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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

DANCE COMPETITIONS: THE CULTURE, THE TRAINING,
AND THE EFFECTS ON YOUNG DANCERS

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
of Master of Arts

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College of Performing and Visual Arts
School of Theater Arts and Dance
Dance Education

December 2019

This Thesis by: Teresa Anne Schmitt

Entitled: *Dance Competitions: The Culture, the Training, and the Effects on Young Dancers*

has been approved as meeting the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in the College of Performing and Visual Arts, School of Theatre Arts and Dance, Program of Dance Education

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study was to assist educators, students, and families, in understanding the advantages and disadvantages of participating in competition dance training as it exists in private studios. The researcher evaluated perceptions of competitive dance training through the lens of nine high school aged dancers who participate or did participate in such activities, with a goal of uncovering how this training experience affected them and what they thought about it. The research instrument used in this study was an electronic survey that included questions that produced responses that were analyzed either quantitatively or qualitatively, depending on the nature of the data produced.

Limitations to this study include the survey questions, number of participants, and the survey demographic. The survey was created by the researcher in an attempt to be unbiased, but was not tested for validity or reliability. This study included nine dance students. Along with the limited number of participants, the selected subjects also created a demographic that lacked diversity. Lastly, the participants generally were involved for a similar number of years in the activity addressed in this study, and were around the same age.

At the conclusion of the study, the data suggested that though students have had both positive and negative experiences with competition dance, they are open to other

dance training options, in order to advance their technical abilities and explore their creativity.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Goal of Thesis

In just the past decade or so, the competition dance scene has grown to gain tremendous popularity. The industry has over 150 companies operating in the United States and Canada, with thousands of dancers participating in multiple competitions in any given year. Students who participate in competitions train for hours on end, perfecting their skills and increasing their flexibility, all in order to get the top spot at the end of the competition. Some say the focus in dance training has shifted from art and expressiveness to competition and “being the best.” The researcher felt the focus on dance competitions presented a few questions. Similar questions were noted in an article by Janice La Pointe-Crump.

Do contests diminish the authenticity and validity of the art form? Does creativity and intention become superfluous when a competition dance is designed? What happens to the dancer-viewer connection when viewers want to be awed by superhuman technique? Can dancers achieve an artistic experience when concerned with winning or losing? What happens to the losers? (4-5)

Media has had an influence on this influx of interest in and appetite for dance competitions and the resulting training experience. In recent years, competition dance has been presented on high ranking television networks with shows such as “Dance Moms,” “So You Think You Can Dance,” and “World of Dance.” “Dance Moms” exposes the intense training experiences related to competition dance, and the need to win competitions. It presents the normalcy of yelling dance teachers, extreme gymnastic,

contortion abilities and dance skills, rivalry between dance studios, stressed young dancers with heightened emotions, and over-involved mothers doing and saying whatever they needed to say and do to get their child to win first place.

“So You Think You Can Dance” and “World of Dance” have also brought competition dance to a national level, by showing live critiques of dancers for the studio and television audience to see and hear, a recorded training process filled with stress, injury, and growth, and dance routines with tricks that are consistently harder and better than they were previously. Elizabeth Schultz, who has written about competition dance, stated,

Nothing could have prepared me for the first time I attended a dance competition with the studio. A local high school was the location of the event and a large classroom served as our dressing room. Dozens of dancers (with just as many moms) filled the room, shellacking their hair back and gluing on fake eyelashes. I quickly realized *Dance Moms* was an accurate representation of what dance competitions were like. Parents were screaming at choreographers, teachers were screaming at crying dancers; it was all shocking. Even more disturbing of the unprofessional behavior was how the girls were asked to perform on stage. (1-2)

Social media has also had a great influence on dance training. With Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, young people are able to see dance almost instantaneously. Here, too, the audience wants to see routines, skills, and tricks that are more extreme than ever seen before.

Social media is a space where the extremes of almost anything (beauty, physique, lifestyle) are celebrated and held as aspirational, resulting in a growing lack of appreciation for the simple or average. In dance, the "average" or "simple" amounts to clean, solid technique, or a body that is well-formed and capable, or a beautifully-placed 90-degree arabesque. Everything has become so extreme that if it's not 15 after 6 o'clock or eight turns, it is of no interest. (Howard)

The question here was, “Where is the artistry?” This heightened interest in the extremes and in being the best has brought the competition training regimen to the

forefront, with little to no emphasis on the history, communication aspect, and artistry of dance.

The researcher found a few articles that included studies of competitive dance, as this is a relatively new phenomenon in the field. Thus, there seemed to be a need for more research to study the effects of this type of training process on young dancers. The researcher began to wonder how it affected young dancers' skills for future careers; what effect it had on their psyche; and the consequences experienced for their bodies and long-term health. The focus of this study was to attempt to answer such questions.

In this study, the researcher analyzed student involvement and participation in competitive dance and looked at how the competitive training environment affected the student in all areas of their dancing. Students and their families who were part of this study remembered these effects, and therefore, were able to make informed decisions when finding a dance studio in which to study.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to look at the advantages and disadvantages of dance competitions and connect them with student learning experiences. The researcher discovered that even though competitive dance has become wildly popular in recent years, and seems like the "be all-end all" option in dance training to many students and families, it, like any other activity, has its pros and cons. The hope was that the outcome of this research will present dancers and their families with the pros and cons of competitive dance, as well as other options for dance training, so they can make the most informed choices.

One of the goals of this study was to discover, from the student perspective, what students find to both the benefits and disadvantages of competitive dance. Another goal was to analyze in what ways pop culture or the media has influenced student viewpoints on dance competition. A third goal was to explore other forms of dance education, equivalent to the standard of training that students believe competitive dance holds.

The research questions addressed in this project were:

- Q1 What are the benefits of competitive dance in the development of young dancers?
- Q2 What are the negative aspects, or disadvantages of competitive dance in the development of young dancers?
- Q3 To what degree does the prominence of competitive dance in pop culture and the media affect the culture of dance training?
- Q4 What other dance training options are available other than the competitive dance option?

LaPointe-Crump commented:

Competition in dance already exists in studios. Teachers evaluate students' performances during the course of a lesson. Students accept criticism, being compelled to improve through our direct interaction with them. Whether evaluators or teachers, we hope to make a difference in dancers' lives and contribute to the art form. (4)

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, competitive dance was defined as a popular activity in which competitors perform dances in any of several permitted dance styles such as acrobatics, ballet, jazz, hip hop, lyrical, and tap, followed by being adjudicated, evaluated and placed based on their age division, category, and group size. Competition dance connects short glimpses of storytelling pieces with strong technique, skills, and tricks.

Alexis Arnow Weisbrod wrote her 2010 dissertation on competition dance in the United States. In this dissertation, the author discussed “. . . the distinct characteristics of the competition body that make it similar but still unlike any other dancing body currently housed in the archive of dance studies” (Weisbrod viii). This study was a cultural analysis of competition dance within the United States and the American culture. It was a foundation for the current study, providing great background information which could be expanded by the researcher in her own thesis project. According to Weisbrod, there was a connection between the American culture and student involvement in dance competitions (ix). The researcher analyzed this connection in the current study in order to develop it further and discover explanations for the phenomenon that created the heightened interest in competition dance.

Possible reasons for student involvement in dance competitions include: gaining a sense of accomplishment, performance experience, adjudicated feedback, heightened technical training, and exposure to dance professionals and other experiences. In 2014, Samantha Sobash conducted a study on dance competitions, and found that her participants agreed with the statement made above. Of the participants in the Sobash study,

. . . 35.53% said it [competition] gives dancers opportunities to receive feedback from experienced judges in the field, 27.5% said it gives dancers more opportunities to perform, 21.6% said it gives dancers opportunities to meet and see the work of dancers from different areas. The dancers (77.1%) enjoyed competing. . . (6)

However, a considerably lower percentage of those involved in dance competitions did not encourage other adolescents to participate in them.

Competition dance has many benefits, but it also has many disadvantages. Martin Bronson of Millennium Dance Center wrote an article in which he described some of the disadvantages he has seen from participating in years of competitions. One disadvantage he discussed was that dance competitions do not reflect what is happening in the college and professional dance scene. In “Bridging the Gap,” Karen Schupp agreed and noted,

for dance majors from competitive dance training backgrounds (i.e., those participating in state, regional, or national dance competitions through dance studios), this transition [from high school to higher education dance programs] is further complicated by differences in dance styles and teaching methods used in postsecondary programs. (25)

Other disadvantages of dance competitions included taking the emphasis off the artistry and focusing on tricks, a conclusion many dance researchers agreed with. The drama associated with competitions, and the lack of age appropriate music and costume choices were also noted as disadvantages.

Rhee Gold, a prominent member of the dance training community, shared his reminder that though studios may choose to participate in dance competitions, it is important that they remember the fundamental values of dance training and education. He mentioned the following with respect to dance competitions:

The point of competing should not be to beat anyone, but to expose students and faculty to the highest caliber of talent available, both to motivate them and to give them an appreciation for other dancers and schools. Only then can we produce the best dancers and teachers possible. (Gold)

Gold also reminded teachers that competition “. . . should be part of the educational journey, but not the entire focus.” Competition provides students with many benefits, but only as long as the focus and intent of the training experience remains holistic and positive.

Through this research, the audience or reader may come to realize that dance instruction does not need to come from this competitive environment in order to be successful as a training regimen, though popular opinion may think otherwise. More specifically, this study focused on describing the student perspective on and response to competition dance.

Significance of Study

Gold stated “. . . competition should be a part of our educational process, but not the entire focus. We need to give our students a range of performance opportunities and make it clear that the best reward for performing is audience applause and appreciation” (Gold). With the influx in popularity of competitive dancing in recent years, this important concept does not get recognized or addressed as much as it should. Nowadays, teachers, students, and parents are so concerned with winning, they lose focus on what is important in dance training. The goal should not be on how high you can hold your leg, how many pirouettes you can do, or how flexible your back is. The important point in performing dance is to express emotion, communicate, and affect the lives of others through your dancing.

Charlene Shannon conducted a research study entitled, *Exploring Factors Influencing Girls' Continued Participation in Competitive Dance*. In this study, Shannon surveyed students of adolescent age as to why they choose to participate in competitive dance. In her research she found that students choose to participate in dance competitions for a variety of reasons, including “. . . flexible participation, enjoyment of dance, and the supportive interpersonal environment that surrounded the dancers” (298). Though these are contributing factors as to why students continue to participate in competitive dance,

they do not provide insight into how the specific training affects their development and growth, both as dancers with budding careers and aspirations, and as contributing members of society.

It is also important to remember that dance competitions are a business, first and foremost. In “Dance Competition Culture and Capitalism,” Schupp wrote, “Dance competition culture operates on a ‘pay to dance’ framework and belief system. By some estimates, for competitors who are deeply involved in dance competitions, the costs can easily top \$1,000 per month” (361). Schupp also indicated that even though Americans are more involved in dance competitions than ever before, there has been little to no discussion of dance competition culture in relation to capitalism (Schupp, “Dance Competition Culture and Capitalism” 361). Dance competitions are a for-profit business, and because of this, results can be skewed, adding additional stresses to students, teachers, and families.

The significance of this research was that the readers of this thesis might be able to recognize that quality dance training does not need to come from a competitive process in order to be deemed successful. The information found in this study is of importance to dance studio owners, dance teachers, students, and their families. Understanding the impacts of dance competitions on the growth and development of young dancers is quite valuable to many practitioners.

