...The most important thing in a rehearsal setting is to remain focused and work together.” There is so much more than just dance moves and formations that dancers can learn in rehearsals. They can also learn how to work well with others, how to put their own style in the choreography being given, how to speak up about issues with spacing in respectful ways, and allow the talent in the room to inspire them to be even better.

According to the survey, dancers’ least favorite part of the rehearsal process is the repetition of drilling the choreography and the long hours. For dance sections to achieve synchronicity, there is always a “cleaning” section within rehearsals where everyone goes count by count and step by step to ensure that everyone is doing the same thing at the same time. The constant repetition is so that it can become muscle memory for the dancers and instead of having to focus on each move, they can start focusing on their performance quality more. From the survey responses, the dancers’ favorite parts of rehearsals are being part of the creative process, working more closely with the choreographer, creating memories with the other dancers, and preparing for the excitement of finally performing. There is the potential for close bonds to be formed within the rehearsal setting due to the long hours, the crazy experience of it from start to finish, and the trust you have to build with your cast. It is special to be a key component in the creative process because it allows the choreographer to use you as a muse and create something

innovative. That debut of new work that a dancer has helped curate can be cutting-edge and very exciting.

Performing

When comparing each of the four dance environments, 73% of the respondents said that performing was their favorite environment (see Figure 3 in the figures list). It is an experience with lights, costumes, hair, and makeup, and is an accumulation of all the hard work from rehearsals to produce a show that can be shared with an audience. When asked which environments made dancers fall in love with dance in the first place, the majority of the responses also said performing (see Figure 4 in the figures list). This could be because participants' favorite parts about performing were predominantly the feeling that came along with it, whether it was adrenaline, a sense of freedom, euphoria, or being able to fully express oneself.

Participants' least favorite part of performing was either the nerves and stress before the performance or when the show was over. The expectations of a performance can be very high which is why the lead-up to the actual show is typically the most stressful. However, if a dancer had put in most of the work in rehearsals, chances are that as soon as they step on the stage they stop overthinking and let their body and soul take over. One dancer said that in performances “you are typically asked to be full out with feeling and give the audience a show. It is an immersive experience for both the audience members and the performers on stage.” The primary goal of performances is to entertain other people therefore it can be helpful to get in the mindset of providing an escape from reality to your audience rather than worrying about all the ways you could potentially mess up. The reality is, the audience will not know if a dancer ball changes on the wrong foot, but they will notice if they are stressed out rather than in character. Another

participant mentioned, “It brings me an insane amount of joy and it requires so many rehearsals to perfect everything. Pushing myself as hard as I can to make someone’s work come to life on stage is just the best thing.” As dancers, we can be the physical and emotional entity that brings an idea to life. Performing allows us to become part of something bigger than ourselves. It is no surprise that a lot of the survey responses said their least favorite part of performing was when it was over. The feeling of being on stage is what motivates a dancer to go to stressful auditions, persevere through the tough rehearsals, and work as hard as they possibly can when training. The dream of sharing art through physical movement on a stage or through a camera is what makes all the stress worthwhile.

Training

Training is the foundation of every performer’s career. It is a space where dancers take from experienced professionals to improve their technique, learn how to properly do the movement without injuring themselves, discover their sense of style, build up their stamina, and find joy in what they love about dance. Based on the survey responses and in stark contrast to feelings about auditioning, the dance environment of training is the least stressful for dancers. This is most likely since the stakes are much lower and the primary reason for taking a dance class is for an individual to improve. The growth that can be seen after consistent training will put a dancer in a better position to book a job. The class setting is also a space where a teacher or choreographer can get to know the dancers better and if they enjoy the dancer’s energy in the room, the way they are executing their style, and the way they apply corrections, then the teacher may even directly book that dancer for an upcoming job. Similar to all other professional work fields, networking and forming genuine relationships can lead to wonderful opportunities. One survey response explained training as an environment that “focuses on the individual’s needs

rather than meeting a director/choreographer's needs. In class, you can work on what you may need at that specific time and personally, I feel less pressure in class than in the other three settings." Rather than having to work with others to achieve a common goal when rehearsing or performing, training allows dancers to be more individualized. They tailor the classes they take either toward their weaknesses to get better or toward their strongest genre to get noticed.

Another dancer mentioned, "In a class/training setting I feel what is asked of me is to be present, leave my outside life at the door and be my best self because (if not) it is not fair to myself or the others in the room." Being present and in the moment should be a throughline for each dance setting but being present while taking a class is important because class settings are where dancers form habits. Dancers are constantly forming muscle memory in class and the wrong execution of technique could make a dancer more prone to injury.

