

***DANCING MOSAICS:  
INFLUENCES ON THE BODY IMAGES OF ELITE ADOLESCENT  
FEMALE DANCERS***

**By:**

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## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Gordon and Lana McLean. All my life you have believed in me: your love and support are unconditional. Thank-you for trusting that I could persevere when the road was tough. I admire you and am blessed to have mentors like you. I love you, God Bless.

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*Dancing Mosaics:  
Influences on the Body Images of  
Elite Adolescent Female Dancers*

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**Abstract**

This research examines how elite adolescent female dancers visualize and scrutinize their bodies and construct their ideal body type from the basis of the thin ideal in dance culture. Competitive and pre-professional dancers were studied to explore the role body image, body satisfaction and dance culture plays in their desire for thinness.

Good body image and body satisfaction in female dancers is lowered during adolescence as their bodies change through puberty and they strive toward the thin ideal (Rhea, 1998). The dance ideal, although similar to the cultural ideal, also emphasizes muscle length, long limbs and few body curves whereas the cultural ideal strives for shapely curves and prominent breasts. As dancers train in classes for performances, they are constantly surrounded by mirrors and this can lead to a heightened desire for thinness and constant self-scrutiny (Benn and Walters, 2001). Dancers use their bodies as a performance tool, therefore they cater their bodies to the audiences that observe them and these practices are highly objectified, externally validated and panoptic.

This study combines three methodologies: i) Participant observation of elite dance classes, ii) Group interviews and iii) Demographics questionnaire. These methodologies are used to capture the actions of the dancers in class, their perceptions of their bodies in relation to themselves, other dancers and their socio-demographic backgrounds. Previous research has focused on eating disorders and dance: however, negative body image is a precursor to this life-threatening illness and better understanding body image in dancers would allow for greater positive intervention. Although the literature on body image is large, there are few studies using qualitative methodology to understand a dancer's point of view. These methodologies along with the researcher's insider status allow for a more complete understanding of how young aspiring dancers perceive their bodies.

The results of this study focus on the three main themes. The first theme looks at the ideals these dancers have in regards to body shape, musculature, and diet as these dancers

continue to strive for perfection. The second theme examines the connections and dreams these dancers have in regards to professional dance. The third theme looks at the two distinct cultures these dancers are a part of and the influences both dance and consumer culture have on them.

Dancers at the elite adolescent level focus on appearance and functionality of their bodies for the dance world while also scrutinizing their bodies and diets. Although they have a strong subjective self-esteem, their bodies are also objectified within the dance and cultural worlds of which they are a part. Since dance is not result oriented, it is difficult to understand the focus dancers have for an idealized performance body. Although the dancers scrutinized and deconstructed their bodies, their positive outlook was influenced by the standards of contemporary dance, role models, health education classes and training regimes. The study found that elite adolescent female dancers are continually striving for bodily perfection while remaining focused on their physical and mental wellbeing. As they negotiate these conditions, the complexities and idiosyncrasies of their own ideals reveal a mosaic of beliefs and influences in regards to dance and body image.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction and Rationale**

In this study, I have endeavored to analyze the body image and body satisfaction of a group of elite adolescent female dancers in relation to dance culture. The study was informed by a historical and cultural scene analysis (Kraus, Hilsendager, Dixon, 1991; Lee, 2002; Bennett, 2000; Bennett, 2002) of dance that helped me to isolate the issues of adolescent female body image among elite dancers. The purpose of this study was to better understand the pressures and perceptions dancers put upon themselves and their bodies in order to achieve success within the dance world.

Research on body image and dance culture are important to the young women who participate in dance not only for their overall personal health, but also because these elite dancers are the future of the dance industry. Female dancers and aesthetic athletes are at high risk for eating disorders, and many dancers have a distorted view of how they are supposed to look based on the dance cultural ideal (Smolak, Murnen and Ruble, 2002; Tiggemann and Slater, 2001; Benn and Walter, 2001). Through practice, mirror gazing, aesthetic internalization, and constant self-monitoring, young dancers attempt to pursue thinness to achieve acceptance and attractiveness (Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997; Benn and Walters, 2001; Tiggemann and Slater, 2001). Dancers are closely scrutinized by teachers, peers, and themselves and are part of a cultural order where there are extreme pressures to be thin (Tiggemann and Slater, 2001). The desire for thinness distorts adolescent dancers' perceptions of their bodies, rendering them dissatisfied with themselves.

Body image and body satisfaction are important elements for adolescent female dancers as they begin to mature. Dancers are aware of the 'thin ideal' and this awareness can begin

during their early years of dancing (Davison, Earnest and Birch, 2002; Benn and Walters, 2001). With a cultural bias against fatness (Smolak, 2004), dancers tend to internalize their desire for thinness more as they perceive that their body shape depicts their attractiveness to the dance world.

As adolescents go through puberty, their bodies change, and friends or peers become more significant in their influence (Harter, 1986 in Smolak, 2004). Friends become a source of comparison and judgment not only in recent trends but in self-esteem also. It is during adolescence that self-esteem, body image, and body satisfaction suffer as social comparison becomes more powerful (Smolak, 2004).

The objective of this research was to gain a better understanding of adolescent dancers' body image through their own words and conversations. I chose to focus on female dancers as they are typically more focused on issues of weight while also being at a greater risk for eating disorders. Also dance culture is highly populated by females and described by George Balanchine as female-focused (Kraus, Hilsendager and Dixon, 1991). I chose to interview competitive and company dancers at the elite level. These types of dancers are involved in dance culture either through competitions or a pre-professional youth dance company. I selected competitive and company dancers because they both are influenced by dance culture. Competitive dancers are involved in local, regional and provincial competitions while pre-professional company dancers are involved in a performance-based repertoire. Many of the highly regarded dance schools within the Vancouver area choose to specialize in performance-based or competitive dance. Although the venues in which dancers perform are different, most dancers tend to have some sort of competition whether within or outside of their school.

The analysis entailed observing elite dance classes, conducting group interviews, administering a demographic questionnaire, and using insider knowledge to examine the influence body image and body satisfaction have on adolescent dancers. Through semi-structured group interviews and a demographics survey, dancers were invited to talk with each other and the researcher about their body image concerns. This type of interview guide also allowed me to ask for clarification or examples about specific discussion topics. Dancers were interviewed in friend groups to allow for accountability and encouragement while also allowing for a sense of trust to be established early in the group interview.

My concern for dancers' body image and body satisfaction comes from my own experience. I grew up as a pre-professional and competitive dancer who struggled with the issues of thinness, desirable body type and acceptance within the world of dance. Although only two or three students within my dance school were diagnosed with eating disorders, many other dancers were highly concerned about what they ate, how much food they ingested and the amount of time they spent exercising. Now as a teacher of dance, the problems and issues of body image and disordered eating are still present and increasing. Although not all elite adolescent female dancers will engage in disordered eating to achieve their goal of thinness, many will, and eventually all dancers will need to acknowledge their body image and shape and its pertinence to their success as a professional dancer.

There is still much research to be conducted within the area of dance and body image. As some dance schools begin to address the issues of body image more seriously, other schools continue to strive for thinner and thinner dancers. Through an in-depth look at dancers' body image and body satisfaction, I propose in this thesis to discuss these issues affecting elite adolescent female dancers and their perceptions of their bodies within dance culture.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

Throughout the confusion of adolescence, teens determine many things based on the varying influences in their lives. These influences could be in relation to nutrition, friendships, smoking, activity levels, peer pressure, media, academics, interests, spirituality and appearance. These characteristics help to establish a teen's identity, and, adolescence also leads to increased self-awareness, self-consciousness, concern for social acceptance and constant reflection on the way one looks (Harter, 1999 in Slater and Tiggemann, 2002). All of these characteristics describe every teen; however, these internal issues are increased for young women participating in dance. The focus for this study is to explore the concerns and issues of body image as it relates to elite adolescent dancers. The study looks at the history and culture of dance to examine the demand on dancer's bodies while methodologically investigating adolescent dancers' perceptions of their body image and body satisfaction.

Although much of the literature on dancers deals with the association of visual arts with eating disorders, this research will focus more on body satisfaction and body image. Negative body image and body dissatisfaction are precursors to eating disorders and since it is hypothesized that thirty-five percent of female ballet dancers have eating problems (Hamilton, 1997 in Benn and Walters, 2001) in comparison to five to fifteen percent of the general population (NIMH, 2001), this study investigates the psychological issues of body image that possibly affect all dancers. The psychological implications of poor body image, body dissatisfaction and constant self-monitoring can affect dancers for years during their involvement and even after they stop dancing.

Eating disorders and disordered eating are two terms that require clarification for this study. Eating disorders are clinically diagnosed behaviors in which an individual has extreme issues and emotions about weight and food (NEDA, 2002). There are many types of eating disorders such as Anorexia Nervosa, Bulimia Nervosa, Compulsive Overeating, Prader Willi, Pica, and Anorexia Athletica. These eating disorders are physically dangerous and can lead to severe weight issues or death. Disordered eating is “when a person’s attitudes about food, weight, and body size lead to very rigid eating and exercise habits that jeopardize one’s health, happiness, and safety” (NEDA, 2002). If disordered eating gets out of control, an eating disorder can develop.

Within aesthetic sports, body image can also be related to a thin body ideal as individuals perceive thinness and attractiveness of body shape as essential to their success. Body image is important to athletes within aesthetic sports as appearance tends to determine approval and success which in turn reflects back to one’s own body image (Smolak, Murnen and Ruble, 2000). It is a vicious cycle that continues to maintain the thin ideal within aesthetic sports including dance.

Dance is termed as an aesthetic sport as it focuses on the appearance of the individual performing the movement instead of a win / loss result. Appearance is important to the success of the dancer which in turn can lead to an increased focus on body shape and weight (Davison, Earnest and Birch, 2002). Since dancers train looking at their bodies in mirrors, they can be highly focused on how they look for the audiences they perform in front of. Leanness and thinness are viewed as performance enhancing characteristics as heavier athletes or dancers are expected to be slower and less flexible (Smolak, Murnen, and Ruble, 2000).

Currently women within the dance world are becoming thinner and thinner (Bettle et al., 2001; Kaufman, Warren and Hamilton, 1996; Montanari and Zietkiewicz, 2000; Benn and Walters, 2001). This drive for thinness and concern about weight in dance can occur as young as seven years old, although the length of involvement is important (Davison, Earnest and Birch, 2002). The longer a dancer has been involved within a sport, or dance culture, the more influenced they are by the socialization elements such as body shape, discipline, peer groups, and role models. Although athletes seem to be at an increased risk for eating problems in comparison to non-athletes, the risk is even higher for dancers (Smolak, Murnen and Ruble, 2002).

The thin ideal that is dictated throughout society and the dance world goes far deeper than recent fashion trends or the latest prima ballerina.

The question of an ideal physique for a female dancer is not fixed or isolated from societal trends; it is politically sensitive in the context of equal opportunities and it is rarely verbalized but visually evident in selection and casting practices in the ballet world (Benn and Walters, 2001 p. 144).

Although present day society reflects a desire for thinness, this has not always been the case. However, the thin body ideal is deeply ingrained into the history, training, culture and traditions of dance. It is through these elements of dance that the thin ideal is dictated which allows for little change as dancers are socialized from an early age. Other influences can come from parents, peers, teachers / coaches, and competitors (Davison, Earnest and Birch, 2002). It is in response to these many influences that dancers struggle for a delicate and thin body that could potentially heighten their success in the dance world.

The concept of Body Habitus from Pierre Bourdieu is a useful concept for understanding the issue of dancers and body image. Body Habitus looks at the 'totality of habits' which

construct a person's lifestyle (Laberge and Sankoff, 1988 p. 268). This reflects the way one dresses, grooms, and views attractiveness while also creating significant priorities that are governed towards their own body (Harvey and Sparks, 1991). The term body habitus is not interchangeable with body image or body concept as it encompasses all characteristics one has towards one's body (Laberge and Sankoff, 1988). It is the way an individual nourishes, carries, and cares for their body that depicts body habitus. Therefore, if a dancer neglects to nourish her body or exercises excessively to achieve the thin ideal, her body image will be part of a broader body habitus based on the nature of her material conditions of existence in which thinness is a valued property.

Another theory that is worth mentioning within this literature is Objectification Theory (Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997). This theory attempts to understand the concerns and issues of being a female in today's society (Slater and Tiggemann, 2002). Objectification Theory investigates how females are sexually objectified within contemporary culture and internalize these images (Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997). This internalization can lead to habitual body monitoring which also leads to shame or anxiety about their appearance (Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997; Slater and Tiggemann, 2002). Objectification occurs when a person's body parts or sexual functions are separated from the person (Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997). This type of objectification can occur within the dance world as there is an increased emphasis on the body as a whole but also on specific body regions such as the stomach, legs, and buttocks. Since dance is a visual art form, dancers will be immersed within the culture as they put their bodies in the spotlight to be viewed as an object of beauty.

## Body Image

The term body image refers to the amount of satisfaction people have towards their current physical self (Jones, 2001). Benn and Walters (2001) state that body image is the beliefs, attitudes, and values we attach to our bodies. Sarah Grogan (1999) states that the definition of body image is “a person’s perceptions, thoughts and feelings about his or her body” (p.1). An individual’s body image can fluctuate monthly, daily, hourly or by the minute depending on internal and external factors. These factors can range from eating habits or amounts, clothes, media exposure, mentors such as teachers or coaches and friend groups. These definitions are useful for a greater understanding of what body image consists of and together provides a basic definition of body image.

Body image is an ever changing perception of one’s own body which has been termed by Myers and Biocca as ‘elastic’ due to its changes in response to social cues and instability (1992). The ‘elastic’ body image is constructed psychologically by every individual through a personal model also called a self-schema (Markus, 1977 and Markus et al., 1982 in Myers and Biocca, 1992). The self-schema assists in the discovery for the individual of a personally constructed schema of specific traits and characteristics that give a sense of individuality. The fluctuation of body image is constructed based on four points of reference: the objective body shape, the socially represented ideal body, the internalized ideal body, and the present body image (Myers and Biocca, 1992). Body image is elastic as the reference points are constantly changing.

Body image is not an objective assessment but rather a mental construction of how individuals perceive themselves (Bell, 1991, in Myers and Biocca, 1992). The four reference points assist in the analysis of what makes up a person’s body image. The first reference point is the objective body shape which looks at an individual’s perception of their body. This reference



point is limited as the individual views themselves through their own perceptions. The socially represented ideal body is the second reference point which is demonstrated through 'cultural representations of ideals of physical beauty' (Myers and Biocca, 1992, p.116). The internalized ideal body looks at the combination of the former two reference points. Usually this internalized ideal represents the possible body one could have through the compromise between the social ideal and one's genetic make-up. Therefore, this is the driving force for bodily change such as make-up, fitness, cosmetic surgery and dieting. The final reference point is the present body image of the individual which represents a constant shifting of ideals. The present body image is dependant on the three other factors (social, internal, and objective) which all work together to shape the perception of one's body.

Dancers' internalized body image would therefore be different from other elite athletes such as body builders. Dancers' may internalize a more slender, long and lean ideal whereas a female body builder may strive for stronger, bulkier and more visible muscle mass. Also, depending on the style or type of dance one is involved in, the body type one has, and many other factors, each dancer's internalized ideal is slightly different.

Body image is the result not only of how much satisfaction one has towards one's body, but also dissatisfaction expressed as negative body image. The values and attitudes of body image are learned through imitation and comparison and become internalized in every individual with how they feel about and perceive their body. Body image is the result of continued socialization, thoughts and behaviors while individuals buy into the desire for thinness. By accepting the thin body image, one internalizes the thin ideal. Dancers, for example, tend to acknowledge and believe the importance of the thin body ideal as it socially defines attractiveness and behaviors in everyday life and on the dance floor (Thompson and Stice, 2001).

Some influences on body image are parents, peers, media, role models, teachers and coaches, and these can significantly affect self-esteem, diet, and body dissatisfaction (Thompson and Stice, 2001). During the period of adolescence, girls state “that they are judged on their appearance and pressured by peers to conform to appearance expectations” (Jones, 2001 p.647). The pressure for attractiveness and ideal physical appearance can motivate young women to look a particular way. However, problems can occur when these pressures are too great and cause young females to think negatively or even harm their bodies in order to achieve the desired body shape and weight.

During adolescence, the female body begins puberty, and sexual characteristics begin to develop, as positive body image and self-esteem decrease (Rhea, 1998). According to the McCreary study, young adolescent females are more likely to view themselves as overweight and 80% of British Columbia youth would like to weigh less than they currently do (The McCreary Centre Society, 1999). Adolescence is a difficult period of life for many young women as they deal with physical, emotional, and psychological changes. Negative body image can arise during this period of adolescence as young women are adapting and adjusting to their newly acquired and rapidly changing shapes. Young women generally focus on individual body parts as they view themselves as an aesthetic object instead of with a holistic perspective (Franzoi, 1995).

Even though every person deals with body image, the societal importance of a thin body can lead to a heightened awareness of one’s body image. Body image is not the problem, but rather the discrepancy between reality and the individual’s perception of themselves (Presidents Council on Physical Fitness and Sports Report, 1997 in Rhea, 1998). Within the body image

conflict, individuals perceive themselves to be overweight even when, in terms of healthy norms, they are not (see Appendix A and B).

Smolak, Murnen and Ruble (2000) state with the rise in the number of women participating in sports, female athletes now are at a higher risk for eating problems in comparison to non-athletes. Using a meta-analysis, they found that college women, dancers, lean sport participants, elite and competitive athletes were at a higher risk for eating problems (Smolak, Murnen and Ruble, 2000). Although Smolak, Murnen, and Ruble's analysis focused on female athletes and eating problems, the study also contributes to research on body image as athletes usually have a negative body image before eating problems occur. Since dancers and elite athletes are at high risk for eating problems, it would be logical that elite performing or competitive dancers would be at an even greater risk for not only eating problems but negative body image as well.