From this study and those cited in this chapter and elsewhere in this thesis, studio owners can make their own conclusions and decisions on how they choose to run their business and studio; whether they would like their studio to compete or not. Parents can make more informed choices as to the kind of training and educational setting they would

like for their children's dance education. Dance teachers can make informed decisions as to what kind of environment they would like to create for their students, in essence creating their own teaching philosophies based on what they have learned and what they know.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Culture of Dance Competitions

According to Weisbrod, dance competitions are becoming a significant place for training non-professional dancers. Since their beginnings in the 1970s, mainstream dance competitions have grown in leaps and bounds throughout North America. For example, Feidelson stated that in the late 1970s Showstopper, one of the first organized dance competitions, held their events out of the trunk of a station wagon. However, during the last circulating year, dance competitions included more than 52,000 dancers. These competitions, which allowed dancers to showcase their skills in group and individual events, focused mostly on the dance styles of tap, jazz, contemporary, hip hop, ballet, lyrical, musical theatre, and acrobatics. Dance competitions are for-profit businesses, privately owned and operated. There are over 100 different dance competition companies that tour the United States, including Starpower, NUVO, Celebrity Dance Competitions, Leap!, 24Seven, KAR/Rainbow, and The Dance Awards, to name a few.

A typical dance competition lasts two to three days, with every few hours dedicated to specific age groups and routines that include different size groups. Studios enter the competitions by paying fees for each piece that they would like to perform at the competition. Judges, who are usually former teachers, choreographers, or sometimes professionals in the field, score each dance in the moment. Winners at the competitions,

or those with the highest numerical score, leave with either trophies, plaques, tiaras/hats, or monetary prizes. Studios tend to perform at two to three regional competitions throughout the school year, and then one national competition at the end of the year (Feidelson).

Competitions are broken up into level and age categories, based on the participants' training and experience. KAR competition literature, for example, explained the criteria for each category. In their competitions, they incorporated the levels of novice, primary, secondary, intermediate, and elite. A student would be considered an elite dancer and would compete in the elite category if they have more than six hours of technique-based training per week. An elite dancer has significant competition experience, as well as mastery and advanced knowledge of technical skills, body lines, flexibility, control, and performs with polished, sophisticated movements and style. Elite dancers must cleanly execute numerous pirouettes and continuous turn sequences. They must also be well-trained in tumbling passes, as well as in accurate execution of complex tap combinations, including their clarity, timing and musicality.

Once students are put into groups according to their training and ability level, they are then subdivided into their age divisions, although the age cut-off date guidelines differ from competition company to company. Based on the style the dancers are performing and the size of the group, any one given entry can be categorized in a variety of ways. For example, one routine can be categorized in a number of ways as “. . . intermediate, ages 9-11, lyrical small group.” This categorization system is used to maintain the assurance that dancers are competing against similarly trained dancers (KAR).

Weisbrod noted that “. . . each competition corporation functions through the implementation of several pages of fine print rules and regulations. From entry requirements to scoring ranges, it is these rules that make each corporation unique (24).” Competitions also use multiple scoring systems. These scoring categories include placement, adjudication, and special awards.

In the placement system, the total number of points awarded from the judges are added together to differentiate a first, second, and third place routine. In the adjudicated system, “. . . an entry only has to reach a point value to achieve a particular award label such as platinum, high gold, or emerald, but the award labels vary by corporation” (Weisbrod 27). The special awards are given when the judges want to draw attention to an aspect of the performance that stood out to them. These special awards could include Best Costume, Best Choreography, or Firecracker for routines that are performed with explosive and dynamic energy. Again, these titles and awards vary from competition to competition, and are created by the judges at each individual event.

Schupp brought up an interesting point in her article, “Dance Competition Culture and Commercial Dance,” noting a trend in what constitutes a good dancer. She commented,

Although judging is subjective, there seems to be unstated standards about what qualifies as a ‘good’ dancer and dancing. The stereotypical competition dancers are young, long and lean, and very flexible yet toned; perform movements that require power and mobility in the lower body that draws from jazz dance, ballet, and acrobatic tricks to tell a story through facial expressions, movement quality, and musicality; and wear costumes that highlight their gender and create a sense of uniformity for a group. (59)

There is also a monetary component to dance competitions. One must be reminded that dance competition corporations are first and foremost businesses, which

means the studios need to pay entry fees in order to participate. Essentially, larger groups are charged a higher price in order to enter a competition. However, for smaller groups, more money is charged for each dancer.

The cost for a regional solo ranges from approximately \$70 to \$90. Meanwhile Duos and Trios (always grouped together) generally cost five to ten dollars more than a solo, though this cost is split among two or three dancers. The next grouping, Small Groups, can range from four to approximately eight dancers (the actual number of dancers at the end of this range is determined by individual competition corporations.) Large Groups follow with approximately eight to fourteen dancers (again determined by the corporation.) As with all entry fees, both small and large groups are charged per dancer, ranging from \$22 to \$27. The last two categories, Line and Production, typically cost the same as other group entry rates. (Weisbrod 29)

LaPointe-Crump mentioned the connection between competition and performance in her article, “Competition and Dance Education.” This point was sometimes argued amongst dance teachers and professionals, as many felt that the competition performances are losing the artistry and storytelling of the dances by emphasizing or focusing too heavily on technical skills, strength, and power.

When dancers step onstage, they compete in a unique world. In this world dancers exhibit themselves for the attention of the audience. Viewed in this way, the exquisiteness of their embodied performance invited appreciation and evaluation. What an audience feels and understands is not controlled solely by the dancers but results from an interpretation within the context of the dance and the venue. This is the dancer-viewer connection. I agree that when performing in a contest, dances are crafted to demonstrate technical and artistic prowess within the aesthetic and judgmental construct of the competition, which includes the dancers’ imagination, abilities, musicality, and energy. Here the dancer-viewer connection is specialized. Adjudicators’ opinions are negotiated within the context of a panel. The viewpoint is respected not only because it is final but because judges are seasoned professionals, perhaps even former competitors and winners. (LaPointe-Crump 4)

In recent years, the topic of sexualization of girls in dance competitions, and age-appropriateness of musical choices, costuming, and movements have become a huge discussion point among dancers, teachers, and parents. Schultz, mentioned in chapter one

of this thesis, discussed this topic in her MFA thesis, *The Sexualization of Girls in Dance Competitions*. She painted a picture for us, by describing a typical scene at a dance competition.

A brightly lit empty stage awaits young dancers at the Kid's Artistic Revue dance competition. An unseen emcee announces the next routine in the category for girls who are four years old and under. As a dog house is brought on stage, the audience erupts with hoots and hollers. Nine girls file in and take their opening positions. They are dressed in white ruffled panties, with an exaggerated red bow strategically placed on their bottoms, red sequined bras, white knee highs, and pigtails with bows in their hair. The music begins, and the song "Who Let the Dogs Out" invited even more cheers from the excitable audience. The routine features few technical dance steps, but does include numerous leg extensions in which the dancers' crotches are opened towards the crowd. A strong response is elicited from the audience when the four-year-olds turn their back to the audience and twerk, as the singer barks, "woof, woof, woof," their bottoms pushing out on each bark. As the music finishes the girls retreat to their dog house and pant on their knees. This type of routine, which features sexualized content, can be seen in person regularly at competitions, as well as on various social media platforms, such as YouTube and Instagram. (Schultz 16)

Though it is hard to believe that the scene mentioned above is typical at a dance competition, it is. Dancers' costumes are becoming tighter and more revealing. Dancers as young as the four-year-olds mentioned above can be seen wearing dance briefs with bra tops, bedazzled with sequins and rhinestones. Organizations such as the YPAD (Youth Protection Advocates for Dance) have developed in an effort to change this growing trend in the dance competition scene.

According to Schupp's article, "Dance Competition Culture and Capitalism," the number of dance competitions rapidly increased throughout the 1990s (363). Because of this rapid increase in competitions, each organization began competing for participants and changed their formats due to this issue. According to Schupp,

. . . the best way to attract and keep participants was to make everyone feel good by emphasizing the experience of performing and being at the event. This led to giving an award to every contestant as well as the removal of the educational

component. Competition organizers capitalized on what participants wanted—a place to perform and feel good about one’s dancing. (363)

Competition organizations emphasize selling an experience which has been highlighted in television shows such as “Dance Moms.” It is an experience that dancers from ages four to nineteen look forward to. The glamorous costumes, fake eyelashes, and make-up are all part of the experience as well. Costumes can cost upwards of \$100 apiece. Makeup is heavy, accentuating beautiful features of the face, with fake eyelashes to make the eyes look bigger and bolder. Competitions involve long, tiring days, but are thoroughly enjoyable for the dancers, provided no drama is involved.

The Training for Dance Competitions

Competitive dancers go through a very rigorous training schedule. The amount of training participants put into their craft correlates with the dancers’ competitive level. Schupp wrote a chapter in *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and Competition* titled “You’ve Got to Sell It!: Performing on the Dance Competition Stage.” In the chapter, Schupp mentioned the importance of training for dance competitions.

Training for and performing in dance competitions cultivates and calls for transferable proficiencies—skills that are not necessarily artistic or technical but are needed to successfully perform. Through the physical and emotional labor invested in their training and performance, competitors acquire resiliency, perseverance, time management, self-efficacy, and interpersonal awareness. (42)

Dancers who are at each competitive level are required to have specific skills present in their routines. For example, as stated above, at KAR competitions, a dance routine at the elite level must include difficult turn sequences and combinations, multiple pirouettes, strong flexibility, as well as difficult tumbling passes. All of these skills require many hours of technical training and practice. These skills are typical of the

commercial dance world, where these competitors may seek to establish future careers. Studio owners, in turn, cater to the technical requirements found in the competitions by offering popular dance styles at their studios, including tap, ballet, jazz, hip hop, acrobatics, lyrical or contemporary, and ballet. In a sense, competitions set the standard for what studios are teaching. “Competitive dancers frequently train in all styles represented in dance competition culture, and are able to quickly adapt to and transfer skills between these styles (Schupp 51).

The archetypal competition dancer is young, long and lean, hyper mobile yet toned; performs movements that demand great power and flexibility, primarily in the lower body, and a sense of muscular control; uses dance movements that are a combination of jazzy moves, balletic vocabulary, and acrobatic tricks, is able to convey a story primarily through facial expressions and musicality that mirrors the rhythmic structure of the music, and wears a dazzling costume that accentuates the body’s performance of gender and uniformity. (Schupp 46)

Not only do dancers need to have perfect technical skills, but they also need to be physically fit to execute dance movements and routines. Many dance skills require tight abdominals, strong backs, and arm and leg strength. Dancers also need to have stamina, as the routines can be a cardiovascular feat for dancers, especially if they are long and filled with tricks, turns, transitions and performed quickly. To meet these requirements the dancers may also be taking strength and conditioning classes along with their technical dance classes.

Children as young as four years old can begin training as competitive dancers. This training is intense, and much more involved than the training of the recreational dancers at the same studio. From an early age, these dancers learn the importance of teamwork, living a healthy lifestyle, commitment, pride in accomplishments, technical excellence, and the gift of performing.

Young Dancers and Competitions

Dance competitions have attracted attention in the past few years with the help of popular television shows such as “Dance Moms” by increasing their popularity and exposure (Bronson). “Dance Moms” is a program that featured Abby Lee Miller, the owner of Abby Lee Dance Company in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. Abby Lee’s students have gone on to Broadway shows, touring performances, and even been in the Rockettes. “Dance Moms” began with a team of young preteen girls, their mother, and their dance teacher in order to showcase their dance training, rehearsal processes and competition experiences. Unfortunately, some of the behaviors of the dance teacher, and even the mothers, seemed questionable and even unconscionable. In any given episode, the viewer could see the teacher, Miss Abby, yell at the young dancers, make them cry, call them names, and scream negative feedback right in front of the mothers who also engaged in similar behaviors at times.

