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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

COMPETITIVE DANCE: THE PHYSIOLOGICAL AND  
PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS FROM THE  
PERSPECTIVES OF CURRENT  
VERSUS RETIRED  
DANCERS

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

Kristen DeMaria

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

December 2021

This Thesis by: Kristen DeMaria

Entitled: *Competitive Dance: The Physiological and Psychological Effects from the Perspectives of Current Versus Retired Dancers.*

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

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## ABSTRACT

DeMaria, Kristen. *Competitive Dance: The Physiological and Psychological Effects from the Perspectives of Current Versus Retired Dancers*. Unpublished Master of Arts thesis, University of Northern Colorado, 2021.

The intent of this research study was to inform students, teachers, and parents of the advantages and disadvantages associated with participation in competitive dance. Through the use of an electronic survey and questionnaire, the researcher evaluated the responses of forty participants through quantitative and qualitative analysis. The participants provided detailed information regarding their personal experiences, both past and present, in regard to the physical, mental, and emotional impact competitive dance had on their life.

The research questions addressed in this study were:

- Q1 What are the effects of competitive dance on a dancer's physical body?
- Q2 What are the effects of competitive dance on a dancer's mental well-being?
- Q3 How has involvement in competitions affected a dancer's personal reflections about themselves and their relationship with dance?

Limitations to this study included time restrictions, subject accessibility, the Covid 19 pandemic, and the construction of the survey and questionnaire. The survey and questionnaire were both created by the researcher and although she tried to develop questions in an unbiased format, the survey was not tested for validity. The next limitation was the Covid 19 pandemic which also correlated with participant accessibility. From the time frame August 2020 until August 2021, when the survey was available, the world was experiencing a global pandemic. Due to this, many people were affected negatively and therefore uninterested or unable to

participate. Lastly, because the survey was only available for a one-year time frame, the ability to collect more data from a larger sample size was limited.

At the conclusion of the study, the data supported that participation in competitive dance had both positive and negative effects on an individual's physical, mental, and emotional well-being. It is the responsibility of the dancers, parents and teachers to educate themselves on how competitive dance can impact the dancer, physically, mentally, and emotionally. This study showed how competition dance can have long lasting effects, both good and bad, on an individual's life.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Goal of Thesis**

Over the past decade, the perfect storm of reality television combined with social media has created an undeniable force that has directly impacted the dance community on a global scale. With this increased popularity, dance has been pushed to the forefront of popular culture which has allowed viewers from across the world to become entranced with highly proficient technical skills, unbelievable ‘jaw dropping’ tricks and heart wrenching performances.

Shows like *Dance Moms*, *America’s Best Dance Crew (ABDC)*, *World of Dance* and *So You Think You Can Dance (SYTYCD)* are all competitive based reality television shows that have brainwashed the population into believing all dance should have this elevated standard of spectacle. Executive producer of *SYTYCD*, Nigel Lythgoe, shared his optimistic perspective on the increased popularity of dance on television. In an interview he stated, “All of these programs have moved, I believe now, a generation and certainly revitalized dance and brought it before a much larger public arena than it’s ever had before” (La Rocco 2). Mr. Lythgoe is not wrong. The dance studio world is growing and according to IBIS World, “The Dance Studio Industry has experienced growth over the five years to 2019, with industry revenue increasing at an annualized rate of 3.8% to \$4.0 billion during the period, including an estimated growth of 1.4% in 2019 alone.”

However, this new dance craze should bring some concern to participants since the information and research about competition in dance and its effects are lacking (LaPointe-Crump

5). There is very little to no research on competitive dance and how it effects an individual for the short term and long term. Overall, there is not much scholarly information on dance competitions, as they are relatively new, especially to the awareness of mainstream culture (Mack 12). Dance has always been relatively competitive in nature due to its requirement of auditioning for specific roles within a piece or moving up a level within a class. Today, the extreme cut-throat level of competitiveness that dancers experience is far beyond the original intent of healthy competition.

The expectations for a dancer's skill level have continued to increase and to keep up, parents are enrolling their young children in countless hours of classes to meet the new norms. It is the researcher's contention that the increased interest in dance competitions is partially responsible for the desire to invest in more classes. To many parents, more classes mean more training, and more training means a stronger dancer. However, more is not always better. The saying, "quality over quantity" could not be truer in this circumstance. If dancers are receiving high quality training in reasonable doses each week, this will cultivate a far more educated and talented dancer who can withstand a longer lasting career in field that demands so much physically and emotionally from every participant.

As a result, with hundreds of hours of training each week, dancers are now experiencing serious injuries that potentially have lifelong effects, not to mention a loss of interest in dance or burnout. In the sports arena, it is well-known that high achieving athletes are likely to over train to the point of exhaustion, self-injury, and stress before the competition even begins (Robson). In a recent study published in the *Journal of Athletic Training*, young dancers were tested to identify the types of injuries sustained from dance. The intent of the study was to retrieve data on adolescent dancers' instead of career professionals. Most studies of injured dancers have been

carried out on professional adult dancers; data on young, nonprofessional injured dancers are sparse (Steinberg 118). The following outcome was concluded in a study of 569 dancers ages 8-16 years old:

In the pursuit of excellence and self-accomplishment through the physical practice of dance, dancers continually face the danger and challenge of dealing with injuries...As many as 60% to 90% of dancers are injured during their careers, and most of their injuries affect the lower extremities and back... This lack of information concerning young dancers prevents the adoption of any preventive strategy and exposes these dancers to injury. In the long run, it may negatively affect their future careers as dancers. (Steinberg 120)

In the article “How Much is Too Much: Dancers and the Risks of Burnout,” authors Brenton Surgenor and Jamie Redfern discussed the potential causes of dancer burnout, providing warning signs and prevention tips. Effective treatments are available for dancers who have experienced symptoms of burnout, but the smarter idea is a proactive approach to the issue. The long list of warning signs provided by Surgenor and Redfern included but are not limited to the following: constant fatigue, excessive sweating, inability to recover, susceptibility to injuries and signs of depression.

Clearly dance is a physical activity and because of this, excessive participation can have a physical impact on a dancer’s body. Another unseen, and arguably more important impact dance can have on an individual, is its ability to impact the dancer’s mental state, identity and self-perception. Competition can encourage youth to work towards high goals and strive for their personal best, but it can affect an individual’s sense of well-being. In the *New York Times* article, “Inside the High-Drama World of Youth Competition Dance,” Lizzie Feidelson took a closer

look behind the scenes at the action that happened during a studio dance competition. Feidelson, who was both impressed and disturbed by what she witnessed from the dancers, ended the article with an interview from competition judge Jared Grimes. When asked what he thought about the mindset required to participate in competitive dance, Grimes responded, “These kids are like gladiators. The dominating, the mind games, the winning. It’s all strategic.” If a dancer does not have a strong moral compass or sense of who they are and what they are worth, then their ability to understand the bigger picture, win or lose, will not be possible.

In contrast, people can work competitively without necessarily comparing self-ability to the abilities of others (Sobash 11). Such skills develop resiliency but are they taught in every competitive studio setting? And if not, how does a dancer cope with loss or feeling like they are not good enough when comparing their skills to those of other dancers? With social media on the rise, comparison syndrome has become more common amongst dancers. Denise Jacobs described comparison syndrome as: You frequently feel like a failure when viewing the success of others. You feel dispirited and paralyzed in moving forward with your own work because it will never measure up to what others have done (Jacobs). A competitive setting only increases a dancer’s awareness of others since the whole purpose of a competition is to be ranked against other competitors. When a dancer constantly experiences defeat, their view of themselves can be negatively altered.

Over exposure to a competitive environment may impact a child’s behavior in more ways than we are currently aware of. Even after a dancer’s competition career is over and the child has grown into an adult, the experiences they had during their time as a competitive dancer can have a lasting impact on their life. In her article, *Dance, Sport and the Unspoken Trauma of Retirement*, Rachel Healy discussed the challenges dancers have faced when dealing with

retirement. For most, their love of dance far outweighed any negative experiences they might have had during their career and the forced exit from the dance world held much sadness, regret and uncertainty. United Kingdom's well-known dancer and choreographer, Akram Khan, referred to his transition into being retired as "...violent, even if it is not physically it is emotionally violent" (Healy).

Whether a dancer is currently involved in the competitive dance world or has retired from competing, there are positive and negative effects which will be explored in further detail throughout this research. From this study, the researcher hoped to discover a correlation between competitive dance and resulting injuries, body image issues, self-doubt, anxiety, and stress. On the positive side, the researcher also wanted to investigate the connection between competitive dance and developing teamwork abilities, mental stamina, physical progress, pride, drive and passion. A final goal of the thesis was to use the information gathered from the research regarding competitive dancers as a means to educate dancers, teachers and families about the advantages and disadvantages competitive dance has on an individual's psychology, physiology, self-perception and relationship to dance.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the advantages and disadvantages of competitive dance for current and retired participants. Competitive dance requires much effort from a dancer mentally and physically and quite often these harsh demands are not necessarily something the dancer is prepared to handle. Whether it be contorting the body into inhumane positions, repeating the same movement within the rehearsed choreography or receiving harsh critiques from judges, competitive dance clearly has the ability to negatively influence the lives of its participants. On the other hand, competitive dance offers dancers the ability to receive

premier training, be part of a team environment, explore artistically, and be exposed to many opportunities that could impact their future career in dance. Mia Michaels, a well-respected choreographer from *SYTYCD*, shared her beliefs about competitive dance and the importance of balance: “It's about balance. If the studio or kid just focuses on competitions, they can get so caught up in winning they lose why they're doing it. A lot of times competition kids dance like robots ... all tricks and no emotion or artistry. You can get caught in the formula of what will win a trophy as opposed to training a real dancer” (La Rocco 4).

It is safe to say that dance competitions are quite normal for young dancers, and many dancers have found success and strength through them. However, it is important to clarify that dance competitions should not be the only approach used to train as a dancer. Non-competitive studios are also an option, where the dancer can focus more on technique and less on an excessive number of performances. A culminating recital can be presented by a non-competitive studio once or twice a year and is an event enjoyed by family or friends. In this environment, the recital is often viewed as a celebration of the student's progress. However, noncompetitive studios do not always provide students with the same opportunities that one can experience in a competitive studio.

Done properly, competitive dance can heighten a dancer's abilities, talent, work ethic, and drive, but it never should be substituted for technique or passion (Mack 6). With such an intense number of hours in rehearsal, the dancer will see more rapid improvement and growth within their flexibility, strength and ability to retain choreography. Competitive dancers are exposed to the latest and greatest technical or stylistic fads, which keep the dancer relevant, but do not necessarily guarantee proper training. Competitive dancers are asked to push themselves mentally and physically on a regular basis and because of this, they are able to reveal layers



within their identity. Dancers may uncover the fact that they are strong willed, hardworking, determined, brave and more capable of accomplishing a goal they might have felt was out of reach. “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” (Sobash 62).

In order to uncover more information about the positive and negatives effects of competition dance, the researcher focused the study on three questions. The research questions addressed in this project were:

- Q1 What are the effects of competitive dance on a dancer’s physical body?
- Q2 What are the effects of competitive dance on a dancer’s mental well-being?
- Q3 How has involvement in competitions affected a dancer’s personal reflections about themselves and their relationship with dance?

### **Significance of Study**

The momentum of competitive dance has and will continue to snowball with the influences of reality TV and social media. With Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, young people are able to see dance almost instantaneously (Schmitt 2). The significance of this research was to educate the reader about the impact competitive dance can have on an individual during their time of participation as well as the unpredicted long-term effects that may alter and influence the life of a retired competitive dancer afterwards. The information found in this study could educate teachers and students about the importance of proper training, injury prevention, creating a supportive studio environment, how self-talk relates to self-worth, the issues of comparison, internal verses external motivation and burnout which can be the effects of being involved in competitive dance.

The study also was designed to provide teachers with reasons why competitions should be viewed as a secondary focus, while cultivating and nurturing a well-rounded human being should be the primary emphasis in dance training. Dance can foster the discovery and cultivation of important life skills that translate from the studio to the real world. Every opportunity to dance can help improve an individual's confidence, creativity and communication. Fred Astaire Dance Studios try to convince any hesitant participant to join class with a reminder that, "In today's fast-paced world, we sometimes forget to take a moment for ourselves. Dance lessons provide an enjoyable escape from your normal daily routine, plus a chance to relax, relieve stress, and concentrate just on yourself."

Competitiveness can inspire positive attributes leading youth to success and appropriate personal improvement (Robson 162). If competitive dance is approached in the right way, it can be an incredible opportunity for growth-and self-discovery. Studio owners need to understand how and why having a supportive studio environment is important. Taking the time to educate students about dance as an art form and that objectivity is necessary when it comes to judges' feedback. The mental stability and fragility of students is not heightened in an environment where they feel 'less than' or not good enough. Often, having these feelings can be attributed to the inability to complete a skill with perfection or feeling like they have let down parents, teammates or teachers by not winning. Renowned dancer, teacher, and choreographer Mandy Moore once said, "Competition doesn't determine the success you're going to have or what kind of dancer you're going to be. Don't let it define who you are as a dancer" (Mack 10).

The intent of this research was to also educate students and families about the value of proper training. Dance training is very expensive by itself but add in costumes, competitions and conventions and the fees are insurmountable. Before committing to a studio, families should do

adequate research to make sure the teachers have exceptional training and education.

Investigating a dance studio's website is a great first step. The Metropolitan School of the Arts is a dance studio located in Virginia whose website has a great description of the studio philosophy and their approach to teacher training. The website educates the readers with the following information:

In order to maximize the learning potential, all dance teachers on faculty follow a unified, well developed syllabus created by dance education specialists. All dance faculty participate in continuing education and training throughout the course of the year on teaching principles, learning styles, safe dance practice and content. Dance faculty meet regularly with the administration to discuss the progress of each student to ensure their development and success. (The Metropolitan School of the Arts)

Dancers should reflect on what it is they are seeking to gain from competitive dance, and whether their goal is the experience or the trophy. In 2019 *Dance Spirit* magazine published an article titled, "10 Things More Important than Winning a Dance Competition." This piece of literature discussed the top reasons why dancers should be involved in competitive dance and receiving a trophy was not amongst the exclusive list. The ten-reasons listed were: sportsmanship, a chance to perform, community, inspiration, feedback, personal growth, teamwork, exposure, camaraderie, and self-celebration (Riley 3). If the primary concern for a dancer is taking home a trophy, then there should be concern from the parents and teacher that the student has the wrong intentions in mind.

Some of the ways to assess the studio environment concerning its possible effects on students include interviewing students or parents at a particular studio. This can be done by asking them about their experiences and why they would or would not recommend joining the

studio. Another way to assess the studio environment would be to take a ‘drop-in’ or trial class followed by having a discussion afterward with the teacher or studio owner about their studio’s philosophy. It is important to ask questions like: What are common classroom management behavior strategies? Are the costumes and music age appropriate? Does an open-door policy exist? Does each dancer have an individualized curriculum? Every person has different needs and every studio, competitive or noncompetitive, has a different approach to teaching dance. Finding the perfect match will take time and research but ultimately, it will be well worth the time invested.

Dance is a beautiful art form that can be experienced through various outlets including, but not limited to, competition. From this study dance teachers, students and parents could have more information about the advantages and disadvantages of competition dance and how it can have lasting effects for a dancer physically and mentally.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **The Competitive Culture of America**

The American society has been built upon the culture of competitiveness. The drive, desire and need to establish dominance as number one, is part of what has driven Americans to be, create, and earn incredible achievements. Winning Olympic gold medals, discovering medical breakthroughs and developing innovative technology are feats that can be attested to a competitive mindset. Competition is a social process that is so pervasive in Western civilization that no one can escape it (Robson 161). Australian author, Richard H. Stephens credited the competitive American spirit to the fact that America is known as the “Land of Opportunity.” In his article, “The Role of Competition in American Life,” Stephens discussed the idea that people from all over the world want to uproot their lives and move to America because of the idea that ‘opportunity’ is readily available. With so much desire to pursue the ‘American Dream’, people are required to fight for the life they want to create in a place where supposedly, anything is possible. Competition is a result of millions of people wanting to live out their dream and having to outdo one another in order to do so. The purpose of this study was to explore how competition impacted the experience an individual had before, during and after the competitive event, specifically in the dance community.