During their careers, dancers as well as aesthetic sport participants come to the realization that how they look is important to their success (Davison, Earnest and Birch, 2002). This emphasis on leanness or body shape can heighten an athlete's awareness of body image and may distort an individual's perception of his / her body. This distortion does not just occur if an individual participates in aesthetic sports. If perceptions and thoughts are reinforced by comments and comparisons, weight and body shape concern will increase (Davison, Earnest and Birch, 2002). Also, during dance training, mirrors are often placed around the room to help perfect dance moves and visual form while observing oneself. However, dancers can also use these mirrors as a form of self-scrutiny (Benn and Walters, 2001). Therefore, through practicing daily in front of mirrors and performing on stage while their bodies are looked upon by others, a dancer's body is under constant examination (Slater and Tiggemann, 2002). This scrutiny can

lead to a heightened desire for leanness and achieving the thin ideal as the body plays an important part in training and selection. The perception of one's body shape confronts every dancer during their dance training and can be critical and detrimental for many.

## **Culture of Dance**

Dancing has existed in various forms in society for thousands of years and although the focus of this study will be on formal contemporary dance (technical dance as opposed to social dance), dance traditions from the past are still important and help to shed light on the current trends. The form of dance and the culture it portrays comes from a historical tradition including the inputs of founding members or significant teachers, teaching techniques, and social historical expectations and conditions.

This study examines contemporary dance which was derived from ballet and modern and these disciplines are mostly observed within a professional dance repertoire. As dancers begin to technically train as students of dance, these disciplines are the most likely styles they will encounter along their journey. Since ballet and modern are two main styles of dance with different and significant histories, they both affect and impact the contemporary dance world. Although modern originated from ballet, it has made a significant impact as a distinct entity since the late 1920's and early 1930's (Kraus, Hilsendager, and Dixon, 1991). It is the combination of these foundational styles that has shaped the culture of contemporary dance.

## ***Ballet***

Ballet is the root or precursor to modern and contemporary dance and its history begins in the early 1800's. Under the influence of Jean George Noverre (1727 – 1810), who is also known

as the “Father of Modern Ballet” (Kraus, Hilsendager, and Dixon, 1991; Lee, 2002). Many of the founders of ballet used his theories to create unity of form and dramatic expressions within dance theatre (Kraus, Hilsendager, and Dixon, 1991). The foundation that Noverre established focused on seven main areas in his book *Letters on Dancing*: training correctness, pedagogical consideration for style and personality, gestural expression, plot development, music relating to plot development, costume/scene décor and make-up replacing masks (Lee, 2002). These foundations assisted in creativity and essentials for ballet while making ballet more coherent and artistic and opposing performance monotony (Kerensky, 1970).

The foundations set by Jean George Noverre followed the French Revolution, just prior to the romanticism of ballet, as Europe began to turn to the fantasy of dance theatres to escape the harshness of reality (Kraus, Hilsendager, and Dixon, 1991). Although these principles were forgotten in theory and practice for many years, they became more prominent in the Twentieth Century with the assistance of a Russian Choreographer, Mikhail Fokine (Kerensky, 1970). Noverre’s principles assisted in the development of dance into a serious art form and into what most people in present day expect from a ballet performance.

It was during the romantic era (1815-1835) that the ballerina was elevated to higher favor and a glamorous lifestyle. “She symbolizes beauty, grace, fragility, and strength – the archetype, epitome and essence of femininity” (Montanari and Zietkiewicz, 2000 p.2). To this day ballerinas are continually described and recognized for their ideal femininity and glamour.

It was also during the romantic era that ballet became a female-dominated visual art form. Female ballet dancers were given glorious roles and solos, as their male counterparts were criticized and attacked (Kraus, Hilsendager and Dixon, 1991). Romanticism was an artistic movement that based itself on emotions and an escape from the previous era of classicism (Lee,

2002). This romantic spirit was conveyed through the art of ballet and a heroine was established: the ballerina. The ballerina during the Romantic Era was financially independent, admired, and notorious for her occupation and success.

Although it is not certain when female dancers began to internalize the ballet culture and drive for thinness, it is evident that throughout the history of ballet, thinness and frailty have been promoted. It was during the romantic era that dancers were lifted to new heights by not only dancing *sur les pointes* (on the tips of the toes) but also with the assistance of cable wiring (Kraus, Hilsendager and Dixon, 1991). Ballerinas would soar through the air with the use of cables and pulleys to symbolize divine roles however, this form of elevation was not always practical. The cables were soon replaced with the strength of the male danseurs to lift the ballerinas, changing the appearance of the ballet. With the ballerina now being lifted by another individual, her need for thinness would be enhanced out of pure practicality.

The Romantic Era sheds light on the importance and distinction ballerinas endured as aesthetic performers. By further understanding the prestige that was given to female dancers during this time of history one can relate to the grace and aesthetic limits they continue to strive for. The romantic era gave ballerinas a tool to express their emotions and talent through movement and grace while the female body became a focal point for many significant choreographers and teachers who continue to influence the world of ballet into the Twenty-First Century.

Ballet became more prominent in North America with the assistance of French performers who toured America demonstrating acrobats and ballerinas in the mid-nineteenth century (Lee 2002; Kraus, Hilsendager and Dixon 1991). Shortly after, other European and Russian ballet companies began to tour North America and before long, America was learning

and performing ballet. In the early Twentieth Century, Ballet had crossed the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans to become prominent in North America.

In 1929 the dreams of an American Dance school began to emerge. Lincoln Kirstein (1907-1996) had a creative spirit for artistic organizations and although he was not a danseur he would unite with George Balanchine (1904-1983) to create an American Dance School (Lee, 2002). Kirstein is continually compared to Serge Diaghileff (1872 to 1929), a Russian nobleman who assembled leading Russian Dancers to perform and tour during the summer months and soon after on a permanent basis (Kraus, Hilsendager and Dixon, 1991). Lincoln Kirstein became a foundational figure in the establishment of the School of American Ballet where dancers were trained in ballet and performed in New York. In 1948, the School of American Ballet became the Ballet Society which joined with the New York City Center of Music and Drama. After this affiliation the ballet company was renamed once again to the New York City Ballet (Lee, 2002).

George Balanchine's influence within the world of ballet not only assisted with the development of ballet in America in the early Twentieth Century but it continues to mold and shape ballet and choreography today. Balanchine began dancing at the Imperial School of Ballet at the age of ten and at the age of twenty entered into Serge Diaghileff's company where he choreographed and danced (Kraus, Hilsendager and Dixon, 1991). In 1927, Balanchine suffered a knee injury which would not allow him to perform anymore and choreography became his passion. After Diaghileff's death, Balanchine joined with Lincoln Kirstein in 1929 to officially open the School of American Ballet in 1934.

George Balanchine's choreography and focus in ballet has and continues to be female centered. He glorifies women and states that "In ballet... woman is first. Everywhere else man is first. But in ballet, it's the woman. All my life I have dedicated my art to her." (Daly, 2002

p. 279). This point of view is prominent with the ballet world as it continues to be a female-dominated art form. Balanchine, along with many other influential choreographers and artistic directors, focuses primarily on female beauty, athleticism, and aesthetics.

Balanchine's influences on ballet culture bring up another notion of masculine power throughout the dance world. There is a range of literature that focuses on gender coherence and gender identity within a male dominated culture. For example, Judith Butler's (1993) work on performativity states that actions are "a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition" (p. 12). Therefore the masculine point of view of dance would assist in shaping the current culture of dance. Although Butler's notion of performativity was consulted for this study, the issues of gender and power will not be examined.

### ***Modern Dance***

Modern dance is another form of dance, which has stemmed from the ballet roots, appearing in America in the Twentieth Century (Kraus, Hilsendager and Dixon, 1991). The discipline of modern dance was viewed as a rebellion against classical ballet and formalism. The origins of modern dance began with Isadora Duncan, a dancer who wanted to be acknowledged as more than a fantasy character within ballet. Modern dance became a vessel in which new groundbreaking concepts were revealed and artists were against the traditional notions of beauty (Sorell, 1981). Isadora Duncan rejected the teaching techniques and style of ballet as she wanted students not to imitate but rather create their own movements that reflected their own style (Kraus, Hilsendager and Dixon, 1991).



With the inspiration of Isadora Duncan many modern dancers gained exposure and respect for this new dance discipline, such as Ruth St. Denis, Ted Shawn, Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman, Rudolf von Laban and Mary Wigman. Martha Graham did for modern dance what George Balanchine did for ballet. Martha Graham's identity and prestige assisted in the respect and creativity in both teaching and choreography for modern dance into the late 1900s.

The disciplines of modern and ballet appeal to different audiences and in unique ways. Ballet tends to be more conservative whereas modern can be more liberal in social and artistic attitudes (Kraus, Hilsendager and Dixon, 1991). Ballet technique is uniform and controlled such that people can recognize and judge a skilled ballerina more precisely. Modern dance tends to be a form of self expression and personal judgment. This obscure definition of modern dance can allow for a wide variety of choreographic interpretations.

Many modern and / or contemporary dancers are trained in the discipline of ballet before entering into the world of modern dance, and then continue to train in ballet as well as modern.

Ted Shawn, a highly regarded modern dancer, teacher, founder and choreographer with the Denishawn Dance Company, states the importance of ballet to modern:

"So much has been said and written against the ballet that I feel it is wise to emphasize some of its positive virtues. Nothing has ever taken its place for disciplinary training. There is no technique in any other style of dancing that is so valuable for producing exactitude, precision, sense of form, and sense of line. I do not think that it should be used as the sole type of training, just as I would not advocate in an academic curriculum that a student should have nothing but mathematics . . . . It must be taught wisely and with discrimination..." (Shawn, 1946 in Kraus, Hilsendager and Dixon, 1991, page 236).

As a founding member and educator throughout modern dance, Ted Shawn created a foundation for technique within his company. The dancers within the Denishawn Dance Company became

some of the most highly regarded and most significant dancers within the discipline of modern dance.

Modern dance is not as popular throughout professional companies, however, it continues to gain respect and to change in ways similar to contemporary art. Although modern dance is a distinct and separate discipline than ballet, at times both ballet and modern become molded together therefore making it difficult to distinguish the difference between the two styles. This blending together can also be termed contemporary dance. Contemporary dance uses the technique of ballet and the varying styles of modern dance to establish distinct choreography with a structured technique.

Classical ballet focuses on training technique and proper positioning whereas modern dance is highly regarded for its innovative body movements and patterns. Although modern and ballet are considered to be at opposite ends of the dance continuum, they are commonly used together to create specific movement styles known as contemporary dance. This form of dance uses the techniques and training of classical ballet and the body movements of modern to enrich a unique blend of aesthetic dance movement. Contemporary dance uses a ballet base while combining modern upper body movements. An example to assist in understanding contemporary dance is a dancer in a grande pli  in second position with her upper body leaning over to the side in a curved position.

Although modern dance is different from classical ballet, modern dancers can experience similar effects on body image as ballet dancers (Poretz, 1982). Since all dancers use their bodies as a performance tool, they cater their bodies to the audiences that observe them and these practices are highly objectified and externally validated. Modern, ballet and contemporary dance all focus on aesthetically pleasing movements and dancers are at high risk for body

dissatisfaction. Therefore, it can be assumed that within the realm of dance, especially elite or professional dance, body image and the struggle for the thin ideal will occur, as the culture is similar.

The term 'dance culture' can be used in a broad and unspecified sense, but to give this study a better grounding in the current trends in dance within a particular local and social context, I will look at the scene within Vancouver, Canada. The dance 'scene' within this region is partly constructed through film and mass media and partly through local interpretations. This experience of the local scene provides dancers with specific interpretations of the appropriate body types and forms of dance within their locality.

Throughout the world there are a wide range of local dance cultures that make up contemporary dance. The scene reflects the aesthetic value and style within a specific group of individuals which construct their own identity by possessing similar values and ideas (Bennett, 2002). It has been noted by several professional Canadian dancers that Eastern and Western Canada have different issues when it comes to body image and dance. According to both choreographers and teachers, Western Canadian elite dancers have generally a more positive perspective of body image than their Eastern counterparts.

The term 'local scene' is the conceptualization of specific processes within the context of a specific urban or rural region (Bennett, 2000). As Andy Bennett explains, music (or dance, in this case) can have different meanings for individuals based on their location. This location is not necessarily a fixed space but rather a contested space that is both 'real and fictionalized' (Bennett, 2000 p. 63).

Professional dance companies within the Vancouver region focus more on the use of contemporary dance. Ballet British Columbia, The Source Dance Company, JoeInk, MoveEnt,

and the Judith Marcuse Dance Company all focus on contemporary dance. Although many of these companies train in other disciplines (ballet, jazz, modern), their performing style is not based on classical ballet techniques such as the Royal Winnipeg Ballet or The National Ballet of Canada but rather a blending of ballet and modern techniques that incorporate into contemporary dance. Young dancers who are connected to these companies see the contemporary-based repertoire as an alternative to the traditional ballet companies. In turn these professional companies can propose a common local identity with west coast style.

Knowing the history of dance and the local dance scene within Vancouver, we are more likely to understand the pressures on young dancers as they deal with the concrete social conditions of the local dance culture. Although there are many different styles and disciplines of dance, each of them plays a distinct role in the overarching dance world (Kraus, Hilsendager and Dixon, 1991). Together these disciplines continue to uphold an ideal dancer's body which young women strive to achieve. These ideals are learned and accepted early on in a dancer's life through role modeling, social learning and comparison.

### **Social Learning Theory**

Within the realm of any sport, whether aesthetic or not, teachers and coaches tend to influence individuals for that particular sport beyond technical training. Procedures, instructions, behaviors and discipline guidelines are taught to dancers at a young age often in ways similar to how their teachers were instructed. Social Learning Theory assists in explaining how younger dancers observe and imitate behaviors (by their teachers, mentors, and peers) that are socially acceptable within the dance world.

Social Learning Theory describes how socially desirable behaviors are learned through interaction and imitation (Khan and Cangemi, 1979). Social Learning is the process of learning acceptable behavior through observational learning, modeling and imitation (Bandura, 1977). Although socially desirable behaviors vary from group to group, culture to culture, age to age, and within different situations, this theory states that one learns behaviors through reinforcement and appropriate conditions (Khan and Cangemi, 1979). Behaviors are first learned through observation and are copied by the observer to imitate the observation. Imitation initially is the act of rehearsal that replicates the behavior modeled to the observers. Imitation is an “indispensable aspect of learning” (p. 3) in which desired behaviors are observed and replicated to match the behavior seen (Bandura and Walters, 1963). After a behavior has been imitated, identification is established. Identification looks at the adoption of a behavior from another person or group as the behavior is associated with satisfaction (Khan and Cangemi, 1979). Although many behaviors can be imitated, not all of those behaviors provide identification or satisfaction to the observer. If satisfaction does not occur, the behavior is less likely to occur again. These two categories of imitation and identification within Social Learning Theory are pertinent to dance culture as dancers are constantly striving to replicate and internalize physical characteristics of other dancers.

The process of modeling occurs through the observation of specific behaviors in others which form notions about how new behaviors ought to be performed. Bandura (1977) identified four component processes in modeling that foster new behaviors: attention, retention, motor reproduction and motivation (Bandura, 1977). These processes assist in individuals learning and repeating behaviors that they have observed.

Attention processes allow for individuals to determine and select characteristics that most influence their behaviors (Bandura, 1977). Not all behaviors that are observed become influential to an individual. Models are chosen by the people throughout the learning process. These models are selected by interpersonal attraction (Bandura, 1977). Therefore models that have appealing qualities are more likely to be observed than those models that lack pleasing characteristics.

The retention process states that behaviors that are seen more often will greatly enhance the learning process (Bandura, 1977). If a behavior is only observed once, the likelihood of learning is slim in comparison to a behavior that is observed numerous times. Retention can occur through imagery and verbal cues. Senses and behaviors that are continually perceived and observed can visually stimulate learning behavior patterns whereas verbal cues can also guide an individual in behavioral performances (Bandura, 1977).

Motor Reproduction and Motivational processes relate to the enactment of the behavior and its reoccurrence. Motor Reproduction allows for behaviors to be physically tested and explored further. Since not all aspects of a behavior can be observed and learned at a particular time, motor reproduction allows individuals to adjust themselves based on feedback. For example, a dancer just learning a pirouette may observe and attempt the skill with awkwardness at first, but over time the pirouette is refined and more adjustments can be made to enhance the behavior previously learned. Motivational processes within modeling tend to separate out general behaviors that are learned from those that demonstrate results (Bandura, 1977). These behaviors are reinforced and will most likely be performed again due to external, vicarious or self-reinforcing influences.

According to Bandura, reinforcement occurs via three dimensions, external, vicarious and self, and assists people in the learning process by encouraging specific behaviors. External reinforcement can come from teachers, peers, or people one observes for example, models or actors. This type of reinforcement can also come from verbal cues, actions or gestures. Vicarious reinforcement allows people to learn from other people's mistakes or successes (Bandura, 1977). For example a dancer who continually sees another dancer getting praise for her flexibility will tend to accept the idea that flexibility is important and possibly try to increase her own flexibility to receive praise. Self-reinforcement focuses on one's own motivation towards a specific behavior. Individuals will evaluate their performance and respond or adjust themselves to their judgments (Bandura, 1977). The concept of reinforcement is critical to the learning process as these incentives assist to shape one's point of view in all aspects of life.

Within the world of dance, dancers will learn not only skills and styles but also behaviors and related attributes both desirable and undesirable. Dancers will observe and model the behavior of teachers, class mates, older or more experienced dancers and professionals. These behaviors are not only modeled and imitated within a dance class but during socialization with other dancers. Expectations and behaviors are at times not specifically stated, however, if not followed, will be negatively reinforced. An example of this is having a teacher who praises dancers with a thin musculature and condemns bulkier muscle shapes. Dancers will learn which type of musculature is favorable to the teacher and may attempt to attain that body shape. If a dancer is unsuccessful at changing her shape, a teacher could respond with negative verbal comments or ignore the dancer completely, therefore negatively reinforcing which body shape is desirable within the class.