The main point is that the dancers were expected to train for numerous hours, performing skills well beyond their developmental abilities, all while facing extremely harsh teaching styles (Cardinal 9). Although “Dance Moms” demonstrated the exploitation of children in the dance competition and private studio scene, it also presented childhood stardom, extreme training, and the importance of winning as normal. Because of this show, the competition dance scene grew tremendously in popularity.

In his online article, Bronson, of Millennium Dance Center, created a list of pros and cons of dance competitions that are discussed at his studio year after year. The content below is based on Bronson’s list, with other information added from various sources.

*The Benefits of Dance
Competitions*

Competitions are an additional performance opportunity for dance students. Young dancers train weekly or even daily at their studios for numerous hours when they are only onstage for a few minutes. Participating in dance competitions allows the student dancers to have more performance opportunities than just a year-end recital. As Bronson stated, “. . . competitions not only allow dancers to get on stage, but also practice the art of performance.” These students are also learning and refining their performance skills, focusing on how to present material, understanding how to tell a story through dance, and learning to connect with others when presenting or performing. These are all skills that can also help with the students’ day to day lives and future careers.

Gold also emphasized the importance of performance in dance competitions. He commented,

If we ask students to focus on the performance aspect of competition, the experience they gain from participating can be an excellent source of self-confidence. If the dancers feel good about a performance and understand that they become better each time they go onstage, they are truly growing through the competition experience. Hitting that stage and doing the best they can do is what it’s all about; whether they win—or which award they win—is secondary. (Gold)

Gold also indicated that a range of performance opportunities is important for young dancers in training. As previously mentioned, he said, “The best reward for performing is audience applause and appreciation.”

LaPointe-Crump also had some thoughts on the performance aspect of dance competitions. Dance competitors attract viewers’ attention, whether they are audience members or competition judges, bringing appreciation and evaluation to their performances. There is a strong dancer-viewer connection from performances at dance

competitions, where audiences watch intently, and evaluate the dancers' technical abilities, as well as their abilities to translate messages and stories through movement.

Competitions allow dancers to receive varied exposure in the dance world as well. As Bronson observed, “. . . it gets them out of their ‘studio bubble’ and allows them to see other dancers their age, different choreography, and different styles of dance.” Competitions allow the dancers to see that this is an art, with each dancer, choreographer, and routine contributing something new, different, and exciting to the dance world.

Dancers are also able to showcase their talents to a panel of judges, who are usually dance teachers, choreographers or professionals in the field. These judges score the dances on the spot and are able to watch the choreography and dancing with intent and focus, looking for technical execution and innovative choreography. When they win, students are showcased and recognized in front of those judges and professionals for their talent, which can lead to potential career opportunities. Participants in the competitions are also sometimes rewarded with extended training and travel opportunities.

Many times, competitions are held along with a dance convention. A convention is a long day or two of classes in various styles that many competitions schedule before the competition weekend. Students who register for these conventions take classes in tap, hip hop, lyrical, jazz, and many dance styles, depending on the other opportunities the convention offers. A key factor of conventions is that the teachers are usually professionals in the field since they are either former or current performers, choreographers, or world-renowned teachers. Conventions provide students with the opportunity to study with different teachers and learn new choreographic styles and skills that broaden their horizons, because many times these instructors are different than those

at the home studio. In addition, students may be noticed at conventions and awarded scholarships for their talents. Many times, competition dancers are required to take the convention classes so the faculty can see their versatility and strengths.

The exposure at competitions is also important to boost learning opportunities and create well-rounded and versatile dancers, who can be ready for any career opportunity. Going into competitions and conventions with an open mind, and a willingness to learn from others is very important.

Through competitions, dance students are able to accomplish small, tangible, and attainable goals. Whether it is perfecting a skill in time for a competition, trying to make the top three at the competition, or winning a trophy, these small goals teach dancers about a work ethic, commitment, and determination. The performance quality needed to score well at dance competitions takes hours of practice and mental focus. These important qualities needed in a professional career are learned at a young age due to the training nature of dance competitions.

Competitiveness can inspire positive attributes leading youth to success and appropriate personal improvement. Youth will practice self-discipline and sacrifice which is preparation for adult life. It can encourage youth to work towards high goals and strive for their personal best. People can work competitively without necessarily comparing self-ability to others (Sobash 62).

Students tend to work harder and smarter when they work towards specific goals (Bronson). Creating tangible goals for student dancers makes them feel accomplished and can have positive effects on retention rates at a studio. Such goals and their connection to student accomplishments were mentioned in the Achievement Goal Theory (AGT), as explained by Shannon.

AGT has been used as a framework for understanding persistence and dropout in young athletes participating in sports and dance. AGT posits that motivation is

related to one's desire to be competent and that there are two ways to define or judge one's competence or ability. Task-oriented individuals focus on developing skill, learning new skills, and putting in maximum effort. These individuals judge their ability and success based on mastering the particular tasks or skills and improving their individual performance. . . . Further tasks goals tend to be associated with sport adherence while ego goals are associated with drop out. (287-288)

Though they are long and tiring, dance competitions are fun. Dancers get an opportunity to be with their peers and friends who have the same interests as they do. During their down time, they also get to socialize with peers, discuss topics they deem important, eat and spend time preparing for the competitions together. (Bronson). "When quality friendships exist within the sport context, this can be a factor positively influencing girls' continued participation" (Shannon 285).

Many times, dancers feel their most important and closest friends are their dance friends. In Shannon's research, she found that friendships that were made in the dance studio were one of the most common factors of girls' continued participation in the sport. "These friendships were described as making dance 'more fun' and several explained that it influenced their decision to return [to study at a studio]" (Shannon 296). It is important that dancers have dance friends because these peers understand the stresses that come with participating in dance competitions, so they can easily relate to one another.

The Disadvantages of Dance Competitions

However, competition dancers who choose to continue to study dance in college struggle to make the transition between the two worlds. There are different dance styles and teaching methods in the two environments.

Competitive studio dancers are familiar with entertainment-based dance styles in which what is 'correct' is clearly defined. Also, they are taught in settings that can provide intense training and simultaneously serve as a social and recreational

outlet. When these students became college dance majors, they are exposed to concert dance forms that emphasize aspects of dance they had not previously considered, and they quickly discover that their dance education must include serious examination beyond the social and recreational context if they want to succeed professionally (Schupp 26).

Schupp also stated that “. . . in college dance programs, many students from competitive backgrounds struggle with understanding what is considered good technique” (26). This tough transition is why competitive dancers end up dropping their dance major after the first year.

As this generation of competitive dancers enter college dance programs, both studio owners and teachers as well as collegiate dance professors can work to make this transition smoother as the two training environments grow and become more connected. It is important to bridge this gap and recognize the fact that dancers come from varying backgrounds.

LaPointe-Crump commented that, “. . . artistic intention and expression are destroyed when dancers prepare tricks and a kitsch routine to win prizes.” Thus, the emphasis on tricks in the competitions is the source of a huge discussion amongst dance professionals because competitive dancers need to display certain skills and tricks to qualify for more advanced levels. These tricks include aerials, turn sequences, strong and flexible leg work, and emotional, complicated choreography. This emphasis on tricks does not allow students to learn creative expression and discover the nuances of their body’s structure and its movements which are all important aspects of dance that need to be learned in order to become creative artists. Schupp agreed, and wrote,

When students become college dance majors, they are exposed to concert dance forms that emphasize aspects of dance they had not previously considered, and they quickly discover that their dance education must include serious examination

beyond the social and recreational context if they want to succeed professionally. (Schupp 26)

The tricks are used as wow factors for purposes of entertaining an audience and impressing the judges. The tricks also make the dancers seem like they are super-human, by performing skills that the average person is not able to do. Marita Cardinal noted that “. . . caution should be used in overemphasizing competition as part of sound dance education” (9).

Typically, when one evaluates a dance, it is assessed based on level of choreographic craft, but when one evaluates a dancer, the analysis is based on their movement skills. Important factors, such as creativity, expressivity, musicality, and artistry are not emphasized as often due to the inability for the common audience member to notice and appreciate the difficulty of these more artistic factors. Private studios emphasize tricks and skills because they show off skilled dancers and attract potential customers. Cardinal remarked that “Uninformed parents may view trophies as a sign of quality dance instruction, which is not necessarily the case. The emphasis on competition can also squelch the pure nature and artistic values of dance” (9).

Many dance majors soon realize the dance tricks and skills they learned previously may not be utilized in their future careers and endeavors. It can be difficult to make this switch from commercial dance for mainly entertainment purposes to concert dance in which they are expected to create meaningful, or even experimental choreography. Finding internal motivation for movement when creating a dance is a skill not widely focused on in the competition setting.

Competition season can bring much unwanted drama. Whether this drama can be internal for the dancer, stem from issues within the team and with other teams, or be

based on conflicts with the teachers, choreographers or parents, the high intensity of the dance competition can create a high level of emotion and release dramatic reactions.

Internal drama, or drama within the team can be created by something as little as which dancers are in the good dances, placed front and center so they are featured, or who gets the highest scores. The high drama world of dance competitions was brought to light with the television series, “Dance Moms,” where the focus was on the drama created by the over-involved mothers of the dancers and the teacher.

Lizzie Feidelson’s *New York Times* article, “Inside the High-Drama World of Youth Competition Dance,” followed a young dancer as she competed with her dance studio at the Imagine National Dance Challenge. The dancer Feidelson followed was a young twelve-year-old girl, who was preparing to perform her group and solo routines. This young dancer expressed her need to show the judges how mature she was both through her facial expression and body language, as well as displaying her technical skill. This same dancer also talked about how she had to zone out before competing, because the people and the tension got in her head.

This is a common thought for young competition dancers, who feel the stress of performing, and of performing well, in order to win. Emotions are high at dance competitions and if the young dancers do not perform perfectly, they get mad at themselves. In addition, their teachers and teammates could even get mad at them. In fact, many times, teammates can end up competing against each other in the same categories. However, at the same time, when dancers win, they cannot seem too excited. Staying humble is important, no matter the level of placement received, because the dancers do not want the other teams to think they are too confident. “Rivalries with other schools

were a necessary part of the performance, but the most piercing feelings of competition were animated by their friends” (Feidelson).

Age Appropriateness

A popular current dance competition topic is the age appropriateness of the material being presented by these young dancers. Just as the dancer mentioned above stated, even at the age of twelve, she felt she needed to present herself as older or more mature. Costumes, music, makeup, and choreography can also be inappropriate for dancers of all ages.

In the research for her thesis, Schultz reminisced about her experiences while working at a dance studio.

Even more disturbing than the unprofessional behavior was how the girls were being asked to perform on stage. One of the groups from the studio I worked for had dancers as young as nine performing a hip-hop routine dressed in gold bra tops, leather crop jackets, and booty shorts. The music was a medley of hip-hop songs with a money theme. The girls shimmied and twerked, and in a dramatic flourish at the end tossed paper money in the manner of a rapper showering a stripper with bills, as seen in popular music videos. I was appalled, and after an entire weekend observing entry after entry of sexualized performances by girls from studios across the state, I was left with deep concerns about the future of dance education and the health and safety of girls in dance. (1-2)

The preceding content and other sources made the researcher wonder why the sexualization of girls in dance is so popular? This sexualization can be seen on competition stages, as well as on social media, including YouTube and Instagram.

Costumes are one way that young dancers can be sexualized. As mentioned earlier competition dancers can frequently be seen wearing bra tops and spandex briefs, decorated with lace, sequins, rhinestones, and other types of tops which bare the midriff. Though such costumes draw the audience members’ and judges’ attention to dancers, it

can also make young dancers self-conscious, and convey undesired messages, whether this is intentional or unintentional.