Dancers' favorite parts about training/class according to the survey was a safe space to be able to make mistakes, the community of artists that they can take alongside, learning new things about themselves as well as about dance, feeling growth/improvement, and the inspiration in the room when the aura is good. Conversely, their least favorite parts included staring at themselves in the mirror for hours at a time, the exhaustion/fatigue, comparing themselves to others, the high cost, receiving judgment, and feeling stagnant in their improvement. A majority of a dancer's career will be spent training to maintain an advanced level of technique, stay in great physical shape, and remain consistent with anything that is asked of them. A large mirror is present in every dance classroom to objectively critique body positions. However, because we are our toughest critics, it becomes much more subjective and easier to compare oneself to everyone else in the room. To get the most out of each class dancers must also be open to feedback and corrections from the teacher. This can be extremely humbling because if a dancer spends an hour

being told everything they are doing wrong, they may start to feel like nothing they do is right. When in actuality, that kind of feedback allows them to improve significantly and elevate themselves to another level.

Conclusion

The four core environments of commercial dance are auditions, training, performing, and rehearsals. Auditions are the most stressful environment due to the uncertainty of success, the high likelihood of not booking the job, and the fast pace of learning a combination to perform for very important people. Training is the least stressful environment due to its low stakes and sole purpose of growth and improvement. At the center of training should be this desire to learn and build community with others trying to do the same. Performing is the environment that made most people fall in love with dance in the first place. The best part of performing was said to be the *feeling* that accompanied being on stage in front of an audience and euphorically delivering movement that was the result of hours in rehearsals or technique from training. Rehearsals are more predictable in what is asked of a dancer but can be a long, arduous process. Cleaning must take place to get a routine show or shoot ready and dancers must always be willing to adapt or change anything at a moment's notice.

The amalgamation of all four environments is a commercial dance career. The same way that stress can be found in each of these environments is the same way a spark of joy or a reason to persevere can be found in each of these environments.