Dancers tend to also learn the ideal body shape at a young age through role modeling and observational learning. Therefore dancers would acquire a new response or modify old responses based on a model's behavior. As dancers observe thinner dancers and these behaviors and body shapes are constantly reinforced, the observers begin to learn the importance of the thin ideal. This reinforcement not only occurs within the classroom but through competition, summer school auditions, pre-professional training school selections, peers and parents. Through the immersion of females within the dance culture, role modeling, imitation, identification and reinforcements all play an important part in how dancers construct the ideal thin body shape.

### **Panopticon**

The work of Michel Foucault and his understanding of the panopticon help to link the condition of surveillance and discipline in dance training to the issues of body image and satisfaction in dance culture. Although the panopticon can be applied to every individual, self surveillance and monitoring is heightened in aesthetic sports such as dance via mirrors and teacher observation. Such self-surveillance and feedback functions as a kind of panoptic mechanism in dance.

The panopticon is a prison structure that was architecturally designed by Jeremy Bentham (Foucault, 1977). The structure is an angular building with a guard in a center tower observing the prisoners from above. Within this structure, the prisoners are not able to see the guard, but the guard can see every prisoner perfectly and individually (Foucault, 1977). This constant surveillance by the guard affects the inmate's "state of consciousness and permanent visibility ... assures the automatic functioning of power" (Foucault, 1977 p.201). Even if the prisoner is not being watched by a guard, they never truly know and therefore assume constant observation.



. From this, the structure of the panopticon will not need bars, chains, or locks as the prisoners accommodate to the power and in turn carry out self-monitored and acceptable behaviors. This theory relates to the form of observation that each prisoner internalizes while enduring constant surveillance.

It is through such constant surveillance that women also internalize a thin feminine ideal and allow for self-monitoring. Margaret Carlisle Duncan (1994) states that women turn the 'gaze' against themselves, even though it originates elsewhere, and they become the disciplinarians. Although Duncan uses this theory of panoptic mechanisms in relation to fitness magazines, dance culture can embody this phenomenon in a similar way. The 'gaze' assists women in internalizing a body standard they need to apply to their own bodies through constant visual reinforcements from magazines or role models (Duncan, 1994). The body standard then becomes an ideal that is strived for, and women tend to blame themselves for negative relationships with their bodies.

Within dance culture, the theory of the panopticon can be observed in most dance classes as dancers observe their bodies and constantly dwell on imperfections. This can be observed by watching dancers look at themselves in the mirror to correct a movement or body part. Since the thin ideal is displayed, the women are under constant surveillance by themselves to become similar to the ideal body shape portrayed by the dance culture. The thin ideal may be recognized in a number of different situations in the dance world such as auditions, master classes, costume sizing, teacher feedback or professional and /or peer role modeling (Benn and Walters, 2001). These circumstances allow young women to overemphasize their imperfect body parts and put them under greater surveillance while disregarding their dance strengths.

Body monitoring or the panoptic gaze becomes a form of self-consciousness in which women begin to internalize the views of society for sexual desire and objectification (Slater and Tiggemann, 2002). This desire for attractiveness is not necessarily for the opposite gender but also for self-acceptance. This point of view for a young adolescent dancer not only comes from dance culture but also from the society and consumer culture in which they are immersed. Pirkko Markula (1995) states that "the media feminine ideal is a contradiction; firm but shapely, fit but sexy, strong but thin" (p. 424). Similarly, the dance culture ideal states that one should be "strong as an ox but look like a pin" (Benn and Walters, 2001 p.144). These two ideals can cause hardship within an adolescent dancer as they desire two different, yet unrealistic ideals.

These two ideals, although not radically different, can cause conflict in how young dancers view themselves. The media ideal has drawn away from a waif-like model and focused on a toned, well-developed and shapely model, but the dance ideal is to be slim, with long limbs, neck and small breasts (Markula, 1995; Benn and Walters, 2001). This also poses a contradiction for young dancers within western culture. The firm and shapely figures that are portrayed throughout the media contrast with the elegant, straight and lengthy shape favored by the dance culture. As most adolescent dancers lose their boyish figures with the development of puberty, they struggle to reach the ideals of both cultures while comparing their bodies to others.

### **Social Comparison Theory**

Social Comparison Theory is closely linked to Social Learning Theory as they both concern information that is acquired through affective, cognitive and social processes. These processes, in turn, influence the various types of comparisons people make on the basis of social learning (Masters and Keil, 1987). Although both of these theories do not have specifically

defined frameworks, research has shown that learning and comparison occur from and towards peers, models and other observed individuals (Jones, 2001; Martin and Kennedy, 1994; Wood and Taylor, 1991). Both of these social theories are often referred to in the literature on body image to assist in the explanation of social behaviors.

Social Comparison Theory postulates that people judge and evaluate their abilities, opinions and outcomes by comparing themselves with others (Festinger, 1954). This theory states that social groups can serve as a standard of reference to which individuals compare and measure themselves (Suls and Miller, 1977; Masters and Keil, 1987). Since many aspects of socialization cannot physically be measured (for example, evaluations, emotions, opinions and personality traits), comparisons are made through perceptions by an individual of other people (Suls and Miller, 1977).

Social Comparison Theory is individually oriented, and people will compare themselves to others based on their need to know (Wheeler, 1991). An example of this within dance is if a dancer wants to know his or her capabilities when they are in an arabesque position. Although this position might look pleasing to him or her, by comparing it to others, the dancer will personally attempt to evaluate their skill. The individualistic nature is based upon the need to compare similar people to oneself to achieve uniformity. Uniformity relates to a person's desire to be similar to others they are associated with. The pressure for uniformity will increase one's drive to evaluate oneself based on someone else who is currently achieving the particular ability or opinion desired (Suls and Miller, 1977). Individuals will look for the comparisons to identify their personal evaluations for social acceptance and respect (Grogan, 1999).

Comparisons are based on a reference group that reflects similar abilities and opinions as the comparing individual. This reference group is constantly changing as individuals strive for

specific characteristics that are comparable to themselves. Other important factors for choosing a reference group are the importance of their ability or opinion, the relevance to a specific situation, and attractiveness (Suls, 1977). Levine and Moreland (1987) state that determining a reference group for comparison occurs because of the desire for salience or attractiveness. Salience depends on the outcome that is desired by the comparer whereas attractiveness focuses on satisfying one's motive for the comparison. Some examples of salience are a wage increase, respect from colleagues or peers, or a prestigious and difficult ballet solo such as the Sugar Plum Fairy in the Nutcracker. The reference group is important in Social Comparison Theory depending on one's motive and desirable outcome (Suls, 1977; Levine and Moreland, 1987). Attractiveness has three motives: equity, self-enhancement, and self-depreciation. Equity refers to when the individual's desire is to have equal attributes to the comparison. Self-enhancement is to make one feel better through comparing to a lower target (downward comparison) whereas self-depreciation focuses on a highly skilled comparison in which the individual is rated lower than the target (upward comparison). As comparisons can affect self-esteem in individuals, downward comparisons can assist people to build self-confidence instead of focusing on their own disadvantages (Wheeler, 1991).

Both downward (self-enhancement) and upward (self-depreciation) comparisons are present within the world of dance. Dancers might focus on inferior dancers in order to make themselves feel adequate whereas during other times they deem themselves second-rate in contrast to their classmates. These different types of comparisons can affect the individual comparer with a wide variety of emotions such as anger, resentment, and distress (Major, Testa and Bylsma, 1991). Upward comparisons can have a direct impact on an individual's self-

esteem and self-image, however, they can increase persistence and performance if a more suitable (closer to equity) comparison is revealed.

As dancers participate in a highly competitive and challenging art form the amount of comparisons can be increased due to the similarity of the group, personality traits, and ability levels. Generally speaking, elite adolescent dancers tend to have similar body shapes, goals, friend groups, and technical skills. These similarities increase the chances that other dancers within the class are comparing themselves to their dancing peers. The classmates become an important reference group for individuals seeking equity, enhancement or depreciation.

In this review I have examined several different literatures pertaining to body image and satisfaction among elite adolescent dancers. Females have a greater sensitivity to judgments made by females rather than those made by males and therefore in an art form dominated by females, comparison will be increased (Jones, 2001). As young women journey into adulthood and their bodies begin to adapt throughout adolescence there is an increased focus on body image. Also, since dance is a visual art, dancers and teachers need to view their bodies in revealing spandex clothing for accuracy and correction. This type of attire that is worn during dance lessons and performances intensifies the focus on dancers' bodies and how they look in their outfits.

A distorted body image and weight concerns can occur within dancers at a young age which creates a more vulnerable teenager. Davison, Earnest and Birch (2002) state that dancers and other girls that participate in aesthetic sports can develop concern about their bodies as young as seven years old. They also state that girls who are enrolled for a longer period of time within an aesthetic sport tend to have a greater concern towards their bodies. As girls become more dedicated to aesthetic sports, their bodies and behaviors are continually compared and

observed throughout their classes and dance school. By further understanding the issues and mechanisms by which dancers learn behaviors and compare themselves to others, the researchers, teachers, and other dancers have a greater potential to intervene and help deal with the issues of distorted body image and body dissatisfaction in elite dancers.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

This thesis used ethnographic methods to study elite adolescent dancers, body image and dance culture. Ethnographic study investigates people's everyday lives to provide insight into their meaning systems (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). This approach is based in symbolic interactionism (Beal, 2002; Blumer, 1969). As elite adolescent dancers are constantly surrounded by dance culture, meanings are learned from and expressed in their experiences. By participating in and observing their social interaction, a researcher can gain understanding of the participant's culture and perspectives (Beal, 2002; Blumer, 1969). With participant observation the issues of body image and body satisfaction can be addressed via the words and actions of young people (in this case adolescent girls) who are involved in dance.

Symbolic Interactionism as developed by Herbert Blumer (1969) entails three premises about how people construct a social reality. The first premise states that individuals' actions are based on the meanings the actions have for them (Blumer, 1969). For example a prima ballerina's pointe shoe can be a symbol of hard work, sacrifice and determination, however to others it might be just a smelly shoe. The second premise is that meanings of things are derived from the social interaction one has with one's peers (Blumer, 1969). Therefore among one's peers there is a consensus of meaning for certain things. The third premise of symbolic interactionism assumes that meanings change according to the context in which an individual interprets a specific symbol (Beal, 2002).

The dance culture that dancers are immersed in reflects the values and norms that collectively dancers bring to their actions. Social Interactionism looks at "meanings as social products' (p. 5), and that meaning is developed through personal interaction with others (Blumer,

1969). Elite dancers spend hours each day within their dance schools not only interacting with the art form of dance but also with other dancers and teachers. These daily interactions begin to shape or build the ideas and values of human conduct and are not simply a setting for expressing points of view (Blumer, 1969).

Since dancers continually make a contribution to the social world which they are a part of, this allows the researcher to work with the dancers being observed to ascertain their points of view surrounding body image and body satisfaction (James, 2002). Social worlds are difficult to understand because human actions are based on social meanings and therefore motives, rules, values and intentions are also based on people's choices in a social world (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). Since elite adolescent dancers have been involved in the dance world for a prolonged amount of time their concerns about weight and body image stand to potentially increase as they continue to participate (Davison, Earnest and Birch, 2002).

Previous research indicates that body physique can have a major impact on a dancer's training, and as a result weight or eating issues can occur as young as seven years old (Benn and Walters, 2001; Montanari and Zietkiewicz, 2000; Davison, Earnest and Birch, 2002). Since the culture of dance is highly competitive in elite youth companies and competitions, dancers are more likely to have body dissatisfaction if their body does not resemble the thin ideal (Bettle et al., 2001). Although the previous research has enhanced the knowledge about and concern for dancers' health and well being, a more in-depth discussion needs to take place between researchers and dancers.

Previous research on body image and elite dancers used surveys and charts to describe the issues of dancers and eating disorders or body image (Bettle et al., 2001; Kaufman, Warren, and Hamilton, 1996; Montanari and Zietkiewicz, 2000; Pierce and Daleng, 1998; Purtez, 1982).



Although these studies examined slightly different aspects of dancers and body image or eating disorders they all strongly recommend more research in the areas of body image, eating disorders and exercise dependence among elite dancers. A study by Benn and Walters (2001) did critical interpretive research on body image and professional ballet dancers which allowed for a more in-depth examination of the dance culture while also recommending tactics for dancers to stay motivated and healthy during their dance career. The study permitted the researchers to use their insider knowledge to assist with their qualitative observations. My thesis research attempts to go a step further than the Benn and Walters (2001) study as I use observation and group interviews as well as insider knowledge to fully examine body image issues and dance culture.

Since quantitative methodology has been the dominant form of research conducted within dance studies (Davison, Earnest and Birch, 2002; Kaufman, Warren and Hamilton, 1996; Tiggemann and Slater, 2001; Montanari and Zietkiewicz, 2000; Bettle et al., 2001), the use of qualitative methods can help to explore the pressures and problems young dancers have in regards to body image and body satisfaction. The Benn and Walters' (2001) study concentrated on a qualitative approach to dance research and disordered eating among professional dancers, but this thesis is focused these issues at a pre-professional, elite level. The study also allowed for a greater depth and insight into the issues that dancers face with diet and self-esteem from their personal comments, verbal explanations and stories. It was through these stories and comments that evidence was provided about the dancers' perspectives which in turn give insight into the culture they are a part of (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). Allowing the dancers to talk freely about the subject of dance culture and body image within a comfortable environment assists them in expressing how they, their classmates and friends feel towards their bodies. Qualitative methods within this study used triangulation which allowed for two or more types of data

collection to take place within the methodology (Mays and Pope, 2000). Through participant observation, demographics questionnaire and group interviews as well as insider knowledge, the researcher was able to develop an in-depth point of view and interpretation of the data. The use of qualitative methods also allowed dancers to discuss and comment on current issues within the dance world and how these issues affect their training and self-image.

### ***Subjects***

The research design was focused on studying female elite adolescent dancers between twelve and sixteen years old during dance classes and group interviews. Females were chosen because women are the focus of this research and are typically more obsessed with dieting, body weight and slimness in comparison to men (Markula, 1995). Also, females that participate in aesthetic sports tend to have a higher weight concern than non-aesthetic sports while dancers and elite aesthetic sport participants are at an even greater risk (Davison, Earnest and Birch, 2002). Female dancers not only struggle with the pressures for thinness that they obtain from society but also with pressures from the dance culture as well. The age range of twelve to sixteen years was selected because this is a time when the adolescent body begins to change and girls will become more influenced socially by how they are supposed to look. The twelve to sixteen year old age group helped to identify the different influences that adolescent dancers have in their struggle for thinness. This age bracket also can articulate emotions more precisely than younger dancers and can voice their opinions on the issue of body image and thinness. The drive for thinness during adolescence and puberty is likely to increase as the dancers' bodies begin to change.

The term 'elite dancer' refers to dancers who have participated in dance for at least two years and who dance a minimum of ten hours per week. Although ballet is likely to be the most

prominent type of dance participated in, these dancers must also train in multiple disciplines encompassing a wide range of teachers and types of movement. 'Elite' also means that the dancer was involved in a youth company or had entered at least two competitions during the year. This allows the study to focus on the dancers that are most affected by the dance culture, demands on the body and other external factors that stand to affect body image internalization and body satisfaction, since they are more immersed in dance socialization and dance culture.

### ***Section 1 -- Recruitment and Selection of Schools and Participants***

The first steps of the research were to identify and recruit dance schools for participation in the study. Dance schools were contacted in regards to programs, participants, age groups and their elite status. Each school was ranked in order from most to least desirable based on three criteria: Did the school offer a variety of dance training? Did the dancers within the school fit the study's parameters? Were there two or more teachers within the school?

These questions regarding dance schools were chosen based on the research questions of the study. The first question reflects the study's focus on elite dancers who were experienced in a variety of disciplines. The second question was intended to see if the school had a program that suits this study. Some dance schools had recreational programs where dancers come once or twice a week while other schools had professional programs where they had only elite dancers of a limited dance repertoire. The third question looked at exposure to dance culture. With a greater variety of teachers, elite adolescent dancers were exposed to diversification of dance culture perspectives.

A 'desirable' school was meant to be a leading contributor to the professional dance world, a high achiever at performing arts competitions, or part of a national or international

performing tour. The most and least desirable ranking was determined by the researcher based on her judgment, information and knowledge of the schools as well as through discussions, visiting competitions and local contacts. The ranking order of the schools determined the schools that were contacted first for the study participation and had first priority to participate in the research.

Dance schools within Vancouver and the surrounding area were eligible for the study. These areas were well known and were be most accessible to the researcher. Also the researcher had contacts with many dance schools within these geographic locations which help with making the connections that were needed for the kind of access required for this research.

Many of the schools that excel at local competitions, festivals, or youth dance companies were already known to the researcher as she is involved within the local dance community. Schools could have also been selected based on personal knowledge and / or personal connections with the owner / dance instructors. In this study the two schools that participated not only met the existing parameters but the schools also provided access to the researcher due to their relationship prior to the research. This allowed for a bond of trust to be already established before the research began. In turn, this allowed for a greater depth of knowledge into the dance culture and the body image of adolescent females.

In the first step of recruitment, the researcher contacted two local dance school administrations and presented the ideas, obligations and basis for participation in the study. The recruitment letter and consent forms were presented to the owner or administrative director before subsequently contacting them by phone to determine the school's willingness to participate. One school functioned with a board of directors and the administrative director stated that the board approval was not required for the study. In each case a one to two week

follow-up phone call was made and an appointment scheduled to meet with them and discuss their participation in the research.

## ***Section 2 – Data Collection Design***

The data collection occurred during the months of April and May of 2004. All forms of data collection were gathered within the two dance schools, Janelle's Dance Academy and Dance Max (pseudonyms were given for identity protection). One dance school was located in Vancouver and the other school was located in the Fraser Valley (Vancouver's surrounding area). All the data was collected first from Janelle's Dance Academy and then from Dance Max.