Music choices can also be deemed inappropriate for specific age groups. For example, Shultz reminded her readers of a 2010 routine in which young seven-year-olds danced to “Single Ladies” by Beyoncé. Other common songs used to accompany young dancers are “Run the World,” “California Girls,” “Fever,” “Candyman” and “Cell Block Tango.” When listening to the lyrics of these songs, one can hear that they discuss sultry love, a sexualized body image, and violence, which are all very inappropriate topics for young children. Choreographers, however, often overlook these lyrics.

A third way in which young dancers can be sexualized in competitions is through the movement and choreography they are expected to perform. Though many of these movements may be from the jazz vernacular, culturally-based movements such as hip hop, or work in Latin or African dancing, can easily become sexualized when paired with the given costume and music choices. Some other sexualized movements include dropping into middle splits, body rolls, or tilt kicks where the crotch is facing the audience. When the music and lyrics suggest something sexualized, these movements are especially difficult to watch.

The television show, “Dance Moms” often showcased dancers in such a sexualized way. In the second episode of the first season, the young performers danced to “. . . sexually suggestive musical lyrics, wore adult makeup, hairstyles, and promiscuous costumes that the moms referred to as making them look like prostitutes” (Cardinal 9). What was worse was even though the parents disapproved of the whole number, they still let their children perform it. There is much initial disapproval from parents or adults

when they see such dances on social media, but eventually the backlash winds down, and these performances become the norm.

One of the most-viewed competition-dance videos is called “My Boyfriend’s Back (7 Years Old – Original).” It has been viewed almost 38 million times. The video was uploaded in 2009; the 7-year-olds in the footage are now high-school age. At least one still dances competitively. The dance, to a cover of Angels’ “My Boyfriend’s Back,” opens to excited audience screams. Three girls wearing striped two-pieces, thigh-high socks and matching bobs, stand in an aggressive, wide-legged stance. When the song begins, they mouth the lyrics, pouting and stomping. All are technically advanced dancers, but the combination of racy costumes, mind-boggling flexibility and slack-jawed facial expressions makes the video feel like too much, like something you aren’t sure you should watch. (Feidelson)

Costs for Competition Participation

Considerable funds are spent in order for students to participate in the dance competitions. Those who are deeply involved in dance competitions can end up paying over \$1,000 per month. Competition fees, which are generally the same from organization to organization, include the following: \$100-\$110 for each entry, while duos and trios cost approximately \$50-\$55 per person, and group routines with four or more dancers pay \$40-50 for each dancer. (Schupp “Dance Competition Culture and Capitalism”).

Other costs for competitive dancers include compensation for lessons/rehearsals, tuition, choreographers’ fees, and the cost of costumes, and shoes. Tuition for dance classes varies from studio to studio, with the average minimum for an hour-long class costing around \$40-\$45 a month. Students who are involved in competition usually take three to four different classes a week. Costumes can cost upwards of a \$100 per costume, and each dance requires specific dance shoes as determined by the choreographer. The shoes can also range in color and style. In addition, students pay for rehearsals and for

choreography they perform in their competition routines. Each routine rehearses outside normal class times, so there is also a greater time commitment as well.

It is also important to note that many times, any one given dancer may be performing in two or more dance routines at a competition. Then, studios are usually involved in two to three competitions during a season. Families sacrifice a lot to enable their children to compete. In an interview, one parent told Feidelson that “. . . she ate ramen to afford as many lessons as possible” (Feidelson).

Dance competitions have become an easily accessible way for the public to get involved with dance. Of the thousands of privately-owned dance studios across the United States, many of them are involved in or affiliated with such competitions, bringing elite dance training to young boys and girls across the country. It is a highly profitable business, generating \$486.6 million in revenue in 2012 alone (Schupp 66). The appeal of dance competitions stem from their use of familiar dance styles, flashy costumes, the dancers' extreme flexibility, movement that is showcased, and the numerous awards available. The media and social networks have helped bring these appealing aspects of dance competitions to the public with their consistent images, therefore, making them something in which many young dancers want to be involved. Its connection to the industry and professional dance are topics that continue to be researched, as competition is a fairly new phenomenon in dance.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the study was to provide the opportunity for readers to understand the culture and climate of competitive dance training. The researcher used the following research questions to guide the study:

- Q1 What are the benefits of competitive dance in the development of young dancers?
- Q2 What are the negative aspects, or disadvantages of competitive dance in the development of young dancers?
- Q3 To what degree does the prominence of competitive dance in pop culture and the media affect the culture of dance training?
- Q4 What other dance training options are available other than the competitive dance option?

The following chapter explains the methodology used to conduct the study and collect data. The researcher used an electronic survey with questions that provided responses which were analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The purpose of the questions was to measure young dancers' perspectives in regard to competitive dance training and also to gather some background information on the participants.

Prior to conducting the survey, this research project required approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). A formal narrative was submitted to the IRB for approval. It included the purpose, methods, data collection and handling procedures, risks, and benefits of the study, along with samples of consent forms for the students and

their parents. IRB also approved the research instruments or tools that were used to collect the data. The IRB requested a revision of the consent forms before final approval was granted. The researcher received written approval from the school administration where she teaches as well to conduct her research study. (Appendix A)

Research Design and Instrumentation

The researcher collected data with an electronic survey that was used to describe the students' perceptions of dance education based on their experiences with competitive training and involvement in dance competitions. The research data were collected through the use of the survey (Appendix B). The electronic survey was designed by the researcher with Qualtrics, an online software used for collecting and analyzing data, and emailed to consenting participants.

The survey included eighteen questions that ranged from those providing descriptive information about the participants to more subjective open-ended questions designed to discover responses to being involved in the competitive dance world. All the questions required short answer responses.

The informative questions included those in which the researcher requested information about the number of years subjects were involved in competitive dance, and a description of their training regimen. The subjective or opinion questions referred to the subjects' likes and dislikes of competitions, benefits and disadvantages to participating in them, and how competitive dance prepared or did not prepare them for their futures. Responses to the electronic surveys were collected from March 1, 2019, to April 1, 2019. A copy of the electronic survey questions can be viewed in appendix B.

Research Site and Participants

The participants in this study were students at a private high school in a suburban area of New York. However, the demographics of the student population are not published on the school's website and therefore not accessible to the public, nor to the researcher. The students in the study were all high school females, in grades ten to twelve who study dance in their high school, as well as participate in dance training at local private studios. The students who participated in this research had been studying dance as an extracurricular activity for more than five years prior to the beginning of this study, and were involved or had been involved in competitive dance, specifically, for three to twelve years. This means the students were involved in attending private dance studios where they studied and trained in various dance styles including tap, ballet, jazz, and lyrical/contemporary, amongst others.

Potential participants were sent an email with an explanation of the study and attached consent forms which had to be signed and returned before beginning the study. One consent form was for the students and the other one was for their parent or guardian. Once the student returned the consent forms, they were emailed a link to the electronic survey so they could fill it out. A copy of the consent form can be found in appendix A. Participation in the study was voluntary and did not include compensation for those involved. All of the consent forms described the purpose and intentions of the research study. Participants submitted all answers to survey questions through Qualtrics and the researcher kept the responses secure and confidential by identifying each student only with a capital letter. Nine students completed the survey in its entirety.

Data Collection and Analysis

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to analyze data from this study. The participants answered eighteen questions in the electronic survey resulting in some of the data used for this research. In the qualitative analysis, the researcher read all the answers to the open-ended questions and identified common themes found in participant responses. Other survey questions required a yes or no answer, or elicited a response which could be analyzed numerically. These responses were analyzed and presented quantitatively. Some of the themes which emerged were also analyzed and presented quantitatively once they were identified.

Qualitative Analysis

The eighteen questions in the survey were answered based on the background of the participants or on their feelings and opinions. The responses to a number of these questions were analyzed qualitatively to identify emerging themes. These questions focused on the student participants' experiences with being involved in competitive dance training. The researcher designed these questions in hopes of gathering honest perspectives from dance students on how the competitive dance culture helped or hindered their training or educational experience. The survey questions are located in appendix B, and the outcome of this study is reported in the discussion chapter of this thesis.

Quantitative Analysis

The answers to the open-ended questions were also analyzed in a quantitative way, since the researcher was able to sort through the common themes or trends that

emerged from the responses and organize and display them in a graph to show consistencies and differences.

Some of the questions in the survey required yes or no responses or answers which could be analyzed numerically. The researcher also analyzed the answers to these questions quantitatively and displayed the outcomes in a graph in order to show similarities and differences in the answers.

Summary

In this chapter, the researcher discussed the context of this study and identified the methods used to gather and analyze the data. The present study used an electronic survey to identify high school student's perspectives on the culture and climate of competitive dance training. The researcher created survey questions to determine the students' opinions and perceptions of whether or not competitive dance benefited or hindered the education of the young dancers. Using both a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the data allowed for a clearer understanding of the students' responses and an overall consensus of the opinions of the students surveyed. Detailed findings and analysis of this data is presented in the discussion chapter.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

In this study, as stated in the introductory chapter, the researcher examined the participants' perspectives on the quality of dance education they received through dance competitions. The survey used for this study aimed to gauge those students' perspectives on their education and training in dance. In the present chapter, the researcher discusses detailed responses to the questions in the electronic survey. This chapter is organized to examine the outcome of the qualitative analysis followed by the findings based on the quantitative analysis. The following data is also organized based on the order of the research questions.

Students who participated in this survey had been involved in dance competitions for approximately five or more years. They described their dance training for competitions as a vigorous process that, for some, starts in the summer before the school year. They participate in weekly technique classes and conditioning sessions. They start learning the choreography for their competitions in September. As the competition gets closer, the dancers go through an intense cleaning process to make sure the dances to be performed are perfectly prepared for the competition. Some students also mentioned that they felt differently about competitions during different stages of their lives. Figure 1 shows how students responded to question ten in which the researcher asked: Did you feel differently about competition dance in different parts of your life? If so, how?

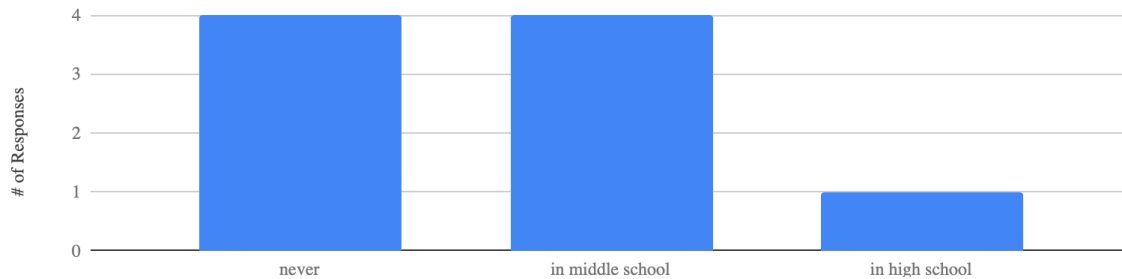


Figure 1: Student responses to electronic survey question ten.

Student C, who said she felt differently about competitions in high school, replied “When I was younger, it was great because I had the time and endurance. Now, I had to quit competition due to injury, school work, and other more important commitments.” Students E and I also agreed that their opinions changed about competitions due to stress, injury, or the time commitment. Student B noted how competitive dance was not as it seemed from the outside. She explained,

Before I joined the competition team, and in the very early stages of being on it, I thought it was the coolest thing in the world. Watching TV shows were a big part of what I thought about it. As I spent more time on the team, I realized it wasn’t as glamorous as it was portrayed to be on TV, but it still became a massive part of my life. When I came to high school and had to drop competition, I thought I would be completely lost without it and would eventually come back. I found that competition wasn’t everything, and that there were so many other opportunities to spread my love of dance than just competing. This is still my opinion now, and I honestly couldn’t have been happier with my decision.

