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The Stereotype Surrounding the Dancer Body

Madison Lynn Menale

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The Stereotype Surrounding the Dancer Body

A Thesis

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of the Requirements for Graduation Honors

Madison Lynn Menale

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Abstract

From a young age, athletes grapple with societal expectations surrounding body image, a phenomenon particularly pronounced in dancers, often leading to detrimental health habits. This research investigates the impact of such pressures on the mental well-being of athletes, focusing on the Butler University Dance Team, female members of Butler Athletics, and the a few Butler Ballet members. A comprehensive survey, comprising of 10 questions, was administered to explore participants' dance environments, the influence of teacher language, and the enduring effects on their mental health. Additionally, two in-depth interviews were conducted for deeper insights on the topic. By surveying both dance team members and athletes, this study aims to compare the diverse effects on eating habits and body image. The research seeks to shed light on the stereotypes surrounding a dancer's physique and advocates for initiatives to enhance the mental health of dancers worldwide.

Literature Review

Growing up in a dance community has numerous benefits, including physical exercise, learning determination, motivation and striving for improvement. There are plenty of reasons why dance is such a beneficial sport to enroll a child in when they are growing up. When these dancers start to learn to love dance for themselves and not just because their parents put them in a class, this is when they start to learn and grow on their own and take their improvement into their own hands. Sometimes, dancers very commonly turn into perfectionists because of these tendencies. They want to do everything to the best of their abilities, and oftentimes more than not will do anything it takes to make them feel that they are being perfect. These personality traits of dancers are what can turn into unhealthy habits when it comes to overexercising and undereating, leading to common eating disorders. People with eating disorders typically have trouble when their plans

do not go as they hoped because they are perfectionists, and feel they are never fully accomplished despite their achievements (Franco-Paredes, 2005, 61). There are several reasons why dancers may become so susceptible to perfectionism, including their dance studio environments, comments by teachers, and pressures from social media.

Dancers are taught from a young age to look into a mirror and listen to the corrections of their teachers as well as to criticize themselves. When dancers are not feeling as successful or accomplished as they hope, they start feeling negative about everything they see in the mirror. When they do not look the same as another dancer who is getting more praise and approval, this is where unhealthy habits can kick in. Staring at oneself for hours each day can lead to an even greater scale of self-criticism. These mirrors can ultimately cause dancers to have a greater sense of self awareness and therefore lead to comparing themselves to their peers (Radell, 2020, 109). Without the correct support and positive feedback, this environment can turn out to be detrimental to the dancer's mental health. The constant comparing and judging of oneself can take a large toll on one's mental health.

This is where the aspect of the dance environment, including the teacher and their language, comes into play. Many dancers may either feel pressured by their teachers to lose weight, or they just feel unable to speak to their teachers about their body image struggles. Some teachers tell their dancers they need to diet without providing the health education needed to go about this in a safe way, while others emphasize foods dancers should not eat which leads to this idea that to be a good dancer, one must be skinny (Dantas, 2018, 41). Some dance teachers may not even realize that the language they use can have such a grand impact on a dancer's body image. Therefore, education about this ongoing issue of a dancer's wellbeing is important because there are so many external factors that go into these health risks for dancers.

Aside from the dancer's own home studio environment, many of the pressures that dancers feel to lose weight come from media and what they see from external sources. The media has so much to do with what dancers see online and on television. Dancers always have idols that they look up to and hope to be like in the future, and they pick up on what this idol looks like and what their body looks like. They start connecting their idol's success in the dance world with what their body looks like too. This criticism of one's body is common in all areas of life, but self-objectification and perfectionism is so common in the dance world, and comparison and judgment from media leads to this prevalence of eating disorders (Heiland, 2008, 258). Overall, there are many factors that have led to this unhealthy expectation of what a dancer should look like, and it has become so accepted that it has become very difficult to challenge this stereotype.

Growing up as a dancer has many positives and beneficial outcomes, but it is important to be aware of the negative effects this environment can have on people as well. The culture of common body image issues in the dance world can be changed with more awareness and education. There are many factors that increase the pressures that dance can put on people's mental health, and to make a change, these factors need to be researched and understood. Men also experience these pressures about their bodies, but in different ways. Our society praises those who have toned and young-looking bodies, but it is especially praised in the dance world (Oliver, 2008, 20). These ideas that have been common for so long need to be talked about more so that change can happen and dancers can treat their bodies in a healthier way.

Purpose

This study aimed to investigate three main questions:

1. Do dancers tend to eat less and have more guilt about food than other female athletes?

2. Do dancers typically have a negative relationship with food because of the culture of growing up in the dance world?
3. What lasting effects do dancers have when it comes to their body image and eating habits because of dance and how does this compare to other female athletes who are non-dancers?

