

## Introduction

Female adolescent dancers have a higher likelihood of developing an eating disorder as compared to their non-dancing adolescent peers<sup>1</sup>.

Body dysmorphia appears to be a precipitating factor in the increased prevalence of eating disorders amongst dancers, which is highly influenced by added pressure from dance teachers<sup>1,2,3</sup>. Young adolescent dancers look up to their teachers as role models and many dance teachers have stated that they value thinness, resulting in the dancer developing a similar mindset<sup>4,5</sup>.

There is limited research that qualitatively looks at the impact of dance on the development of body dysmorphia and eating disorders; this study extends prior research by utilizing qualitative measures to examine this relationship, specifically using the method of photovoice.

## Study Objectives

The objectives of this study are to

1. qualitatively explore current adolescent dancers' perspectives on dance culture, body image, and eating habits via photovoice, and to identify factors that influence these views;
2. determine whether adolescent dancers receive education or counseling about healthy eating habits and body image, as well as eating disorders;
3. to assess current dance teachers' perspectives on dance culture, body image, and eating habits among dancers;
4. make recommendations to the dance program based on the outcomes of the study.

## Study Design

**Photovoice** is a community-based participatory research method that allows individuals to use photographs to provide evidence, knowledge, and their own perspective about a specific topic<sup>6</sup>.

It offers individuals a platform to share their own experiences, begin dialogue with each other, and help bring about positive change within their community.

Adolescents are very in-tune to technology and use photos and videos to tell their stories on social media, so using photovoice is a way to bring research to the adolescents and allow them to share their perspectives and experiences in a creative way they understand.

## Methods

### Recruitment and Eligibility

- Dancers and teachers were recruited from a non-competitive dance studio in Spokane, WA.
- Dancer eligibility: age between 13 and 17 years old, no previous diagnosis of an eating disorder, and access to a smartphone camera.
- Teacher eligibility: age > 18 years old, experience as an adolescent dancer, and experience teaching adolescent dancers for at least 1 year.

### Participants

- Three 15-17-year-old girls who are current dance students at the above studio.
- Five adult dance teachers were recruited at the same studio.

### Preliminary Meetings

- Researcher met with each adolescent and their parent:
  - Obtained informed consent
  - Reviewed instructions on how to capture images and ethical photo taking
  - Provided prompts for photovoice
- Participants used smartphone cameras to capture images and emailed them to the researcher prior to focus group

### Photovoice Prompts:

1. What best represents how you feel about your body when you dance?
2. What makes you feel confident, strong, beautiful, and/or powerful?
3. What do you enjoy eating or drinking before, during, or after dance?
4. What clothes do you wear to dance and what clothes do you wish you could wear to dance?

### Focus Groups:

- Semi-structured format, 2 hour sessions
- One with adolescent dancers, one with teachers
- A version of the **SHOWED method**<sup>7</sup> was used to analyze photos the participants took
- Open ended questions to facilitate conversation about dance culture, body image, and eating habits
- Audiotaped and transcribed
- Thematic synthesis of data using line-by-line coding strategy

Figure 1. Sample participant photos



## Thematic Analysis

Line-by-line coding analysis revealed overarching themes including:

- Body Image and Self-Perception
  - Having negative feelings towards specific parts of their body
- Insecurities and External Perception
  - Comparison to others (specifically regarding body type and dance ability)
  - Struggling with the opinions of others, whether spoken or not
- Food, Diet, and Body Relationship
  - Awareness of how food affects the body leading to avoidance
- Dance and Personal Growth
  - Needing a strong sense of community within dance to feel comfortable
  - Recognizing areas that need to be changed within the dance community
- Clothing and Self-Expression
  - Awareness of how clothing influences physical comfort and self-confidence
- Body Image in Social Contexts
  - Feeling more confident when teachers are supportive

## Next Steps

The next steps in this study include:

- Disseminating results into a paper to be submitted for publication
- Create a short educational module or video to help educate dance teachers on this topic

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