Two schools, Dance Max and Janelle's Dance Academy agreed to participate in the research. Permission was sought by the parents and students first and then by the teachers to observe their classes. The dancers were given a research study package (within a sealed envelope) to take home to sign and discuss with their parents. The researcher delivered these packages to the female elite adolescent dancers and asked them to return the form in one to two weeks to the front desk of the dance school. Both dance schools were asked to put the signed consent forms in an envelope for the researcher to pick up. The dancer's parent or legal guardian had to sign the consent form due to the age range of the elite dancers. However, since the dancers were participating in the study and were competent to make their own decision whether or not they would like to participate, the dancers also had to sign the consent form to take part in the research. Once the researcher received consent from the participants, a time was set up for the participant observations to occur. If a dancer decided not to participate within this research, the researcher did not observe her actions or engage in conversation with that dancer.

Four classes were viewed for the ethnographic observations. The amount of classes observed allowed the researcher to establish common behaviors among the students that were also discussed in the group interviews. The dancers recruited and observed fit within the parameters of the study. Both of the schools that were selected were known and nine out of fifteen dancers were previously known by the researcher. Dancers that knew the researcher enhanced the data of the group interviews as trust was already established.

#### ***A). Participant Observation***

During the participant observation portion of the study, the researcher recruited the dancers for the group interviews. The observed classes were for the twelve to sixteen year old age range allowed the researcher to visually observe body language of individual dancers within a dance classroom context. Three of the twelve to sixteen years olds were in separate classes so the researcher chose classes that incorporated the different age categories (repertoire for example). In total there were forty-two dancers observed in four classes.

During the participant observation of the class sections, the classes were in different disciplines (ballet, modern, contemporary or repertoire) which allowed the researcher to not focus on one discipline within the dance culture. Since there were a variety of studies that focused on ballet culture (Benn and Walters, 2001; Montanari and Zietkiewicz, 2000), this research wanted to focus on the dance culture of elite dancers whether the dancers aspire to be professional ballerinas, modern dancers or teachers in a broad range of disciplines. The variety of disciplines allowed for a well-rounded view of the dance culture instead of focusing purely on classical ballet culture.

While observing the dance classes, the researcher was attentive to the dancers and the teacher's actions and words. The researcher looked at the dancers' non-verbal language by focusing on mirror gazing and deconstruction of specific body parts whether by the teacher or dancers themselves. A tally was kept on how many times the dancers looked to the mirror for body correction and another tally was kept for body part correction through manipulation. Mirror correction was noticeable as the dancers looked at the mirror, then at their body and then the mirror again. The mirror glancing gaze was recognizable to the researcher as this technique is highly used as a form of body correction within dance. This three step process was a way to see if the dancer had adjusted the body part in question correctly. The validity of the mirror gazing techniques for body correction was also identified within the group interviews. The dancers were asked why they used the mirror and how often they look at themselves in class. The researcher also shared her tallied statistics from the class observation on mirror gazing correction.

Deconstruction of body parts is also a common occurrence within dance as specific body parts are targeted (for example the stomach or legs), and focused on for certain movements and techniques. The result of body part deconstruction was that dancers want to achieve legs like Evelyn Hart's, a torso similar to Chan Hon Gogh and movement like Karen Kain. The focus on different parts and muscles also allows young dancers to become dissatisfied with specific body parts while wishing to correct them. This correction of specific body parts was identified within the classroom setting as the dancers looked in the mirror, self-correct parts with the use of their hands, or teacher correction with body part manipulation. Body part manipulation differs from mirror gazing as the former requires physical contact with the body whereas the latter is observing and body correction without physical touching.

Body part manipulation was categorized by the researcher when a dancer or teacher physically corrected the body using physical force. This type of manipulation was not harmful to the dancers because the proper body placement and correct muscle training was achieved through this technique. One example of body part manipulation that was observed was a ballet teacher assisting in the rotation of a dancer's legs in first position. The teacher put her hands on the dancer's legs and physically rotated the dancer's leg around. This helped the dancer understand the responsibilities of the leg muscles while standing in a static position.

Field notes were taken during the observation sessions and expanded on immediately after the class. Notes were briefly jotted down to allow for maximal observation time and perceptions were written up immediately after the observation therefore allowing less time for the observations to fade (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). These notes included the tallies of mirror gazing and body part manipulation along with key descriptive words that were mentioned by the teacher during class time. These descriptive words and quotations were also presented to the teacher at the end of the class for further clarification. The clarification of spoken words within the class assisted with authenticity and respondent validation (Mays and Pope, 2000). Expansion on these field notes took place immediately after class as this allowed for the observation to be fresh in the researcher's mind to reflect accurately on the class that took place.

Friend groups were also observed during the class to assist in the construction of groups for the interviews. These groups of three or four individuals were identified in class as the dancers tended to interact with each other during the class time. Some types of interaction were standing by each other in class or being partners in corner work or socialization during class time. One of the dancers from the friend groups identified was asked to pick two or three of their friends to be in the group interview with them. These groups allowed the dancers to



already have a sense of trust among their friends therefore allowing them to freely share information while holding each other accountable.

### ***B). Group Interview and Demographic Questionnaire***

The term group interview was used in this study instead of 'focus group' as the group discussions required everyone to speak on the subject of body image and dance culture. The groups were also small in size (3-4 participants) and this allowed for more in-depth information to be discussed. Focus groups usually describe a group that is larger in size and can allow for some people's points of view not to be addressed; however, within a smaller group setting with familiar people this obstacle was overcome.

The group interviews were used to obtain data from the elite dancers in regards to body image internalization and the dance culture. Interviewing subjects was an "extremely important source of data" that was difficult to acquire elsewhere (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995 p.131). The interviews were constructed based on friend groups in which three to four individuals were asked to participate together. Group interviews or small focus groups based on friend groups allowed for the individuals to feel a greater comfort when talking about a sensitive issue such as body image (Wilson and Sparks, 1999). This type of group interview assisted the researcher to "tap into the many different forms of communication that people use in day-to-day interaction, including jokes, anecdotes, teasing, and arguing" (Kitzinger, 2000 p.21).

There were four group interviews that were conducted for data collection. These interviews were dependant on reoccurring themes within the data. Reoccurring themes were evident after these four groups and therefore more interviews would have been redundant. These

themes meant that each question that was asked by the researcher concerning body image and dance, the answer was predictable.

Within each group interview there were three to four elite adolescent female dancers. Three group interviews had four participants while one interview had 3 participants totaling to fifteen dancers. Each dancer interviewed had also been observed previously during the participant observation portion of the study. One group was held in a dance studio whereas the other three group interviews were conducted within a meeting room within the dance school where the dancers attend. This was to establish a comfortable setting in which the dancers could be relaxed (Kitzinger, 2000). After the first interview within the dance studio, it was difficult to hear the commentary of the participants as there was an echo throughout the room. The meeting room allowed for greater clarity in speech and the reduction of unwanted background noise. The dancers were seated in a circle along with the researcher to allow for conversations to occur not only between the researcher and the dancers but also between each other. This setting allowed for group interaction and in turn greater insight into the perceptions of adolescent dancers and body image (Punch, 1998).

The group interviews were an hour to an hour and a half in length using a semi-structured interview guide (Appendix C). This interview guide allowed for the use of probes during the discussion. Probe questions were used by the researcher to pick-up on things said by the participants or to ask them questions to clarify or give examples of a situation (Seale and Filmer, 1998). Probes such as “why do you say that?”, “can you explain that more?”, and “what do you mean by that?” assisted the researcher to get a broader sense of what the dancers were saying. Probes were also used to guide the conversations of the participants to areas that needed to be clarified or to unexplored areas. By asking open-ended, clear, sensitive and neutral questions the

interviewees were able to focus on their own opinions while the researcher asks others for their comments (Britten, 2000). In Appendix C, the interview questions are stated along with potential probes that might have been asked to the participants although some probing was also done during the interview that was not included in the interview guide. These probes not included on the interview guide were in relation to what the dancers are talking about during the group interviews.

Each group interview was tape-recorded and typed into text afterwards. The transcription of each group interview was done either that day or one day after each interview. Tape-recorded documentation allowed for what was said within the interviews to provide accurate evidence of the group's perspective and culture (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). Field notes were also taken during the group interviews and expanded on after the interviews. These notes highlighted actions, gestures or expressions of the dancers that were not captured on audio cassette. The tapes from each group were then transcribed into text, giving the group's members pseudonyms for confidentiality. These pseudonyms were chosen by the participants during the group interviews therefore allowing them to know who they were when and if they would read the research they were apart of.

### ***C. Data Coding***

Transcriptions of the group interviews were kept in separate MS Word files and once all the transcriptions had been done, the texts were examined for commonalities. Since there were only four group interviews, the data was compared and contrasted adequately through the use of MS Word instead of an ethnographic coding program. This form of manual coding assisted in the process of categorizing the data into relevant sections (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995).

The texts of all the group interviews were printed out and compared to each other for emerging common themes. These transcribed texts were also compared with the researcher's participant observation notes and interview field notes for the major themes of the research to be revealed.

The categorization of data began with the researcher becoming familiar with all the data sets and this familiarization became the foundation of the data analysis (Ritchie, Spencer, and O'Conner, 2003). Each data set and the researcher's proposal were carefully reviewed to allow for the research objectives to be examined. Within the data sets, reoccurring themes were identified by the researcher to devise a conceptual framework or index which, in turn, was used to classify the commonalities in the data (Ritchie, Spencer, and O'Conner, 2003).

Through categorizing the transcribed data, it assisted in identifying the major themes within the research. Themes were identified by interpreting and identifying recurrent patterns in what was observed and said within the methodologies (Hammersley, 1997). These themes were not necessarily black and white however, they reflected the range of events and statements observed by the researcher (Atkinson, 1992). The major themes within this research were derived from observed commonalities in the data, and were not necessarily reflecting the categorizations laid out by the researcher (social comparison, dance culture, body image and body satisfaction). For example, themes were based on a word or phrase that was said within the interview process. These themes encompassed the perceptions and interpretations of the dancers by using the examples and words that they used to describe their point of view (Hammersley, 1997).

Each portion of the data sets were categorized into a general thematic framework therefore indexing the major and sub themes of the research. During this time there was no abstraction or imposition of the literature of the data as it would have led to distracted analytical

thinking (Ritchie, Spencer, and O'Conner, 2003). There were three major themes that were constructed based on the group interview data sets. From these major themes, eight sub themes were created with a numeric code which allowed all the data sets to be indexed (Ritchie, Spencer, and O'Conner, 2003). This indexing allowed for similar statements within different interviews to be highlighted and in turn, categorized into the same sub groups.

After reading the transcribed interviews four times each, four main categories within the interviews emerged. These categories had common broad themes however there were many sub-categories under each category. The four common categories were 1). Bodies 2). Professional Links 3). Competition and Comparison and 4). Ideals in Dance and Society. Each of these main categories were broad however each group was broken up into six to eight sub-categories. Examples of the sub-categories for the first category of Bodies were: ideal body parts, femininity, healthy body, musculature, extra exercise, dieting, skinny/slender/thin, and bodies over time.

The diversity of the sub-categories assisted in classifying the data from the interviews into similar areas. Each of the statements made by the participants during the groups interviews were slotted into a sub-category along with any possible links to another sub-category as some statements could fit into two or three different groupings. Once the sorting was complete the categories were reviewed twice followed by a reading of the transcribed group interviews again. This last review of the transcribed data focused on taking the context meaning of what was said by the participants and not just snippets of conversations to fit into the categories. From the sorted data three main themes and ten sub-themes were identified. The three themes that will be examined during this study are Already Striving for Complete Perfection: Strong, Thin and Feminine; Dreams of Professionalism and The Distinction is Made: Involved in Two Different

Cultures: Dance and Society. Each of these themes were inspired by specific comments the participants made during the group interviews.

It was through the transcribed data, observations and insider knowledge that the researcher addressed the validity or truth of the effect of dance culture and negative body image on elite adolescent dancers. These results also addressed relevance within the dance world as this type of qualitative study has not been conducted on elite adolescent dancers previously. Interpretation of the data was guided not only by the dancers' own accounts that were observed, clarified and discussed within the study but also through the personal and insider knowledge of the researcher.

A limitation of this study was the reflexivity of the researcher. Although the researcher's insider knowledge assisted with potential gatekeepers, the study could have been skewed due to this knowledge. By asking for further explanation in comments and stories during both the participant observation and the group interviews, I tried not to jump to conclusions but rather have the dancers fully explain their comments. The issue of reflexivity was reduced through constant reflection on behaviors and comments made by the dancers.

The representativeness of this study was partially established by comparing the findings with previous quantitative and qualitative research as well as cross-comparing the findings from the three methods of the data collection (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). By comparing the characteristics of this study with what was known about dancers generally, in relation to body image and eating disorders, I hope to shed light on related conditions in the elite adolescent dance population. This study will offer guidelines for further research on elite adolescent female dancers concerning socialization into dance culture and its effects.

## Chapter 4

### Results

This chapter is organized into two sections; participant observation, and group interviews with demographic questionnaire. These sections compile information of the reoccurring themes within the research. The quotes, comments and written statements or explanations made by the interviewees with the group interviews are provided with grammar and spelling in context to the conversations and discussions that took place.

#### *A).Participant Observation*

The participant observation component of the study was conducted in two dance schools in the Vancouver area: Dance Max and Janelle's Dance Academy. Both of these schools are located within the Vancouver area and are committed to a multi-faceted type of dance education for their students. Although the schools have slightly different programs, they both focus on developing the whole dancer: creatively, technically and athletically according to their mission statements.

During the participant observation phase there were forty-two participants in total who were observed in four different dance classes. The instructional ages for the classes ranged from twelve to sixteen and the classes were an hour and a quarter to an hour and a half in duration.

**Table #1 Participant Observation Class Information**

	<b>Class #1 Ballet / Pointe</b>	<b>Class #2 Repertoire</b>	<b>Class #3 Contemporary</b>	<b>Class #4 Ballet / Pointe</b>
<b>Students Observed</b>	10	12	12	8
<b>Ages ranges</b>	12-15	14-16	14-16	13-16
<b>Duration of Class</b>	1.5 hours	1.25 hours	1.5 hours	1.5 hours

The classes observed were ballet, pointe, contemporary and repertoire. The observations that were recorded focused on teacher or student comments, unique behaviors, and a tally in regards to mirror gazing and body part manipulation. These observations were used to have a greater understanding of the dance class these adolescents participate in while also striving for consistency in the group-interview data.

The participant observation was useful for establishing the context of the study as it allowed for a broad overview of the localized art form that the dancers followed. Through knowledge and personal insight, the researcher was also able to draw her attention to specific comments made towards the dancers and cue words that were used while training.

The more detailed data collected during the participant observation consisted of four main categories: body part manipulation by the teacher and by the student, mirror gazing and self-gazing (looking at the dancer's own body).

**Table #2 – Tallied Participant Observation Data**

<b>Tallied Data</b>	<b>Classes Observed</b>				<b>Total</b>
	<b>1 Ballet / Pointe</b>	<b>2 Repertoire (Modern / Contemporary)</b>	<b>3 Contemporary</b>	<b>4 Ballet / Pointe</b>	
<b>Students Observed</b>	10	12	12	8	42
<b>Body part Manipulation (Teacher)</b>	12	0	8	12	32
<b>Body Part Manipulation (Student)</b>	3	1	2	3	9
<b>Mirror Gazing</b>	32	29	39	44	144
<b>Self-gazing</b>	6	2	4	3	15



Body part manipulation that was done by the teacher varied depending on the class that the dancers were participating in. During the 'technique classes' (ballet, pointe and contemporary), there was more physical corrections performed by the teacher. This was due to the desired form and technique that was required and focused on during these classes. During the repertoire class, the dancers were not manipulated at all as the teacher used verbal cues and allowed for the individuals to create their own inspired choreography to specific music. The body part manipulation performed by the dancers was relatively low in all classes, since at a young age dancers are not expected to touch or look at their body but rather to 'feel' their muscles working properly.

Mirror gazing occurred numerous times during all the classes although mirror dependency varied with the individual dancer. While some girls constantly eyed themselves in the mirror, others looked once or twice the entire class. On average the dancers would look in the mirror 3.5 times per class for either corrections or 'just to look'. Self-gazing, or when the dancer is looking down at her own body and correcting herself, was only done by a few individuals. Self-gazing was done usually just prior to the beginning of an exercise as the dancers were preparing in first or fifth positions. This self-gazing was a confirmation that their legs and feet were correct before they began the exercise.

The time that was spent in the classroom can be divided into two distinct sections; class exercise time and non-exercise time. The class exercise time looks at what the individuals are doing when they are learning or performing a class exercise. For example, within a ballet class a teacher could be demonstrating the plié exercise and this demonstration along with the execution of the exercise with music would be the class exercise time. The non-exercise time refers to the

class time that the dancers have before, during and after exercises. This is the non structured part of the class whereas the class exercise time is the structured, on-task part of the class.

During the class exercises, the researcher observed that every dancer looked at themselves in the mirror at one point during the class; however, how often they observed themselves and for how long differed from individual to individual. This varied depending on position in relation to the mirror, type of exercise that was being performed and the amount of mirror dependence of each individual. The position of the dancers within the classroom directly relates to how much they look in the mirror because if they are not able to see themselves at all times, they may look at themselves less as the mirror is not readily available. The type of exercise is important as the dancers tend to look at themselves less in pliés and warm-up exercises rather than during arabesques and adage. 'Mirror dependence' concerns how often the individual looks in the mirror to get feedback on whether they are doing things correctly in comparison with others at the same level within their class.

An interesting finding in the participant observation was the fact that almost all of the dancers observed looked in the mirror during the arabesque position. It was stated during the interviews that the arabesque position is one that is highly observed not only for personal correction but also competition within the classroom. This position is then a trademark for each of the dancers to try to accomplish a technical and aesthetic arabesque.