The desire for Americans to be the best sounds great in theory, but when does it become too much? When does competing cross the line of being healthy and encouraging, to turning into

a detrimental situation of overwhelming anxiety and pressure? Doctor Jim Taylor used his psychological background to take a closer look at whether or not competition is positive in the article, “Has America Become Too Competitive?” Taylor claimed, “I’m seeing some pretty clear indications that America’s competitiveness may be getting more than a little out of hand.”

Taylor blamed Americans’ interest in turning everything into a competition in the media and popular culture. For example, competitive reality TV shows provide viewers with the ability to live vicariously through the winners while experiencing the most exquisite schadenfreude by watching the losers, without having to face the potential risks of experiencing these highs and lows first hand (Taylor). Americans have been sucked into a vortex that has turned simple everyday tasks, such as cooking, into a game of ‘who can do it better?’ With competition blatantly shoved into the face of every American, Taylor proposed an important question. He asked, “Do so many people find watching others compete at these activities more rewarding than actually doing them themselves simply for the joy of it?”

### **Culture of Competitive Dance**

The nature of dance was not derived initially from competition but rather was integral to self-expression, celebration, and tradition. Historically, “...dance was an important means of social interactions... the primary functions of dance were social and religious” (Kassing 22). Dance was used to explore individualism but was often performed during ceremonies or rituals. During the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the birth of ballet began in the royal courts of Italy and France. Over time, as dance became an art form that required disciplined study, it began to grow in a more competitive direction, resulting in the rise in interest in competitions. Dancers had a new-found desire to attend dance schools, which led to auditioning for famous companies, or being cast in a

lead role. The culture of present-day dance versus dance over a century ago has completely shifted from very little focus on competition into an extreme obsession with winning at all costs.

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 their last circulating year, dance competitions held by this organization included more than 52,000 dancers (Schmitt 10).

There are hundreds of different competition companies across the nation and each is a privately owned business that profits from the participation of paying customers. A majority of the competition companies try to stay as relevant as possible by building their faculty with dancers who have just won the most viewed competitive dance reality television show, awarding their participants with the shiniest trophy or hosting the competition at a ritzy venue. Reflecting the ideals of the competitive American mindset, competition companies are also competing with each other to maintain and grow their businesses as well. There are over 100 different dance competition companies that tour across the United States including, NUVO, Velocity, Showstopper, NYCDA, Jump and West Coast Dance Explosion. The best way to make participants interested in returning year after year is to emphasize the overall experience they have at the event. Competition organizers have capitalized on what participants wanted—a place to perform and feel good about one's dancing (Schupp 363).

In the competitions, dancers have the ability to perform as an individual or in group dances and can demonstrate their skills in the following styles: tap, jazz, ballet, contemporary, hip hop, musical theater, acrobatics, improvisation and more. When the dancers compete, they are placed in a category which is created by a set of variables. The dancers age, years of dance

experience, style of choice, and group size are important factors that divide the competition into multiple categories.

Velocity competition literature explained the breakdown of their seven different age divisions starting with mini (5-8 years old) all the way up to Pro-Am (20+ years old). At Velocity, regardless of the dancers' age, or the point system, the judge's scoresheet remains the same. Dancers are judged on technique, performance, choreography and musicality, and overall appearance. 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).”

Dance competitions are marketed and perceived by participants as places to connect with dancers, to perform and share what is learned in the dance studio, and to receive feedback from a trusted panel of experts (Schupp 59). The judging panel at each competition consists of highly acclaimed dance professionals who have the experience, knowledge, and ability to share their expertise with the competing dancers.

In the article “Dance Competitions: Are You Ready?” author Allison Gupton, shared with the reader a helpful resource about preparing your dancer mentally and physically for the rigorous demands of the dance competition world. Gupton stated the book *Dance Competitions: Are You Ready?* by Jill Ann Wolins is, “. . .the perfect book for a studio or dancer that wants to begin competing, a studio or dancer wanting to know how to improve their competition skills, or a seasoned studio or dancer looking to refine their competition skills as a whole” (Gupton). Gupton's article addressed Wolins' concern with the fact that dance competitions continuously vary in their award ranking systems and outcomes due to the variance in the judging staff. Wolins expressed, “Dance competitions are unique, as results are determined by a panel of



judges and their opinions.” A key word in the statement by Wolins, is ‘opinion.’ Dancers will receive feedback from various judges throughout their competition season and often times judges can give feedback that contradicts that of another judge. In the end, who is to say which opinion matters more over the other? According to Schupp’s article, “Dance Competition Culture and Capitalism,” the qualifications for dance competitions clearly exist but might be based on dated stereotypes.

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)

Ultimately, dance competition companies are a for profit business that need to make a substantial income in order to thrive. Putting on the event can be expensive but participating in the event comes at a very high cost as well. The studio will pay a fee for every dancer to attend and the dancer is charged an entry fee for each routine in which they perform. Most competitions do not put a limit on how many routines in which a dancer is allowed to perform. Often times, over the two-or three-day event, dancers can compete in upwards of ten routines which can cost thousands of dollars. As an award, many competitions give out scholarship money that can waive the fee of the dancer for the next regional or national event they attend with that company. Scholarships can also be awarded for collegiate dance programs, but the most common awards given are the predictable trophies, crowns and medallions. Few competition companies, like NYCDA, pride themselves on viewing tangible awards as a second priority. Executive Director

Lanteri said, "It's not about the trophy here. It's about the journey. This is the real deal. This is the closest thing they will get to the professional world. That's what keeps people coming back, not the fact that we give them an award" (Kinetz).

Competition organizations belong to an industry that continues to show growth and stability. Though reality television shows may be a trend, the interest and love of dance in America has found its permanence within the culture. "Dance competition culture involves numerous stake-holders, from competitors and their guardians to competition judges and organizers to studio owners and teachers, and others. It is a multilayered phenomenon centered around dance as entertainment, competition as a vehicle for improvement, and consumption of dance" (Schupp 59).

### **Youth in Competitive Dance**

A choice often made by parents, is to enroll their young child in a dance class with the intent to increase motor skills like balance, range of motion and strength. Regardless of the age, "...movement is essential for survival, our brains are highly stimulated by dance" stated Jennifer Stahl in her article "We're Born to Dance-Science Says So!" Dance studios welcome students of all age levels and experience. Many studios even offer a 'mommy and me' class where the mother and child, as young as 12 months old, can attend class together and bond over music and movement. Bodies are inclined to move when music is heard so exposure to dance at a young age is a positive experience. However, when a dancer or a parent decides for the dancer, that competitive dance is the right avenue for the child, a more serious approach to the once leisurely activity, will start to shift the focus. Competition is not a negative term, but when a young individual is not physically and psychologically mature enough to manage the situation, it is detrimental to their social development (Sobash 66).

While some students make the choice to become involved in competition others have the choice made for them by a parent or guardian. Without doing the proper research beforehand, one can be surprised by how much time is required to train and rehearse, let alone additional time spent participating in competitions themselves. In her MFA thesis, *The Psychology of Competitive Dance: A Study of the Motivations for Adolescent Involvement*, author Samantha Sobash shared powerful insights about the participation of youth in dance competitions.

While most feel it is important to view dance competitively, there is still the hesitation to encourage adolescents to participate in youth dance competitions. Competitions take a major toll on a young individual's social life. Competition requires a lot of extra hours of rehearsals, training, and traveling to competitions. Dancers involved in competitions have little to no free time. There are no opportunities for youth in competitive dance to explore other interests. (Sobash 65)

The expectation of a competition dancer, regardless of age or skill level, is set at a high standard. What is seen in television reality shows, like *Dance Moms*, has become normalized behavior. When the focus for the dancer, parent or teacher has changed from learning throughout the experience to winning the biggest award, there should be a concern. Can dancers achieve an artistic experience when concerned with winning or losing? What happens to the losers? (LaPointe-Crump 5). Sobash also addressed the idea that it is imperative for the social development of the child to be protected for the sake of their well-being. Over exposure to loss, defeat, or comparison can have lasting effects on a child's psyche.

#### *The Advantages of Dance Competitions*

In the following section, the researcher discussed the advantages of dance competitions in terms of their physical and mental impact and the opportunities they provide to participants.

## Physical Impact

Science has proved that dance has a multitude of physical benefits for the human body. Not only can dance improve the body externally, but internally it can improve the functions of the brain as well. Flexibility, strength, stamina, balance and coordination are examples of physical improvements dance can have on an individual's physique. Dance can act as a means of exercise, therapy and for some individuals, like 55-year-old modern dancer Valerie Perdue, dance is transcendental. She stated, through dance we are, "...connecting ourselves to our bodies in elemental ways" (Ianzito).

In order for a dancer to gain the skill needed to be competitive, they are required to take hours of technique class. Within technique class, regardless of the genre or style, the dancers will be moving and training at a high level for a long period of time. The nature of dance lends itself to the participant's need to engage various muscle groups through the duration of a class and the repeated motions can result in an increase of strength and muscle definition. Many dance studios offer a class specifically dedicated to building strength and flexibility within their dancers with the intention of preventing injuries. Elements Dance Space is a studio that titled such a class "Strengthen and Lengthen." In the description of the class the studio literature stated, "Strengthen & Lengthen is an active stretching class that targets the various muscle groups of the body. Tight muscles can cause imbalances that can lead to injuries, so we will be focusing on increasing flexibility and range of motion" (Elements Dance Space).

A unique trait of dance is the fact that choreography is ever changing. Dancers are required to memorize new movement which often requires focus and helps to maintain a high functioning brain. Dance can help prevent dementia, improve Parkinson's and is often used in therapy as a means to express feelings that may be difficult to verbalize. "The lead author of the

study, Joe Verghese, a professor of Neurology at Albert Einstein College of Medicine, said he's not sure why dancing had such a unique effect, but surmises that, 'unlike many other physical activities, dancing also involves significant mental effort and social interactions'" (Ianzito).

### **Mental Impact**

In Taja Riley's article, "10 Things More Important Than Winning a Dance Competition," she described her interview with faculty members of the competition company, National Dance Showcase. NDS's executive director, Sonia Pennington, was prideful about the fact that their company provides networking opportunities where dancers can create meaningful relationships with teachers, judges and fellow competitors. Pennington stated, "We try to build and foster a community of dancers that transcends their home studio." (The Pennington Studio). A main goal of NDS is to inspire their dancers to be great individuals at their studio and throughout their community. "We want them to see how wonderful they are—how much talent they have—and use that onstage and off. We want to support dancers in mind, body, and spirit." (The Pennington Studio). In a recent article, New York Dance Center shared four surprising benefits of dance competitions being: physical fitness, experience, exposure, and coping skills.

In the competitions, dancers have the opportunity to perform with a group but can also choose to perform a solo as an individual. As a soloist, the dancer has more control over the outcome of their dance because they are responsible for how often they practice and how serious they are about wanting to improve. The skills that a soloist can gain from competing as an individual are ownership, responsibility, and self-reflection. (18) Whether the dancer is competing in a large group or as a soloist, Sobash shared in her MFA thesis how a competitive environment can build helpful characteristics which are important in adulthood.

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)

Dancers can spend many hours together at studio rehearsals and competition performances. With so much time spent together, it is inevitable for the dancers to engage in an argument or have an issue with one another. However, in most cases, they ultimately build a special bond with one another because of their shared experiences together. Lifelong friendships are established between dancers at the same studio or dancers who have grown up competing against one another at regional competitions across the state or country. “Many times, dancers feel their most important and closest friends are their dance friends...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” (Schmitt 21).

Competitive dance can help develop an individual from a young inexperienced dancer to become a mature, well-rounded artist. With constant exposure to new choreography, people and situations it encourages each participant to be social, confident, and open to opportunities. If the teacher or parent can encourage the student to have a positive perspective on competitive dance then win or lose, the dancer will gain knowledge and experience from each event. Author and dance professional, Rhee Gold, provided his audience with helpful advice in his article “On My Mind: Find the Real Win in Competition.”

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)

### **Opportunities**

One of the biggest selling points for participating in dance competitions are the opportunities that come with the territory. With exposure to industry professionals, dancers have a chance to build relationships that can help bridge the gap from dance as a hobby to dance as a career. 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 (Schmitt 20).

Competitions are also well-known for providing winners with scholarship money which can support the study of dance at a collegiate level. In order to produce dancers that are prepared and capable of making their mark in the dance world, it is essential "...to expose students to the highest caliber of talent available" (Gold).

Miss Dance Drill Team USA is an organization that prides itself on the scholarship opportunities it offers to all contestants. Dr. Kay Teer Crawford, the company founder, has a scholarship in her honor which is awarded to a high school senior planning to pursue higher level education at an accredited college or university with the intent to major in dance and/or other related performing arts (MDDT USA). Many competition organizations reflect a similar ideal and want to award their dancers with financial support to pursue dance after high school.

Participants in the competitions are also sometimes rewarded with extended training and travel opportunities (Schmitt 19). As much as dancers can appreciate winning a trophy or crown, there is more value in an award that provides the dancer with experience. Tremaine is a well-

known organization that travels across the United States and visits over 40 cities to host their regional and national dance competitions. Tremaine offers their winners a chance to be part of their apprenticeship program through which they travel with the company, assist master teachers, and train with professionals at no cost. This kind of exposure is invaluable and can really help dancers build the skills and relationships they need to be successful in their dance career.

### *The Disadvantages of Dance Competitions*

In the following section, the researcher discussed the disadvantages of dance competitions in regard to their physical and mental effect on a dancer. The researcher also addressed the issue of artistic integrity and how it is impacted by competitive dance.

#### **Physical Impact**

Dancers are often compared to athletes because both partake in activities that require the utmost strength, stamina and dedication. In order to stay relevant in the competition circuit, dancers spend hours a day training with the hope of mastering their craft. Most professional dancers began dancing at the age of five or six, and the repetitive practice of movements that require extreme flexibility, strength, and endurance make them prime candidates for overuse injuries (Solomon et al. 31). There is also a good chance for dancers to experience a condition called burnout throughout their time training. “Burnout is a state of consistent or unexplained tiredness, poor performance in spite of normal training, negative mood state and increased incident of illness or injury. Burnout is often seen in dancers where training, rehearsing and performing schedules do not give them sufficient time to rest and recover” (Redfern).

If a dancer experiences burnout, it is common that their focus is elsewhere and the ability to experience an injury is heightened because their mind and body are disconnected. Parents and teachers play a big role in understanding what burnout looks like because dancers may not



recognize that they are going through it or understand the serious side effects that it can cause.

“The health and wellbeing of a dancer is the most important consideration, so keep everything in perspective...Focus on quality of training, not quantity...The old adage “no pain, no gain” and “more is better” needs to be understood and in most cases discouraged” (Redfern).

The repetition required in rehearsals and the demand of putting the body in contorted and obscure positions are concerning factors that occur during the process of perfecting a routine. What dancers often refer to as ‘cleaning’ can take a toll on a dancer quickly if the routine requires high energy, stamina and a variety of difficult skills. Choreographer, Lai Rupe, explained the term ‘cleaning’ as meaning that, “...you review a dance routine and basically edit it, to take out any of the ‘profane’ parts.” This process requires the dancers to repeat certain sections or tricks over and over again until all dancers are doing the dance perfectly and in unison, with the correct technique and with the right musicality. The more the routine is rehearsed, the more energy is expended by the dancers, and the higher the risk for an individual to experience an injury.

### **Mental Impact**

Competition requires an individual to be in peak physical shape but what about the condition of a dancer’s mental capabilities? Dance has the ability to bring joy, freedom, and fun into someone’s life, but those positive attributes can quickly switch to stress or anxiety dependent upon the situation. A competitive environment pushes dancers to perform at their best at all times but is that a realistic expectation? And if not, how can a dancer cope with letting down her teacher or team members in a situation where he/she is at fault for an imperfect performance? The stress dancers put on themselves to always be the best can cause their mindset

to spiral in an unhealthy direction if they are not given the proper tools to utilize in a situation where defeat is inevitable.

When dancers step onstage, they compete in a unique world in which they exhibit themselves for the attention of the audience (La-pointe Crump 4). All eyes are on the dancer and the dancer is aware of this intense focus which heightens their adrenaline and adds pressure to their performance. Some dancers thrive under pressure while others falter by giving into their anxiety and letting nerves get the best of them. This means the mental preparation before a dancer goes onstage is just as important as the physical preparation, but not all teachers or parents are aware of this factor.