Benefits of Competitive Dance

The researcher asked a variety of questions within the survey that allowed the students to discuss what they found were the benefits of competitions, and what they enjoyed about being involved in them.

What Do Young Dancers Enjoy about Competitions?

In questions five and eight in the survey, the researcher asked students what they enjoyed about competing and what aspects of the competitions they liked. The researcher

analyzed answers to these questions and found similarities within the answers. Figure 2 below shows the categories or themes found in the responses to questions five and eight. Hard work and camaraderie were the two themes that came up the most frequently. The total number of answers exceeded the number of students in the study because some participants provided more than one answer to these two questions. This is also true in the following figures.

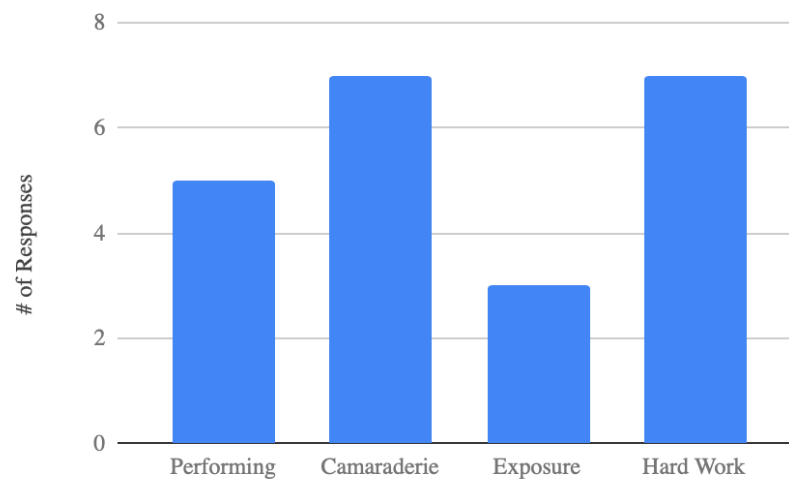


Figure 2. Themes found in students' responses to survey questions five and eight.

In survey question three, the researcher asked what benefits the students experienced from participating in dance competitions. Here, the researcher found that three overall themes emerged in the students' responses. These themes were experience, community, and confidence. The number of students who mentioned one of these themes in their answer is displayed in Figure 3.

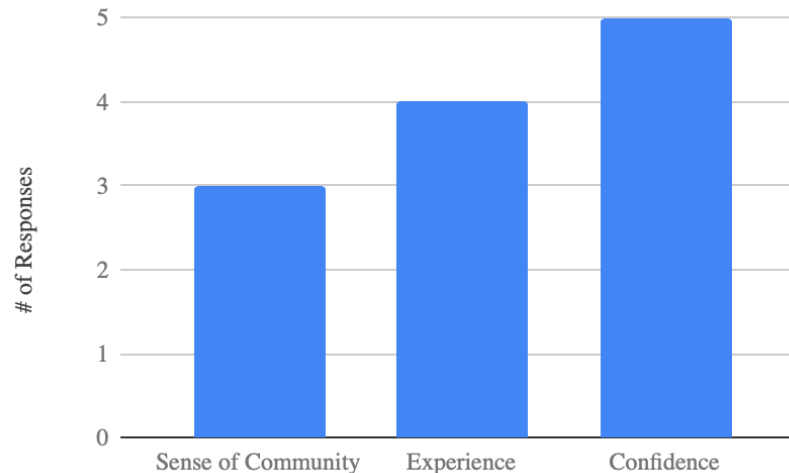


Figure 3: Themes found in from student responses to survey question three.

Experience

Overall, students felt that competitions allowed them the opportunity to gain experience in performing, acquire technical excellence, and develop a broader perspective. Of the nine responses, four of them focused specifically on the experience that dance competitions allowed one to have. Student B stated,

Dance competition allowed me to gain a wider perspective on today’s dance world. My studio is somewhat conservative and didn’t even have a children/teen competition team until I was in 8th grade. We were able to see what other studios were doing and getting creative inspiration from the things we saw. I also benefited from hearing judges’ critiques; I had never been given feedback on my dancing from anyone before besides my own dance teachers. Also, I was able to create lasting friendships with the girls on my team.

This student’s response confirmed Bronson’s mention that competitions “. . . get them out of their ‘studio bubble’ and allows them to see other dancers their age, different choreography, and different styles of dance.” Competitions allow the dancers to see that this is an art, with each dancer, choreographer, and routine contributing something new, different, and exciting to the dance world.

Sense of Community

At the end of her response, Student B touched upon the friendships she was able to make from being involved in a competition team. There were a total of three responses in which the participants felt the sense of community which developed was a benefit of dance competitions. Student C expressed that she “. . . feels satisfaction from winning and learning with those who are around her. It creates a sense of community.” Student B also noted the sense of community stemmed from those on their team who pushed them to become better dancers and supported them. The feeling of community also developed based on the process of learning, winning and losing with those around them, whether they were from their own studio or a competing studio. This feeling of community was based on the bonding experience that comes with dance competitions and competitive dance teams.

The students’ focus on the sense of community and camaraderie supported Shannon’s account of why girls continue to participate in dance. She wrote, “These friendships were described as making dance ‘more fun’ and several explained that it influenced their decision to return [to study at a studio] (296). Their peers understand the stresses that come with participating in dance competitions, and they feel that they can easily relate to one another. Shannon also remarked “. . . when quality friendships exist within the sport [or dance] context, this can be a factor positively influencing girls’ continued participation” (285).

Confidence

Five students mentioned that they gained confidence from being involved in dance competitions. Student E said, “. . . you gain the experience of performing and

overcoming nerves. You learn how to be humble when you win, and confident when you lose.” This student discussed two important aspects of confidence that her peers also mentioned because many students wrote about the confidence gained from performing. A number said they learned to feel more confident in their dancing and ability to perform onstage from their experiences in dance competitions. They also learned how to maintain their confidence, regardless of the outcome of the competition. Student G replied that she “. . . learned more time management with dance and school, became more confident in her dancing, have [sic] made amazing friends, and made new friends from competitions.” Student H added, “. . . taking part in competition dance brings an extremely different atmosphere, because of the intense practices and months of cleaning, and it is also one of the most enjoyable things to experience.”

In a quote in the Literature Review, Gold discussed the importance of focusing on performance in dance competitions. He indicated,

If we ask students to focus on the performance aspect of competition, the experience they gain from participating can be an excellent source of self-confidence. If the dancers feel good about a performance and understand that they become better each time they go on stage, they are truly growing through the competition experience. (Gold)

Preparation for the Future

In question thirteen of the survey the researcher asked: “In what ways have dance competitions prepared you for your future in ways that other forms of dance training or dance education has not?” These answers varied, but all believed the competitions were important in the development of not only dancers, but young adults. Responses to this question included the themes of learning how to take constructive criticism without feeling insulted; developing good time management skills and a work ethic; gaining

confidence and comfort with performing; discovering how to pay attention to detail; and reinforcing and comparing what is out there in the real world and the dance world. These are all qualities that can help prepare the dancers for their futures, regardless of their career paths.

Student A responded to question thirteen by saying, “. . . the behavior I have learned through dance and competitions is important to bring with me into the real world of competition. This is because I can push myself as hard as I can, fail, and always know how to come back from a failure.” Student D noted that competitions helped her “. . . put myself out there and become comfortable in front of people I don’t know.” Student I provided a detailed response, mentioning that she learned the importance of hard work and perseverance. She wrote,

I think that the competitive nature I have developed has set me up for success in my future. I have learned that failure does not define character, but instead it is something to learn from. This point of view is optimistic in the sense that I believe I can always do better and always strive to do better. While I feel pride in what I have accomplished thus far, I know that in order to be fully satisfied with myself, I need to accept challenges and step outside of my comfort zone, even if I know I am going to fail the first few times. Without doing so, I will not be able to grow as a person.

Figure 4 displays the number of students who discussed the above themes in their answers to the open-ended question.

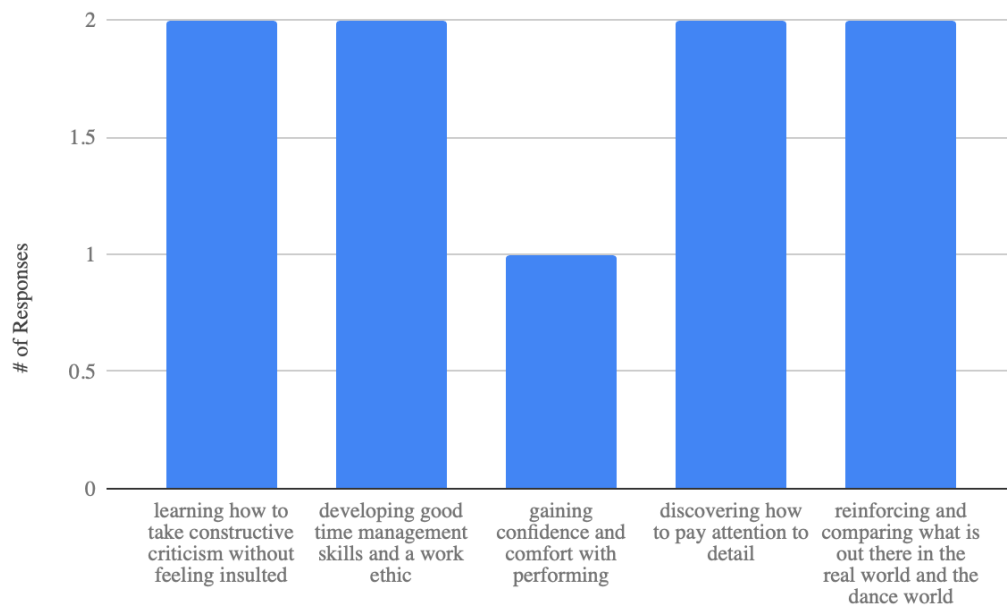


Figure 4: Themes found in student responses to survey question thirteen.

The idea that dance experiences can prepare one for the future was confirmed in the Literature Review chapter, where some of those cited commented that the opportunities students receive and the lessons they learn to become strong dancers can support them in any opportunity or chosen career field. Bronson of Millennium Dance Center agreed, noting that the students are learning and refining their performance skills, focusing on how to present material, understanding how to tell a story, and learning to connect to others when presenting or performing. These skills are imperative in helping students become successful in their future careers, and even in their day to day lives.

Sobash also agreed with these themes when she discussed how dancers who are involved in competitions learn the importance of working to achieve small tangible goals, which is a skill necessary for life. Students learn how to better themselves through learning how to take constructive criticism, developing good time management and work

ethic, gaining confidence, paying attention to detail, and participating in experiences that prepare them for the real world.

Competitiveness can inspire positive attributes leading youth to success and appropriate personal improvement. Youth will practice self-discipline and sacrifice which is preparation for adult life. It can encourage youth to work towards high goals and strive for their personal best. People can work competitively without necessarily comparing self-ability to others (Sobash 62).

Disadvantages to Participating in Competitive Dance

The researcher asked a variety of questions within the survey that allowed the students to discuss what they found are the disadvantages or negative aspects of competitive dance, and what they do not enjoy about being involved in competitions.

In questions six and nine in the electronic survey, the researcher asked the students to discuss what they disliked about the competition dance scene and to describe those aspects. Three themes emerged from the student's various responses to these questions. These themes included: the pressure, stress, and drama; the judging and awards of the competition; and the decreased focus on technical training. Figure 5 displays the themes found in the answers to these two questions.