During the exercise time the dancers were focused on remembering their steps while also looking in the mirror occasionally to check and correct their positioning by adjusting their body. Although the dancers observed their bodies during the exercise time, their mirror gazing and body part deconstruction occurred more readily during the non-exercise time. During the non-exercise time there was little to no structure and therefore the dancers were free to observe

themselves in the mirror. However, different classes allotted different amounts of non-exercise time. The amount of mirror gazing increased in non-exercise time as the dancers observed and fixed their uniforms, hair, and cleavage or just gazed at their body parts that they admired or had concerns with.

Dance instructors would remind dancers of corrections during or promptly following their exercises. These comments were used in two distinct ways; as encouragement and as cue words. The encouraging words such as:

“Now *those* are ballerina legs” (italics are emphasized).

“A nice, soft, expressive focus.”

These comments motivated the dancers to whom the comment was made because they seemed pleased with their hard work and the correct result. They showed their satisfaction with themselves through smiles, nodding, or becoming slightly shy. Cue words were delivered to the dancers both on an individual basis and as a group. Some cue word examples are:

“Nice, soft, graceful arms.”

“Lengthen, lengthen, lengthen” (in regards to the dancer’s legs).

“Take the weight of your hips off your legs.”

“Each body part needs to be supported so they’re not heavy.”

These comments allowed for the teacher to remind the dancers of corrections talked about in previous classes and in their present class. Many of the cue words referred to lengthening the body and legs to be longer and ‘not heavy’. During one ballet class, the teacher demonstrated with a student the difference between having “your weight of your hips on your legs” and taking the weight ‘off’. The teacher referred to the dancers lengthening their muscles and ‘supporting’ or working their muscles to achieve the desired results. These comments were used for the

purpose of technical teaching, but could become negative and harsh to some dancers. The words “heavy”, “weight” and “lengthen” could be perceived by the dancers as referring to themselves as being fat, overweight or not tall or thin enough. Although the intention of these cue words was meant for body correction, it is possible that the dancers take these comments personally and negatively.

One comment that stood out during the participant observation was:

“Without a professional look, you won’t get a professional job.”

This comment was made to the dancers in regards to stage presence and emotion within their movements. In a class with twelve to fourteen year old dancers aspiring to be the next first soloist, this comment could have a critical impact on one’s body image. The expression having a ‘professional look’ is associated not only with a stage presence but also with body shape and appearance. Since most professional contemporary dancers are thin, lean, and tall, these aspiring dancers will need to acquire those ‘looks’ as well as stage presence for professional success. This can put tremendous pressure on an adolescent who desires a career in the dance industry.

### ***B). Group Interviews with Demographic Questionnaire***

This research allowed the dancers to freely talk and converse about the issues that they all deal with and encounter within the dance culture. Although as in every subculture these dancers do not have the answers to every question, their knowledge and confidence about themselves and their bodies can transfer into a new approach to dance. As dance is a visual art form where dancers are socialized to be thin and almost waif-like in appearance to be successful, a new wave of dancers who emphasize health, technical training and proper nutrition potentially could assist in a dramatic change in the area of dance. This change could allow for extreme thinness to be a

decreasing issue among the dance community. The future of dance is unknown, but with the constant infiltration of new faces, styles and body shapes, dance can continue to change for the better.

#### *a. Questionnaire*

The interview participants within this study ranged from 12-16 years old with the average age of the participants interviewed being 13.9. Each dancer had danced for a minimum for two years at an elite level although some had danced for ten or eleven years. On average the participants have danced for 7.1 years and have been involved in local and provincial competitions, school performances, summer school and pre-professional dance school auditions, and professional performances like The Nutcracker with Royal Winnipeg Ballet. These girls have participated in the following dance styles: ballet, jazz, lyrical, pointe, modern, hip hop, modern stage, tap, musical theatre, flamenco, and contemporary. The girls interviewed danced an average of 21.1 hours per week; however this ranged from 13 to 26 hours per week.

Information about the dancers' ethnicity was collected in the group interviews to help understand the dancers' backgrounds and points of view. The ethnic breakdown of the sample was representative of the dancer population in this age group in the two dance schools, and was mainly Caucasian (n=13) with only one participant with a Middle Eastern background and one with an African-Canadian background.

Fourteen of the dancers interviewed wanted to pursue a career professionally within the area of dance, whether by dancing within a professional company or teaching in a dance school. The questionnaire asked if the participants would like to dance as a career, and many responded with comments like:

“A professional and once in a while teach.”

“Yes, unless I get a fatal injury and can’t anymore. I would like to be a physiotherapist.”

“Most likely!”

“If I had the opportunity.”

“That’s my goal and my dream.”

This question was to establish the dancer’s commitment to dance and their inspiration to pursue a career within the dance world. Although many of the girls dreamed of becoming professional dancers, they were never asked what their professional dreams looked like. This answer would have been interesting as this could determine the dancer’s focus.

Only one dancer stated that she would not like to be a professional dancer. This comment was made by a fifteen year old dancer who said:

“I don’t think I could be a dancer, so no.”

This comment was interesting as it was not just a ‘no’ but a statement that this dancer does not feel adequate enough in some form or another to be a professional. This could be due to her body shape, her features (muscles, feet) not reflecting that of a professional, her motivation, or a number of other personal reasons. This comment was interesting to the researcher since each of these girls are capable both technically and aesthetically of becoming professional dancers if they continue to dance at this level.

In the demographic questionnaire, the dancers were asked to rate the way they look on a predetermined scale while also asking them to explain their answer. The girls were given a scale from one to ten, one meaning that they were very dissatisfied with their appearance and ten

meaning they love the way they look. The girl's ratings ranged from 4 to 9 in regards to their body image, however on average the group rated their bodies at 7.2.

**Table #3 – Numeric Body Image Scale of Elite Adolescent Female Dancers**

Scale rating										
Love my body						Very dissatisfied				
	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
# of dancers at scale rating	0	2	4	6	2	0	1	0	0	0

Most dancers rated themselves between six and nine, and only one dancer rated herself at a four. The dancers were asked to explain why they rated themselves at that particular number and they typically commented on different parts of their bodies that negatively impact the way they look. Of the two dancers who rated themselves at a nine, one stated that she liked the way she looked but that she's not perfect, while the other stated that blemished skin was the reason why she scored less than perfect. The number eight ratings stated consistently that they did not like a specific feature but overall they liked the way they looked. Some of those features included height and leg shape. The six dancers that rated at a seven usually had a few more problem areas that they observed on their body such as:

"I don't like how short my legs are, my face always has a zit, and my ribs are too big."

"I have big hips and a huge bum, don't like my legs cause they're all bruised and scarred. I hate my thighs."

These two comments are examples of what these dancers think about the way they look. At the scale rating of seven, these dancers observe and despise their problem spots. Of the two dancers

who rated themselves as a six, one stated that she did not really care about the way she looked and she wasn't worried about it, while the other dancer stated that her scoliosis (a curvature of the spine) made her not like the way she looked. The one dancer that rated herself as a four is concerning due to her age and her response:

"I want thinner legs, less muscular arms and a better stomach (abs). I wish I was taller and had less hyper-extended legs."

The quantity of body shape corrections concerns the researcher because this aspiring professional dancer could attempt to 'better' her body through restrictive eating or excessive exercise.

**Table #4 – Group Interview Participant Information**

<b>Group Interview participants</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Years Danced</b>	<b>Hours per week</b>	<b>Body Image scale Rating</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Professional Career Dreams (Yes/No)</b>
1	12	6	13	7	Caucasian	Yes
2	16	3	15	4	Caucasian	Yes
3	13	2	17	7	Caucasian	Yes
4	16	10	13	6	Caucasian	Yes
5	16	12	26	9	Caucasian	Yes
6	14	6	25	6	Caucasian	Yes
7	13	9.5	26	9	Middle Eastern	Yes
8	14	8	23	7	Caucasian	Yes
9	14	7	23	8	Caucasian	Yes
10	15	11	24	7	Caucasian	Yes
11	15	10	23	7	Caucasian	No
12	12	7	22	7	Caucasian	Yes
13	13	7	22	8	Caucasian	Yes
14	13	4	22	8	African Canadian	Yes
15	13	4	22	8	Caucasian	Yes
<b>Average</b>	13.9	7.1	21.1	7.2	13 C 1 ME 1 AC	14 Yes 1 No



This demographic information was also summarized for Table # 4 for a greater description of the dancers interviewed. The demographic questionnaire allowed for the researcher to more readily understand the dancers' statistics and personal perceptions of their bodies. These were used along with the interview data to clarify the dancers' body image as individuals to see if they correspond to what was said in the interviews. The interview time allowed the researcher to probe for and get further explanations of the issues of dance and body image.

### ***b. Group Interviews***

Themes emerged from the group discussions that emphasized the importance of one's body both in society and in dance. These themes were unique to dancers because they did not focus on becoming a ballerina clone but rather to be muscular and healthy, while developing their own unique style. This culture of contemporary dance focuses more on the training, style and movement of the dancer and therefore, although the body is important, it does not have to be extremely skinny and waif-like. From the details of the conversations with these elite adolescent dancers, we are able to perceive that, like most women, they have concerns about their bodies but they are also confident about how they look.

After reviewing all the categories and sub-categories, the commonalities of the data narrowed to three themes that continually emerged from the participant's conversations in all of the group interviews. These themes were prompted from comments that the participants made during the interviews that stuck out to the researcher. The three themes are: Already Striving for Complete Perfection: Strong, Thin and Feminine, Dreams of Professionalism, and The Distinction is Made: Involved in Two Different Cultures: Dance and Society. Each of these

themes has quotes (or sub themes) from the group interviews which assist in summarizing the data.

***Theme #1 – Already Striving for Complete Perfection: Strong, Thin, and Feminine.***

***Sub theme #1 -- “She works on how she looks and she looks good”***

Many discussions within the groups focused on the ideal body parts that they would like to have. These focused mainly on physical characteristics but also gracefulness and femininity. All the girls not only perceive themselves as dancers but also members of society and are trying to excel in both. The adolescents understood that dancers have a different ‘look’ or ideal and are therefore trying to blend these ideals in order to succeed in both cultures.

All the girls within this study, similar to non-dancing girls, are highly conscious of their bodies. However, since these girls view their bodies in mirrors day after day and physically examine their bodies during each class, I would argue that these dancers are more aware of their bodies. The uniform that they wear is tight fitting and does not hide any unsightly bulges. Through the study of dance, these dancers critique their bodies on a daily basis for both looks and technical excellence. Throughout the classes, auditions, competitions and performances, these dancers strive towards an ideal with the help of hard work, determination and commitment.

The ideal bodies that the dancer described had two main purposes, aesthetic and functional. The aesthetic look of a dancer was described as tall, long legs, good feet, flat chest and nice long muscles. These characteristics reoccurred throughout the interviews as the dancers continually referred to peers and dancers who had these special features that they desired. The functionality of their bodies was continually described to be ‘better for dance’. Some

characteristics are flexibility, movement, gracefulness and style. Although both aesthetics and function contribute to the art of dance, it is the dancer's perspective that the balance of both will assist in attaining success.

All the participants stated that the ideal dancing body was tall, long, and lean. These characteristics reflect the ideal ballet body, but these dancers also state that this type of body is attainable for contemporary dancers also. Although a specific desirable height was never stated, it was more important that the dancer be 'proportioned' and have control of her body. A long, lean body is most desirable as the dancer can then work on strength and movement.

The dancer's legs, a trademark within the dance industry, were continually discussed by all participants. Not only were the legs supposed to be aesthetically pleasing but thin, lean and sculpted. Ideal legs are described as long and slender, hyper-extended and muscularly defined. Not only are these individual characteristics important but the leg as a whole needs to be an extension from hip to foot. Six of the participants described this extension with arm actions (pretending their arms were their legs) and used descriptive words to demonstrate the proper lines they wanted to achieve.

The importance of being thin was also a major concern among the dancers interviewed. The distinction was made by all the dancers that thinness is important, however, being skinny is undesirable. This fine line was described as follows:

Rachel: "I want to be thin but I don't want to be skinny... Thin is like, you still have muscles but skinny is just like, eating disorders, you know."

Thinness and skinniness were constantly contrasted within the group interviews as all the girls believed that to be thin was desirable yet to be extremely thin was 'gross'. Becoming too skinny

was associated with weakness whereas with being thin or slender with the right amount of muscles, was not only sought-after but achievable.

Although all of the dancers desired to be thin and slender, eight participants hoped to look as thin as a fellow class mate.

Kaitlyn: "So I find that, I don't know sometimes I wish that I was skinnier. I find that I'm skinny but you know I want to be like *Ashley skinny*." (emphasis in italics)

Ashley's body shape and thinness was brought up a number of times within the interviews and served as a point of comparison for two of the groups interviewed (8 participants). Although these dancers were satisfied with their bodies they also wanted to reflect an ideal dancing body which they would observe among their peers in some form or another.

Although it was never stated how thin was too thin, three participants commented that bones sticking out were not acceptable to a certain extent:

Jennifer: "I think it's nice when you can see like bone but not like when it's like, gross."

Since all of these dancers differ in opinion a definition of acceptable thinness would have been helpful. By learning their acceptable range of thinness for these participants, more difference or contradictions could have been examined.

It was not enough to be just skinny – you must also be toned. Musculature was extremely important to the dancers as their bodies needed to be functional and strong within dance.

Joni: "She is really like, strong and has got, like, muscles but she's just so skinny at the same time."

This comment was in regards to a mentor of Joni's that she looks up to in regards to body shape and dance style. Both characteristics are desirable to a dancer as they serve as a practical and artistic purpose.

The clothes the dancer would wear and where she would stand during the class assisted the girls in perceiving their bodies as thinner than they are. Both the mirrors and their dance uniforms could be adjusted to achieve their desired thinness. The dancers would choose different mirrors within the classroom to observe their bodies:

Mary: "Yeah like today, in class umm, like, I heard someone said 'oh I want to be at this spot at the barre cause like, I'm like, in front of the mirror and it's the skinny mirror. So I want to be in that spot because it's the skinny mirror, I don't want to be in that spot because it's like, the fat mirror."

Ten of the dancers related to the idea that there were fat and skinny mirrors within their classrooms while the other five did not state their point of view. The ten girls stated that they would even compete for specific spots in front of the skinny mirrors to observe themselves as they danced. The dance uniform was another tactic that the girls used to look thinner within dance class. Dark colored, seamed bodysuits produced a tighter fit which hugged and held the body whereas nine of the girls preferred to cover up with spandex shorts or dark colored leggings instead of pink ballet tights. This change in attire allowed for the girls to perceive they were closer to the ideal dance body and therefore had a positive attitude toward how they looked during class.

The ideal dance body was seen largely as an achievable standard through hard work, determination and commitment. All fifteen of the dancers viewed their bodies as a project that they could continue to work diligently on to achieve a desirable result. However, fourteen of the dancers stated that certain characteristics could not be achieved and were due to genetics, such as height and bone structure. Regina was the only participant that did not state whether she agreed or disagreed with the statement of genetics and achievable standard. However she stated "you can't stretch your legs' in regards to a fellow classmate with long arms but short legs. Many of

her comments agrees with the discussion taking place in the group interview however she never stated her opinion clearly but rather focused on hard work to achieve desirable results.

The perfect dancing body was seen as rare or impossible by all the dancers. Having talent and a good work ethic were more valued over perfection. According to one dancer, Autumn, "usually people who are perfect don't dance." This comment was made in regards to people with an ideal body shape for dance. In each interview, the dancers were asked if the perfect dancing body is attainable, and the responses were:

Taylor: "They don't have to have the perfect body but they have to have something."

Natasha: "You can't have everything so I'm like, she has to work on this and I have to work on this"

Kaitlyn: "You don't necessarily have to have everything, like, you don't have something but you have something else."

Gladys: "Like most people have one thing and then they have to work really hard towards something else."

All the dancers recognized that it was very rare to have the perfect body. Although it was also stated by all the participants that dancers without the ideal body shape or size have a chance to advance to professional or elite dance through talent and continual hard work. This kind of determination, work ethic and ability was described as leading a dancer to success.

During one interview the girls discussed two former classmates who had ideal bodies but lacked determination and work ethic.

Miranda: "yeah like, two people have quit this year and they have, like, they have a really good body. Like Jane and Vanessa are good and they quit and Vanessa has a *really* good body." (emphasis in italics)

These two classmates were described as having the perfect body to succeed within the dance world but they were deficient in their enthusiasm and dedication to dance. The consensus among

all of the group interview participants was that they would rather have to work diligently for and earn their success then to have it handed to them. This hard work allows for the dancers to have a significant part in their success or failure to become an elite or professional dancer.

Commitment to success was another factor that assisted dancers in their training at the elite level. If the dancer was committed enough to the art of dance and wanted to succeed, she would be dedicated to changing her body.

Natalia: (They succeed) "with their style, creating like movement that suits them."

Taylor: "It's how committed they are to dancing and learning." (referring to success)

Frenchy: "Yeah like, we all try to do that (change our body). Like if you have weak hamstrings then you work on them everyday."

All of these quotes refer to the commitment and work ethic these dancers have to try to change and maintain their bodies for the sport they love. Frenchy's statement describes the common consensus of all the dancers; hard work will improve your weaknesses and if you decrease your weaknesses there is a greater chance for success. By being able to change one's body, one shows the amount of commitment and determination one has.

Joni: "Teachers should try not to really push their image and that may not be the best route to take, so take care of your body and so you should keep fit and work really really hard."

Hard work and determination was viewed by all the dancers as commitment. If they were committed to dance, they wanted to excel at it and excellence occurred through a constantly working on specific parts of their bodies for success. These dancers stated that with proper training, healthy eating and hard work they can achieve a body that is acceptable and desirable.