Methodology

Participants

To obtain the data needed to analyze the answers to the questions of the thesis, a survey was conducted. The survey was a mixed methods approach, gathering both quantitative and qualitative data. In addition, small interviews were held after the survey was closed. This survey was designed to gather information from the Butler University Dance Team, as well as some other members of Butler Athletics and the Butler Ballet Program. The survey was sent to the Butler Dance Team, other female athletic teams, as well as to the Honors Listserv for those who were eligible. Participants represented each grade to keep the survey and sample diverse. They were recruited by email, and could volunteer if they were willing to participate in a small interview post-survey as well.

Survey Data

A Qualtrics survey (Appendix A), approved by Butler's IRB, was administered. This survey gathered information from the Butler University Dance Team, as well as some other female members of Butler Athletics and the Butler Ballet Program. The survey began with a consent statement to ensure participants knew what study they were participating in before answering any questions and knew that they were able to stop at any point if they wished. The survey link was sent to the dance team in a group message, through the female athletics team group messages, as well through the Honors program List Serv email chain. Thirty-seven athletes in total completed

the survey. Twenty-one participants were dancers as well as sixteen other students who have backgrounds in athletics for comparison. These students were selected by their willingness to participate in the study as well as their personal relationship they have with the researcher. Questions asked addressed topics such as their typical eating behaviors, the effects their teachers have had on their body perception, as well as the effects dance has had on their eating habits even now through college.

The series of questions helped to gather a better understanding on what their dance environment was like growing up, how the language of teachers has affected them, and to gather if these effects are long lasting. The survey consisted of questions to gauge how eating habits have been affected by their sport, and ultimately if their sport has affected their relationship with food in a positive or negative way. Some questions were yes or no answers, while other questions gave respondents the option to write more detailed explanations. By having both dance team members, other athletes, and some dance majors complete the survey, this helped to compare the different or similar effects each sport has on the athletes' eating habits and body images.

Interview Data

After the survey was conducted, single interviews were held upon willingness of individuals to participate in an interview (Appendix B). The last question of the survey gave the participants the option to leave their email if they were willing to participate in an interview in the future. Two dance team members were willing to participate in this post-survey interview. Before answering any questions, the interviewees read and acknowledged the consent form, and had acknowledged and agreed to their answers being recorded and protected on a password protected laptop. These interviews allowed a more detailed and in depth look at those participating in the study. Both interviews were held in January and February of 2024, after the survey had concluded.

The interviews consisted of five questions to gain a better understanding of the dancers point of views. The questions revolved around learning how their relationship with food has been affected by dance, how their outlooks have changed throughout the years on body image and nutrition, as well as their opinions on changes that may need to be made in the future to improve the relationship between dancers and food. These questions aimed to understand the dancers' feelings with food and body image on a more personal level. The interview responses helped to understand the more emotional aspects of this topic and how it affects someone in their everyday life apart from the basic statistical questions mostly asked in the survey.

Results

Demographics

The survey was sent to all 29 members of the Butler University Dance Team, as well as to the Honors program List Serv, and the female athletic teams at Butler. During the 2 months that the survey was open, 19 dance team members, 2 ballet dancers, 2 golfers, 1 swimmer, 1 softball player, 1 track runner, 6 lacrosse players, 1 basketball player, 3 soccer players, and 1 volleyball player answered. All participants were female and currently enrolled in college at Butler. For the two interview participants, both were senior students. All dancers had at least 8 years of dance experience, and the mean number of years spent dancing was 15.7 years. The answers for the other female athletes varied in the length of duration they have participated in their sport as well as if they chose to answer the question. The average length of time spent playing their sports was 8.7 years.

Daily Meal Intake

Survey participants were asked about their typical daily eating habits, focusing on how many times they eat in a day. The survey results were analyzed by comparing the results of dancers versus non-dancers. The specific question being looked at was whether dancers, as a subset of female athletes, exhibited a lower frequency of daily meals compared to their non-dancer counterparts (Figure 1). The findings found that dancers, on average, ate 3.14 times a day, whereas the other athletes who were non-dancers had a mean frequency of 3.975 times a day. Because of the question being looked at, if dancers eat less than the other athletes in a typical day, a one-tailed T-test was run. A p-value of 0.047 was found, stating that the results were significantly different.

Subsequently, another question was asked to participants regarding their typical breakfast consumption. Among dancers, eight individuals disclosed that they did not usually partake in breakfast, while thirteen said they did consume breakfast daily. Conversely, among the other athletes, twelve non-dancers reported eating breakfast regularly, while only four indicated that they did not. A two-tailed t-test was administered to discern any statistical difference between the two cohorts regarding breakfast habits, yielding a p-value of 0.413, suggesting no significant difference between them. These results show some of the differences in dietary patterns observed among these different athlete groups, with implications for tailored nutritional practices depending on if someone is a dancer or not.