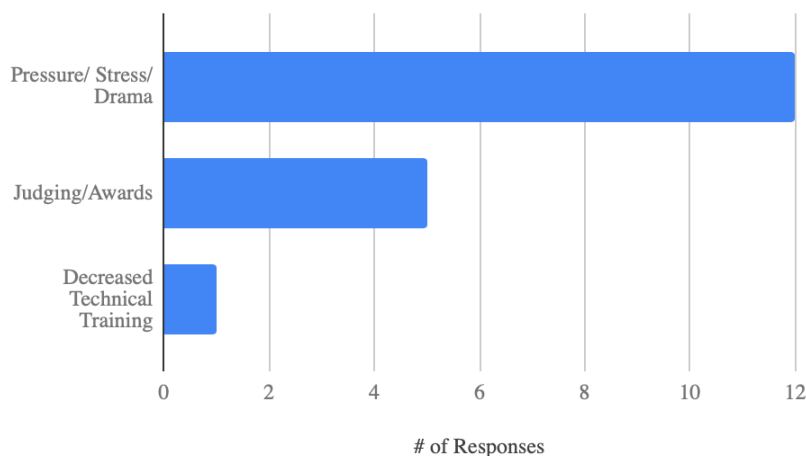


Figure 5: Themes found in students' answers to survey questions six and nine.

Pressure/Stress/Drama

There was an overwhelming mention of pressure, stress, and drama as being an aspect of dance competitions that students disliked. Student A mentioned that she “. . . did not like the constant pressure of competition from your team, your parents, the judges, and teachers who all count on you.” Student I also mentioned that she did not like the constant pressure.

The pressure put on dancers to win is excessive and begins at a very young age. Personally, I have seen girls have panic attacks, get sick, and even faint before or after dancing because they were so nervous. The anxiety dancers have stems from a fear of dance directors and teachers who are obsessed with winning. Dance directors sometimes intentionally put dancers in positions where they know they will fail, or they will test their confidence. While in some environments this is very constructive, the manner in which it is done is often not.

She went on to say,

The amount of pressure put on dancers to be perfect and to win was overwhelming and something I found very unhealthy. I think that instead of being threatened and pressured to be the best dancers—especially young ones—should be encouraged into being the best they can be. Dance competitions, while the goal is to win, should not be solely about winning.

The researcher discussed these same points in the Literature Review. Competition season brings unwanted drama from peers, teachers, parents, and the choreographer which results in a high level of intensity during competition. Lizzie Feidelson described this intensity in her article which resulted from following around a young dancer at a competition. She commented, “Rivalries with other schools were a necessary part of the performance, but the most piercing feelings of competition were animated by their friends” (Feidelson).

Students also discussed the intensity of the stress from competing in their responses to question seventeen. This question was: Has being involved in dance

competitions caused any stresses in your dance training or life? If your answer is yes, please describe the reason for or nature of such stress.”

All of the students surveyed answered yes to this question. Some students mentioned that the stress stemmed from outside influences imposed by dance teachers or other competitors, and from their own team members. Student I described how such stress impacted her dance experiences.

I was stressed throughout most of my dance career because of the expectations others set for me. Instead of dancing to please myself, I danced to please others. I always worried about what my dance teacher thought of me and what the judges thought of me that I forgot to have fun sometimes. Instead of dancing from the heart, I simply danced to beat everyone else. This is something that caused me a lot of stress at a very young age, which translated to having severe anxiety as I grew up. I would sit in the bathroom at competitions and refuse to go backstage for my solo because I was scared of disappointing my dance teacher. Sometimes I would refuse to go to competitions altogether because I did not want to have to go up against my friends.

Many students felt like being involved in competitions caused stress in other areas of their lives. Many described how they have a tough time putting so much time into their dancing when they have school and other commitments. Student A wrote, “I feel overwhelmed at times with both school work and dance training; especially, since dance training is mandatory when being on the competition team.” Student B also talked about the conflicts with school, saying, “It has caused stress in my life in a couple ways. Firstly, it was a major time commitment, so it frequently conflicted with things at my school. Having to divide my time and attention like that was very difficult.” Student C agreed that dance competitions have caused her stress. She said, “I have been injured from stress to complete a step and often the teacher can become very passionate and angry if the results are not there.”

Student B also mentioned the unhealthy amount of drama among students. She responded,

From what I've heard, some dancers are only about competing 24/7 and forget about the joy and unity that dance can bring. I have noticed this even in my own studio. Girls think being on the team is purely a status symbol, and that if you aren't on the team, you are somehow below them. I hope this behavior completely disappears from the dance world soon.

This focus on stress, drama, and pressure is seen on television shows like “Dance Moms,” where the dance teacher places an unhealthy amount of pressure on her students to win by saying things like, “. . . don't embarrass me,” or “. . . second is first to lose.” Throughout the show, you see the dancers going into these panic attacks or start crying because of the pressure that the dance teacher and their mothers have put on them. You also see the disappointment in the mothers and teachers after the girls' dance. In question fourteen, student I discussed the comparisons of what is seen on “Dance Moms” to her own experiences.

Many people say that Dance Moms is unrealistic and staged, and while some parts may be, the experiences that the girls had on the show are very similar to the experiences I had at dance [competitions]. I was under immense pressure from my parents, teachers, and peers. I was always being watched closely and never had a moment to myself. I would be at dance 6 days a week from the moment school let out to sometimes 10 or 11 pm. This routine was draining and can be compared to the exhaustion seen in the girls from Dance Moms. My dance teacher held my team and I to such a high standard that was sometimes unrealistic for our age. We were expected to win every competition, and if we didn't, we were ridiculed and belittled for it. This is similar to how Abby [on Dance Moms] treated the dancers when they did not do as well as she hoped they would. Not only were we brought down in rehearsal, but we were brought down in front of our peers, parents, and in public.

Judging Experiences

Some students also discussed the judging and the experience of competing when asked what they did not like about competitions. Competitions last from morning to

night, all weekend long. These are long days with many people and performances involved, so they do have the potential to get off schedule, usually ending a lot later than originally planned. Student F mentioned this as something that she did not enjoy about competitions. She stated “I dislike how they always end up not on schedule, and how it's only someone's opinion. A judge could hate tap and one judge could love tap, but it affects the person's scores.”

The students' responses also brought up the point that dance competitions are judged by people who have opinions about what they want to see in a performance. Therefore, it is very subjective. As the above student mentioned, a judge might not enjoy tap dance. If that judge had to evaluate a tap dancer, he or she might give that person a lower score because of this opinion. Student F restated these ideas in her response to question six in which the students were asked: What do you dislike about competing? She commented, “I dislike how long dance competitions are, and how the judges score because it is biased, [and] it's based on what that person prefers.”

At the awards ceremonies, many, if not all participants, walk away with an award. Some students felt that this defeats the purpose of competing. Student E mentioned her struggle with this concept in one of her responses. She stated, “I dislike the awards ceremonies. I think giving awards out to everyone defeats the purpose of having placements.” Cardinal commented on this point when she declared, “. . . uninformed parents may view trophies as a sign of quality dance instruction, which is not necessarily the case. The emphasis on competition can also squelch the pure nature and artistic values of dance” (9).

Decreased Technical Training

Question four was: How has the competition experience affected your dance training? In response to this question, students G and D discussed that the focus on competitions limited their technical training. Student G answered by saying, “. . . dance competitions have affected my training because when a competition is coming up, the ballet training and technique falls behind and the whole studio becomes so focused on competition [that] the training falls behind.” Student D also said, “. . . it [competition] makes you focus more on a dance over technique.” In all, students felt that they started to focus on drilling a routine to perfection over technical improvement and growth. Some believed that this could stifle their growth as a dancer.

Popular Culture, Media, and Dance Training

Questions fourteen and fifteen in the survey related to pop culture, media, and social media, and how they influenced dance training. Since the early 2000s, television shows like “So You Think You Can Dance,” “Dance Moms,” and more recently, “World of Dance,” have brought dance and dance training to the forefront of entertainment. Such shows have also heightened the level of dance training as dancers have been able to see all of the advanced, difficult tricks and skills that these dance celebrities can perform.

In question fourteen the researcher asked the students: Can you describe any connections between dance training and competition dance and various media platforms? All but one of the students responded in agreement that there are many connections between the two. Student B even went on to say that these media platforms were the exact reason why she decided to participate in competition dance to begin with. She wrote,

Dance Moms was a huge part of why I wanted to be on a competition team. I am not completely sure, but I actually think Dance Moms was part of the reason why the junior competition team was created at my studio. Me [sic] and the other girls on the team even assigned which Dance Moms [sic] girls we would be. My competition experience was definitely not as dramatic as any Dance Moms episode, and I always knew that situations on the show were majorly exacerbated. The drama and pressure that was exhibited on the show was excessive but is definitely a legitimate part of competing. I think SYTYCD [So You Think You Can Dance] has inspired choreographers to be more creative and innovative in their pieces. The contestants on SYTYCD are all practically professionals, so they are great role models for any young dancer.

Student A mentioned how this same program emphasized the importance of cross training in a variety of genres in order to be successful in the dance and performance industry. She remarked,

Competition Dance and Dance training are both highly profound in “So You Think You Can Dance” because of the vigorous mentor choreography and adaptation to choreography. The show challenges [a] dancer’s ability to learn and apply techniques from many years of training. This is a parallel to competitive dance and its aspects of harsh training and picking up choreography to perform and be judged on stage.

Question fifteen was: In what way do you believe social media influences the dance industry and, more specifically, dance competitions? The students responded with answers that described both the positive and negative influences that social media has had on dance. Figure 6 displays the number of students who responded in a positive or negative way to the influences of social media.

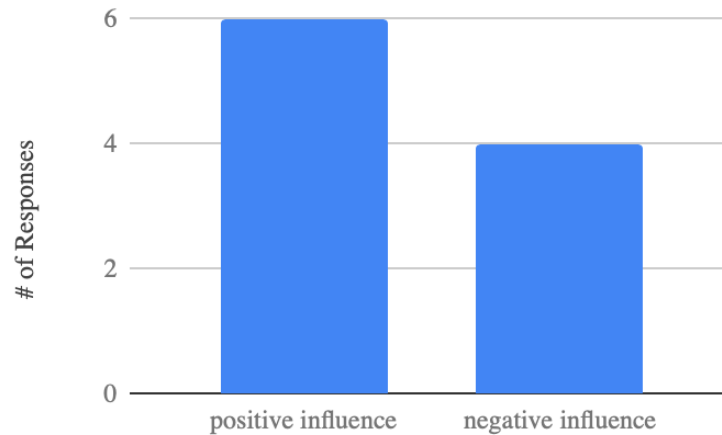


Figure 6: Number of students who responded in a positive or negative way to the influences of social media.

One positive influence students discussed was that it has helped dance grow tremendously worldwide. In her response, Student F suggested, “Because of social media and technology, dance competitions have been spread worldwide, and dance continues to grow because of the videos all over the internet that inspire others.”

Dance has become readily accessible to the masses because of social media. This means anyone can now enjoy dance whether they are personally involved in it or not. Student H said, “Social media exposes the dance industry, which is a good thing, because it helps to show others the powerful meaning of what dance really is, and how it is a huge part of many dancers’ lives.” This was another point addressed in the Literature Review because the media and social media have helped bring these appealing aspects of dance competitions to the public with their consistent images, making it something that many young dancers want to be involved in. Because of this exposure, dance competitions have become an easily accessible way for the public to get involved with dance.