***Sub-theme #2 -- "I like try to put other people's body parts together into one. It's like the perfect body!"***

In all of the group interviews, each participant talked about specific body parts as problem areas while also praising other dancers for representing the ideal. Some body parts that were commented on by the dancers were: feet, leg (size, shape and musculature), buttocks, hips, stomach, arms, breast size, and complexion. Each dancer within the group interviews focused on their specific problem area by continually bringing it into the conversations.

Miranda: "I am very conscious of my legs and I like to wear pants a lot"

Miranda: "I just have a lot more muscle, like my calves and thighs..."

Miranda focused on her musculature within her legs as being a problem area however other members within her classes looked up to her body shape.

Kaitlyn: yeah, Miranda has that too, she's got really nice legs. She's got nice muscle tone but it's on the bone, it's not like, on top of fat or anything that would cause bulk."

The dancers would often talk about other classmates desirable features that they would covet. All the dancers would observe their peers in class and not only compare themselves but also mentally piece together a perfectly constructed ideal body. Body part deconstruction occurred throughout the interview process as the dancers mentioned professionals and peers to describe the ultimate collage of perfected parts.

Within the group interviews thirteen of the fifteen dancers defined three main problems areas: feet, buttocks, and legs, and it was these areas that they desired to change. The other two dancers focused primarily on the shape and style of their arms. These changes were desired to succeed in dance and to reflect the ideal dancing body that these girls observed. Six dancers identified feet as their personal problem area whereas four focused on buttocks and ten on legs.



Of the thirteen dancers that identified these potential problem areas, three dancers stated both legs and feet were problem areas whereas one dancer said all three areas were problematic. The areas of feet, buttocks, and legs were not only considered problem areas for many of the girls but also areas of comparison among their peers.

The attraction for nicely arched feet occurred among all the participants as a beneficial quality for contemporary dance although only six dancers stated it was their personal weakness. Since the feet are an extension of the legs, these features accent the leg to make it look a particular way. The feet are also seen as a signature characteristic among dancers as they make or break the line of movement the dancers are trying to achieve.

The feet were stated as being in constant comparison among the dancers in a variety of ways. Arches, stretch, strength, and lines of the feet were all forms of comparison that these dancers made during class. They not only compared their feet to other dancers but also they compared classmates' feet to other classmates. What the dancer's looked at to compare feet was evident by the conversation between Gladys and Mary:

Gladys: "feet and jumps ... like your pointing."

Mary: "yeah who points their feet a lot, like, uses their feet."

Gladys: "who has the nicest line like throughout their legs to their feet too."

Since not every dancer has the optimal feet for contemporary dance, it is also taken into account that the dancers need to 'use' or work their feet in a particular way to achieve the desired arch and line.

Kaitlyn: "Like, Natasha doesn't have *really* high legs and she has not great feet but she's got high legs and her feet are getting so much better." (emphasis in italics)

Although Natasha may not have the ideal feet for contemporary dance, Kaitlyn had noticed her determination and hard work to try to improve her problem area.

The buttocks, like the feet, were also seen as an extension of the legs and therefore were an area of concern and comparison among four of the dancer's. The buttocks region was seen as undesirable when it stuck out while standing in certain positions or if it was perceived as too large. Jennifer stated that she did not like her buttocks because they are "a bit outside the line" in 5<sup>th</sup> position. This 'line' begins at the top of one's head and goes down to one's feet. Although it is necessary to have a curvature around the buttocks area when standing in 5<sup>th</sup> position, Jennifer perceived that her buttocks stuck out too much.

The four dancers also compared their buttocks to others' within the class and celebrities' within popular culture. The importance of having buttocks that are small lies in the ability of the dancers to perform more skills and to look more similar to the ideal dancing body:

Natasha: "Cause like most people in our class, like everyone, has like, skinny little butts and like umm, I have, like, a big butt and like these massive legs. ... I don't mind for normal life, it's just for dance it's kinda like, annoying, like, in arabesque it can't go up anymore because, like, your butt is like, touching your back (giggling)."

The comparisons that are made by the dancers reflect the perception that without an ideal body they will never be quite good enough to excel at dance. The buttocks area was seen as an area of concern not only with how it limited one's skill but also how it looked while performing contemporary dance. The dance ideal of a small, 'skinny' butt was more important to these dancers than the societal ideal of shapely features.

The comparisons demonstrated an understanding that having round buttocks was not beautiful within contemporary dance, however this feature is acceptable and sought after within popular culture.

Jessica: "People tell me I have a J Lo butt... I'm like great, and they're like, be proud of it ... but it's like, *so big!*" (emphasis in italics)

The phenomenon of having a round, voluminous buttock region like Jennifer Lopez (J Lo) has not only swept the nation but has become a cultural icon for the buttocks of women today. Although these are viewed as desirable among women in society, in dance this is perceived as too large and therefore is not acceptable.

Within one group interview Jessica was described as having an ideal body for society. When the participants made a distinction between ideal dance bodies and ideal bodies in society Jessica's name was used as an example of a societal ideal:

Jennifer: "Carla has a nice body cause she has a really flat stomach and she has boobs

Natasha: "Jessica does too."

Although Jessica stated that her buttocks were "so big", three other dancers saw her as a resemblance of the societal ideal. Although this comment focuses on breast size it was also stated by Kaitlyn that Jessica was proportionate in her body parts while also being in shape.

The legs of the dancers were the most talked about as a point of concern and comparison for the participants within this study. Although only ten dancers pinpointed their legs as a problem area, all the dancers stated that the leg size and shape were extremely important for dance. Legs were often seen as too big or not the correct shape for dance:

Jennifer: "Umm and then I think with my legs sometimes, I think that they could have some excess cut off. But overall, I think that I don't have scarred legs and they're okay."

According to her peers, Jennifer had a great physique and performance style for contemporary dance, but she continually tried to better herself and how she looks. This reaction of wanting smaller legs was the consensus for most dancers in the interviews.

Natalia, like many of the other dancers, describes her dissatisfaction with her legs as not just one characteristic but a few:

“I don’t like my legs. Legs like the shape of my legs and how they look in the mirror and your arms and how they are part of your lines.”

Natalia disapproves of her legs for aesthetic reasons, but she has slim, toned legs. This negative outlook is not only targeted towards her legs but also towards the lines that she makes with them and her arms combined. The lines of a dancer’s legs are deemed important as they show skill and understanding of proper technique.

All the girls discussed length, musculature and shape of one’s legs as being very important for skill and aesthetic reasons. The shape of one’s legs was important as this reflected lines and extensions within all forms of dance. Four of the girls wanted less muscle while three wanted more while all ten wanted their legs reshaped in some form. All in all, they wanted slim muscles that were close to the bone instead of a bulkier musculature.

These three areas of the body were seen as very important to the participants as they were areas of concern and competition among classmates. It was through this concern that the dancers began to observe their peers’ bodies and deconstruct them. All of the dancers deconstructed their and other people’s body parts through their conversations. In the group interviews each dancer would describe one specific body region that needed improvement or was ideal. Ideal bodies were pieced together with the imaginations of the dancers. Not one dancer described other dancers as a whole person but rather as a segmented mosaic of ideal parts. The only time the participants looked at the entire body instead focusing on specific body parts was when in conversation about movement style. As dance focuses on the body as a whole (movement and style) and its parts (specific characteristics), all the dancers also deem these important.

All fifteen dancers seemed to enjoy not only comparing their specific body parts with others but also building a mental representation of what an ideal dancer looks like.

Jessica: "I like try to put other people's body parts together into one. It's like the perfect body. Carla's legs and Ashley's upper body."

Kaitlyn: "What else, Jennifer's arms, Natasha's focus, people's hair, yeah I do everything. And you have like, your perfect little dancer and have everybody's good qualities are all on one thing."

The other dancers within Kaitlyn's interview agreed that they also deconstruct individuals' body parts during class and almost enjoy piecing together the ideal dancer. In the other three interviews, the eleven dancers explained ideal parts of others that they desired as they began to piece together ideal bodies. The dancers never discussed why they deconstructed their peers' bodies into parts, although it is possible that constructing a perfect dancer would give them something to work towards. Another reason could be due to the focus dance has on individual body parts such as strong, turned-out legs and soft, flowing arms. Body part deconstruction was observed by the researcher as being part of the culture of contemporary dance because the dancer's see their body parts as more important then their body as a whole.

### ***Sub-theme #3 -- "As long as it's engaged then it's not gross."***

Musculature and exercise were common themes within the group interviews as the dancers seemed to understand the benefits of both characteristics. A body's musculature was very important as this not only shows proper dance training but also commitment and perseverance. As stated earlier, contemporary dancers desire a toned and strong muscle structure to successfully perform the skills they need at the elite level. Although muscular function is very important, the way it looks is also significant.

All the dancers favored a toned, muscular body type but this strength was different from other athletes that they are often compared to. Gymnasts and dancers are continually seen as similar due to their intense training and body type selection. The dancers perceived that

gymnasts and dancers are extremely different not only in their training regimes but also in the way they look.

Gladys: "Like gymnastics it's a lot about being muscular and like strength. There's strength in dance but it's different, it's more internal strength."

Gladys talked about the stamina and endurance dancers have whereas gymnasts have more explosive power in their movement. Each of the participants also recognized that the physical build of gymnasts was unlike that of dancers as gymnasts usually have 'bulkier' muscles as opposed to long muscles. The difference was also made between artistic and rhythmic gymnasts as artistic developed bulkier muscles and rhythmic gymnasts were longer and leaner than dancers.

Jennifer: "Cause rhythmic are usually their like, skinnier like, longer than us and more stretched out and with broad shoulders."

Regina: "I think that with the rhythmic gymnasts ... they are definitely more concerned about their weight than dancers, well the dancers here."

Only two group interviews made a distinction in body shape between artistic and rhythmic gymnasts. The rhythmic gymnasts were stated as being more similar to dancers in body shape than artistic gymnasts.

Four of the dancers interviewed had also participated in gymnastics at one time. Two of the dancers had quit gymnastics and to join dance while the other two were involved to improve their flexibility for dance.

Mary: "...my dad enrolled me in like, the gymnastics in like the mornings, for like flexibility and it's like, I found that I have a flexible back from that."

Both Mary and Jennifer had attended gymnastics classes during the year to assist in their flexibility and movement repertoire for dance.

Although both gymnastics and dance are perceived as strong and athletic, all the participants stated that dance is unique from all forms of gymnastics as it focuses on the skills, and the transitions between those skills, therefore demonstrating fluidity, movement and art. Gymnasts, on the other hand, direct their attention to the skills and perfect execution. Therefore, dance is performance based rather than results-based like gymnastics and although these aesthetic athletes are often compared, it is also crucial to state that they are quite different and unique in a number of ways.

Twelve of the participants also perceived their mentors as looking athletic yet distinct from other athletes. Emily Molnar, a professional dancer with Ballet BC who specializes in contemporary dance, was described by nine of the twelve participants as an athlete and a dancer:

Autumn: "The thing is she is not built petite, she's built big but she's developed it so she looks like an athlete... but a skinny athlete, a dancer athlete."

The twelve dancers made a clear distinction between athletes and dancers, because athletes tend to be bulkier than their artistic counterparts. These participants stated that dancers are athletes as they have to be strong and fit but they are also quite different from athletes in their musculature and body shape.

Contemporary dancers at a professional level within the local Vancouver area demonstrate a toned, long, lean body in contrast to bulky, bulging muscles or toothpick thinness. A toned body is highly favorable within dance as it allows the dancers to perform a specific movement series while also looking long and lean. Although all the dancers desired to be skinny, a body that is muscularly defined was highly regarded:

Natasha: "I don't like skinny legs with no like ... you have to have muscle on them."

Extreme thinness, which is desirable among classical ballerinas, is not the trend for contemporary dancers. Dancers demand more out of their bodies as they focus on numerous characteristics that are deemed as equally important such as toned musculature, technique and movement style. Being skinny was no longer the only thing that young female dancers desired; however they expected more out of themselves and their appearance such as musculature and beauty.

Since all the dancers interviewed valued toned musculature, they also stated the importance of lean muscles over under- or over- developed musculature. Bulky muscles are seen as undesirable as they make the dancers look heavy and stout. Muscles were observed as being very important to the participants but it is also imperative for those muscles to not be too big.

Kaitlyn: "Cause Carla (a fellow classmate) is really strong and like she's got like a six pack but it's not like bulging."

Bulging muscles appear big and bulky. Twelve dancers continually stated that these types of muscles are unwanted and that there is a fine line between toned and bulky.

Five dancers who participated in the group interviews also stated the importance of muscles being close to the bone. Although eleven participants talked about long, lean muscles only five participants described muscles with expressive words such as "inverted", "on the bone", or observing the "strands of muscles". These elongated muscles would allow for the dancers to obtain that long, lean look without bulking up. They described this ideal muscular look as:

Natasha: "Emily (Molnar) is really tall but I mean she's got skinny legs. And even though she has muscles but the muscles are like inverted instead of like bulked on top."

Kaitlyn: "she's (Miranda) got nice muscle tone but it's on the bone it's not like on top of fat or anything that would cause bulk."



Jennifer: "I think it's nice when you can see like bone but not like when it's like gross. Where you can see definition but there is also like muscle and bone."

Natasha: "When you can see like where the bone is and you can actually see like the strands of muscles..."

'Inverted muscles' were stated as muscles that lie close to the bone. They are desirable for these contemporary dancers as they are still strong and are able to perform their vast repertoire of skills but also they are able to achieve a straight, toned body shape. An inverted muscle was described as being long and lean instead of bulky. Inverted muscles could occur on any individuals but require extensive training. Poor training would allow dancers to have bulky muscles which would interrupt dance lines. The thin, bony musculature distinguishes the dancers from other athletes in body structure and appearance.

The importance of having a toned body was observed with eleven dancers as they referred to peers outside of dance that were skinny but still had 'blubs'. 'Blubs' were defined as a part of the body where muscle should be but because the individual is not active, the muscle does not develop. This leads to an area on the body that is not necessarily fat but rather displays un-worked muscle. One participant grabbed the skin above her hip bone ('love handles') while trying to describe what 'blubs' were to the researcher. 'Blubs' were seen as unattractive and were joked about among the participants as they reminisced about peers who were skinny but still had un-worked portions of their body and therefore had 'blubs'. The conversation about having a body with un-worked muscles showed the value and commitment these dancers put on a toned and muscular body for dance and within society.

Although muscles were seen as desirable among all fifteen dancers interviewed, it was also clear that gracefulness and femininity were important. Each participant revealed that

dancers have a unique posture and fluidity about them as they conduct every day life. The importance of a good posture and not slouching dictated a kind of gracefulness and control these dancers saw as distinct and important both in the classroom and community.

The musculature that each of the dancers described reflected a feminine ideal that they wished to achieve without a hint of masculinity. The statements made by four dancers in regards to bulky muscles reveal the importance of being muscular while also being distinctly feminine.

Natalia: I think Amy Wells (fellow classmate) has a good body. I don't know just like her legs and stuff and she looks really feminine too which is good."

Natalia's statement not only indicates that she desires a good body but also a body that looks distinctly feminine. Musculature that looks to masculine was not desired.

Kaitlyn: "you can have man arms as long as their not too manly"

Kaitlyn reflects that strength is optimal however looking too masculine was not desirable. Since men acquire bigger, stronger and bulkier muscles, these dancers want to remain strong but also feminine with slim and lengthy muscles.

The desire for toned and firm muscles can also be observed in the participants' fear of becoming fat and flabby. Although all of these elite dancers were far from fat or flabby, it was significant that these individuals felt the need to exert more energy after their proposed practice times. There were a variety of different types of exercise they would participate in such as hiking (1), canoeing (1), rhythmic gymnastics (2), drama/musical theatre performances (5), weight training (4), and cardio workouts like running on a treadmill (3). Although some of these activities were done in the off-season (summer), many were performed in conjunction with their intensive dance training.

In the summer off-season, twelve of these dancers not only participated in dance summer schools across Canada for three to six weeks but also participated in other forms of exercise to keep in shape. The twelve dancers were enrolled in summer school or 'dance camp' for a minimum of three weeks out of the ten weeks off during the summer months. Since both Dance Max and Janelle's Dance Academy finish in June and begin in September this allows the dancers to have a bit of time off. However, all twelve dancers stated that when they weren't participating in dance they were doing some other form of physical activity to keep in shape. Jennifer even reported that she only had about two to three weeks off during the summer as she participated in dance camp, rhythmic gymnastics camp, and a local musical theatre show of Chicago.

During the off-season many of the dancers try to keep up their dance skills through flexibility training and 'working out'. The summer was seen as a time when the dancers can focus on their bodies and rejuvenate, and it was also a time to prepare for the coming year. Although some of the dancers took time off, they are continually anticipating the year to come with excitement and eagerness.

Throughout the year seven participants stated that they do much more exercise than just their dance classes:

Jessica: "I totally work out now, I just started this new routine where I'm trying not to eat too much chocolate cause it like ruins my skin, and then also I'm doing, like, a work out I made up."

Jessica continues in the interview to talk about her new exercise routine that contains sit-ups, buttocks and hamstring exercises and sometimes going on the treadmill. Three other dancers agreed with Jessica by stating that they participate in similar exercises at home not only to strengthen their muscles but to tone their bodies. Joni acknowledged that she works out through going to the local gym before school to keep her muscles toned and strong.

Since the study participants dance an average of twenty-one hours per week in addition to their academic education it would seem that extra exercise might be excessive. Between school and homework the dancers spend approximately forty hours a week on academic success. Participating in dance also adds on average, twenty hours of activity to their schedule meaning that they are occupied for at least sixty hours per week. With a full week of both academics and athletics, these dancers have little time to spare but tend to occupy their spare time with extra exercise to keep toned and active.

Although all these dancers participate in numerous hours of exercise, they were also greatly concerned with their health and lifestyle while also remaining incredibly fit. Although their commitment to exercise could be seen as excessive, it is also a trademark of elite athletics. This is similar to a rower who not only trains in the boat six days a week for three hours per day, and also participates in cardio workouts and weight training. These dancers were similar to other elite athletes as they train long hours and continually strive to become a better dancer and athlete through self improvement and dedication. It is through this dedication, exercise and healthy nutrition that the face of contemporary dance is changing. All the elite dancers were concerned with not only how they look and perform but also if they were healthy.