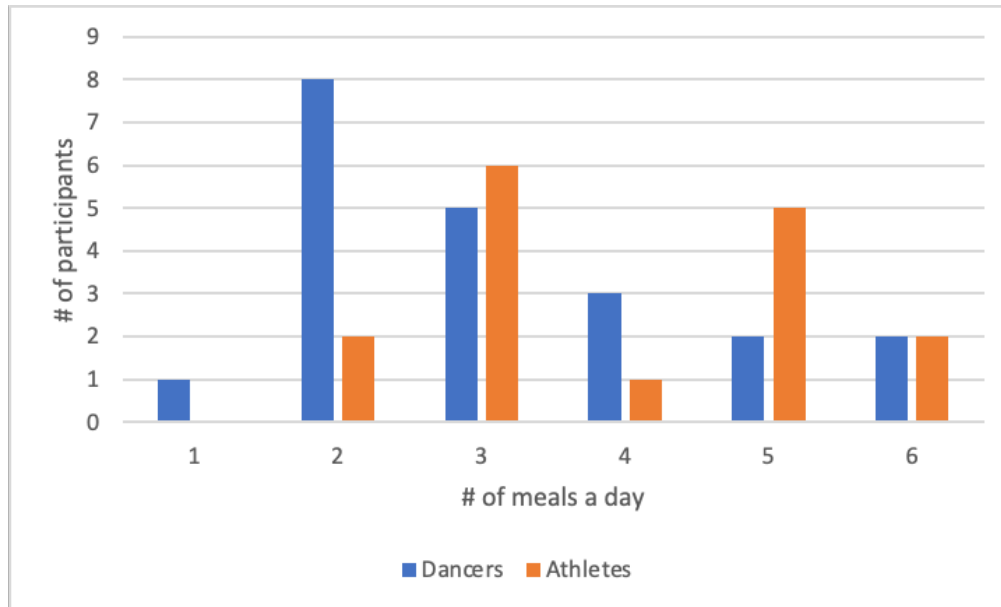


Figure 1. Dancers and other athletes were asked on average how many times they eat in a day.

Food Restrictions

Another area of interest of this study was how one's sport had potentially affected their food restrictions in their diet. Sometimes, it is proposed that athletes try to cut out certain food groups due to trying to keep their body looking a certain way whether this be cutting out carbohydrates and dairy for example. This question in the survey aimed to see if the number of dancers with restrictions differed greatly from the number of other athletes with restrictions, and it aimed to see if there were any restrictions, if they differed in what kinds of foods were being restrained from. When asked this question in the survey, the participants either had no restrictions, food allergies, or restrictions that they try to keep from eating certain foods (Figure 2). The restrictions that were stated included being lactose-free, gluten-free, vegetarian, beef and pork free, as well as sugar and wheat free. Out of the dancers surveyed, three had food allergies, two had food restrictions, and the rest had no restrictions. The other athletes all had no restrictions besides three who were flexitarian, wheat- and sugar-free, and dairy-free. The other athletes had no food

allergies stated. When performing a 2 tailed t-test, the p-value was 0.22, showing no statistical significance.

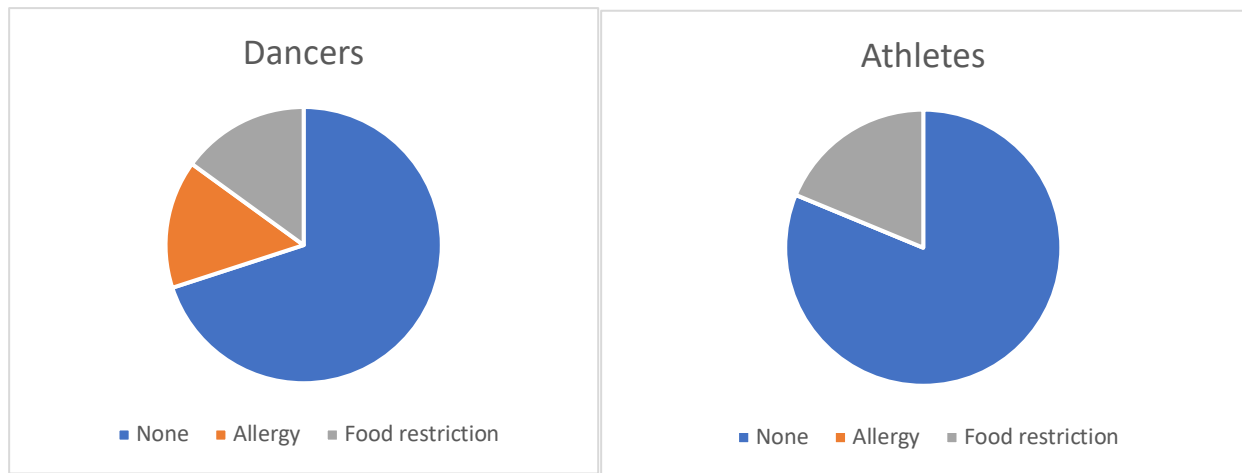


Figure 2. Dancers and other female athletes were asked of any food restrictions and allergies they had.

Calorie Counting

The survey participants were asked if their sport had caused them to make any changes to their diet, and if these changes included increasing or decreasing their calorie intake each day (Figure 3). Three dancers out of the twenty-one said that they did not make changes to their diet due to their sport, but the rest said yes. Out of the other athletes, only three of the sixteen also did not make any changes to their diet. When discussing calories, eleven dancers said that their sport led them to decrease their calories and three increased calories. The other seven dancers said they had no change in calorie intake due to dance. For the other athletes, four said they had decreased calories while seven increased their intake, and the rest did not change their calories. When running a 2 tailed t-test for this question, the p-value was 0.035 showing that there was a significant difference between the two groups and how they have changed their calorie intake for their sport.