Student B mentioned both positive and negative influences of social media on dance. Her response to question fifteen was,

Like with everything social media is involved in, there are positives and negatives. I liked how each competition had an Instagram page, which allowed us to stay updated. It was also fun if the competition posted pictures of things behind the scenes and on stage, because we would always try and see if were posted. The live-streaming aspect of competitions is so helpful too, especially to those who aren't able to attend in person. However, social media is always full of critics and people who like saying whatever they want because they can hide behind a screen. I have not experienced this personally, but I have heard of social media drama translating into in-person drama. That can be super harmful to a team.

Along with any other form of technology, social media has its negative effects.

Because everyone's posts are public, anyone is able to comment and state their opinions on the dancers or choreography, even though they are not professionals and possibly unqualified to give professional opinions. Public posts have also increased the ability of viewers to copy the dance routines or competition format. Student A expressed this idea in her response, declaring, "Social media influences dance competitions in the use of ideas within YouTube and Instagram videos of dancers as well as other dance competition's Instagram [posts]. Most dance competitions have become direct copies of one another because of [the] social media influence."

Student E mentioned that social media posts have emphasized the importance of winning, an influence with which she does not agree. She confirmed, "Social media has a huge influence over dance competitions. When big names win awards at competitions, it is posted all over social media. However, winning is not the most important part of competing."

All in all, social media is good for business, and it is important to remember that dance competitions are, first and foremost, a business. Social media allows for free or cheap advertising, and the posts can be seen by people all over the world. Student I mentioned this point in her thorough response.

Social media plays a large role in advertising the rigor of competition. Instagram pages and Facebook pages of competitions and studios are always posting about title wins, national wins, scholarships, and special recognition. Dances posted online are usually of a very high standard and raise the expectations of other dancers and dance teachers. Those levels should be something to strive for, but they cannot happen overnight. I feel as if some dance teachers believe that if their studio is not as successful as another, they have failed.

Options for Dance Education and Training

Dancers had mixed thoughts about how the competitive atmosphere and competitive experience affected their dance training. Student G mentioned that dance competitions affected her training negatively, because “. . . when a competition is coming up, the ballet training and technique falls behind and the whole studio becomes so focused on competition the training falls behind.” Student I said that “. . . competing at a high level for many years has made me a perfectionist.” However, she believed what some may see as diligence is also very unhealthy because it is detrimental to be so hard on oneself. Others, however, mentioned that competition heightened their dance training, helped them to become risk-takers, and made them physically and mentally strong.

In question eighteen, the researcher asked the students if they felt they were getting the best possible dance training by studying at a studio that participates in dance competitions. Figure 7 shows how students responded to this question.

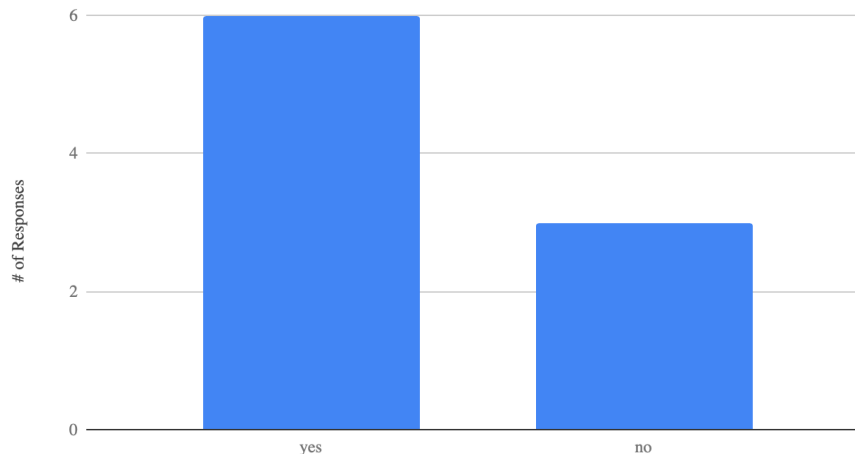


Figure 7: Student responses to electronic survey question eighteen.

Some students provided details as to whether or not they felt they were getting the best possible training. Students who responded negatively emphasized the focus on cleaning the dances and winning competitions, instead of developing their technique.

Student B noted,

I do not think I am getting the best possible dance training from my studio. Competition is the biggest priority at my studio by far; everything revolves around the competition team. Because the majority of focus is placed on them, teachers that choreograph for competition aren't as dedicated to their regular classes. I really hope that in the future, my studio will learn to balance competition with those regular classes, so that no matter what you are involved in, you are receiving a healthy and beneficial experience.

Conversely, students who responded positively to this same question discussed the level at which they were training and the opportunities they were afforded from being involved in competitions. Student I thought,

If I went to a studio that did not offer competitive dance, I would not be at the level I am at today. I would certainly have not been exposed to discipline or rigor early on, and I would not have had many of the opportunities I have had. I was able to work with some of the best choreographers in the nation, get critiqued by qualified judges, attend national talent competitions, win national titles, and meet dancers from other parts of the nation. I am very grateful for the opportunities that competitive dance has afforded me.

From these two responses alone, the researcher was able to see that these were strictly opinionated answers, based on the experiences these students have encountered at their studios.

Question sixteen was: Would you be open to dance education or dance training that does not include the competitive aspect? Figure 8 shows how the students responded, with the majority of students responding in a positive way.

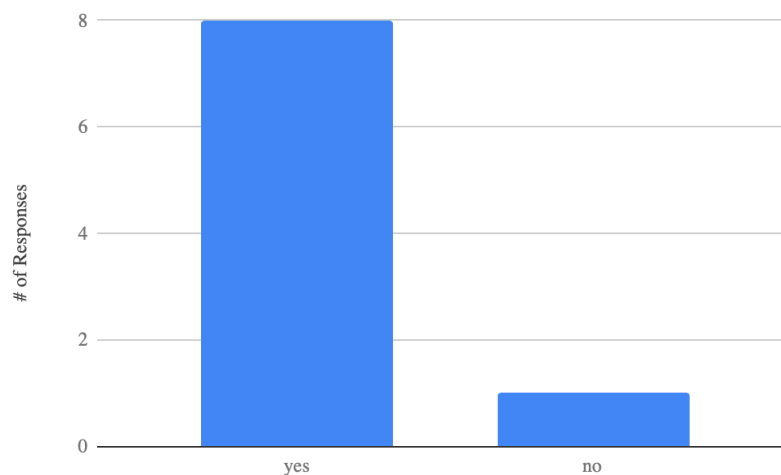


Figure 8: Student responses to electronic survey question sixteen.

From their detailed responses, the researcher discovered many students mentioned the desire to enjoy dance training without the pressure of learning and perfecting a routine. Student A elaborated on this thought when she wrote,

Yes, although I enjoy competitive dance, instead of the constant pressure to learn, use technique, and perform, I can enjoy the art of dance itself. Dance education and training without the aspect of competition lessens the stress of dance and opens up new boundaries of the exploration of dance and better understanding of dance.

Student I agreed, mentioning her personal experiences with non-competition dance education through her high school dance experience.

High school was the first time I was able to dance in a non-competitive environment and I honestly enjoy it more. Instead of worrying about if I am going to win or not or if I have to out-place my friend, I can simply be creative and do

what I love. I enjoy dancing without it being a competition because it is less stressful and more fun.

Some students described other kinds of dance programs they would be open to participating in if they had an opportunity to study dance in a setting that did not include competitions. These settings included recreational (non-competitive studio) programs, premier ballet schools, and in public and private school dance programs. They realized that participating in these experiences would allow them to focus more on technique and exploring the creative aspects of dance education in their training.

Summary

The data collected from the quantitative and qualitative analysis of responses to this survey indicated that students had mixed reviews of their experiences with dance competitions and competitive dance training. The quantitative data accumulated in this study provided the researcher with background information, including the number of years participants had been involved in competitive dance training. Quantitative data also resulted from questions which could be answered yes or no. Other questions allowed for responses which provided data which could be analyzed qualitatively and which was more detailed. Participants noted that, although most believed they were receiving the best possible training (six out of nine respondents), they also appeared to be open to other avenues of dance training (eight out of nine respondents) which did not involve competitions.

In the qualitative portion of the study, many students explained their training regimens, what they liked and disliked about dance competitions, and how they believed it has affected their experiences. In this same part of the study, the participants also described their perceptions concerning the influence of media, social media, and pop

culture on dance competitions and dance in general. Students felt they most enjoyed the sense of community established through their studios and the competition experience. However, many also agreed that what they enjoyed the least was the drama, pressure, and stress that came with competitions. The students noted that these effects were due to outside influences, including parents, teammates, and teachers, as well as being generated internally.

Although many students realized the competitive training would be beneficial and prepare them for future experiences in dance, they also believed their experiences were limiting because of the focus on perfecting one piece of choreography, and lack of emphasis on technical dance training. Even though more research is needed to identify the best practices for training young dancers, the responses in this survey revealed that the responsibility for entering a competition is shared between the teachers and studio owners, who provide these experiences, and the parents, who decide on the type of dance training the young dancers receive. Thus, all dance educators must assess their current pedagogy and discern whether they would like to and should have their students participate in dance competitions.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

As previously mentioned, this study was conducted to assist readers in understanding the advantages and disadvantages of participating in dance competitions. The final chapter of this thesis restates the research questions, reviews the methodology used, summarizes the findings, discusses limitations to the study, and provides recommendations for further research.

The Research Questions and Methods

As stated throughout this thesis, the intent of the study was to analyze student involvement and participation in competitive dance, and look at how the competitive training environment affected the student in all areas of their dancing. The following research questions were used to guide the study:

- Q1 What are the benefits of competitive dance in the development of young dancers?
- Q2 What are the negative aspects, or disadvantages of competitive dance in the development of young dancers?
- Q3 To what degree does the prominence of competitive dance in pop culture and the media affect the culture of dance training?
- Q4 What other dance training options are available other than the competitive dance option?

As explained in chapter three, the research instrument used in the present study was an electronic survey which was employed to measure the perceptions of current private studio dance students who participate in or did participate in dance competitions. The participants were nine female high school students from a local school, who participate in private studio dance training. The survey incorporated questions which could provide responses that were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively to enable the researcher to gauge the participants' perceptions and viewpoints concerning their involvement in dance competitions.

Interpretation of the Findings

The analysis of the more open-ended responses in this study showed that students were generally happy with their decision to participate in dance competitions. However, a higher percentage of responses indicated that many of the same participants would be fine leaving competition training to focus on different aspects of their dance education. Most students believed the best part of their competitive experiences was the camaraderie they developed with their peers. Most also believed the worst part of the dance competition experience was the highly competitive atmosphere, and the drama, pressure, and stress that comes along with it.

While answering the eighteen survey questions, the young dancers provided both positive and negative feedback regarding their experiences with dance competitions. One outcome was that participants felt they were getting the best possible training they could receive, but were open to other dance education options, because they thought they had outgrown competitions and were ready for new dance experiences. The dancers in this

study also agreed that media, social media, and pop culture have affected and influenced their outlook on dance competitions and how training is accomplished.

Limitations to the Study

Although the survey for this study was presented electronically without much participant interaction, it is important to note several limitations to the study and its findings. The primary limitations were connected to the survey questions, number of participants, and the survey demographics.

The first major limitation to this study was that the researcher wrote and designed the electronic survey. She attempted to create unbiased questions, but the survey was not tested for validity and reliability. Some questions may have limited the participants' responses because only some aspects of the competitions were addressed in the survey questions. Thus, other aspects of the competitions may have been overlooked in this report. The researcher also included quite a number of open-ended questions which may have deterred some participants from answering every question and giving honest feedback.

The next limitation to the study was the participant sample size. The present study included responses from nine dance students, but would have been significantly more rigorous with a larger sample size. The participants were all students at the same high school, but lived in different surrounding areas and attended different dance studios. The limited participant base may have also created a survey demographic that lacked diversity.