If a dancer does not know how to calm their nerves or use them to their advantage, their performance can be negatively impacted. A poor performance can result in negative feedback from judges, teachers, peers and even parents. This has the potential to snowball into self-deprecating behavior which can alter a dancer's interest in dance, desire to improve, or cause them to go to extreme measures to regain praise from their audience.

Dawn Smith-Theodore was a professional dancer who struggled with an eating disorder throughout a majority of her career. As an anorexia-nervosa survivor, Smith-Theodore is a psychotherapist who specializes in eating disorders and the treatment process. She opened up about her struggle with her body image in her article "The Eating Disorder Trap: How Dancers' Perfectionism Can Make Things Dangerously Worse."

Dancers are required to look at themselves in the mirror constantly to check on placement and alignment within their bodies. However, such over exposure to seeking perfection in the mirror can cause negative thoughts to come to fruition. Smith-Theodore shared her story in the following excerpt:

It was when I began comparing myself to others and listening to the drill sergeant in my head that never stopped proclaiming that I wasn't good enough and needed to lose weight, that the mirror became my enemy... While perfectionism is part of the temperament some people are born with, dance further cultivates it. The perfectionist is highly motivated, self-disciplined and conscientious, with high performance standards—all the qualities needed to be a good dancer. Yet there is a dangerous line where perfectionism becomes problematic and the dancer begins to lose perspective. (3)

Historically speaking, the desired body for a dancer has been one which is very lean, thin and toned. Thus, a dancer can easily get it in their head that the only thing holding them back from the next career step is her weight (Spinner 2). This emphasis on being thin was reinforced by many ballet companies that required their dancers to step on a scale each week and report their weight in order to receive performance opportunities and compensation. Thankfully, the 'thin dancer' stereotype is taking a shift in a positive direction because companies are becoming more accepting of diverse body sizes in the dance world. However, there are still teachers who praise their students when they lose a significant amount of weight. If the teacher is not taking the initiative to educate the dancer on proper nutrition and the importance of a well-rounded diet, then the parent should take responsibility for educating their child on this topic. It should not matter what the dancer looks like as much as it should matter that they are eating whole unprocessed foods to support the demands of such a physical activity.

Parents must be cognizant of any nutritional or psychological changes their children display as a result of trying to conform to an unhealthy dance image. Eating disorders, disrupted menstruation, and counterproductive perfectionism are examples of problems that are more prevalent in dancers than non-dancers. The observant parent should be alert

to the development of such conditions and head them off before they become truly problematic. (Solomon et al. 33)

With too much emphasis on winning, competitive dancers can start to feel envious of their peers who are showing more success in receiving recognition during award ceremonies. Abigail Werner from Center Stage Performing Arts Studio in Orem, UT, recommended channeling your envy into something more constructive (Hilton 1). Instead of bad-mouthing a dancer for their success, Werner recommended to anyone who has ever felt jealous to, “Focus on being a good person—and friend!—first, and a good dancer second.” This is a mature outlook for a young dancer and not all dancers have an outlook that is as levelheaded. Again, the responsibility of teaching this behavior is in the hands of teachers and parents. All studios should have open discussions with the dancers about failure, resilience and the importance of a positive outlook.

### **Loss of Artistic Integrity**

Dance is classified as an art form because of its ability to communicate culture and create a storyline and expression through movement. With that said, a big criticism of competitive dance is the emphasis on training dancers to execute tricks over developing artistic understanding. LaPointe-Crump commented that, “. . . artistic intention and expression are destroyed when dancers prepare tricks and a kitsch routine to win prizes” (41).

The emphasis on tricks in the absence of self-expression is a concern that college educators feel needs to be addressed in the training of competition dancers. To an outsider or an uneducated audience member, the ‘wow factors’ within a dance are usually the showiest, latest and greatest tricks that involve more gymnastics skills than dance technique. Marita Cardinal noted 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” (Cardinal 9). 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 (Schmitt 22). Rhee Gold emphasized that competitive dance is not going anywhere anytime soon so regardless of whether it is positive or negative, helpful or hindbersome, it should be embraced. He wrote,

Approve or disapprove, competition is everywhere; it’s inspiring thousands of young people to enroll in classes. Those who are already training want to take more because they’re seeing what can be accomplished with hard work and dedication. As a result, we have stronger schools, dancers, and choreographers who are striving to be the best they can be. That’s a good thing! (Gold)

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this research project was to discover and analyze the effects of competitive dance on the physiological and psychological development of dancers who are currently competing and on dancers who are retired from competition. The research used the following questions to guide the study:

- Q1 What are the effects of competitive dance on a dancer's physical body?
- Q2 What are the effects of competitive dance on a dancer's mental well-being?
- Q3 How has involvement in competitions affected a dancer's personal reflections about themselves and their relationship with dance?

The purpose of the questions was to measure the impact of competitive dance on dancers currently competing in comparison to dancers who had retired from competing. This is a qualitative research project that includes the analysis of quantitative data. In this methodology chapter information will be presented about the research instruments used in the study, research participants, how the data were collected and the analysis of the data.

#### **Research Instruments Used in the Study**

The researcher used two complementary approaches to collect data which provided the participants a variety of ways to explain their experiences with competitive dance.

### *Survey for Participants*

One instrument used to collect data for the study was an electronic survey administered through the Qualtrics software program. The electronic survey was designed by the researcher with the intention of discovering the demographics of the participants as well as the dancers' perceptions on their involvement with competitive dance. The survey included twenty-one questions that provided the participants with multiple choice answer selections (Appendix C). Each question also gave the participants an opportunity to explain their responses in more depth through an explanation in a short answer response. When formatting the survey, the researcher believed that it was important to receive background information from each participant as well as information regarding the dancer's thoughts and feelings about their experience as a competitive dancer.

There were two variations of the survey, one for dancer's who were currently still competing in dance and the other survey was for dancers who were retired from competitive dance. The only difference in the survey formatting was the use of past and present tense. The survey included informative and subjective questions. In the informative questions, the researcher requested the general location of dance training, years of participation in competitive dance, and total years of dance training. The subjective questions requested information about dancer's opinions on their participation in competitive dance, specifically covering the following topics: time commitment, pressure, body image and body fatigue. Because of the use of informative and subjective questions, the researcher collected data that were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively.

The survey was available for participants to access from August 25, 2020 through August 20, 2021. A copy of both variations of the survey can be found in Appendix C.

### *Questionnaire for Participants*

The researcher also used a questionnaire that consisted of six questions intended for longer answer responses. The questionnaire only contained subjective inquiries and varied from the survey because it included questions that required participants to explain a personal story or experience that impacted them because of their involvement in competitive dance. The information collected from the questionnaire was solely qualitative because of the non-numerical nature of the questions. The questionnaire was given to only two participants from the retired group of dancers and one participant from the current group of competitive dancers. The questionnaire can be found in Appendix B.

### **Research Participants**

To recruit participants for the study the researcher sent out a recruitment letter via email and social media. The researcher has been involved in the competitive dance scene for fifteen years and was able to reach out to personal friends, studio owners, and dance team coaches to find dancers who qualified and were interested in completing the survey. Potential participants were then sent a personal email which contained consent forms that had to be completed and returned before completing the survey. A copy of the consent form can be found in Appendix C. Dancers had the opportunity to ask questions and were given a description of the parameters and goals of the study before they chose to participate. Participants under the age of 18 years old were required to get a separate consent form signed by a parent or guardian in addition to the assent form required from the participant. A copy of the assent form can be found in Appendix D. No dancers or parents found it necessary to clarify any information with the researcher before participating in the study or questionnaire.



Participants submitted answers for the survey through Qualtrics and the researcher kept all responses confidential by identifying each dancer with a correlating capital letter.

Communication was done solely through the internet and there was no sharing of personal information. Twenty-seven individuals completed the retired competition dancer survey, and thirteen participants completed the current competition dancer survey, totaling to forty participants.

The participants in the survey ranged from the ages of nine years old to fifty-two years old and vary in their years of dance training and competitive dance experience. In order to qualify to participate in the survey, dancers needed a minimum of one year of competitive dance experience. In regard to location, participants were asked their current location of residence as well as their location of competitive dance training. Figure 1 below for a summary of the residence locations for the retired competitive dancers who participated in this study. From this figure, it can be seen that the greatest number of retired participants lived in the West with the least number living in the Southeast and Midwest.

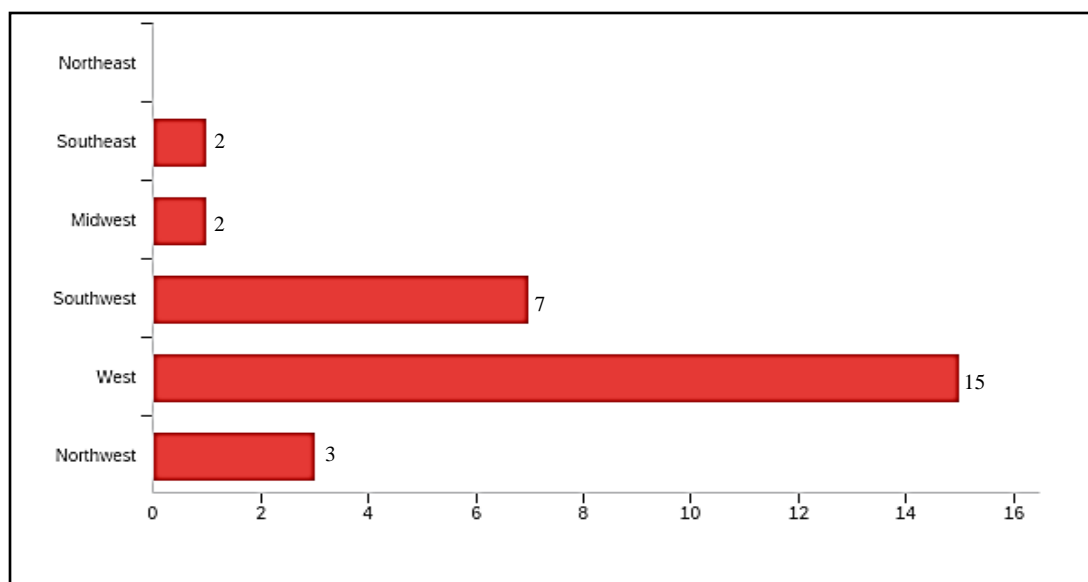


Figure 1. Current location of residence (retired competitive dancers).

Figure 2 below is a detailed breakdown of the locations where the retired competitive dancers trained. Again, the greatest number of this group of dancers trained in the West with the least being trained in the Midwest.

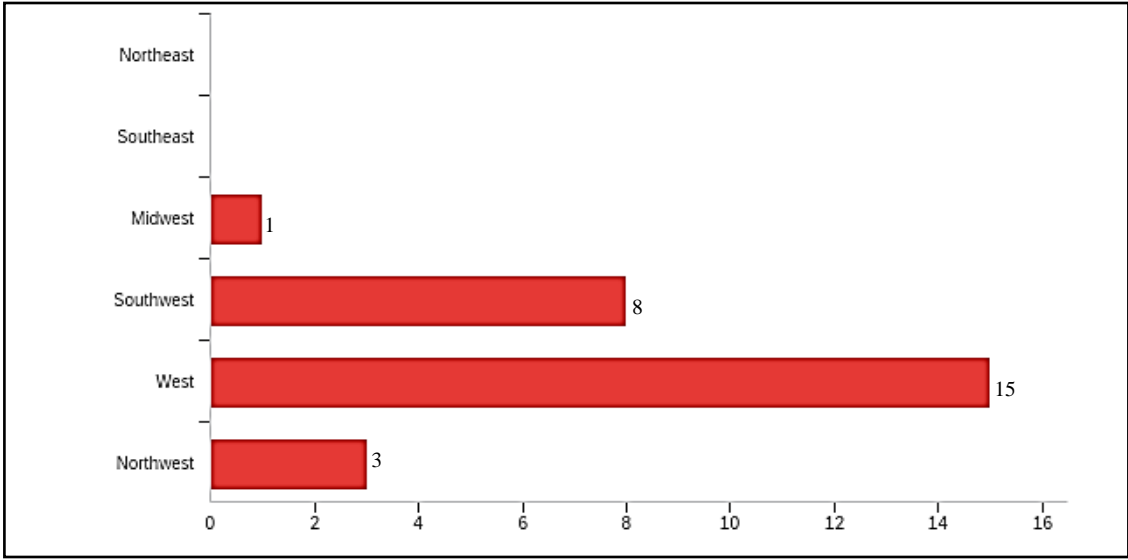


Figure 2. Location of competitive dance training (retired competitive dancers).

Figure 3 below displays the current residences of the current competitive dancers with most of these dancers living in the Southwest and the remainder in the West rather than in other parts of the country.

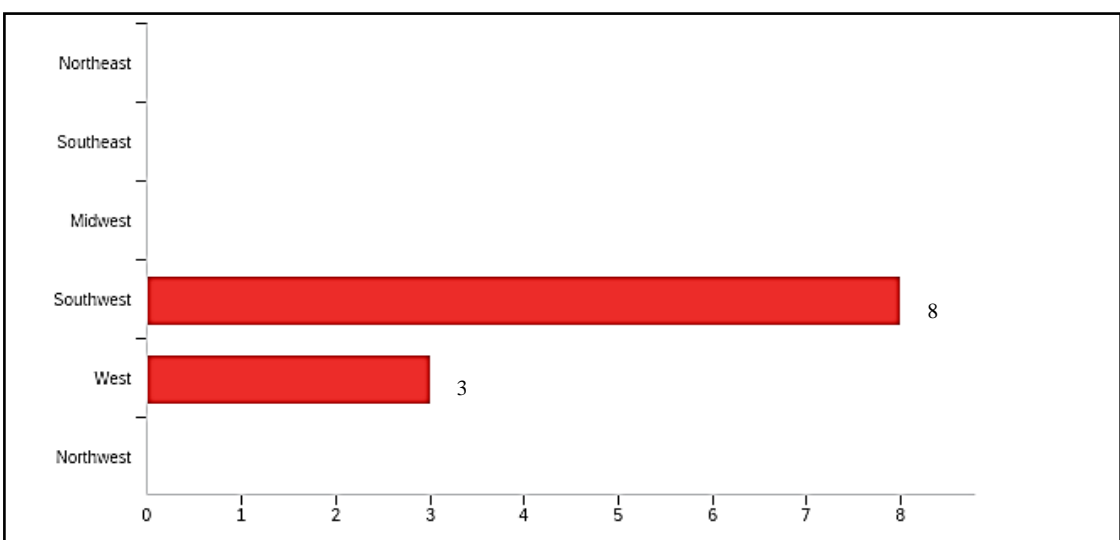


Figure 3. Current location of residence (current competitive dancers).

In figure 4 below it is possible to view the locations where the current competitive dancers train. This figure clearly shows that the majority who participated in the survey currently train in the southwest.

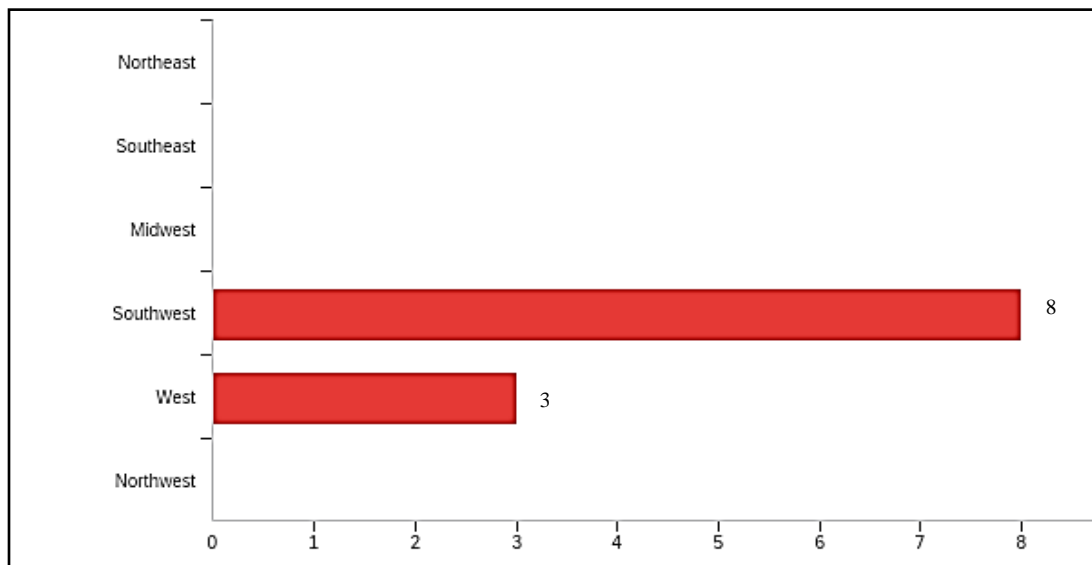


Figure 4. Location of competitive dance training (current competitive dancers)

Overall, the four figures clearly show that a majority of the dancers in the survey currently live and train(ed) in the southwest/west regions. Although there is no evidence in this study to further investigate the correlation of location and dance training, location may have an influence on a dancer's experience throughout their competition career.