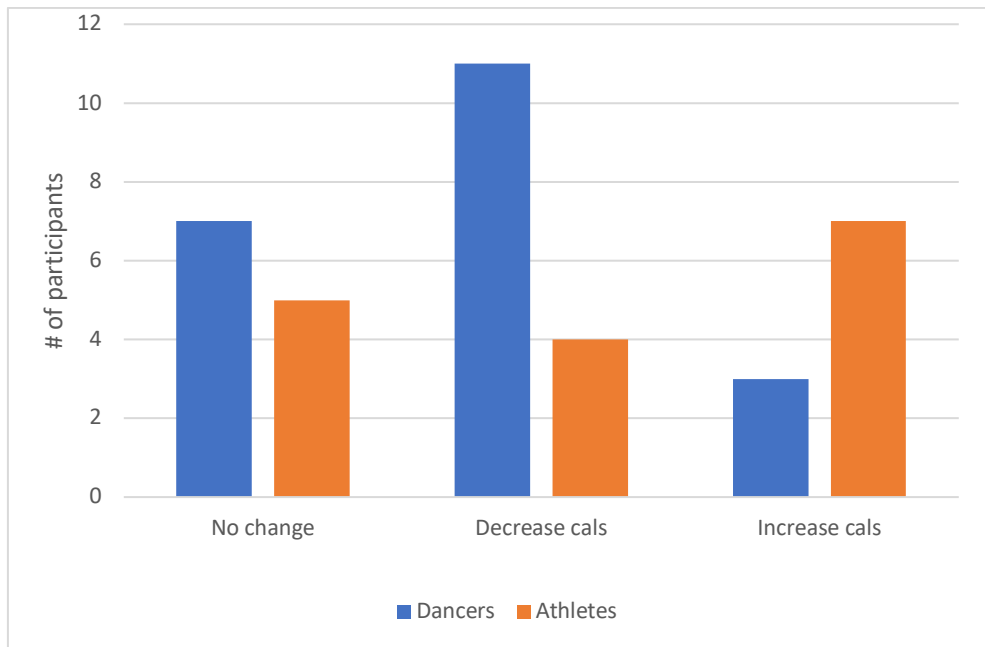


Figure 3. Dancers and other athletes were asked if they made dietary changes including increasing or decreasing calories because of their sport.

Dancers and other athletes were also asked in the survey if they had ever counted calories in order to stay under a certain number. This was to gauge if dancers had more of a tendency to obsess over the number of calories they were eating compared to the other female athletes. The question was a yes or no response. Thirteen out of the twenty-one dancers said they have tried to stay under a certain number, while seven of the sixteen other athletes had responded that they have tried to stay under a certain number (Figure 4). A 1-tailed t-test was run to see if more of the dancers had counted their calories for this reason compared to the other female athletes and the p-value was found to be 0.142, so there was not a significant difference in this sample.