***Sub-theme #4 -- "Well instead of eating like lots of big meals, I eat lots of small snacks."***

Throughout the group interviews the dancers continually referred to being healthy by exercising and eating properly. Although they seemed to be well educated about nutrition, the majority of the dancers were still mindful about the food they ate on a daily basis. Some of the dancers stated that they had dieted before while others were against limiting their nutritious food

intake although they also tended to shy away from specific foods all together such as chocolate or sugar.

This consciousness of food and nutrition intake was constantly displayed throughout the dancers. Many of the participants were aware and knowledgeable about nutrition and how to 'burn off' excess food they had eaten earlier. They were not only cautious as to what they put into their bodies but their food intake also became a distinct part of their daily routine.

Joni: "I'm like, super caution girl, like, I plan everything I eat so it's like, something that I always think about. It doesn't really matter if it's at competition or not, like, it's just something I do."

Joni was a typical elite dancer who was cautious about her food intake. This type of caution was not necessarily restricted to the competitive or performance season for these dancers but rather was a continual process that requires constant intake monitoring. Joni refers to this eating cautiousness not as a decreased amount of food intake, but rather a plan for eating right and nutritiously to maintain being healthy. However, Joni also states that her planning is essential to her nutrition and health and it is something that she is 'always' thinking about.

Through the constant pondering of food and proper nutrition, many dancers will be consumed with what they should or shouldn't eat. Some dancers explained within the interviews that they were 'bothered' if they were to eat extra food and not exercise it off. These thoughts tended to trouble the dancers as they examined their food intake not only in quality of nutrition but also in the quantity of what they ate.

The general consensus among all the dancers was that nutrition and being healthy was extremely important and that dieting dancers were a thing of the past.

Jennifer: "I've never cut down on the amount of food, like, you should eat, I've just gone okay, I'm not going to have any chocolate or any candy, and like, not fattening stuff."

Jennifer, like many of the other dancers, believed in proper nutrition rather than dieting. By never cutting down on the essential foods that made up her balanced daily diet, she could still maintain a healthy and fit body. Of the fifteen dancers interviewed one stated that she did not eat meat while another did not eat dairy products. The elimination of these food groups were described by the dancers as “meat doesn’t agree with my stomach” and “ I try not to eat a lot of dairy, I don’t know it makes me feel sick but that’s about it.” and therefore avoided them. The distinction was continually made that dieting was not the same as cutting out the ‘junk food’ present in one’s diet but rather it was perceived as the healthier alternative. Although this elimination of ‘junk’ food undoubtedly wise, it begs the question of what constitutes ‘junk food’. Nine dancers mentioned things like chocolate, chips, coffee, candy, and sugar foods.

The dancers seemed to acknowledge the implications of not maintaining a balanced diet not only upon their health but also upon their dancing ability. Both schools’ interviewees stated that they have received nutrition talks from teachers and /or nutritionists on how to eat healthy. Dance Max had a monthly class where nutrition, safety and rehabilitation issues were discussed by professionals within those fields in addition to one-on-one semester meetings with the artistic director. The dancers from Janelle’s Dance Academy demonstrated having an open relationship and would have one-on-one meetings with at least one teacher during solo rehearsals once a week. With the increase in nutritional knowledge and dancers learning how to nourish their bodies effectively, it remains to be seen whether the dancers are getting enough food for the amount of exercise they do. The dancers go to school, dance an average of twenty-one hours per week, and most do other forms of exercise as well. The likelihood that they are consuming

enough calories per day for the intensity and duration that they are dancing could be questionable, but was not directly assessed as part of this study.

Overall the dancers wanted to be healthy but there were a few dancers who felt there was a greater pressure on them as they did not reflect the ideal dancer's body.

Natasha: "I have (*in regards to cutting down on her food intake*). Cause sometimes when you see, like, all the skinny people but also when you watch videos, like, all the professional dancers who made it, they're all skinny. Like, I think, oh I'm not going to make it if I'm not thin. I like, I don't cut down a lot, but like, sometimes..."

Natasha tended to feel a greater amount of pressure to be slim. This pressure probably resulted in part from her not having a body type that was comparable to the professional dancers she observed. One way that Natasha, like six other dancers, could control her need for thinness was through her dietary habits. This form of control allowed Natasha to apparently take personal responsibility for her success within the dance world because her thinness became her personal accomplishment. Natasha often remarked that her body was not ideal for dance and therefore she felt pressure to become slimmer based on her surroundings within the dance classroom. Thinness and diet control can be viewed as a coded form of success and / or failure among dancers depending on how they perceived their importance and the outcome of their efforts. If a dancer succeeded at achieving her desired thinness there was a chance that she would have the opportunity to dance at the elite level. At the same time, the researcher's observation of the dancers also revealed the fact that these elite athletes do not have a wide variety of body types. It was ironic, therefore, that although Natasha was striving to be healthy for dance she also constantly thought about her food intake and her body shape which was itself quite similar to the other girls.

The elite dancers stated that they were highly conscious of how much and what type of food they consumed. Although they stated that eliminating junk food, not dieting and eating healthy were all important, however a definition of what healthy eating looked like was not given. The dancers stated that they tended to eat their meals in smaller portions since their metabolism had slowed down with the onset of puberty. Kaitlyn stated that she never really worried about her body image until she reached puberty but now she was more conscious of how she looked and how she had to eat. As mentioned above, if the dancers eat more meals of smaller portions it could be questioned whether they actually got enough calories per day for the amount of physical exertion they did.

All the participants also focused on the body, exercise and daily diets that would in turn produce a healthy dancer. They were not focused on weight issues nor even mentioned how much they weighed. Their body mass did not seem to be an apprehension however the shape of their body was their concern. All fifteen dancers were more concerned about their health, nutrition and toned body parts instead of body weight.

Body weight was never discussed throughout the interviews. The dancers focused on their body shape and the musculature rather than weight. None of the dancers mentioned their body mass or that they wanted to weight more or less however all of them described a shapeliness that they desired.

Autumn: "your arms need to be a bit muscular but not obvious"

Natalia: "I think about other things like the shape of my legs"

Kaitlyn: "long legs are nice cause they make a nice line"



Body shape such as lines, and musculature was a concern among the dancers and was highly emphasized whereas body weight wasn't mentioned during any of the discussions in the group interviews.

At the elite adolescent level, all the girls knew someone who had an eating disorder, however, almost all of these girls who had the eating disorders were not dancing at present. Many of the girls interviewed were very aware of the stereotype that has been given to dancers as 'anorexics' or 'bone racks' however, these dancers felt they were not in that category. Although the stereotype was acknowledged by the dancers; athleticism, health, and musculature were more important. Becoming too thin was not the look they were striving for and felt it would not help but rather hinder their success.

Eight of the dancers interviewed had heard or seen the effects of eating disorders on friends, classmates, or professionals. This type of behavior was condemned by all the dancers as self-starvation was viewed as being unhealthy and undesirable.

Joni: "Ballerina's are gross ... it's something about their face like, to me their face is hideous like they have no cheeks and are anorexic looking and stuff."

Mary: "She doesn't look like, very up to it, it looks like she could use a little rest. And a little food (giggling)... Evelyn Hart is just like pure bones. You can actually see her bones, it looks scary. You don't want to be that."

Jennifer: "when I saw her it was kind of like a turn off, to be a dancer, it was like this is what you have to look like! She actually did look kind of gross on stage."

Although anorexic behaviors were monitored closely by both teachers and peers, all of the dancers interviewed stated they disagreed with eliminating their food intake to achieve a desired weight. In turn, the dancers also stated that they continue to watch out for early signs or symptoms of eating disorders:

Janice: "I think we all kinda look out for that, with each other and help each other out if there is something like that."

Janice is referring to the pressure that some elite dancers feel to not eat. This type of behavior was not acceptable within the two schools studied. All the girls not only had knowledge of nutrition they also recognized the demands on their bodies and what it takes to be healthy while dancing. Each of the eight dancers stated that they 'watch out' for their classmates in the area of eating whether they have anorexic tendencies or their diet consists of only junk food.

This type of behavior and watching out for your peers does not occur at every dance school. Moreover, a lack of nutrition can be highly regarded within some dance schools.

Gladys: "Yeah you always hear about people who's like, oh yeah, they've been told that they are fat and that sort of thing and you hear it but I've never actually seen it. ... like, they are telling you, like, don't eat and whatever."

The fact that these participants had not experienced the pressure and approval of self-starvation from teachers and peers is a significant occurrence. If extreme thinness is desired within the school, the teachers and the local dance environment, dancers that participate in erratic eating behaviors would be praised rather than condemned. This paradoxical phenomenon was not only due to the multi-faceted dance training the dancers receive but also to the local scene and the professional icons they look up to.

Since all these dancers have grown up in a dance school where the focus has been not on a single discipline but rather on an array of dance styles, this allows them to strive for not only technique, but also movement and personal style. All of the dancers participated in a variety of disciplines, therefore not allowing themselves to be pigeon-holed into only one form of dance. This variety allows the dancers to attempt to discover different movements, while blending together the benefits of dance styles.

This variety of styles also assists with ideas of what is an ideal body for dancing at an elite contemporary level. With different aspects or styles of dance being learned throughout their years, these girls stated that there was a difference between a dancer who was physically ideal for ballet and one who was ideal for contemporary or modern. These styles allowed the dancers to focus not on one ideal body type but rather expand their view to encompass more than one body type.

It is important to these young dancers that they be healthy in order to accomplish their goals of becoming professionals. Diet and nutrition played a large role within the group interviews as the dancers perceived that a balanced diet and proper exercise could help someone to be healthy. Although all these elite dancers were striving for perfection through technical training and aesthetic excellence, they also acknowledged the dangers of unhealthy habits and intended to continue to strive to be healthy dancers.

### ***Theme #2 – Dreams of Professionalism***

Becoming a professional dancer is a difficult task that is similar to becoming a professional athlete. There are many different levels, types and specialties in which one may excel. Although Canada has three major classical ballet companies; The Royal Winnipeg Ballet, National Ballet of Canada and Les Grande Ballet de Canadiens, there are also many smaller ballet companies that specialize in ballet and in contemporary dance. In the Vancouver area alone there are at least six well-known contemporary dance companies that hire professional dancers on a full or part-time basis.

The dancers within this study were also very involved within the dance community and knew local professional dancers and dancers from across Canada. This was compared by the

researcher as being similar to elite tennis hopefuls knowing Billy Jean King, Boris Becker or Steffi Graf . Although the dance world is smaller than tennis, these dancers have known, watched, and performed with these professional dancers as mentors and teachers.

Almost all of the study participants said they dreamed of becoming a professional dancer one day and with their high-quality training and commitment, it is possible that they are the professionals of the future. Although they were not specific about what type of dance they wanted to pursue, the conversations highlighted contemporary dance or contemporary ballet as their top choices. The participants had classical ballet training but seem to enjoy the style, movement and freedom that come from contemporary dance.

***Sub-theme #1 -- "It's cause they're ballet schools, like, Royal Winnipeg Ballet and National Ballet. So ballet isn't really changing. Yeah it's like, the new forms of dance are, you can have an average body to be able to do the things that you ask us"***

During the group interviews many of the girls said that the appearance and the prerequisites of dance are evolving. Twelve of the dancers understood that classical ballet was staying the same, but that many other forms of dance that were also respectable, were leading away from the classical ballet body standards. Although in these alternative forms of dance, dancers work to create their own unique style, while also training their bodies through hard work and discipline to achieve a lean, strong look.

Since classical ballet was a distinct form of dance that was known and valued by all fifteen of the dancers, they stated they also had a deep respect for the professional dancers within a classical ballet company. During the interviews twelve of the dancers stated that many of the professional classical ballet dancers are too thin to be healthy, however they hold the utmost respect for their accomplishments. The participants would show their respect for the

professionals by name dropping about an experience they had watching or meeting a professional, or through comments on specific body parts that were admired on certain dancers.

One dancer that was used as an example by eleven of the dancers was Evelyn Hart. The participants respected her career as a professional dancer with The Royal Winnipeg Ballet but did not respect the decisions she had made to become very thin. Although the participants were not completely sure Ms. Hart had an eating disorder, they felt convinced that she did due to a variety of factors such as appearance, age, and slimness.

These eleven dancers looked to Evelyn Hart not only as an example of unhealthy habits but also as a dancer who took slimness to the extreme for the sake of dance. The participants declared that Evelyn Hart was an extreme case of how a classical ballet dancer looks and that because it wasn't healthy it wasn't something they would like to replicate. Although this slimness might look beautiful on stage, it was regarded by the dancers as 'scary' and 'hard to watch'. Jennifer danced in the Nutcracker with Evelyn Hart during her Vancouver show and stated:

“...she was a really, really beautiful dancer but she was so skinny that it kinda took away from it. And made her look worse because she was like, over extremes, like, her arms were just like little frail things.”

Jennifer's comment was similar to the other participants' as they thought she was fragile, weak, and too tired, while also stating that if that was what one needed to look like to be a professional then many of them would decide against it.

Although Evelyn Hart was described as an extreme case by eleven of the dancers two dancers stated that they had never seen her but knew of her while the other two stated they did not know who she was. One of the dancers that knew of Evelyn Hart declared:

Joni: "Ballerina's are gross... it's something about their face like, to me, their face is hideous like they have no cheeks and anorexic looking and stuff."

Joni's comment states her disapproval towards professional ballerinas. Although she has never seen a performance or viewed pictures of Evelyn Hart, Joni was quick to express her disapproval of ballet professionals.

All fifteen dancers described other professional ballet and contemporary dancers that they recognized as having a more acceptable body. These professional dancers were described as not as extremely thin but were acknowledged as being skinny and healthy. However, the study participants also declared that if they did not have similar characteristics then they might not become a professional:

Gladys: "Cause everyone you see in their company is, like, so skinny and whatever, long legs, nice feet, and all that stuff, and then you're like, if I don't have that am I ever going to be able to make it in that world?"

Gladys' feeling of inadequacy indicates that although she does not agree with extreme thinness, she is aware that being thin is a necessary condition for professional success. This comment was interesting coming from Gladys as she was the thinnest of the dancers interviewed and yet viewed herself as too skinny. She was well aware of the demands for thinness within dance but would have liked to have more muscles on her body. Although Gladys did reflect the ideal dancer's body, she felt that her skinniness was too extreme. I think it is important to mention also that Gladys' slimness was due to genetics and scoliosis, and not because of under-eating or too much exercise.

Three participants described the dancers within a professional classical ballet company as 'clones' because they all look the same in regards to body type, feet, training, and style.

Autumn: "They like having clones for Ballet. So they all look the same"

Although Autumn stated the idea of professional ballet clones, eight other dancers described the necessities to get into a professional school such as the National Ballet of Canada or The Royal Winnipeg Ballet School. Long legs, hyper-flexibility and good arches were a few of the characteristics that were described as ideal to get in.

***Sub-Theme #2 -- "What she has done is amazing; I mean, like, she doesn't have the perfect body but look at her."***

The perfect, ideal body was identified as one of the ways to get into the world of professional dance. All the participants desired an ideal dance body but also highly criticized the measures of evaluations of auditions and summer ballet school selections. However, these dancers continued to see the infiltration of contemporary dance in Vancouver in their schools, and through the teaching they receive.

In contemporary dance, the ideal body that was desired for classical ballet was not the determining factor for acceptance. The participants mentioned examples of professional contemporary dancers within Vancouver that they saw as mentors such as Emily Molnar, Acacia Schachte and Simone Orlando, due to their distinct features.

Janice: "What she has done is amazing; I mean, like, she doesn't have the perfect body but look at her."

This comment made about Emily Molnar, a Ballet BC dancer, states that although she is tall, and built more like an athlete than a dancer, her style, work ethic and stage presence continually amaze the dance community. Another mentor from Ballet BC was also mentioned by three dancers:

Mary: "yeah Acacia, oh totally"

Autumn: "yeah she is nice and a strong look too."

Gladys: "I know that she is really tight (flexibility-wise), like me, I'm so tight, so it's possible."

In this conversation, Acacia Schachte, was mentioned as someone these girls look up to and related to. These three dancers also identified that they have some similarities with these professional dancers and therefore looked up to them and their success.

Contemporary dance attracts these young dancers because of the movement style and technical strength. These two factors were very important and drawing for the elite adolescent dancers but were also accompanied by the desire for healthy bodies. The importance lies in the movement and style that the dancers possess allowing for undesirable body parts to be 'covered up' by their movement. As an ideal body type becomes eliminated from the contemporary dance culture, there is a greater emphasis on individuality and style then on uniformity of the body.

Jessica: "like the modern companies, like the modern ones that still do ballet. Like with Ballet BC they do a lot of modern so they can actually move... But then we saw like the Royal Winnipeg do the Magic Flute and they're amazing. Like they're absolutely amazing but like when they did modern it's like it wasn't  
Kaitlyn: "well it was contemporary."  
Jessica: "it was contemporary but it wasn't that good".

This conversation within one group interview displayed that the ballet dancers were talented however lacked the movement that was associated with contemporary dance. This was again highlighted through Natasha's statement:

Natasha: "Like having that ballet training that was so good, but they had so much ballet training that when they do contemporary they can't like, turn in properly and they can't like, do contractions and stuff like that because they are so stiff."

The style that was demonstrated by professional ballet dancers was not determined as fluid or unique for the dance that they were performing according to four of the participants. Nine other dancers stated the importance of movement and dance style and although technique was important, movement was crucial.



All the participants stated that movement within dance was a highly important factor that determines excellence and professionalism. Classical ballet dancers were observed by the participants as lacking in movement and therefore the performance was not enjoyable to watch.