### **Data Analysis**

Due to the design of the questions in the study, the data were analyzed using qualitative and quantitative methods. The participants answered twenty-one questions in an electronic survey and three participants answered short answer questions in a questionnaire. Responses to the questions from both research instruments were used as data to assist the researcher in the analysis of positive or negative effects of competitive dance.

The electronic survey and questionnaire were answered based on the perspectives and backgrounds of the participants' feelings, memories, or opinions of competitive dance. The researcher identified reoccurring themes within the qualitative data and was able to organize the various themes in a way to see the participants differences and similarities in their competitive dance experience. Seventeen of the survey questions provided the participants with multiple choice answers as well as the ability to write short descriptive responses explaining their selected choice in more depth. Questions answered with a yes or no response and multiple-choice answers were analyzed quantitatively and questions with a longer written response were analyzed qualitatively. The researcher designed the survey questions with the intention of gathering honest and detailed perspectives of how competitive dance impacted their psychological and physiological well-being. The survey questions and questionnaire are located in Appendix B. The outcome of the study is reported in the discussion chapter of the thesis.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, the researcher reviewed the purpose of the study, the research participants involved, as well as the instruments used to gather the data along with a description of how the data were analyzed. Through the use of the online software program, Qualtrics, the researcher designed a twenty-one-question electronic survey in addition to a six short response questionnaire. Both instruments were used in the study with the intention of collecting responses that would uncover data related to the three research questions.

The data were analyzed through qualitative and quantitative processes to develop a clearer understanding of the participants responses in relation to their experiences with competitive dance. The next chapter of the thesis will discuss the analysis of the data in more depth and the researcher will share pertinent information about the findings of the study.

## CHAPTER IV

### DISCUSSION

#### **Introduction**

In this study, the researcher focused on three essential questions regarding the positive or negative effects of competitive dance on dancers who are currently participating in competitions, as well as the long-term effects on dancers after they have retired from competition. The researcher focused on the effects that competitive dance can have on a dancer's physical body, mental well-being, and a dancer's personal reflections about themselves. The survey and questionnaire used for this study aimed to gauge the dancer's perspectives, past or present, on their experience with competitive dance. In this chapter, the researcher will discuss in depth the details of the participants responses and compare the responses of current competition dancers with retired competition dancers. The purpose of this study was to explore the advantages and disadvantages of competitive dance for current and retired participants.

#### **The Advantages of Competitive Dance**

Due to the popularization of reality television shows combined with the power of social media, competitive dance has become one of the biggest trends over the past decade. From an outside perspective, one may think dance is a simple pastime activity that is made up of sparkly rhinestones, behind the scenes drama, and silly tricks. However, through the data collected in this study, it is proven that the benefits of competitive dance have a lifelong impression on an individual and on their character. There are many benefits to participating in competitive dance

and through the responses gathered from the survey and questionnaire used in this thesis project, five themes reoccurred in the data: 1) establishment of an advanced skill set, 2) a sense of community and support, 3) increased self-confidence, 4) the development of life skills, and 5) integral feedback from the judge or judges, along with additional opportunities.

### *Physical Impact*

If approached in the right way, competitive dance can be used as an incredible tool to train a dancer and safely push them to discover their physical limits and develop a more advanced skill set. In the *Everyday Health Newsletter* an article “9 Health Benefits of Dance,” described these benefits as improved flexibility, the ability to fight heart disease, helping an individual lose weight, and creating better balance. In terms of this article balance referred to the stabilization and control of placement throughout the body. Competitive dance amplifies these benefits plus it provides the dancer with more ability to train at an elite challenging level.

### **Advanced Skill Set**

In this and the following paragraphs, the current competitive dancers are identified with the letter C followed by their number, while the retired competitive dancers are identified with the letter R and their number. When asked the question, “Are the movements you were expected to perform in your choreographed competition routines physically challenging for you personally?” Dancer R8 shared that competitive dance was beneficial because “...it physically pushed me in good ways and made me a better dancer.” It is the teacher’s responsibility to make sure the dancer is executing each skill with proper technique and alignment to avoid creating unnecessary injury or harm to the dancer’s body. Dancer C4 felt confident in her teacher’s ability to inform her with the correct safe alignment. She stated that learning new choreography or skills was never done, “...in a dangerous way, it was just exciting and challenging in a positive growth

way.” Dancer C11 had a similar experience with her dance teachers as well. She graciously expressed that, “My teachers would not push me past my capabilities, but they would still challenge me.”

Overall, both the retired and current competitive dancers agreed that the physical challenge of the competition choreography they experienced throughout their career was more helpful than harmful. Dancer R27 said the choreography was, “...just exciting and challenging in a positive, helpful growth way.” Dancer R15 also agreed with this idea and stated, “I loved being challenged in dance and always wanted to try the newest move. I would push myself to try different tricks.”

A big element of trying to succeed in competition dance is staying current with the latest fads and tricks. Each dancer is required to continue to push their minds and especially their bodies to achieve what it is the choreographer is asking him or her to do. Over time, as dance has increased in popularity, the skill level required by each dancer has also increased. The ‘wow’ factor has played a big part in keeping the judges entertained and making one routine stand out amongst the hundreds of others it is competing against. Reflecting back on their competition experience in comparison to movements and tricks competitive dancers execute in today’s competition world, Dancer R20 shared, “Looking back, the things we were expected to do weren't nearly as challenging as they are now. There were times where I thought ‘There's no way I can do that’, but somehow, I always did. I think the most challenging thing for me wasn't physical but mental.”

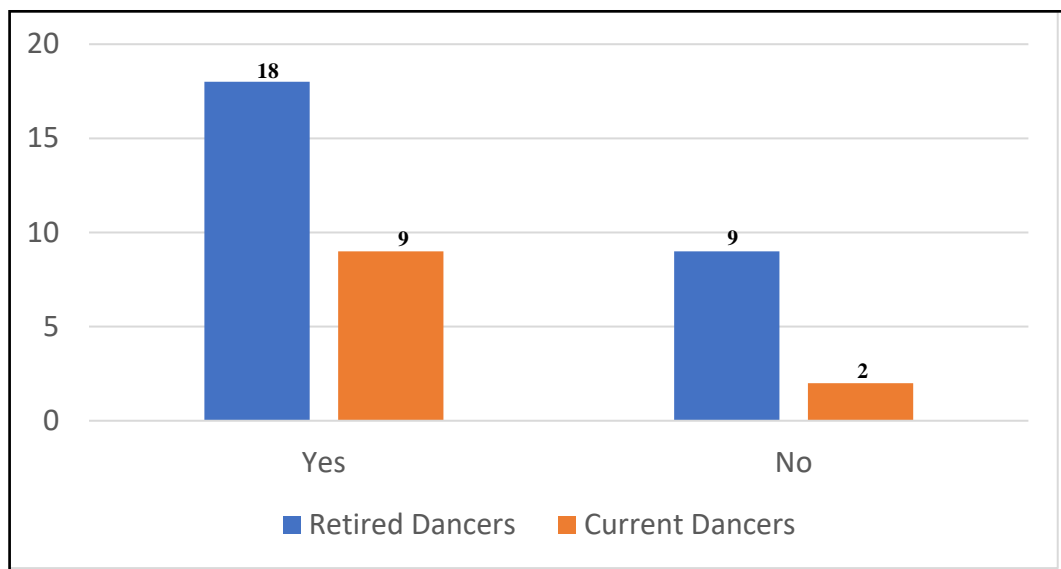


Figure 5. Summary of responses to survey question 9: Are or were the movements you were expected to perform in your choreographed competition routines physically challenging for you personally?

*New York Times* best-selling author, K. Bromberg is well known for the quote “You will never know your limits, until you push yourself to them.” This is the mindset needed to be a successful competition dancer. One may think their body is not able to physically complete a task but over time, with dedication and perseverance, the dancer will learn they are capable of the skill and much more. Dancer C2 freely admitted that the physical requirements of the competition choreography are, “...a good challenge, not over my head.” Dancer R10 explained that the choreography for her was, “...challenging yes... but I trained for the better part of a year to execute the movements correctly.” The physical benefits of competitive dance are only possible because of the mental impact it has on a dancer’s ability to push themselves regularly with a desire to see growth which is cultivated through support and community from their peers and teachers.



### *Mental Impact*

In analyzing the data collected through the participant responses to the survey and questionnaire, the mental impact of competitive dance on an individual far outweighs any other factor, positive or negative. Current and retired participants both supported the fact that they felt an increased sense of community and support through competition dance as well as gained self-confidence and life skills throughout the duration of their experience. In regard to receiving feedback from professional judges, the participants believed this feedback to be more helpful than harmful in the development of their confidence and skills.

### **Community and Support**

One important factor about competition in any sport or activity, is the fact that every member of the team is working toward a common goal. The idea of winning, should be enough to hold each team member accountable for doing their part to help achieve the common goal. Professional NBA coach and motivational speaker, Phil Jackson, claimed "...the strength of the team is in each individual member, and the strength of each individual member is the team." With a unified mindset, undeniable trust, collaboration and tenacity, a team can become unstoppable. These beliefs apply to athletics as much as they apply to competitive dance. The dancers rely on each other to play a certain role in each routine and follow through with the responsibility of completing their role to the best of their ability.

Dancer C1 explained her reasoning behind why community is built through competition dance. "Competition dance has affected my life in a positive way because it has provided me with a support system. Since competition dance requires a lot of rehearsals and time together, we form a genuine connection that is lifelong. This connection forms through the time spent together, but also the commonality of our passion and goals."

In total, the word ‘family’ was used over fifteen times in the participants’ responses to the question, “Do you feel competition dance created a positive support system in your life?” The themes of family, support, community, and friendship were discussed frequently in the short response section of this question. Out of all the participant responses, only one individual felt competition dance did not create a supportive environment.

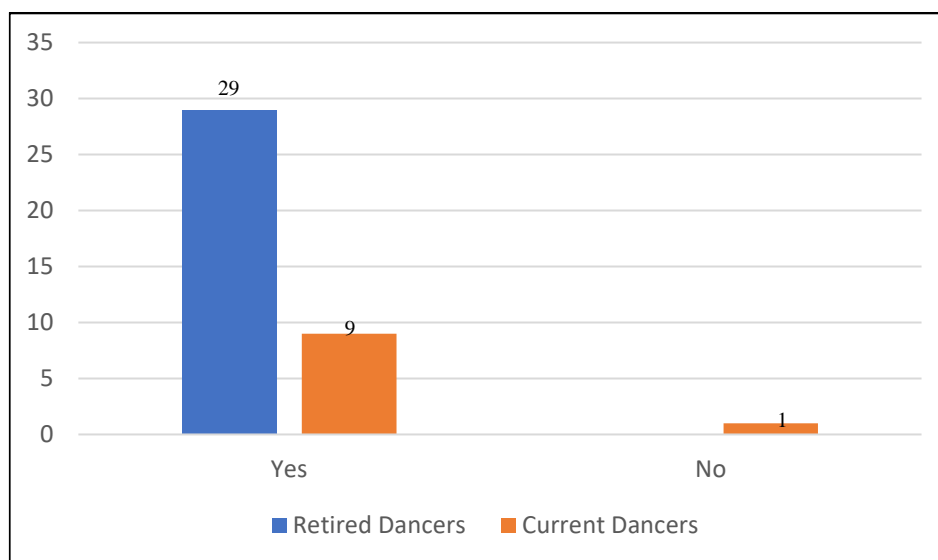


Figure 6. Summary of responses to survey question 11: Do you feel competition dance created a positive support system in your life?

Dancer R19 admitted that competition can be stressful at times but “...there was always someone supporting you through it. Parents, coaches, choreographers, and teammates supported me through it all.” Dancer R9 agreed and stated, “As stressful as competition life can be, some of my closest friends came from this environment which always put me at a sense of ease and comfort. These people you’re around all the time become your family.” Dancer R6 believed competition dance was responsible for building lasting friendships that helped her persevere through life’s challenges. She explained, “Competition dance was my thing!! I met my best friends, my mentors, and found myself through all the programs I was a part of. I went through a

lot of personal struggles throughout my years competing, and I can whole heartedly say that I would not be standing here today if it wasn't for the support system and outlet that dance gave me.”

Competition dance requires a huge time commitment due to extensive practices, dress rehearsals, and performances. Because of this, the dancers spend countless hours together and with their teachers which gives them the opportunity to get to know each other on a deeper level. Relationships are built through the struggles and the victories but overall, Dancer C8 clarified that “...getting to know your team is like building a family.” In hindsight, Dancer R21 reflected on her memories and stated, “I loved my friends and teammates that I danced with and feel like the things I learned helped me grow into the person I am today. I also feel like it constantly pushed me to challenge myself to be better, in a good way.” Competition dance served as a platform for the participants to build a community of like-minded individuals that supported one another on and off the performance stage. To echo this idea, Dancer C10 stated, “We all share the share the same passion and goals, which creates a strong support system.”

### **Confidence**

Question sixteen and seventeen in the survey related to self-confidence and the dancer's personal reflections about themselves. Both retired and current competition dancers, felt their sense of self-confidence increased more than decreased due to their experiences in competitive dance. Although most participants leaned toward feeling an increased sense of confidence in competition, Dancer R17 shared her reasoning behind why she felt her self-confidence decreased instead. She wrote, “I kind of have always hated myself and my body for not being better. That's just how I thought. I think those predisposed to like low self-esteem and anxiety probably feel

this way because your brain just constantly tells you that you aren't enough. Every negative comment is internalized, and the positive ones are overlooked or forgotten.”

Many participants had mixed emotions in their written responses to this question. Dancer R16 indicated, “I loved the atmosphere, but it definitely puts you in a position of critiquing your own talent and worth a good amount.” Similarly, Dancer R15 explained how this mindset shifted for her over time, “I found that my self-worth increased when I was younger, but as I got older and more aware of others, it slowly decreased (especially when I tried to transfer into the professional world).” Dancer R8, with another divided response stated, “I would say somewhere in the middle. there were times when I felt good because I was improving and doing better but other times, I felt like I was not good enough.”

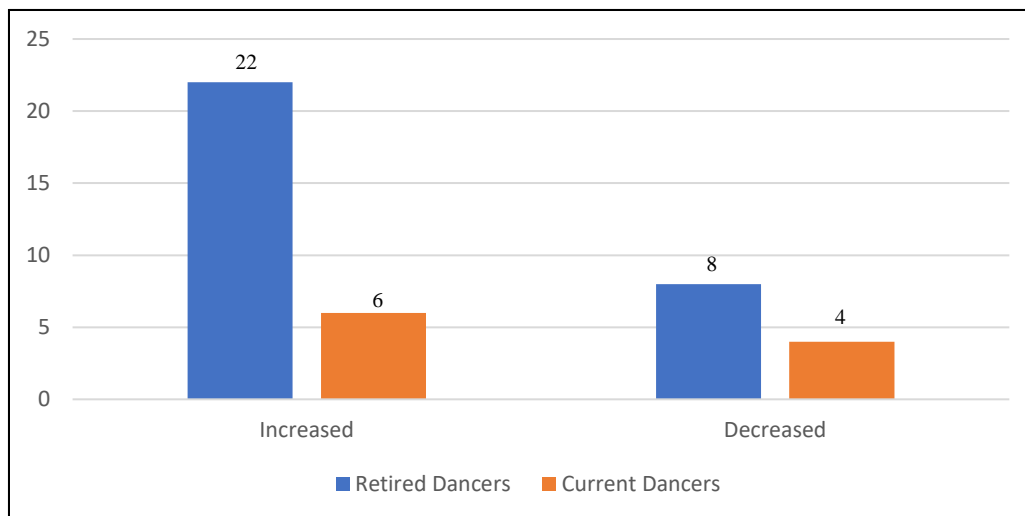


Figure 7. Summary of responses to survey question 16: Do you feel your sense of self-worth increased or decreased since participating in competitive dance?