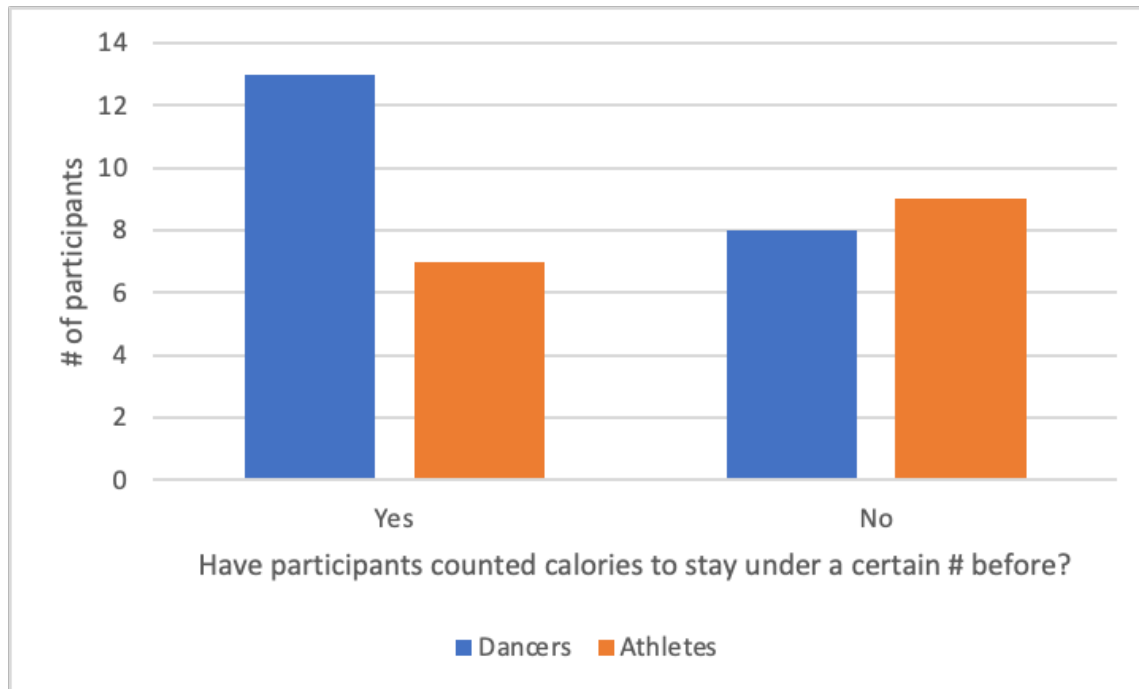


Figure 4. Dancers and otherathletes were asked in the survey if they have ever counted their calories to stay under a certain number.

Relation Between Performance Days and Diet

To analyze how both dancers and other athletes change their food intake on the days they perform versus off days, the survey participants were asked open-endedly how they alter their diet. Common themes were looked at between the responses. For both groups, it was found that there were four overarching themes (Table 1). These themes were eating less on performance days, eating the same regardless if it is a performance day or not, eating more on performance days, and aiming to eat more carbohydrates and proteins on performance days.

Theme 1 is found that some generally decided to eat less on their performance days mostly for appearance reasons. For example, one dancer said,

If I perform in a day, I like to eat less to look less bloated.

Another athlete also fell under this theme when saying,

If I know we have a harder practice that day I tend to eat less just due to nerves.

The athletes stated this idea that they eat less on performance days, but as seen here, the reasoning as to why they end up eating less differs in some ways. For the dancer, it was because of how she wants to look and the other athlete states that it is due to nerves.

The second theme found was that the athletes' diets would stay the same regardless of if it was a performance day or not. A dancer said,

I still eat 3 meals and snacks regardless with a ton of water as always.

Some of the participants just stated that there was no change specifically that they made if it was a performance day versus just a regular day. They do not make any drastic changes to the foods they are eating even if it is a day of performance.

The third theme is that some athletes eat more for more fuel on performance days as seen when a dancer says she is,

Eating more on dance days but making sure it's "healthier" so it doesn't upset my stomach.

An athlete also felt this way when she said,

I eat more during days that I play soccer.

These participants who fell under this theme all had the common idea of fueling their bodies for performance by eating more on these days.

Lastly, theme 4 had to do with the athletes who try to eat more carbohydrates and more nutritious foods on performance days. A dancer stated,

I try to eat more protein and healthy foods to feel my best during performances.

Another athlete also fell under this theme when saying,

I try to eat fairly healthy throughout the week and then try to carb load prior to tournament days. Other than that, I'd say I eat the same (try to keep balance).

This theme shows the idea that the athletes may alter the intake of carbs, proteins and fats on performance days to best suit their energy needs, but these changes do not involve increasing or decreasing their calorie intake.

The themes can be seen in the table below as well as the frequency of each theme in dancers versus other athletes. Seven dancers fell under the eating less on performance days categories compared to one other athlete.

Many dancers think like theme 1, which is most likely why several dancers choose to eat less on performance days as opposed to eating more to fuel their bodies. For dancers, it appears that they value looking the skinniest over feeling their best as dancers typically responded that they would eat less on performance days which was different from most of the other athletes' responses.

The frequency of these themes in the responses were looked at and the groups were compared and further analyzed (Figure 5). Four dancers said their diets stay the same for the most part and two other athletes answered this as well. Four dancers and six other athletes said that they try to eat more on performance days. Six dancers and six other athletes had responded that they aim to eat more carbohydrates and more nutritious foods rather than trying to eat more or less.

Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4
Eat less on performance days	Mostly eat the same	Eat more for fuel/energy on performance days	Eat more carbs/better foods on performance days
7 dancers, 1 other athlete	4 dancers, 2 other athletes	4 dancers, 6 other athletes	6 dancers, 6 other athletes

Table 1. Common themes from the responses of participants when asked how they eat differently during a day they perform versus an off day.