Lastly, the age and experience of participants in the present study created another limitation. Most participants in the study have been involved in dance competitions

between six to twelve years. Only two participants have been involved in dance competitions for less than six years. This meant it would have been beneficial to include the perspective of students in the research who were just beginning to compete. The age range of the participants was between fourteen and nineteen years. Adding more input from both younger dancers and those in college might also have brought a new perspective to the discussion of dance competitions.

Recommendations for Further Research

It is ultimately the responsibility of dance teachers, private studio owners, and parents, to decide whether they believe participating in dance competitions would be the right fit for their students and children. Parents must educate themselves on each studios' atmosphere, environment and mission statement, and also on the benefits and disadvantages of dance competitions. They must also have a discussion with their young dancers about outcomes they expect from their training. The outcome of this study could provide the basis of such a discussion.

Other topics that need to be researched are dance teachers' perceptions of dance competitions and the effect dance competitions have on the learning experience and preparation for future careers. This study focused solely on responses gathered from a student's perspective, but it would also be advantageous to identify how dance teachers view dance competitions. In addition, it would be useful to conduct a larger qualitative study on the effects of dance competitions on a young dancer's psyche. Face-to-face interviews might also provide more detailed and insightful responses. This study provided general feedback from young dancers who are currently or were previously

involved in dance competitions, but gaining different perspectives and insights on career readiness also calls for further study.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the researcher believes this study showed there are both advantages and disadvantages to participating in dance competitions. Through the use of an electronic survey, the researcher learned that students who participate in such activities encounter both enjoyable and unenjoyable situations, and have experienced both the benefits and disadvantages of dance competitions. These outcomes were similar to those described previously in the literature cited in chapter two.

The students in this study also noted they would be open to other dance learning and training experiences that do not include competitions. In response to the initial research questions in this study, the young dancers believed the benefits of dance competitions included: creating a sense of community, developing a wider exposure to the dance world, providing more performance opportunities, and instilling a positive work ethic. Young dancers thought the disadvantages of the competitions were: the drama, pressure, and stress that comes along with competing, the judging and awards, and the decreased emphasis on technical training. These high school aged dancers felt that pop culture, social media, and the media have influenced the culture and climate of dance competitions quite significantly. Lastly, the participants shared that they would be open to other dance training environments, including, but not limited to, recreational programs, performance companies, K-12 dance programs, and conservatory programs, all of which do not have an emphasis on competition.

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APPENDIX A
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FORMS



Institutional Review Board

DATE: November 6, 2018

TO: Teresa Schmitt

FROM: University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [1326743-2] Dance Competitions: The Culture, the Training, and the Effects on Young Dancers

SUBMISSION TYPE: Amendment/Modification

ACTION: APPROVED

APPROVAL DATE: November 6, 2018

EXPIRATION DATE: November 6, 2019

REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

Thank you for your submission of Amendment/Modification materials for this project. The University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB has APPROVED your submission. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on applicable federal regulations.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of November 6, 2019.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Nicole Morse at 970-351-1910 or nicole.morse@unco.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

Ms. Schmitt -

Thank you for your patience with the UNC IRB process. The first reviewer, Dr. Collins, and I have both reviewed your original, and amended, materials and are recommending approval. Please be sure to use the amended consent form and protocols submitted in this second package of your application in your participant recruitment and data collection.

Best wishes with your research and please don't hesitate to contact me with any IRB-related questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Dr. Megan Stellino, UNC IRB Co-Chair

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB's records.



CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO
PARENT/GUARDIAN

Thesis Title: Competition Dance: The Culture, the Training, and the Effects on Young Dancers

Researcher: Teresa Schmitt, Graduate Student at the University of Northern Colorado

Contact Information: schm8598@bears.unco.edu

Research Advisor: Dr. Sandra Minton, University of Northern Colorado,
sandra.minton@unco.edu

Your child is being asked to take part in a research study of the effects of dance competition and training and the response to a competitive atmosphere on young dancers. I am asking for your permission for your child to take part in this study. This study will be conducted through an online survey using Qualtrics, an online research tool. This survey will be taken during the students' free time when they are not in class. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to allow your child to take part in the study. This survey should take about an hour to complete.

What is the study about: The aim of this research is to discover answers to four questions: (1) What are the benefits of competitive dance in the development of young dancers? (2) What are the negative aspects, or disadvantages of competitive dance in the development of young dancers? (3) To what degree does the prominence of competitive dance in pop culture and the media affect the culture of dance training? (4) What other dance training options are available other than the competitive dance option? As part of the graduate research project, the research will assist the researcher and future readers of the final thesis in understanding both the positive and negative impacts of competitive dance. The purpose of this research is to show students' perspectives on competition dance, and how their training may affect those perspectives. This research will be completed in one semester. The method of research being utilized in this project is qualitative in which the researcher will identify common themes and opinions that emerge from the data collected.

Risks: The risks associated with this research are no more than what the potential participant would experience in everyday life. For example, feelings of fatigue could be associated with completing the online survey. Participants will be made aware that they are able to pause and save progress at any time during the survey process. Surveys will be completed and collected then coded with pseudonyms or numerical codes; therefore, there is no risk of confidentiality breaches for the participants. Other possible risks may be associated with the emotional connection to

Page 1 of 2 _____

(Parent's initials here)

answering opinion-based survey questions. Questions have been worded in an unbiased way that will allow the participant to answer honestly. Although it will be recommended to complete the entire survey, participants will have the option to skip a question if it causes anxiety or emotional stress in any way. Participants can also stop the survey at any point, save their answers and return to the survey later if need be. The researcher will provide these options in her verbal instructions to participants.

Your child's answers will be confidential: Every effort will be made to protect your child's identity. The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I make public, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify your child. A code system will be used to identify all participant responses included. No actual names will be used. I will use pseudonyms or numerical codes. The goal of the research is to simply document the effects of dance competitions on the development of young dancers. All data compiled from this study will be stored in a locked cabinet in the home of the researcher, and it will be destroyed after the completion of the thesis. No one else will have access to this cabinet. Completed consent forms will be stored in a locked cabinet in Crabbe Hall, room 308, the office of Dance Education co-coordinator Christy O'Connell-Black.

Taking part is voluntary: Participation is voluntary. Your child may choose not to participate in this study. If your child begins participation, you or your child may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you and your child are otherwise entitled.

If you have any questions: The researcher conducting this study is Ms. Schmitt. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have any questions later, you may contact me at any time. Please retain one copy of this letter for your records.

Participation is voluntary. Your child may decide not to participate in this study. If your child begins participation, you or your child may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you and your child are otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like your child to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact Nicole Morse, Office of Research, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-1910.

Statement of Consent: I have read the above information and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent for my child to take part in the study.

Child's Full Name (please print) Child's Birth Date (month/day/year)

Parent/Guardian's Signature Date (month/day/year)

Researcher's Signature Date (month/day/year)

Printed Name of Researcher Obtaining Consent Date (month/day/year)

This consent form will be kept by the researcher for at least three years beyond the end of the study and was approved by the IRB on (date).



UNIVERSITY OF
NORTHERN COLORADO

CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO
STUDENT

Thesis Title: Competition Dance: The Culture, the Training, and the Effects on Young Dancers

Researcher: T. Schmitt, Graduate Student at the University of Northern Colorado

Contact Information: schm8598@bears.unco.edu

Research Advisor: Dr. Sandra Minton, University of Northern Colorado, sandra.minton@unco.edu

You are being asked to take part in a research study of the effect of dance competitions on the development of young dancers. I am asking you to take part because you are involved in this educational experience. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the study.

What the study is about: The aim of this research is to discover answers to four questions: (1) What are the benefits of competitive dance in the development of young dancers? (2) What are the negative aspects, or disadvantages of competitive dance in the development of young dancers? (3) To what degree does the prominence of competitive dance in pop culture and the media affect the culture of dance training? (4) What other dance training options are available other than the competitive dance option? As part of the graduate research project, the research will assist the researcher and future readers of the final thesis in understanding both the positive and negative impacts of competitive dance. As part of the graduate research project, the research will assist the researcher and future readers of the final thesis in understanding both the positive and negative impacts of competitive dance. The purpose of this research is to show students' perspectives on competition dance, and how their training may affect those perspectives. This research will be completed in one semester. This research will be completed in one semester. The method of research being utilized in this project is qualitative in which the researcher will identify common themes and opinions that emerge from the data collected online through a website called Qualtrics.

What you will be asked to do: A survey will be posted to a data collection website called Qualtrics. The link to this survey will be emailed to you. This survey will take you about an hour to complete. This survey will be done on your own time, outside of class. Please be aware that you are able to pause and save progress at any time during the survey process. Surveys will be completed and collected anonymously then coded with pseudonyms numerical codes; therefore, there is no risk of confidentiality breaches for you. Other possible risks may be associated with the emotional connection to answering opinion-based survey questions. Questions have been worded in an unbiased way that will allow you to answer honestly. Although it will be recommended to complete the entire survey, you will have the option to skip a question if it causes anxiety or emotional stress in any way.

Page 1 of 2 _____
(Student's initials here)

Your answers will be confidential. Every effort will be made to protect your identity. The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I make public, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. A code system will be used to identify all participant responses included. No actual names will be used. I will use pseudonyms or numerical codes. The goal of the research is to simply document the effects of dance competitions on the development of young dancers. All data compiled from this study will be stored in a locked cabinet in the home of the researcher, and it will be destroyed after the completion of the thesis. No one else will have access to this cabinet. Completed consent forms will be stored in a locked cabinet in Crabbe Hall, room 308, the office of Dance Education co-coordinator Christy O'Connell-Black.

Taking part is voluntary: Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time.

If you have questions: The researcher conducting this study is Ms. Schmitt. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me with the information listed above. Please retain one copy of this letter for your records.

Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study and if begin participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact Nicole Morse, Office of Research, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-1910.

Statement of Consent: I have read the above information and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study.

Participant's Full Name (please print) Participant's Birth Date (month/day/year)

Participant's Signature Date (month/day/year)

Researcher's Signature Date (month/day/year)

Printed Name of Researcher Obtaining Consent Date (month/day/year)

This consent form will be kept by the researcher for at least three years beyond the end of the study and was approved by the IRB on (date).

APPENDIX B
RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

Student Survey

1. How many years have you been involved in competition dance?
2. What benefits do you experience in dance competition?
3. Describe your training experiences in regards to preparing for dance competitions.
That is, describe the process in which you prepare for dance competitions in as much detail as possible.
4. How has the competition experience affected your dance training?
5. What do you like about competing?
6. What do you dislike about competing?
7. In what ways do competitions or the competitive atmosphere affect you personally?
8. What aspects of competition dance do you like?
9. What aspects of competition dance do you dislike?
10. Did you feel differently about competition dance in different parts of your life? If so, how?
11. In what way has being involved in dance competitions and your specific studio training prepared you for your future?
12. In what way do you feel limited due to your training and involvement in dance competitions?
13. In what way have dance competitions prepared you for your future in ways that other forms of dance training or dance education has not?

14. Can you describe any connections between dance training and competition dance and various media platforms (eg. “Dance Moms,” “So You Think You Can Dance?,” social media, etc.)
15. In what way do you believe social media influences the dance industry and, more specifically, dance competitions?
16. Would you be open to dance education or dance training that does not include the competitive aspect? Why or why not?
17. Has being involved in dance competitions caused any stresses in your dance training or life? In your answer is yes, please describe the reasons for or the nature of such stress.
18. Do you feel that you are getting the best possible dance training by participating in a studio that involves dance competition? Why or why not?