The responses from dancers currently competing had a similar perspective to the retired dancers. Dancer C9 said, “...my self-worth certainly fluctuated, but often times dance is such a toxic environment that you often end up feeling worse. Overall, my self-esteem is quite high

now, but it used to be much lower when I was younger.” Dancer C10 brought up a valid point when she noted, “So much time in front of a mirror, so much comparison.”

Dancer R14 believed she gained confidence because of her experiences in dance. She noted, “I was more confident in who I was and what I was capable of which kept me accountable in both dance and school.” Dancer R22 also felt gratitude toward her competitive dance experience because it increased her self-confidence. She expressed this in her response, “100% yes! Competitive dance gave me a huge foundation in my life to be confident and have discipline.” Regardless of their issues with comparison, the majority of the participants still leaned more toward competitive dance building their self-confidence, which in turn impacted their lives positively in many other aspects.

### **Life Skills Development**

Many of the participants in this research commented on the relationship between competitive dance and the development of their life skills. Dancer R4 explained this relationship in the following way:

Competitive dance taught me how to better deal with failure. Accepting failure as part of the process has been something that has allowed me to continue to push through and keep going in life. Accepting that things will not always go the way they are planned or that you won't always get the results you are looking for has helped me as an adult. Obstacles are all around us and will continue to be a part of our world so long as we exist.

Competitive dance taught me to be optimistic and trust in the process, failure included, with a reminder that no one can achieve greatness without facing failure in the process.

The nature of dance lends itself to requiring the dancer to understand the importance of teamwork, time management, prioritization, leadership and much more. These learned skills

have a direct effect on their character and have a lifelong impact on the individual's life. Dancer R17 stated, "I appreciate the training dance teaches—listening to your body, expressing yourself through movement. I am grateful for those lessons that I carry with me to this day." Similarly, Dancer C7 said, "Most of my life lessons have come from dance." Dancer R19 credits competitive dance for her success in the work force. She explained in more depth when she shared, "My success in the workforce comes from a lot of the skills and characteristics I acquired through competitive dance. Responsibility, respect, being early, collaboration and much more." In regard to competitive dance and the impact it had on her life, Dancer R15 said, "It helped me grow into the person I am today."

### **Judges Feedback**

An enticing reason for many dancers to participate in competitions is the fact that they will receive feedback from a panel of professional judges. The commentary from the judges is written or recorded feedback which is accompanied by a written or virtual scoresheet. Most scoresheets are broken down into four categories: technique, execution, choreography, showmanship. Depending upon the competition circuit, not all judges receive a formal 'judge's training' where they are educated on how to articulate their comments in a positive, supportive manner. At times, judge's feedback can be brutally honest and harsh to the young aspiring dancer, however, most of the participants in this survey expressed they felt encouraged from the judge's feedback verses frustrated.

Dancer C1 stated that receiving judges' feedback, "Encourages me to grow as a dancer." Most participants had these same feelings toward the feedback they received throughout the competition season. Dancer R6 said, "I think constructive criticism is important in order to be better, so it encouraged me." In a similar manner, Dancer R7 noted, "They always had a kind

tone in the way they presented critiques. I never felt embarrassed by the way in which they told me feedback.” Dancer R9 had a mature perspective on the feedback she received. She shared, “I know as a human being I am not perfect. That’s why I would always look at the criticism with encouragement and optimism instead of things I did poorly. And the good things they would comment on, of course made me feel like I was always doing something right.”

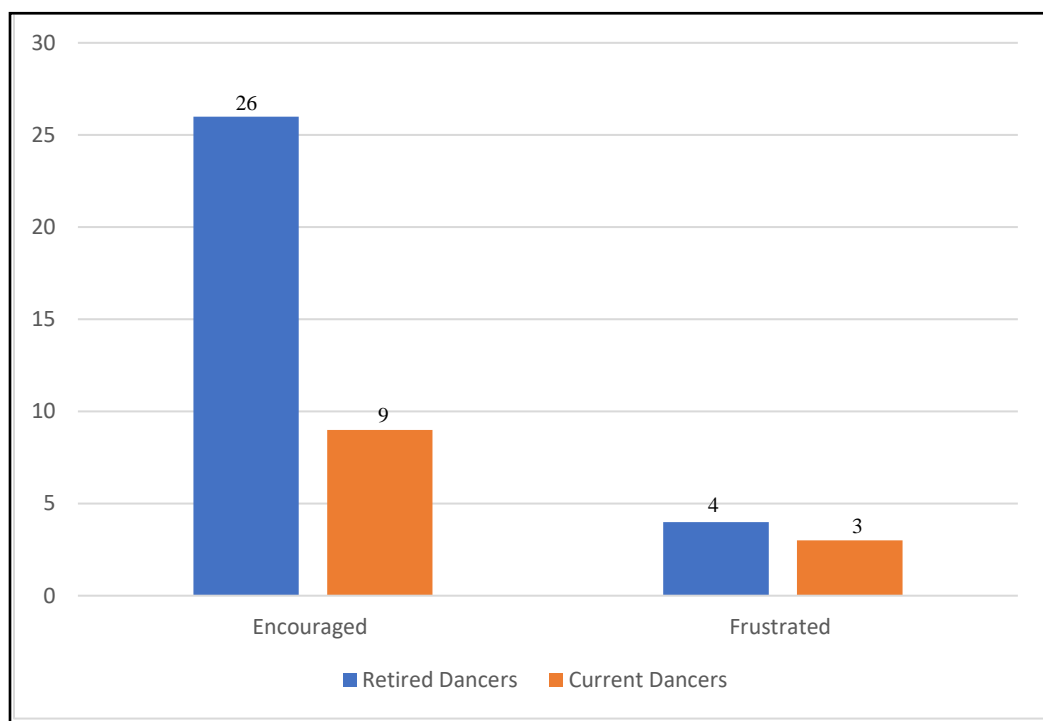


Figure 8. Summary of responses to survey question 15: Does the feedback you receive from judges after competition make you feel encouraged or frustrated?

As much as the dancer’s valued the feedback from the judge’s, many participants also noted that the credibility of the judge, albeit their resume, training, or experience, played an important factor on whether their commentary was taken seriously. Dancer C11 said she was usually encouraged but needed to be able to see the judging was done fairly and, “...done well, I don’t want just comments about costumes, which are common.” Dancer R17 said the feedback,

“... would remain in the back of my head for months” but it was dependent upon the tone and credibility of the judge. She continued to share, “I guess it just depended, some judges who took the time to care honestly gave good feedback where others were useless.” Dancer R27 learned from her director that a judge’s feedback is opinion based. She described an experience at a practice that followed her competition weekend. She said, “I valued their good old cassette feedback and found it super useful. We would listen to the tapes as a team and take notes and apply them. Our director also empowered us to decide if we agreed or not, most of the time we agreed with the professionals but every now and again it was great to see our teacher say I respectfully disagree and invite us to as well.”

Whether or not the participants chose to agree with the judge’s feedback, it was deemed to be more helpful in most cases than not. Feedback is meant to be constructive and positive with the intention of pushing the dancer to work toward becoming their best self.

### *Opportunities*

Another clear advantage of participating in competitive dance are the opportunities that it provides to the competitors. Dancers get a chance to take class from master teachers, train in styles they have never experienced before, receive scholarship money or awards, and build relationships that could impact their future. Dancer R20 credits the competition circuit to her career success. She wrote, “I look back at when I was competing in dance and look at where I am now, and I believe it was the platform that I built my career on. The people I have met and made relationships with over the years through dance are still close colleagues and friends of mine in the present day.” Dancer C9, a current competitor in the dance world, agreed with this same perspective. Dancer C9 explained that “...meeting new people, getting opportunities, and other



things, all come from competitive dance.” Dancer R6 also credited her current job situation to her exposure to competition dance. Her response to question twelve was,

Every job opportunity I’ve been given is through connections I made during my time as a competitive dancer. I found a passion for choreographing, inspired by my coaches and programs that forced me to choreograph (when I was less comfortable and [a] less willing freshman especially). USA Dance, which was our main competition we would participate in for dance team, is now my employer! I’ve met even more amazing people through working there and grown so much as a choreographer and teacher. If I never competed, I would have never met the teachers who mentored me and lit the spark!

A theme that was clear throughout the responses to survey question twelve, was the fact that competitive dance provided dancers with the opportunity to travel. Dancer R21 wrote, “The travel and exposure to studios, teachers and techniques was invaluable.” Dancer C11 had a similar opinion to the above statement. She claimed that “Competitions hand out a great deal of scholarships that allow you to get a lot more experience and the ability to travel which can give you exposure in the dance world.”

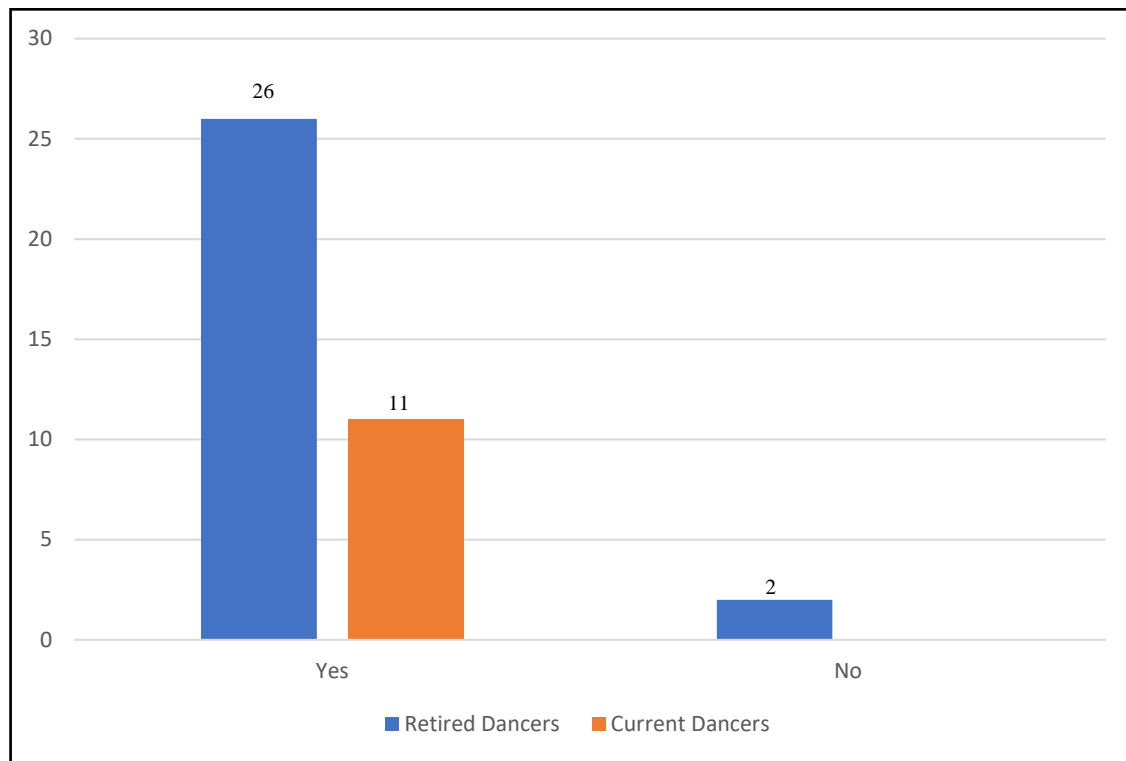


Figure 9. Summary of responses to survey question 12: Do you feel a competitive dance environment provided opportunities that would be unavailable outside of the competition circuit?

Some maybe argue that dance, whether it is done in a recreational setting or competitive setting, will provide the individual with a plethora of opportunities. However, Dancer R14 experienced dance in both settings and argued that competitive dance gave the dancers more exposure, training, and experience. Dancer R14 shared her story:

I was a competitive dancer at a competition studio, and I did see the difference between the students that just took recreational versus the competition team. The competition students did receive more attention, a stronger push, and the option to do solos and duets. I also was involved in a dance company where we participated in competitions for adjudication only, which was amazing, but we did everything like a competition but without the awards and scoring. With the dance company we had more opportunities too,

like working with different choreographers, concert dance work, and college modern courses.

To further emphasize the fact that dance competitions provide more opportunities than recreational dance, Dancer R24 said, “The competitive dance environment creates opportunities for major networking and growth. It definitely accelerates the process to whatever you are looking for whether it's dancing competitively or working in the dance industry.”

### **The Disadvantages of Competitive Dance**

Although competitive dance is proven to have its advantages, like any competitive activity, there are very serious negative effects it can have on an individual’s physical body and mental state of being. As discussed in the introductory chapter of this thesis, the competitive nature of America has become a disease that has spread through the country like wildfire. Questions like: Who can be the fastest? the best? the biggest? These are now driving forces for many Americans who will sacrifice anything and everything to become ‘the winner.’ Unfortunately, all victories come with a cost, and in this case the negative effects of competitive dance can be life altering in shocking and disheartening ways.

#### *Physical Impact*

Survey questions six, seven, and eight addressed the issue of injury. Injuries amongst dancers are fairly common but are seen more frequently in competitive dancers due to the fact that there is no off season. An off season is a time of year when a sport or activity is not practicing or rehearsing which gives the participants time to heal, rest and recover. Competitive dance is an activity that is year round and because of this, issues such as overuse and burnout are a major concern. Without an off season dancers do not have the opportunity to rest their bodies and minds.

## Injury

Themes that arose in the participants' responses regarding the topic of injury were fatigue, lack of proper training, and overuse. Dancer C6 blamed the demanding schedule of competitive dance for her injuries. She stated, "Constantly dancing and putting a ton of pressure on my body led to some injuries." Dancer R15 also noticed a similar issue of "...constant training with no breaks." Another factor that did not help with this concern was the fact that she was "...not aware that my body needed more cross training." Dancer C8 indicated "sometimes it's too much stress on my body just constantly going."

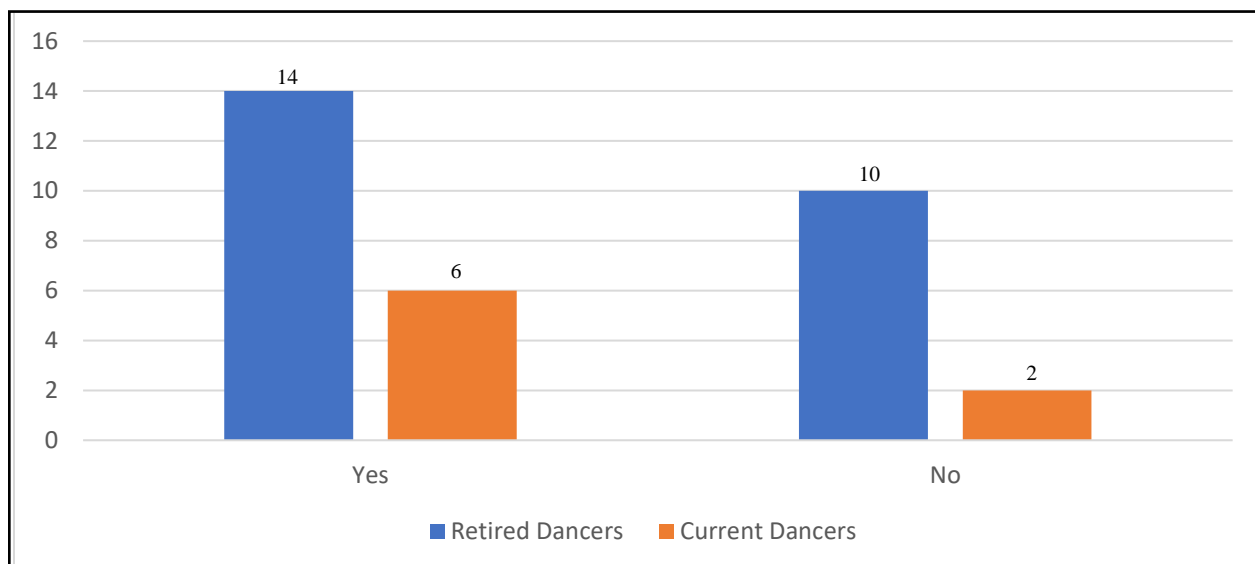


Figure 10. Summary of responses to survey question 7: Have the number of injuries you have experienced increased since you began participating in competitive dance?