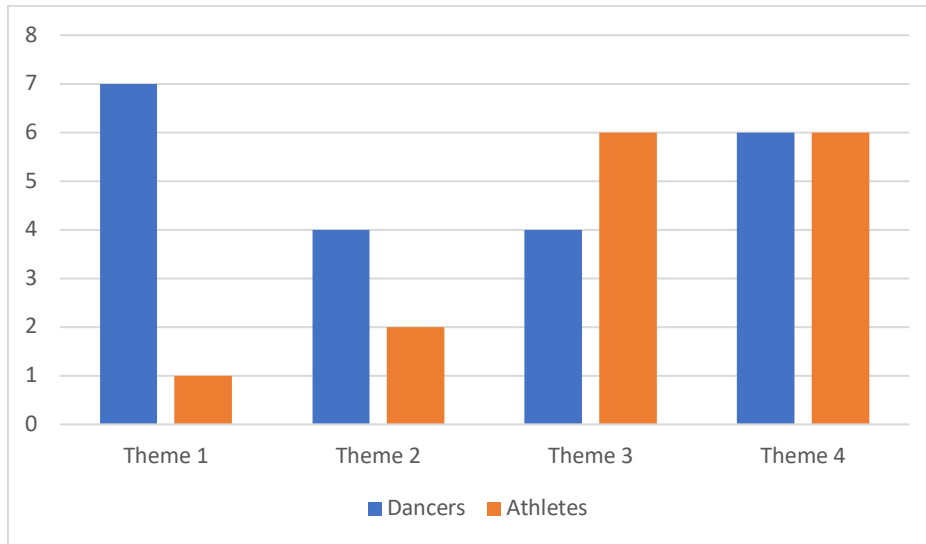


Figure 5. Distribution of responses according to common themes between dancers and other athletes when asked how they eat differently during a day they perform versus an off day.

Guilt and Cheat Meals

The survey participants, including both the dancers and other female athletes, were asked about if they felt any guilt when eating cheat meals or going off their diet. The answer options given were yes, no, and in the past yes but not recently. Thirteen of the 21 dancers answered yes, 2 answered no, and 6 said they used to feel guilty in the past. Out of the other athletes, 10 said yes, 1 said no, and 5 said in the past they had. A 2 tailed t-test was ran and the p-value was 0.86, showing no statistical significance. The shows how most of the other athletes did still have some form of guilt when it comes to their diet, but for the dancers, these effects have lasted still throughout their lives while a few more of the other athletes said these thoughts have gone away.

Current Relationship with Food

The last survey question asked to the participants had to do with explaining their current perspective on nutrition and their relationship with food. This question was aimed to see if there

were any common themes for each group, as well as if there were any similarities or differences between the other athletes and dancers.

For the dancers, there were four main themes that could be concluded from their responses. The four themes were feeling guilt and fear of gaining weight, currently improving their relationship with food, feeling a positive relationship and appreciation of food, and having good and bad days with their relationship with food. Theme 1 of the dancers was specifically supported for example when a dancer shared,

I have always loved snacking and eating desserts, but I have also had a very bad mindset about my body so I often try to restrict myself on what snacks I eat and am always keeping a mental note of my calorie count. I almost always feel guilty after eating too much or having a big dessert.

These dancers who answered this way all related to feeling some guilt when eating and having a fear of gaining weight.

Theme 2 was that the dancers were currently trying to improve their relationship. This was found when multiple dancers shared something along the lines of what this one dancer said,

Nutrition is crucial to health, so I'm trying to have a more complete diet with all the food groups instead of restricting food groups like I have in the past.

This shows that within recent years, those who answered and related to this theme have felt an improvement in their relationship with food. However, in the past, they have dealt with negative thoughts and feelings when thinking about food and nutrition.

Theme 3 was that some of the dancers have an appreciation of food and a good relationship such as when one response said,

I have found a new appreciation for food and have been fueling my body with proper foods to help me dance.

There were several dancers who answered that they view food currently as fuel and also appreciate all that food can do for their bodies.

The last of the 4 themes for the dancers was that they feel they have good and bad days and still some contradicting thoughts when it comes to food. One dancer specifically stated,

I need to eat to fuel my body and what I ask of it but also feel the pressure to look a certain way and the two don't always align.

This theme shows how some of the dancers felt that on some days they have a good relationship with food, but still on other days they struggle with some of the negative thoughts.

Of the dancers, five shared the theme of feeling guilt or fear of gaining weight. Five say they are trying to improve their relationship with food. Eight mention they have an appreciation of food now, and three dancers have good and bad days as well as some contradicting thoughts.

For the other female athletes, there were three overarching themes. The themes were having a good relationship with food, sometimes feeling that they are not eating enough for what their body needs, and also feeling they have restrictive diets sometimes. Theme 1 was that they had a good relationship and can eat what they want for the most part in moderation. One of the responses said,

I know that in order to perform at my best, I need to fuel my body with sufficient nutritious food, but it is ok to have treats in moderation as well.

Those participants that fell under this theme related to some of the dancers who also had a good relationship with food as they view it as fuel to be able to do their sport.

Theme 2 of the athletes was found to be that they sometimes have difficulty eating enough. An athlete said in her response,

I have a hard time fueling properly while in season. I have experienced extreme weight loss at certain points of my athletic career, especially in season due to stress and intense amounts of cardio.

A lot of the other athletes related to this theme. Because they work out and play their sport so much, they feel that sometimes they do not eat enough even though they try too. They mention that because they burn so many calories, it is sometimes difficult to replenish their bodies completely.

Lastly, the third theme of the athletes was that they felt they had restrictive diets. One stated her relationship with food as,

Toxic... I do not let myself enjoy as much food compared to my peers especially when it comes to dessert.

This theme was not very common among the other athletes, but some did feel that they are sometimes too restrictive when it comes to eating and that they could work on enjoying food more.