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List of Figures

Figure 1

Presence of Stress

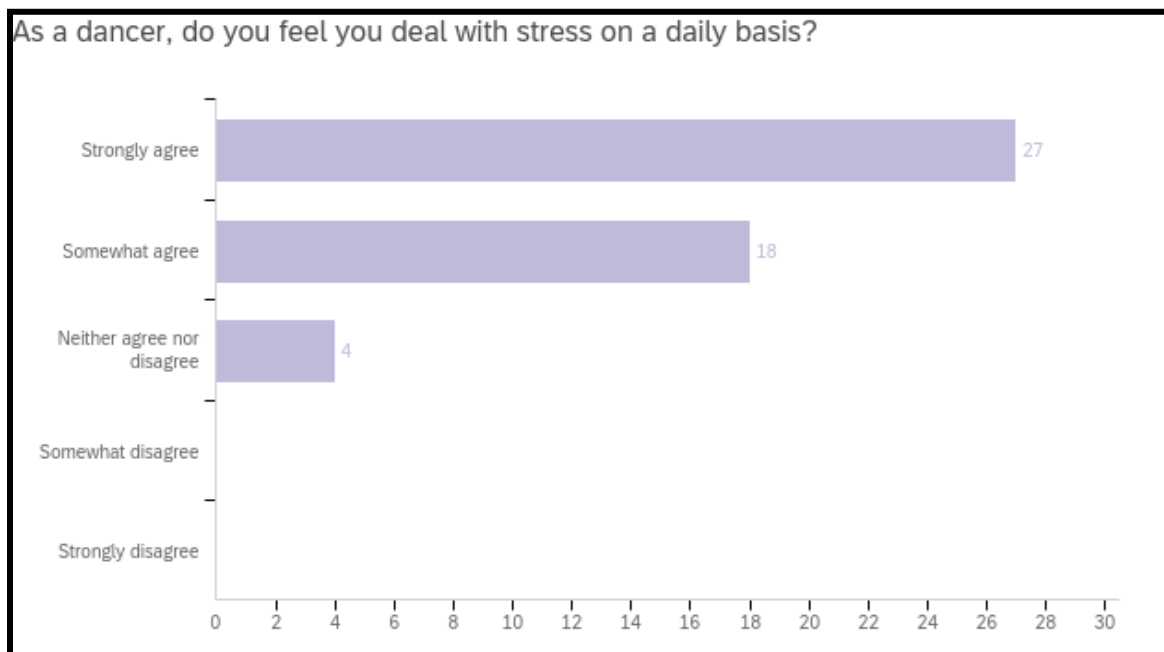


Figure 2

Comparison of Stress Levels in Dance Environments

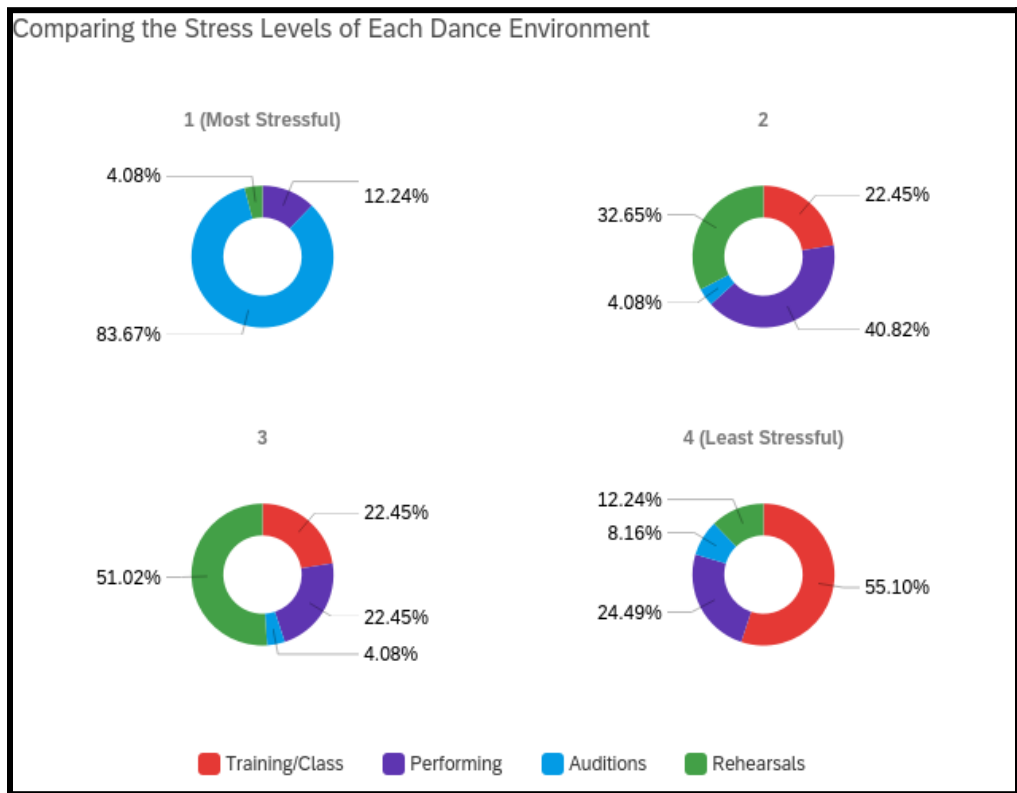


Figure 3

Favorite Dance Environment

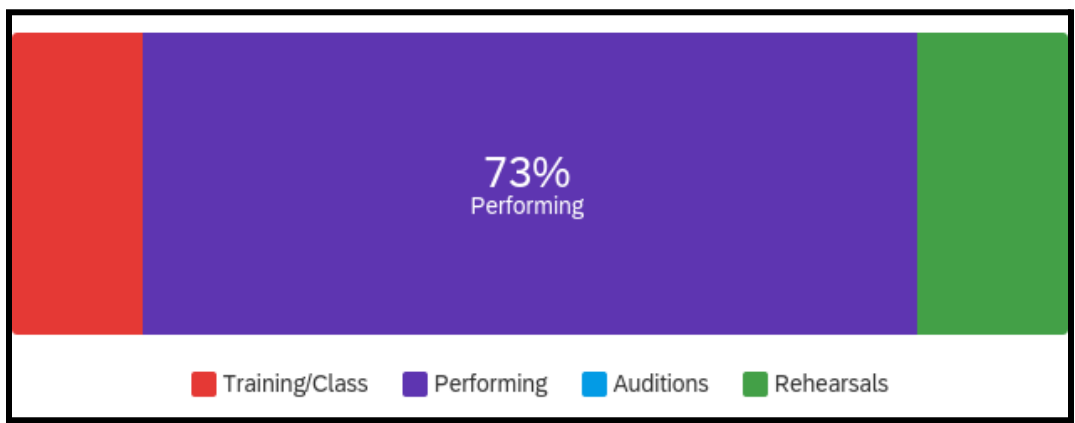


Figure 4

Environments That Made Commercial Dancers Fall in Love with Dance