Dancer R27 felt her injuries were due to her teacher's lack of knowledge and the repetition that comes from rehearsing the same choreography until it was deemed perfect. She said my "...back injuries were a combo of not great training and not doing things correctly, same with knee stuff. It wasn't caught until college and the damage was done just from lack of attention to my own body by me or my teachers." During a competition rehearsal, dancers are

required to repeat a section of choreography or the whole routine repeatedly, so the teacher can look for any errors that may cause an imperfect score. “I believe doing certain movements repeatedly in rehearsal can cause damage simply from over usage,” shared Dancer R9.

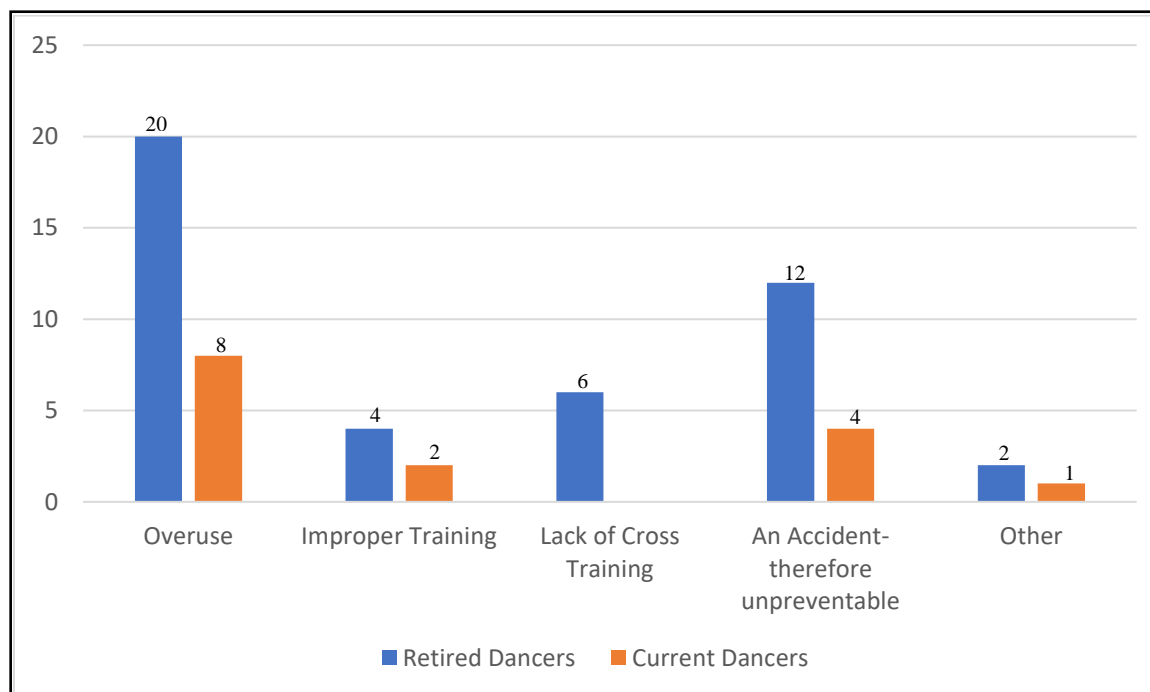


Figure 11. Summary of responses to survey question 8: To what do you feel your injuries are due?

Dancer R6 described in detail how the extensive amount of competitive dance training she participated in on a weekly basis had a major impact on her physical body in a long-term sense. She shared:

I was lucky enough to have really good basic technical training where I was taught proper placement and conditioned to prevent injury. However, dancing almost 20 hours a week for 8 years as competition dance got more serious, it took a toll on my body. In 8th grade I was diagnosed with tendinitis as well as planter fasciitis. Naturally, as a dancer, I pushed through the pain and never took breaks—but my sophomore year it got so bad to where I couldn’t walk without serious pain in my feet. I was put on mandatory rest for a

week and wore a boot, but aside from this I've never had any other injuries where I've needed to take time off! Unfortunately, this is chronic, and I still experience pain every once and a while.

In her response to question eight, Dancer R12 said it was not just the time commitment that made her injuries more prevalent, but a lack of cross training and body awareness. Her response to question eight was,

I think my injury was partly due to overuse and also lack of training in areas that taught me more about my body and how to take care of it properly. I didn't understand what "engaging my core" meant back then, until my injury occurred, and then realized I was not fully aware of my body or what my teachers were telling me to do. I didn't understand correctly. I think I would have benefited greatly from yoga or Pilates training in conjunction with my dance training & conditioning. In the long run, my body still feels the effects of certain injuries from my competitive years.

### **Burnout**

Burnout is defined as a form of exhaustion that can impact an individual equally on an emotional and physical level. A main cause of burnout is a lack of down time. Down time away from the source of stress or anxiety, can allow the individual an adequate amount of time to rest and reenergize. As mentioned above, there is no off season in competitive dance for most studios or dance teams. Dancers train year-round and have a schedule that is very demanding of their time. In order to 'be the best,' one is required to train at a high level on a consistent basis. In the figure below, one can clearly see the amount of time required for elite competitive dance training.

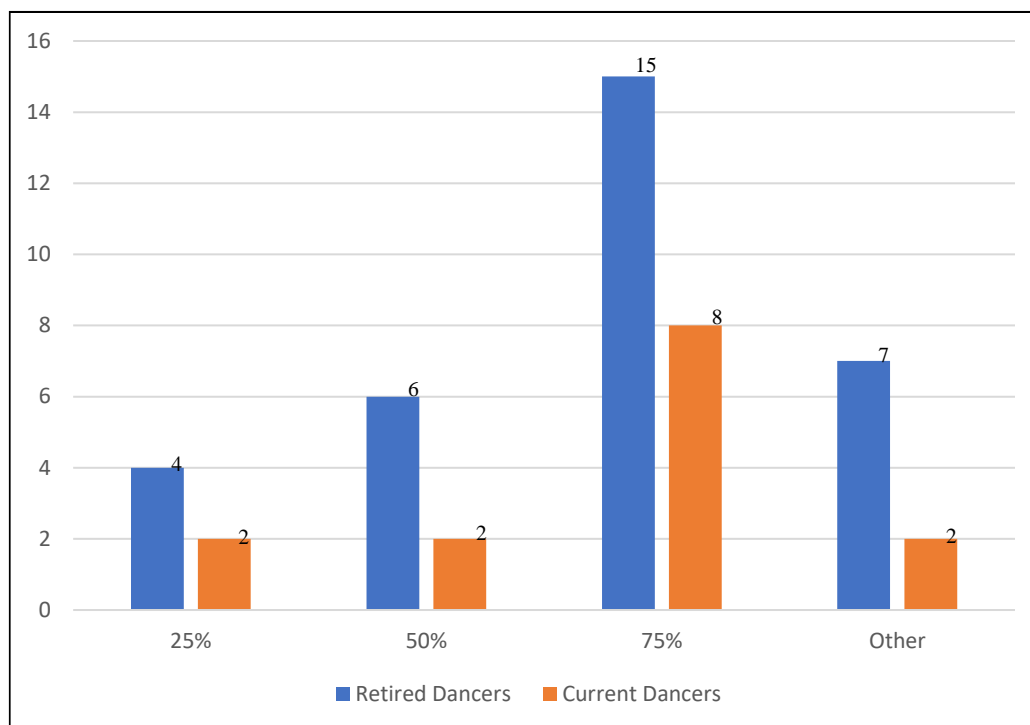


Figure 12. Summary of responses to survey question 13: What percentage of your time do you feel was required in order for you to participate in competitive dance?

Dancer C1 was blunt in her response to survey question 13 when she wrote, “It is what I do outside of school, and it takes a lot of my time.” The peak of intensity for most serious competitive dancers is in their high school years. During this time, they are trying to balance their academics, social life and more. For Dancer R2, she had a very regimented schedule. She said, “Probably more than 75%...I never slept much in high school because I would go straight to the studio after school, be there until 10pm, go home and do homework, and do it all again the next day, with weekends full of either competitions, performances, or private lessons. "I can't, I have dance" could not be truer.”

In both participant groups, retired and current competitive dancers, a majority selected the option of dance requiring seventy-five percent or more of their time. Many dancers claimed to have missed out on important adolescent events because of the time commitment of dance.

Dancer R25 said it, "...took a lot of time and sacrifice especially at a young age. I missed birthday parties, hangouts, family vacations, etc." Dancer R17 also felt like dance caused her to miss out on important events. She claimed, "Either you were at the studio, at school, or home, and at home I spent a lot of time stretching and going over choreography. Practices were pretty much daily and I didn't have much of a social life outside of dance." Even though dance did take up some, if not all, of the dancer's 'free' time Dancer R9 wouldn't have had it any other way. "Dance is not just a hobby but a passion and way of life. If you're truly devoted to the sport it will take up most of your time, but you will enjoy that time and there is still time for other fun and activities as well."

### *Mental Impact*

To the outside viewer, it is easy to understand how dance can impact an individual's physical body. It is a taxing physical and athletic activity that requires stamina, endurance, flexibility and strength. However, competitive dance is equally as impactful on one's mental and emotional well-being. *Psychology Today* shared an article titled "Competitive Dancers at Risk for Neurotic Perfectionism" by Robert T Muller in which this doctor described the reoccurring issues that can be seen in competitive dancers. "Unsurprisingly, studies have found links between neurotic perfectionism and anxiety, exercise addiction, and burnout in athletes," wrote Muller (7).

Three dancers who participated in the survey responded to a questionnaire that contained six short response prompts. Question two asked "Explain how competition dance has affected your life in a negative way." Dancer R14 responded:

I wanted to be a great dancer, so I began to work independently. The problem was, I became highly critical of myself and no longer saw growth as a positive. Instead, I only



expected success or failure. If I did not achieve a skill that day, it was very difficult to get out of my head. I ended up pushing myself really hard and ignoring illness and fatigue. It landed me in the hospital for a few days and I could not dance for four months.

### **Pressure and Stress**

“For dancers who train at a highly competitive level, the sport can take a toll on their mental health,” expressed Muller. The pressure to execute at a high level of perfection during every practice and performance (7). can create a huge amount of stress on a dancer. This pressure can be caused by their teammates, teachers, or parents but more often than not, it is caused by the dancer being critical of themselves. Dancer R 12 open admitted that the pressure “...came mostly from myself.” The idea of neurotic perfectionism is unfortunately a hard reality for many competitive dancers. When asked “Did you feel pressure to execute your competition routines perfectly?” Dancer R14 responded, “Always. I put the pressure on myself to be perfect and always be the best. It really started to take a toll on me.”

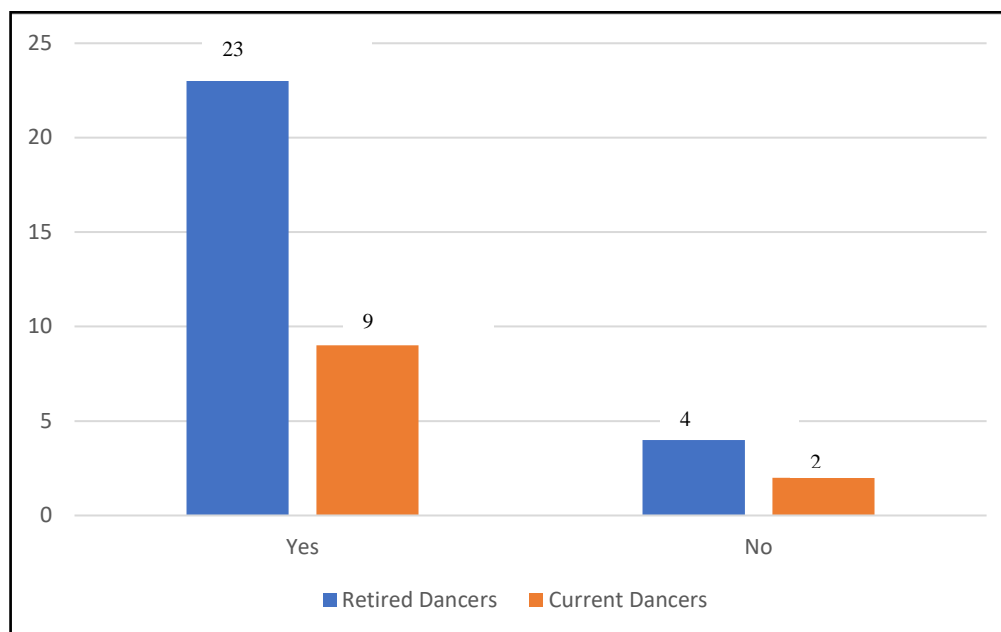


Figure 13. Summary of responses to survey question 18: Did you feel pressure to execute your competition routines perfectly?

For some dancers the need to be perfect is self-inflicted but for others it is driven by the desire to uphold good relations with their team by performing without error. Everyone plays an important role in each performance, and no one wants to be the reason a victory becomes a loss. Dancer C6 felt the pressure to perform well because she didn't, "...want to let down my team or my coaches." Dancer R22 recounted her experience with how pressure took a toll on her: "I'm a perfectionist. But so are dance teachers! So, I felt double the pressure to be perfect. Especially with dance team, where everyone had to look the same. There is a lot of pressure to be successful." Dancer R8 responded to question eighteen with a similar tone, "Yes, I did not want to mess up and let anyone on my team down or myself down." Dancer R20 eloquently summarized her feelings of perfection and pressure when she wrote,

As a leader I put pressure on myself to be perfect more than anyone else—but that also meant all my teammates' eyes were on me as an example. You want to be the person

other girls can look up to so that the team doesn't get lazy or think it's okay to mess up.

Win together, lose together, everyone matters and everyone is under equal pressure to not mess up. Perfection is expected from coaches, it's what we're all striving for.

Regardless of where the pressure came from, thirty-two of the thirty-eight participant responses to question eighteen, indicated they felt there was a clear increase in pressure and stress because of their participation in competitive dance.

### **Self-Doubt**

Regarding the topic of self-doubt, the overarching theme that reoccurred in the data was the idea of comparison. Dancer C4 responded to a prompt in the questionnaire with, "Competition dance has affected my life in a negative way through encouraging comparison. Competition is a big game of comparison with the judging and expectations. Although there is a lot of healthy competition in the dance world, I find myself taking this habit of comparison into other parts of my life as well."

Question fourteen on the survey asked the participant "Did participating in dance competitions make you question your skill set in relationship to your competitors?" Dancer R2 said, "There is just constant comparison because we are literally looking in a mirror all the time. And then sometimes the instructor compares one person to the rest of us." Dancer R5 took a realistic and optimistic approach to the idea of comparison. She wrote, "Life is a competition and filled with comparison, I feel like the competitive circuit made me more aware that people may have skills that I lack, however I was able to understand what skills I could work on and hone, to be more competitive in dance auditions." While a realistic approach can be healthier than most, Dancer R25 did not have the same mature outlook. She doubted herself regularly and admitted, "You always compare yourself to other dancers, and question, am I good enough?"

Among, the current group of competition dancers that participated in the survey, all had very similar answers in terms of self-doubt and comparing themselves to others. Dancer C9 said, “I feel like every dancer is constantly comparing themselves to others” while Dancer C4 echoed, “I compare often even though it is not always healthy.” Dancer C1 also agreed and wrote, “It’s easy to compare yourself to others you haven’t seen dance before.”

Comparison is inevitable and is emphasized more today than ever because of the accessibility of social media which is used as a highlight reel for people’s lives. However, the bigger issue weighs on the shoulders of the teacher and parents. Are these topics being openly discussed within the dance studio or at home? What tools can a dancer use to deal with the constant comparison that comes from competition dance? Comparison is unavoidable, but it is possible to create a healthy relationship with how one deals with these issues.