Ten of these non-dancer athletes align with theme 1 and have a good relationship and feel that they can eat what they want with no guilt. Two other athletes fall under theme 2 and say that they feel it is difficult to eat enough to meet their nutritional needs. The other two athletes say they feel their diets are restrictive and fell under theme 3.

Overall, from this qualitative survey, it suggests that more dancers struggle with the idea of guilt and fear of eating too much while the other athletes have more of the mindset that they

can appreciate their food and even sometimes feel that they are not eating enough. It is interesting to see how these relationships differ as dancers seem concerned with eating too much while the other athletes do not always feel they are necessarily eating enough.

Societal Pressures

When interviewing the two dancers, more of an opportunity was given to explain further their views on societal pressures and their opinions on the future of these issues. When sharing their thoughts, some one of the main ideas shared is that some of these pressures stem from society. People watch dance to see how dancer's bodies look while doing their movements. One of the interviewees emphasizes this idea as she says,

Dance is so much about lines and the way your body looks when you do things... That does not necessarily mean that you need to be super thin to do it but often times that is the connotation that comes with that.

Dancers have this idea instilled in them that people will like watching them dance if they look this certain way, and this is where changes will need to be made eventually to see improvements in these stereotypes.

The interviews also shed light on how the dance team members at Butler feel dance team has helped them improve any negative thoughts they used to have with dance. One dancer states, When I was younger (dance) gave me a negative outlook on nutrition. I wasn't educated really at all on what I should be eating and really the only things I was hearing from other people was that... As far as Butler Dance team... it is more about performance and being able to feel and do your best as opposed to looking the thinnest.

If more dance teachers and environments change to this way of thinking, dancers may adjust their mindset of needing to be the thinnest to needing to be the strongest. Dance is not easy in any way, shape, or form, and it is clear these athletes need the adequate nutrition to be able to do the movements and skills they are executing on a daily basis.

In regards as to how these two dancers see these issues improving, a big step they see to making changes includes educating dancers and changing the language used when speaking to dancers. One dancer said,

So many dancers are raised by dance teachers that say things like ‘I can see your lunch’ or things like that make them automatically instills this negative self-talk about what they are eating and what they look like.

Going along with this, the other interviewee also states,

I had teachers and people I respected tell me I should really only be eating salads or that they can see my lunch.

This kind of language needs to be changed, and instead, more teachers need to be educating their dancers on the kind of nutrition their bodies do need to perform their sport to the best of their ability. As one dancer put it,

I think teaching dancers that having visible muscle will translate in a great way because it will allow you to jump higher and move faster... as opposed to putting a negative connotation with that.

This change in language to be less negative to more encouraging and educating words would make such a difference in these dancers’ lives.

Discussion

Athletes, particularly dancers, often grapple with societal pressures surrounding body image, which can have profound implications for their mental well-being. This study aimed to investigate the impact of such pressures on athletes' mental health, focusing on members of the Butler University Dance Team, other female athletes within Butler Athletics, and a few ballet dancers. Through a comprehensive survey and in-depth interviews, this research looked at the participants' experiences in their dance environments, the influence of teacher language, and the enduring effects on their mental health. By surveying both dancers and other athletes, this study aimed to compare the diverse effects of societal pressures on eating habits and body image, with the ultimate goal of shedding light on stereotypes surrounding a dancer's physique and advocating for initiatives to enhance the mental health of dancers worldwide.

The findings from the survey provide valuable insights into the experiences of other athletes within different dance and athletic contexts. Participants reported various challenges related to societal expectations surrounding body image, with many expressing concerns about their appearance and feeling pressure to meet certain standards. Interestingly, responses differed in some ways between dance team members and other athletes, suggesting that the nature of the sport or activity may to what extent the individuals are affected by these pressures.

Data from the participants in the survey shared important findings when looking at athletes and their eating habits. Dancers did not eat as many times in a day on average as compared to the other non-dancer athletes. Most of the time, dancers are instilled with this idea that the less they eat the better, because then if they are looking in the mirror at themselves all day, they want to like what they see in that mirror. What was interesting was that more than half of both groups of athletes said that they did eat breakfast on a normal day. So, if the dancers are skipping certain meals, it

does not seem to be breakfast which sometimes is a meal that people tend to miss if they are not eating all three main meals in a day.

Another main theme seen from the survey was the comparison of the athletes' relationship with food. Majority of all the athletes combined said that they did alter their diet and what they eat due to their sport. This does not necessarily mean that these changes are negative, which is why it is important to look at the qualitative data gathered in the study. Overall, the main goals in the dietary changes seen in the dancers had to do with decreasing calories while the other athletes more so aimed to increase their calories. Dancers tend to eat less on their performance days, and multiple responses said that they do this for the reason of looking better in their outfits. Meanwhile, the other athletes mentioned changing the kinds of foods they are intaking on performance days to get the most energy for their performance and did not mention calorie intake at all.

There was not really a difference when looking at guilt in eating cheat meals or going off track of the diet. It is suggested from this that in every sport there is a demand to eat and train a specific way for their sport.