### **Body Image**

Creating a positive relationship with one’s body can be a very challenging task for a dancer. Dancers are in front of a mirror for countless hours, searching for any flaws in their reflection and desiring to “fix” them. With constant feedback and corrections, one can start to feel like their body is never good enough. This mindset can lead down a dark and dangerous path.

Dancer R4 was brave enough to share her personal story with her body image struggle. She wrote,

When I was dancing competitively, I remember the remarks made by my coach of others in regards to the way they looked in specific costumes—[specifically] the ones that were less forgiving. I now realize that I subconsciously made [a] decision about my food intake in hopes for my name to stay out of those kind of comments. This [led] to me

becoming anorexic without truly realizing [it] until one night after going home after a late night practice my mother asked me what I eaten all day and I realized I had only consumed water and a granola bar all day. And that this had been going on for a week.

Dancer C1 has also experienced body image issues because of competitive dance. She has opposing perspectives regarding her feelings toward her body, but the journey is ongoing. She responded,

Based on my experiences with competitive dance, I feel as if my relationship with my body fluctuates. As a dancer, you spend hours in front of a mirror. I notice that whenever dancing my focus goes up above the mirror or to the floor, I avoid the reflective surface in front of us. However, dance has also shown me all the amazing things that my body is capable of. Even if I may not like the way my body looks most of the time, I have become proud of what it can do.

Young girls are transitioning into young women during their teen years which means there are many physical changes happening to their bodies that can be difficult to accept. Dancers are usually dressed in costumes that showcase their bodies, but during this stage of growth and transition it can be very harmful to have dancers dressed in costumes that make them feel uncomfortable. "I just feel exposed and then pair that with some body dysmorphia and comparison," said Dancer C8 about her feelings towards the dance costumes she is required to wear for performances. Dancer C5 responded to question seventeen in the survey with, "I don't feel the most comfortable in my body by itself and wearing revealing costumes don't help." Dancer R27 said the experiences she went through as a competitive dancer have greatly impacted her relationship with her body today. She expressed, "As someone with body dysmorphia, the costume try on days were some of the worst feelings I've experienced. Even though I looked like

pretty much every other thin girl, the tricks my mind would play on me were devastating. It's something I still battle with to this day.”

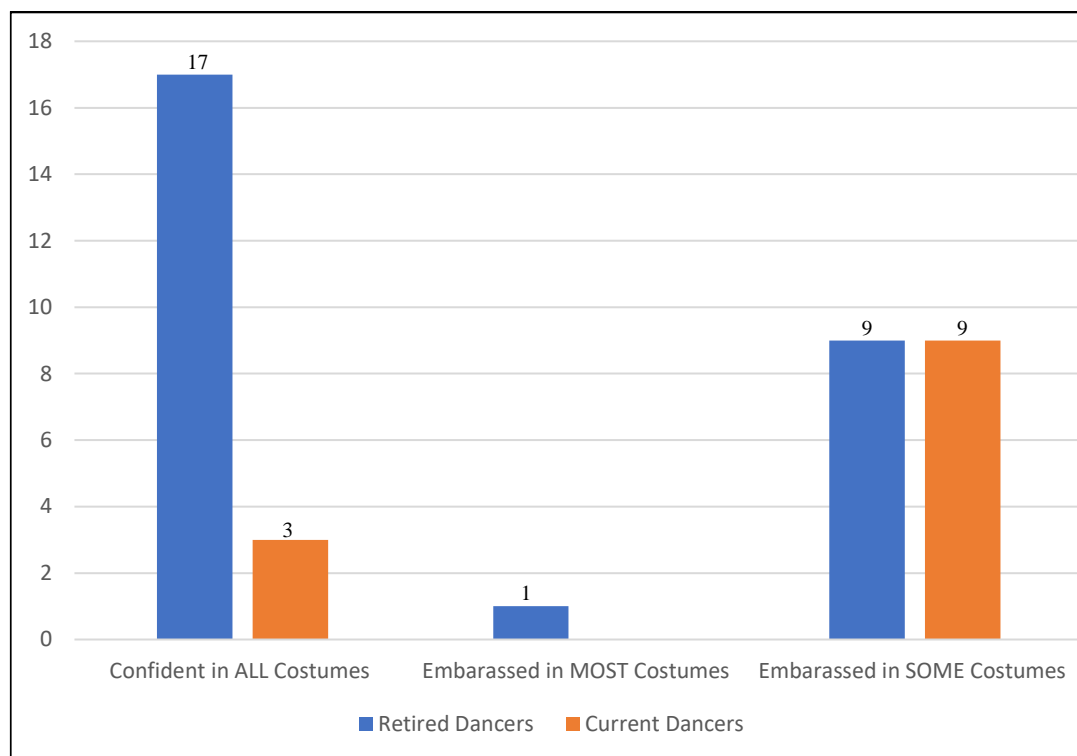


Figure 14. Summary of responses to survey question 17: How did you feel about your body when performing in competition costumes?

Not every participant felt discontented with their body, and some were even thankful to have coaches that recognized this issue and worked through it with their team by making mindful choices. Those who did not feel they were embarrassed while wearing their performance costumes credited it to good genetics. Dancer R13 said, “I feel lucky that I had the body type that could wear costumes and not feel self-conscious” while Dancer R19 similarly noted, “I was always really small, especially when I was dancing so I was not insecure in my costumes.” Dancer R10 said it wasn’t genetics but the long hours and strenuous rehearsals that helped her maintain a positive body image. She stated, “Dancing several hours a day got me in serious

shape. I was muscular and powerful and that's the way most costumes made me feel." Not having to experience it firsthand but more from a secondhand perspective, Dancer R22 observed, "I personally never had this issue as I did not hit puberty until I was 17 so I was always very skinny. But I could see it with my peers who hit puberty early and were forced to wear the same costumes no matter their shape or size."

The job of finding, creating, and costuming the dancers is usually in the hands of the choreographers or coaches. In some scenarios, not all body types are taken into consideration during this process. What might look flattering on one body, may look, or feel uncomfortable on another. Dancer R14 was grateful her coach made an effort to keep in mind the fact that the dancers should feel confident and proud of what they are wearing on stage. She wrote "I was super lucky. My coach did not let us wear underwear/lingerie on stage as a costume. She made sure we were comfortable, and our parents were too. We were never objectified, and costumes were always tasteful for children to be wearing."

### **Summary**

The data collected from the quantitative and qualitative analysis of responses to the survey and questionnaire used in this thesis, implied that all participants had mixed reviews about competitive dance based on their personal experiences. The quantitative data provided the researcher with background information for each participant which included the number of years of involvement in competitive dance as well as the area in which the dancer received their dance training. Quantitative data were also accumulated through answers that required a yes or no response. Most of the survey questions were designed to have the participant select one of the multiple-choice answers provided as an option and elaborate on their answer with a short response. The data collected from the short responses were analyzed qualitatively which allowed

the researcher to discover reoccurring themes within the findings. Participants noted that they enjoyed dance more because of their involvement in competitions (thirty-one out of thirty-eight respondents) and credited their participation in dance competitions to providing them with more opportunities (thirty-six out of thirty-eight respondents).

Through the qualitative data gathered in this study, participants shared their reasoning of why and how competition dance impacted their lives in a positive and/or negative way. Each participant perceived situations throughout their competitive journey from a unique point of view but there was a consensus that competition dance provided a sense of community, confidence, increased skill set, and the development of life skills. However, many also agreed that competitive dance caused injury, burnout, self-doubt, and additional stress in their lives. The participants noted that these effects were due to outside influences such as teammates, teachers, and competition judges, as well as being generated internally.

The responses in this survey revealed there are many advantages and disadvantages to participating in competition dance but ultimately every person's experience varies greatly from the next depending upon their internal and external support systems. Dancers need to be educated in emotional skills or tools that can prepare them to deal with the hardships and struggles that competition dance can unintentionally cause. The teachers, coaches and parents are responsible for preparing a dancer to succeed in a competitive environment, not just physically but emotionally as well. All educators should assess and reflect on their motivation behind supporting competitive dance and ensure it is coming from a place of growth, positivity, and good intentions.



## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

The intention of this study was to discover the positive and negatives effects related to participating in competitive dance. The final chapter of the thesis reiterates the research questions and research instruments used, an interpretation of the findings, limitations noted to the study and provides recommendations for further research regarding the topic of competition dance.

#### **Research Questions and Methods**

As previously mentioned, the researcher focused the study on three questions in order to collect and analyze data related to the participants' experiences in competitive dance. The research questions addressed in this project were:

- Q1     What are the effects of competitive dance on a dancer's physical body?
- Q2     What are the effects of competitive dance on a dancer's mental well-being?
- Q3     How has involvement in competitions affected a dancer's personal reflections about themselves and their relationship with dance?

The electronic survey and questionnaire were answered based on the perspectives and backgrounds of the participants' feelings, memories, or opinions of competitive dance. There were two variations of the survey, one for dancer's who were currently still competing in dance and the other survey was for dancers who were retired from competitive dance. The only difference in the survey formatting was the use of past and present tense. The researcher identified reoccurring themes within the qualitative data and was able to organize the various

themes in a way to see the participants differences and similarities in their competitive dance experiences. The data were analyzed through qualitative and quantitative processes to develop a clearer understanding of the participants' responses in relation to their experiences with competitive dance.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

The analysis of the data in the study showed that overall, both retired and current competition dancers, enjoyed dance more because of their involvement in competitions. While answering the questions in the survey, the participants continued to share both positive and negative feedback toward their experience in competitive dance.

Dancers felt they had more opportunities, a greater sense of community, a more advanced skill set and the development of valuable life skills based in their competitive dance experiences. However, the same set of participants also felt the competition dance caused them to question their skill level and sense of self-worth as well as cause a higher chance of injury. Not to mention, competition rehearsals and performances took up most of their time and energy. As beneficial as the competition dance experience was to each participant, it also caused a majority of the dancers to feel additional stress and anxiety.

### **Limitations to the Study**

It is important to note the study had several limitations because of time restrictions, subject accessibility, the Covid 19 pandemic, and the construction of the survey and questionnaire.

The survey and questionnaire were both created by the researcher and although she tried to develop questions in an unbiased format, the survey was not tested for validity. Some questions did not receive full participant participation and the reason for that is unknown. This

caused the outcome of the figures in the previous chapter to have a variation in their numerical totals. The survey consisted of seventeen open ended questions in which the researcher asked for short response answers which may have deterred participants from completing the questions.

The next limitation was the Covid 19 pandemic which also correlated with participant accessibility. From the time frame August 2020 until August 2021, when the survey was available, the world was experiencing a global pandemic. Due to this, many people were affected negatively and therefore uninterested or unable to participate. The increased demand of online learning also dissuaded potential dancers from participating in the study due to virtual burnout. The sample size of forty participants served as a good amount for the collection and analysis of data, however a larger sample size would have created a more well-developed and cohesive study.

Lastly, because the survey was only available for a one-year time frame, the ability to collect more data from a larger sample size was limited. If the survey was accessible for a longer period of time, the inclusion of more participants could have been possible, therefore allowing more data to be gathered and analyzed.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Ultimately, it is an individual's personal preference to participate in competitive dance verses recreational dance. It is suggested that the dancer speak with their parents and teachers about the advantages and disadvantages of competitive dance. However, it is the responsibility of the parents and teachers to educate themselves on how competitive dance can impact the dancer, physically, mentally, and emotionally. They should be aware of the positive and negative effects of any competition activity by educating themselves through research. A conversation should take place about the dancer's goals and desires regarding their participation in competitive dance.

This conversation should be an ongoing discussion to help ensure the dancer is continuing their participation in competitive dance because it is still an activity they enjoy, versus an activity they feel obligated or pressured to continue.

This study focused on competition dance from two different perspectives, one being that of dancers who are currently still competing and the other from dancers who have retired from competing. Having two different perspectives allowed the researcher to gather a wider range of varying data because the experiences of both groups of participants were from different points of their lives. It would be advantageous to gather responses from the perspectives of teachers and parents regarding competition dance as well.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion the researcher believes this study showed that participation in competitive dance had both positive and negative effects on an individual's physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Through the use of an electronic survey and questionnaire, the researcher learned that dancers who participate in competitions believe there are advantages and disadvantages through the outcome of their shared experiences.

In response to the initial research questions, the participants noted that the physical impact of competition dance was an increased skill set, but the risk of injury and burnout also increased because of the time commitment and challenging choreography. The mental impact of competitive dance was an increase in stress and anxiety but also a feeling of commandry, support and teamwork. Many dancers noted that their teammates and teachers felt like a family which made them enjoy their experience to the fullest. In regard to their personal relations with themselves and dance, participants were on both ends of the spectrum in their responses. They noted that the constant comparison to other dancers' skills, negative judge's feedback or

inappropriate costumes had a negative impact on their self-confidence. However, question sixteen of the survey asked, “Do you feel your sense of self-worth increased or decreased since participating in competitive dance?” which had thirty participants respond with the choice ‘increased.’

Dancer R4 summarized her overall experience with competition dance in her response, “My self-worth, love, and acceptance came not from the competitive dance itself but rather [from] the people around me. Spending the majority of your days with your team allows you to create much deeper connections. It was the people around me that became the reminder of my worth.”

In any environment, competitive or not, the people make the experience. Having coaches that are mindful, considerate, and educated will lead to a more enjoyable outcome. Having judges whose intentions are to build up a dancer as a performer and individual will help keep the dancer encouraged and engaged. Having teammates who are supportive and compassionate, regardless of a win or a loss, will make the individual feel valued, appreciated, and respected. The impact of the people that one surrounds themselves with, will deeply affect the outcome of one’s experience.

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APPENDIX A  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



UNIVERSITY OF  
NORTHERN COLORADO

## Institutional Review Board

Date: 02/04/2021

Principal Investigator: Kristen Volk

Committee Action: **Expedited Approval - New Protocol**

Action Date: 02/04/2021

Protocol Number: [2010012273](#)

Protocol Title: Competitive Dance: The Physiological and Psychological Effects from the Perspectives of Current Versus Retired Dancers.

Expiration Date:

The University of Northern Colorado Institutional Review Board has granted approval for the abovereferenced protocol. Your protocol was approved under expedited category (7) as outlined below:

Category 7: Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. (NOTE: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

All research must be conducted in accordance with the procedures outlined in your approved protocol.

If continuing review is required for your research, your project is approved until the expiration date listed above. The investigator will need to submit a request for Continuing Review at least 30 days prior to the expiration date. If the study's approval expires, investigators must stop all research activities immediately (including data analysis) and contact the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs for guidance.

If your study has not been assigned an expiration date, continuing review is not required for your research.

For the duration of the research, the investigator(s) must:



## Institutional Review Board

- Submit any change in the research design, investigators, and any new or revised study documents (including consent forms, questionnaires, advertisements, etc.) to the UNC IRB and receive approval before implementing the changes.
- Use only a copy of the UNC IRB approved consent and/or assent forms. The investigator bears the responsibility for obtaining informed consent from all subjects prior to the start of the study procedures.
- Inform the UNC IRB immediately of an Unanticipated Problems involving risks to subjects or others and serious and unexpected adverse events.
- Report all Non-Compliance issues or complaints regarding the project promptly to the UNC IRB.

As principal investigator of this research project, you are responsible to:

- Conduct the research in a manner consistent with the requirements of the IRB and federal regulations 45 CFR 46.
- Obtain informed consent and research privacy authorizations using the currently approved forms and retain all original, signed forms, if applicable.
- Request approval from the IRB prior to implementing any/all modifications.
- Promptly report to the IRB any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others and serious and unexpected adverse events.
- Maintain accurate and complete study records.
- Report all Non-Compliance issues or complaints regarding the project promptly to the IRB.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three (3) years after the conclusion of the project. Once your project is complete, please submit the Closing Report Form.

If you have any questions, please contact Nicole Morse, Research Compliance Manager, at 970-351-1910 or [nicole.morse@unco.edu](mailto:nicole.morse@unco.edu). Please include your Protocol Number in all future correspondence. Best of luck with your research!

Sincerely,

Michael Aldridge  
IRB Co-Chair, University of Northern Colorado: FWA00000784



UNIVERSITY OF  
NORTHERN COLORADO

Institutional Review Board

*Silvia M Correa-Torres*

Silvia Correa-Torres  
IRB Co-Chair, University of Northern Colorado: FWA00000784

2010012273  
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APPENDIX B  
ASSENT/CONSENT FORMS



ASSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH  
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO  
STUDENT/CURRENT COMPETITIVE DANCER

Thesis Title: Competitive Dance: The Physiological and Psychological Effects from the Perspectives of Current Versus Retired Dancers.

Researcher: K. Volk, Graduate Student at the University of Northern Colorado

Contact Information:

Research Advisor: Dr. Sandra Minton, University of Northern Colorado, [Sandra.minton@unco.edu](mailto:Sandra.minton@unco.edu)

You are being asked to take part in a research study that will look at the effects of competitive dance on both dancers currently competing and dancers who have retired from competition.

Survey: You will be asked to complete an online survey that will ask you questions about the effects competitive dance has had on your body and your mental well-being. The survey will not ask you to give any information that will identify you. Your responses will be kept confidential and be labeled as "Dancer 1", "Dancer 2", etc. If you are not comfortable answering one of the questions, you can skip it.

Interview: Four participants will be selected from among volunteers for a virtual interview with the researcher. The goal is to include one male and one female from the retired competition group and one male and one female from the non-retired group among those to be interviewed. The interviewees will be asked to respond to six questions and all responses will be kept confidential. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes to complete.

Voluntary Participation: Taking part in this study is voluntary. Your parents have said it's okay for you to participate, but you don't have to. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without being penalized.

Any questions, comments or concerns: The researcher conducting this study is Ms. Kristen Volk. Please ask any questions you have now or share related comments or concerns. If you have questions at a later time, you may contact Ms. Volk using the contact information provided above. Please keep one copy of this letter for your records.

If you would like to complete the survey and possibly be interviewed about the effects of competitive dance, please print and sign your name below and write today's date. Thank you!

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Participant's Full Name (please print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Participant's Birth Date (month/day/year)

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Date (month/day/year)

This assent form will be kept by the researcher for at least three years beyond the end of the study and was approved by the IRB.



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

Thesis Title: Competitive Dance: The Physiological and Psychological Effects from the Perspectives of Current Versus Retired Dancers.

Researcher: K. Volk, Graduate Student at the University of Northern Colorado

Contact Information:

Research Advisor: Dr. Sandra Minton, University of Northern Colorado, [Sandra.minton@unco.edu](mailto:Sandra.minton@unco.edu)

Your child is being asked to take part in a research study in which the researcher will analyze the effects of competitive dance on the physiological and psychological development of dancers who are currently competing and also on dancers who are retired from competition. I am asking your child to take part in this study because he/she is a current participant in competitive dance and his/her experiences are meaningful to the research. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to allow you child to participate in the study.

Purpose and Description of Study: The intent of this research is to discover answers for the following three questions: 1) What are the effects of competitive dance on a dancer's physical body? 2) What are the effects of competitive dance on a dancer's mental well-being? 3) How has involvement in competitions affected a dancer's personal reflections about themselves and their relationship with dance? As part of the graduate research project, the research will assist the researcher and future readers of the final thesis in understanding the positive and negative impacts competition dance has on current participants and retired participants. The data collected from the survey, which will be analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively, will educate dance teachers, parents/guardians and dancers on the positive and negative effects of competitive dance. The outcome of this study, if applicable, may provide for necessary adjustments which could prevent negative effects and help participants focus on cultivating positive responses during the competitive dance experience. The research will be completed in one semester.

Survey Requirements: Your child will receive an email with a link to the voluntary survey which will be accessible through an on-line data collection website called Qualtrics. The survey will take 20-30 minutes to complete but can be done at the participant's own pace and does not have a time limitation. Surveys will be completed and collected anonymously then coded with labels such as "Dancer 1" to ensure there is no risk of breaching the confidentiality of your child. Please be aware that your child is able to pause and save his/her progress at any time during the process. Possible risks include minor fatigue due to increased computer screen time however, participants are not timed during the survey and may take a break when needed. Additional possible risks may be associated with the emotional connection related to answering specific opinion-based questions. Questions have been worded in an unbiased way that will allow your child to answer honestly. Although it is recommended to complete the entire survey, your child has the option to skip a question if it causes anxiety or emotional stress.

Interview Requirements: Four participants will be selected from among volunteers for a virtual interview with the researcher. The goal is to include one male and one female from the retired competition group and one male and one female from the non-retired group among those to be interviewed. The interviewees will be asked to respond to six questions and all responses will be kept confidential. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes to complete.

Confidentiality Notice: Every effort will be made to protect your child's identity and the records of this study will be kept private. In any public report of the data, the information included will make it impossible to identify your child. A code system will be used to identify all participant responses and no names will be used, but instead labels such as "Dancer 1" and "Dancer 2" will be used to identify participants. The goal of the research is to document the effects of competitive dance on the physiological and psychological development of dancers who are currently competing and dancers who are retired from competition. All data compiled for this study will be locked in a cabinet in the home of the researcher and it will be destroyed after the completion of the thesis. Completed



consent forms will be stored in for three years in a locked cabinet in Crabbe Hall, room 308, the office of Christy O'Connell-Black, Dance Education MA co-coordinator. After three years, the consent forms will be destroyed.

**Voluntary Participation:** Taking part in this study is voluntary. Your child's decision to participate will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If your child decides to participate, he/she is free to withdraw at any time without being penalized.

**Any questions, comments or concerns:** The researcher conducting this study is Ms. Kristen Volk. Please ask any questions you have now or share related comments or concerns. If you have questions at a later time, you may contact Ms. Volk using the contact information provided above. Please retain one copy of this letter for your records.

Participation is voluntary. Your child may decide not to participate in this study and if he or she begins participation they 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 consent 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)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher Obtaining Consent (please print)                      Date (month/day/year)



CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH  
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO  
RETIRED COMPETITIVE DANCER

Thesis Title: Competitive Dance: The Physiological and Psychological Effects from the Perspectives of Current Versus Retired Dancers.

Researcher: K. Volk, Graduate Student at the University of Northern Colorado

Contact Information:

Research Advisor: Dr. Sandra Minton, University of Northern Colorado, [Sandra.minton@unco.edu](mailto:Sandra.minton@unco.edu)

You are being asked to take part in a research study in which the researcher will analyze the effects of competitive dance on the physiological and psychological development of dancers who are currently competing and also on dancers who are retired from competition. I am asking you to take part in this study because you have retired from competitive dance and your past experiences are meaningful to the research. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take the study.

**Purpose and Description of Study:** The intent of this research is to discover answers for the following three questions: 1) What are the effects of competitive dance on a dancer's physical body? 2) What are the effects of competitive dance on a dancer's mental well-being? 3) How has involvement in competitions affected a dancer's personal reflections about themselves and their relationship with dance? As part of the graduate research project, the research will assist the researcher and future readers of the final thesis in understanding the positive and negative impact competition dance has on current participants and retired participants. The data collected from the survey, which will be analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively, will educate dance teachers, parents/guardians and dancers on the positive and negative effects of competitive dance. The outcome of this study, if applicable, may provide for necessary adjustments which could prevent negative effects and help participants focus on cultivating positive responses during the competitive dance experience. The research will be completed in one semester.

**Survey Requirements:** You will receive an email with a link to the voluntary survey which will be accessible through an on-line data collection website called Qualtrics. The survey will take 20-30 minutes to complete but can be done at your own pace and does not have a time limitation. Surveys will be completed and collected anonymously then coded with labels such as "Dancer 1" to ensure there is no risk of breaching your confidentiality. Please be aware that you are able to pause and save your progress at any time during the process. Possible risks include minor fatigue due to increased computer screen time however, participants are not timed during the survey and may take a break when needed. Additional possible risks may be associated with the emotional connection related to answering specific opinion-based questions. Questions have been worded in an unbiased way that will allow you to answer honestly. Although it is recommended to complete the entire survey, you have the option to skip a question if it causes anxiety or emotional stress.

**Interview Requirements:** Four participants will be selected from among volunteers for a virtual interview with the researcher. The goal is to include one male and one female from the retired competition group and one male and one female from the non-retired group among those to be interviewed. The interviewees will be asked to respond to six questions and all responses will be kept confidential. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes to complete.

**Confidentiality Notice:** Every effort will be made to protect your identity and the records of this study will be kept private. In any public report of the data, the information included will make it impossible to identify you. A code system will be used to identify all participant responses and no names will be used, but instead labels such as “Dancer 1” and “Dancer 2” will be used to identify participants. The goal of the research is to document the effects of competitive dance on the physiological and psychological development of dancers who are currently competing and dancers who are retired from competition. All data compiled for this study will be locked in a cabinet in the home of the researcher and it will be destroyed after the completion of the thesis. Completed consent forms will be stored in for three years in a locked cabinet in Crabbe Hall, room 308, the office of Christy O’Connell-Black, Dance Education MA co-coordinator. After three years, the consent forms will be destroyed.

**Voluntary Participation:** Taking part in this study is voluntary. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without being penalized.

**Any questions, comments or concerns:** The researcher conducting this study is Ms. Kristen Volk. Please ask any questions you have now or share related comments or concerns. If you have questions at a later time, you may contact Ms. Volk using the contact information provided 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 you 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 consent to take part in the study.*

*Please sign the highlighted sections below and send ONLY this page to [kristenmarievolk@gmail.com](mailto:kristenmarievolk@gmail.com)*

Participant’s Full Name (please print)

Participant’s Birth Date (xx/xx/xx)

Participant’s Signature

Date (month/day/year)

Researcher’s Signature

Date (month/day/year)

Researcher Obtaining Consent (please print)

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.

APPENDIX C  
RESEARCH SURVEY AND QUESTIONNAIRE

## Current Competitive Dancer Survey

### 1. Current Age:

- 9
- 10
- 11
- 12
- 13
- 14
- 15
- 16
- 17
- 18
- 19
- 20
- 21
- 22
- 23
- 24
- 25

### 2. Current Location of Residence:

- Northeast
- Southeast
- Midwest
- Southwest
- West
- Northwest

### 3. Location of Competitive dance training:

- Northeast
- Southeast
- Midwest
- Southwest
- West
- Northwest

### 4. How many years have you been training in dance?

- 1-3 years
- 4-6 years
- 7-10 years
- 11 or more years

5. How many years have you been competing in dance?
  - 1-3 years
  - 4-6 years
  - 7-10 years
  - 11 or more
  
6. How many injuries have you experienced since you have been dancing?
  - 1-2
  - 3-4
  - 5 or more
  - Please explain the nature of these injuries:
  
7. Have the number of injuries you have experienced increased since you began participating in competitive dance?
  - Yes
  - No
  - Unsure
  
8. To what do you feel your injuries are due?
  - overuse
  - improper training
  - lack of cross training
  - An accident and therefore, unpreventable
  - Other:
  
  - Please explain your answer in more detail:
  
9. Are the movements you are expected to perform in your choreographed competition routines physically challenging for you personally?
  - Yes
  - No
  - Please explain your answer in more detail:
  
10. What level of stress do you feel a competitive dance environment gives you in comparison to a non-competitive dance environment?
  - No Additional Stress
  - A Limited Amount of Additional Stress
  - A Manageable Amount of Additional Stress
  - A Great Deal of Additional Stress
  - Please explain your answer in more detail:
  
11. Do you feel that competition dance creates a positive support system in your life?
  - Yes
  - No
  - Please explain your answer in more detail:

12. Do you feel a competitive dance environment provides opportunities that would be unavailable outside of the competition circuit?

- Yes
- No
- Please explain your answer in more detail.

13. What percentage of your time do you feel is required in order for you to participate in competitive dance?

- 25%
- 50%
- 75%
- Other:
- Please explain your answer in more detail.

14. Does participating in dance competitions make you question your skill set in relationship to your competitors?

- Yes
- No
- Please explain your answer in more detail.

15. Does the feedback you receive from judges after competition make you feel encouraged or frustrated?

- Encouraged
- Frustrated
- Please explain your answer in more detail.

16. Do you feel your sense of self-worth has increased or decreased since participating in competitive dance?

- Increased
- Decreased
- Please explain your answer in more detail.

17. How do you feel about your body when performing in competition costumes?

- I feel confident performing in the competition costumes.
- I feel embarrassed when performing in SOME of the costumes.
- I feel embarrassed when performing in MOST of the costumes.
- Please explain your answer in more detail.

18. Do you feel pressure to execute your competition routines perfectly?

- Yes
- No
- Please explain your answer in more detail.

19. If you feel pressure to execute your competition routines perfectly, from whom do you feel that pressure?

- Fellow Dancers
- Coaches/Teachers
- Parent/Guardian
- Please explain your answer in more detail.

20. Do you feel your coaches/teachers have your best interests in mind at all times?

- Yes
- No
- Please explain your answer in more detail.

21. Do you feel like you enjoy dance more because you participate in competitions?

- Yes
- No
- Please explain your answer in more detail.



## Retired Competitive Dancer Survey

## 1. Current Age:

- 18
- 19
- 20
- 21
- 22
- 23
- 24
- 25
- 26
- 27
- 28
- 29
- 30
- 31
- 32
- 33
- 34
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- 41
- 42
- 43
- 44
- 45
- 46
- 47
- 48
- 49
- 50

## 2. Current Location of Residence:

- Northeast
- Southeast
- Midwest
- Southwest
- West
- Northwest

3. Location of Competitive dance training:

- Northeast
- Southeast
- Midwest
- Southwest
- West
- Northwest

4. How many years did you train in dance?

- 1-3 years
- 4-6 years
- 7-10 years
- 11 or more years

5. How many years did you compete in dance?

- 1-3 years
- 4-6 years
- 7-10 years
- 11 or more

6. How many injuries have you experienced since you have been dancing?

- 1-2
- 3-4
- 5 or more
- Please explain the nature of these injuries:

7. Did the number of injuries you experienced increase since you were participating in competitive dance?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

8. To what do you feel your injuries are due?

- overuse
- improper training
- lack of cross training
- An accident and therefore, unpreventable
- Other:
- Please explain your answer in more detail:

9. Did you find the movements you were expected to perform in your choreographed competition routines physically challenging for you personally?

- Yes
- No
- Please explain your answer in more detail:

10. What level of stress do you feel a competitive dance environment gave you in comparison to a non-competitive dance environment?

- No Additional Stress
- A Limited Amount of Additional Stress
- A Manageable Amount of Additional Stress
- A Great Deal of Additional Stress
- Please explain your answer in more detail:

11. Do you feel that competition dance created a positive support system in your life?

- Yes
- No
- Please explain your answer in more detail:

12. Do you feel a competitive dance environment provided opportunities that would be unavailable outside of the competition circuit?

- Yes
- No
- Please explain your answer in more detail.

13. What percentage of your time do you feel was required in order for you to participate in competitive dance?

- 25%
- 50%
- 75%
- Other:
- Please explain your answer in more detail.

14. Did participating in dance competitions make you question your skill set in relationship to your competitors?

- Yes
- No
- Please explain your answer in more detail.

15. Did the feedback you received from judges after competition make you feel encouraged or frustrated?

- Encouraged
- Frustrated
- Please explain your answer in more detail.

16. Do you feel your sense of self-worth has increased or decreased since participating in competitive dance?

- Increased
- Decreased
- Please explain your answer in more detail.

17. How did you feel about your body when performing in competition costumes?

- I feel confident performing in the competition costumes.
- I feel embarrassed when performing in SOME of the costumes.
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- Please explain your answer in more detail.

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- Parent/Guardian
- Please explain your answer in more detail.

20. Did you feel your coaches/teachers had your best interests in mind at all times?

- Yes
- No
- Please explain your answer in more detail.

21. Did you feel like you enjoyed dance more because you participated in competitions?

- Yes
- No
- Please explain your answer in more detail.

### Interview Questions

- 1.Explain how competition dance has affected your life in a positive way.
- 2.Explain how competition dance has affected your life in a negative way.
3. Do you feel you have a healthy relationship with your body based on your experiences with competitive dance?
- 4.How much of your self worth/love/acceptance do you feel is due to participating in competitive dance?
5. Before a competition performance, walk me through your emotions and how you deal or dealt with them.
6. Share a story or give an example about how competition dance has affected your life in a positive/negative way