From the data, the relationship between these eating habits can be connected to this idea of body image that can be seen in athletes, but especially dancers. There have been decades of this unhealthy expectation now for dancers to look a certain way, and most of the time, this ideal is to be as small as possibly (Oliver, 2008). There definitely has been some movement in the right direction when it comes to the expected body types of dancers, but there still are some areas, especially in the ballet world, that need much more improvement. If all these dancers in the surveys have these common themes of restricting meals, decreasing calories, feeling they must look a certain way on performance days, and feeling guilty for eating a cheat meal every now and then, this all stems back to the societal pressures they felt when growing up in the dance world. With

the help of the supportive teachers that are out there, eventually their relationships with food will hopefully improve, as can be seen with most of the dance team members here at Butler. The main issue is that these dancers should not have to feel this way about their bodies and food in the first place.

In-depth interviews provided further insights into the lived experiences of two of the participants and the relation between societal pressures and mental health. Participants spoke about the challenges they faced when noticing societal expectations, as well as some ways they have been able to overcome some of these pressures. Importantly, the interviews highlighted the need for greater awareness and support for athletes' mental health, including access to resources and interventions tailored to their unique needs.

Comparative analysis between dancers and other athletes revealed both similarities and differences in their experiences with societal pressures. While both groups reported feeling some pressure to eat and look a certain way, dancers appeared to be more susceptible to restrictive eating habits and negative self-perceptions. However, it is important to recognize that athletes from all backgrounds may experience challenges related to body image and mental health, and efforts to promote positive body image and well-being should be inclusive and comprehensive.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the understanding of the relationship between societal pressures, body image, and mental health among athletes, with a particular focus on dancers. By highlighting the unique challenges faced by athletes within different dance and athletic contexts, this research underscores the need for targeted interventions and support mechanisms to enhance the mental health and well-being of athletes worldwide. Moving forward, it is very important that we continue to challenge stereotypes and promote positive body image specifically within dance communities, where these expectations are seen on more extreme levels. It is so

important to be able to have supporting environments that empower athletes to thrive both on and off the field.

Conclusions

This study is significant for anyone who had grown up in dance world. Dance is able to give people so many opportunities and definitely helps build character, but it is also important to acknowledge the damage that can take place to one's mental health.

After analyzing the data from the study, more conclusions can be made about this stereotype that has been created and believed for so many years about what the dancer body should look like. After looking at the question, in what ways can dance alter one's relationship with food as well as with body image, it is clear that dancers are likely to have a negative outlook on these topics after growing up in the dance community for so many years. Due to the societal pressures, the hours of standing in front of mirrors, and even the type of environment that dancers grow up in, dancers are instilled with these specific ideas of how they think they need to look. They are more susceptible to decreasing their calorie intake, eating less frequently in a day, and struggle with having a positive relationship with food.

It is important to acknowledge that all athletes may have some form of a struggle with their diet as every sport is so demanding on one's body. Athletes of any sport will put pressure on themselves to eat a certain way to keep their body performing to the best of their ability. However, comparing the non-dancers to the dancers in this study has made it clear how their perspectives on food differ. The other athletes view food as a way to fuel their body, and even sometimes, they do not think that they are getting enough food. This difference really helps show how dancers

sometimes see food as a fear of what it will make their body look like while other athletes see it as a tool to help their bodies perform and do their sport sufficiently.

Overall, by knowing more about this stereotype surrounding what a dancer's body is expected to look like, change can be made to help improve the mental health of dancers all around. By knowing the main factors that lead to these negative body issues, teachers and society can try and help change how dancers think about what they need to look like. Moving forward, it is essential that stereotypes continue to be challenged, inclusive and supportive environments are provided, and the holistic well-being of these dancers are prioritized. By doing so, these dancers can be encouraged to create healthy relationships with their bodies and minds as well as with food. Ultimately, this research advocates for a shift in how the dance world approaches body image and mental health, with the aim of creating a more inclusive, supportive, and empowering environment for dancers of all shapes and sizes.

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Appendix A

1. How many years have you been dancing/participating your sport?
2. How many times do you eat in a day?
3. Do you typically eat breakfast in a normal day?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
4. Do you have any food restrictions? If so, what is it?
5. Have you made any changes or adjustments to your diet because of your sport?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
6. Do these changes include cutting down your calorie count?
 - a. Increasing calories
 - b. Decreasing calories
 - c. Neither
7. Do you eat differently during a day you dance/perform your sport versus your off days?
8. Have you ever counted your calories to stay under a certain number?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
9. Do you or have you in the past felt guilty for eating cheat meals or splurging every time you went off track of your diet?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. In the past I have, but not recently

10. What is your current perspective on nutrition?
11. Are you willing to participate in an interview? If so, include your name and email.

Appendix B

1. How do you feel that dance has changed your outlook on nutrition?
2. Have your views changed at all about nutrition because of dance, or if applies, since stopping dancing?
3. Is there anything you would tell your younger self now when it comes to body image and nutrition that you wish you knew back then?
4. Do you think that dancers view body image different than say other athletes? Explain why.
5. What changes do you think need to be made in the dance community to put a more positive light on body image?