Miranda: "Like everybody says she's really really good, but I don't see the movement, I just see, like, the thought and messing around."

Miranda refers to a performance that she saw of a Canadian classical ballet company. It was explained that during the performance the company attempted to break free from their classical roots and do some contemporary dance. However it was during this performance that Miranda acknowledged that although they were beautiful dancers, they lacked the sense of style that was so important to contemporary success. The professional dancers were seen as stiff and lacking in contemporary basics such as contractions and turned in positions because they were so used to classical technique.

In contrast to the above comment made by Miranda, she also stated that professional contemporary dancers were distinct from classical dancers as they displayed their movements.

Miranda: "yeah, movement-wise, like, she can do anything and she didn't have the perfect prima ballerina body..."

In regards to professional contemporary dancers, such as those in Ballet BC, fourteen of the elite dancers observed the lack of perfect ideals and seemed to value style over perfect technique or body type. This was due to the fact that movement was seen as one of the most important components among the elite dancers. Although the dancers interviewed may not have the 'perfect' body they hoped to achieve success within contemporary dance through hard work and unique style.

Professional status and success within the contemporary dance world was revealed as being fit and having a unique style. One dancer describes how dancers succeed within the dance world as:

Natalia: "Like with their style, creating movement that suits them."

A style of movement that was unique to a dancer assists in the artistic expression that was different from the ballet 'clones'. This style enabled each individual dancer to be recognized for their athleticism and movement patterns instead of perfection of positions. The participants viewed success as much more than an ideal body and proper positioning but rather a great contemporary dancer is one that uses her body to move creatively and stylistically.

Movement was observed as a way to achieve success if their bodies were less than perfect. However, movement was not the only factor that would lead to professional success, since the participants stated that work ethic, proper training and talent were also essential.

Kaitlyn: "You don't necessarily have to have everything, you don't have something but you have something else..."

Talent and hard work were also factors to which the participants deemed important as one couldn't be completely hopeless and become a professional. However, one could have feet, or legs, or a body shape that was not ideal and yet have a talent for dance and therefore become successful. The elite dancers also stressed that talent must be accompanied with hard work and proper technical training as without one or the other, that talent can be diminished.

Contemporary dance was perceived by the participants as equally challenging as classical ballet but could be seen as a cop out for talented dancers without the ideal body.

Gladys: "Oh yeah, like, I'll just go and do modern or something, like, that's the alternative (*sarcastically*). Even though it's probably as equally as hard. For some reason people stereotype ballet to be so much harder to get into because there is this ideal body image that they have."

Contemporary or modern dance was often seen as an alternative to ballet within professional dance as the dancers do not have to strive for a specific body type. Ballet was continually perceived as being more difficult to get into due to the specific characteristics that each dancer was required to have. Contemporary dance was unique from ballet because the ideal characteristics are not genetics or extreme thinness but proper training, muscular leanness and movement style. Although contemporary or modern dance was not perceived as an alternative for ballet dancers not 'making it' into the professional ballet scene, rather it was seen by the participants as a form of dance where they can dance and not compromise their health.

Contemporary dance was seen as accepting of the non-ideal body types and therefore became a pathway to strive for. Professional dance was understood by all the participants as difficult to achieve, but became more feasible within the contemporary dance world. Since all of these participants had talent and solid technical training, hard work was the determining factor they would need to achieve. It was through work ethic that the dancers would be able to become personally responsible for their success, and it was through hard work that they would be able to achieve style, movement and a professional job. Although not all of these dancers will become professionals, it is highly likely that the majority will make contemporary dance a large part of their working lives whether at an amateur or professional level.

### ***Theme #3 -- The Distinction is Made: Involved in Two Different Cultures, Dance and Society***

Throughout the entire interviewing process the participants continued to make a distinction between what was a desirable body for dance as opposed to society. When asked about what an ideal body looked like, the majority responded with: "like for dance or for

anything?" These comments at first were seen as trivial, but as they began to reoccur throughout each interview, the researcher began to investigate the significance and conflict these girls face by being involved in two very distinct cultures.

The conflict between an ideal dance body and an ideal societal body were mainly the difference in body shape and muscular tone. As mentioned previously, the dancer ideal was observed as a long, lean body with a straight profile. The societal ideal takes on a more curvaceous look as young women strive for a slim body with prominent breasts and a slight curve to the hips. This difference provided some conflict for the dancers as the majority of them were striving to achieve the ideal dance body yet still wanted some characteristics of the societal ideal.

***Sub- theme #1 -- "When I'm in school I feel fine. I feel good actually because people, you can really tell dancers from other people."***

The contrast between school and dance was continually brought forth by the participants as they observed a difference between the two distinct cultures. School was seen by the majority of the participants as a place where little socialization occurs. Since many dancers attend the same schools, dancers hang out with other dancers, and don't tend to venture out to other social groups. However these elite dancers are still greatly affected by the culture they participate in through school, magazines, movies, television and more. They continue to strive for an ideal dance body while making some modifications to their ideals to incorporate societal norms.

The participants all recognized there was a difference between school or society and dance not only in body image but also in bodily respect, confidence and the clothing they would wear.

Natalia: "I think it's different at school and at home because at dance, like, you're looking at different things and school, you probably feel better about your body cause no one really cares about certain things you're either fat or you're skinny."

Natalia's comment was common among the dancers touching on some distinct factors that differentiated dancers from people at their schools. The distinction was made not only that there was a difference between dance and school but also there were really only two categories in which people at school classify others depending on their body size. Natalia's statement also notes that dancers feel better about their bodies as they would be classified within the skinny category at school due to their active lifestyle.

The societal ideal distinctly contrasts with the dance ideal due to the curvaceous body that is desired among many young women. Within society, the ideal that was prominent in the media was to be skinny while also having distinctly feminine features such as breasts and hips. Although these norms reflect a stereotype in society, not everyone ascribes to these standards. Dance culture was distinct, however, and a conflict arises within the dancers that were immersed in both cultures:

Gladys: "Like, at school there is a totally different body, like, there are guys there and it's like, most girls want, like, the big boobs and big bum but here at dance it's, like, almost the exact opposite. Like at dance you want, like, flat lines and long legs you know, and it's, like, totally different at school I think."

The school culture that Gladys describes contrasts with that of dance culture, as the focus was not on long, lean, toned muscles with very few curves but rather on a more voluptuous ideal that displayed these features. Eight dancers observed the difference between societal ideals and dance ideals and appeared to be in conflict about specific characteristics such as breasts and hips on their bodies, but they also stated that their body needed to have some curves even if they are small.

The eight participants stated that the ideal dance body was so different from the ideal societal body that if you achieve one of those ideals, you are far from the other.

Jennifer: "Like Sophia has a really nice dance body but she doesn't have hips and like, shape and stuff, so if I saw her walking down the street she wouldn't catch my eye."

Sophia was described by three other participants to have an ideal dancing body however this body shape was also very far from the societal ideal. Jennifer also stated that although Sophia had an ideal dance body, this was not her personal ideal as she would still like to be attractive in society's standards. During the adolescent years, these dancers continue to compromise their ideals as they strive for desirable values within both dance and society.

The dancers seemed to adjust their opinions by blending the two cultural ideals together. In dance culture they desired the toned, straight, and lean body they also felt that they needed some slight curves on their body especially in their breasts. The participants referred to dancers that were 'flat chested' and straight and felt that it looked acceptable to have breasts and "a little bit of hips" in proportion to their body. These modifications of ideal body shape assist the elite dancers in conforming their bodies to something that was desirable within both cultures yet not swaying too far away from both ideals.

In both society and dance, girls use different techniques to attempt to enhance their desirable features. One example that was given by the dancers was the similarity between push-up bras and pulling up one's leotard. The push-up bra was seen as a way for adolescent girls to enhance their breasts and therefore come closer to the societal ideal. Autumn stated that although she wears push-up bras at school, they were uncomfortable and she would much rather wear a sports bra. Autumn chose to wear push-up bras to school to accentuate her breasts within that specific culture but does not wear one during dance class. Pulling up one's leotard was seen

as similar as the dancers attempted to visually increase their leg length. This 'hiking up' around the hip region was observed as a feature enhancer, as long legs were a highly desirable feature within the dance culture. Although the push-up bra and pulling up on leotard enhance different characteristics they also cater to the different ideals. Since the elite dancers never wear push-up bras into dance class they tend to change their ideal according to which culture they are in. They may push up their breasts within society in an attempt to accentuate this feature although within the dance culture, where small breasts were desirable, this form of enhancement was not needed.

***Sub-theme #2 -- "I'm the most comfortable in dance clothes actually not so much tights but shorts and a body suit, I'm happy in that."***

All of the dancers within this study felt accepted and comfortable within their dance clothes. Nine girls stated that they preferred to wear a body suit and spandex shorts or pants instead of wearing pink tights. Suggestions were given by the participants that different colored tights or shorts would allow for them to feel better about their body as then one would not be able to "see everything" on their body while dancing. The dancers also stated that they understood body correction and proper training techniques were the purpose of the uniform.

The dancers expressed slight dissatisfaction within the traditional classical ballet uniform of a body suit and pink tights whereas they felt comfortable in a more contemporary dance outfit.

Natalia: "I feel fat in a body suit because they are so tight and the tights are like blah (makes a constricting action towards her stomach)."

Natalia also declared that she understood the purpose for wearing a specific ballet uniform as it assisted in viewing the whole body. Natalia and Joni stated that they would have liked to wear a

variation in their dance uniform whether in color or style. Both stated that pants, shorts or darker tights would be a nicer alternative.

The traditional ballet uniform was also critiqued by Natasha and Jennifer as it revealed their bodies.

Jennifer: "I hate bodysuits and tights"

Natasha: "yeah you can see everything"

Jennifer: "like it outlines your whole body and there is nothing covering you anyway so you just feel fat."

Later in the group interview Jennifer stated that a variation of shorts or 'rolling up' the bottom of her tights would be an acceptable alternative. She also stated that a ballet uniform was good for ballet however for other disciplines it was too restrictive.

Jennifer: "I hate wearing ballet tights and stuff like that and doing jazz or something."

Although Jennifer and Natasha did not like wearing tights and a body suit, their suggested alternatives were also tightly fitted, spandex clothing.

Overall the elite dancers found their contemporary dance uniform to be comfortable and 'normal'. They were used to wearing the attire that they have trained in since they were younger:

Frenchy: "It hasn't become a big deal wearing tights and a bodysuit because we've all been wearing tights and a bodysuit since we were like a lot younger, since we were nine or so. Basically if someone was to join dance now or whatever, and had to wear tights and a bodysuit everyday, it might be a bigger shock to them."

The participants did not mind wearing their dance uniforms because they had been immersed within the dance culture for a prolonged period of time. However it was the dancers' preference to wear a more contemporary dance outfit, body suit and shorts or pants, which they wore in their non-ballet classes. This type of uniform still allowed for the dancers to see their bodies



while remaining more satisfied with how they perceived their own bodies by wearing something more contemporary.

All in all these elite dancers were positive about their bodies in their dance clothes and tended to prefer different color, tightness, and designs of body suits depending on which made their body look best. Many of these dancers did not mind wearing dance clothes because they were used to them and they spent a lot of time in them. Also it was helpful for the dancers within a class to all have the same uniform which allowed them to think less about what they were wearing and to think more about how they were working their body.

Outside of dance nine dancers stated that they disagreed with many of the recent fashion trends which allowed for the showing of a girl's midriff, extremely low rise pants and short skirts. Although the fashion trends were not the problem, the problem occurred when young females wore these types of clothes that were not flattering to their body shape.

Gladys: "One thing that really bugs me is when people wear really short tops and low jeans..."

Mary: "and the belly hangs out."

Gladys: "there's no problem with having a belly, but just like, don't show it off."

Kaitlyn: "And they wear them (jeans) even lower, like, they wear them even lower then we do, so they have even more blub hanging out."

Rachel: "I think it looks good on some people but some people it just doesn't" (in reference to short skirts and showing your midriff).

These quotes state the general point of view among the elite dancers in regards to revealing clothing and certain body types. It is worth mentioning that these dancers also stated that the style of midriff tops and low rise jeans can look attractive on certain people however are not suitable for all body shapes. Even though these dancers do wear trendy clothing they also felt that young women need to dress appropriately for their body types. The dancers wore clothes

that were tight or fitted but they refrained from wearing clothes that were revealing. The majority felt that revealing clothes showed a lack of respect one has for their body and in turn, the respect others have for you.

The dancers stated that revealing clothing did not need to be worn to be attractive and good looking, but rather that this type of clothing would make most people look less attractive. The participants talked about how anyone can have a beautiful body if they dress appropriately for their body and their age:

Janice: "not someone who is like over confident, but someone who is okay with their body and they dress themselves appropriately, then someone has a good body because I know that if someone is trying to be a different kind of body type and dressing inappropriately, that's when you see a bad body. But someone who can dress appropriately with their body, this is someone who I think, that I would say, had a good body."

In this description of a great body, Janice's statement summed up this point of attractiveness and attire rather nicely; everyone can be attractive if they dress appropriately for their body.

Along with the comment on attractiveness comes the point of view that women respect their body through what they wear. Nine of the participants stated that they felt that body confidence or positive body image came from respecting your body in how you acted and how you dressed:

Natasha: "I think, well, this is just the dancers I've seen around Dance Max, but they really respect their bodies more, like they're not like, I've never seen anybody going around in like skimpy little things and like, they kinda have more dignity than that."

Natasha's perception was also noted by the researcher as the dancers were all dressed in attire that was non-revealing yet stylish within their culture. Though the clothes worn connect to personal standards these clothing styles were also reinforced through peers and mentors. Respect for one's body was essential for a positive body image and through proper clothing these elite

dancers stated that one could be attractive and beautiful even though they were not showing specific body parts. Although there were portions of their bodies they disliked, all the dancers stated that their skills in dance assisted with their positive image. These dancers were confident with their bodies and the way they dressed within society as they stated that being involved in dance gave them an assurance in their body and their abilities.

***Sub-theme #3 -- "All the make-up people have like perfect skin tone and you're like, that's impossible! No one has skin like that!"***

These dancers are not only highly involved within dance culture but they are also immersed within societal culture through different forms of media such as magazines, television, and movies. The participants reflected on the media they observed on a daily basis and stated that they were influenced by these forms and through their relationships at school. The immersion in dance and society causes conflict some times as some of the participants appeared to struggle for perfection within all areas of life.

The participants talked mainly about magazines and how they felt when they observed the material. The conversation was not only about models within the glossy pages but also about celebrities or pop icons, advertisements, and fashion and runway models. The dancers observed a wide variety of magazines such as Seventeen, Teen People, In Style, Cosmo Girl, Cosmopolitan, The Twist and other fashion magazines.

They looked at magazines for not only the models and current celebrities but also for fashion tips on hairstyles, clothes, and recent trends. Many dancers stated that magazines made them feel like they wanted to buy something, mainly clothing or apparel.

Miranda: "umm, when I look at fashion magazines it makes me feel like, oh I need more clothes."

Gladys: "Definitely like, what they wear and how they look, kind of thing."

Autumn: "It makes me think more about my wardrobe like hmmm, I would like a pink shirt too."

Many of the dancers stated that they enjoyed looking at the clothes the models or celebrities wore and that it made them want to buy more clothes. Although these clothes did not have to be what was advertised, it was a reflection of a different style or color of clothing that they would like. These girls also acknowledged that the clothes they wore determined their 'coolness' and although some did not care as much, others thought how they dressed was important. As Gladys stated they not only looked at what the models were wearing but also at how they looked. This was in specific styles of clothes and fashion trends but also how their bodies looked.

The magazines and advertisements that were viewed regularly by the dancers had two main themes, either closer to reality or totally fake. Four participants stated that the advertising industry was getting better and displayed a broader array of body types throughout magazines. The dancers stated that these images displayed portrayed a more accurate depiction of social norms. However, eight participants described models in magazine advertisements as looking false or fake. These dancers stated that model's bodies looked extremely thin with perfect features. The dancers also stated that they knew about the advertising industry's tactics to make people look perfect through airbrushing and this technique was perceived by some as becoming farther from reality whereas others perceived that fewer techniques were being used. A conversation in regards to magazine models within one interview stated that:

Gladys: "They are pretty fake."

Mary: "yeah like..."

Autumn: "It's like, humanly impossible to look like that."

Gladys: "Like, all the make-up people have like, perfect skin tone and you're like, that's impossible! No one has skin like that! And they have like, great eye lashes and lips and stuff."

The dancers agreed that the models within the advertisements must be touched up in some form as there were never any flaws on the person modeling the product. Although these girls felt strongly that these images were digitally enhanced, they also commented on how the models were beautiful and very lucky to be in that profession.

Some of the dancers stated that although each model was unique, they were still relatively skinnier than the general public.

Natalia: "Really tall girls, long legs, they don't all look the same, like, everyone has a unique look but it's pretty much the same body kinda thing."

Natasha: "Like when I look at the models I'm like, well, oh great, they have really skinny bodies..."

About half of the dancers did not think there was a variety in body shapes as they felt that the models were still very skinny even though the models were distinct in appearance. These dancers stated that although the models may display a slightly different shape, they were still extremely thin and therefore did not reflect a wide variety in body shape.

Four other dancers commented on how the advertising industry was getting better over these last few years in their realistic looking models with a variety of body types.

Frenchy: "They're getting better, like, the people aren't all ...umm; they're never sticks, like, total sticks anymore. And there are some pictures of not skinny people but normal people in them. Like, regular average size people and it's like, that person's normal!"

Regina: "I find that when I see pictures of celebrities too, like, it's getting better with celebrities too. Their not like so stick anymore."

Frenchy and Regina both expressed that the models within the magazines were reflecting a variety of body types instead of the 'stick' or extremely thin body type. Although she did not

expand on her thoughts of what makes them more average, she just clearly stated that a wider variety of body types were being used and this was a positive change within the media. The magazine models were seen as displaying a plethora of body types whereas runway models were still really skinny:

Jessica: "I know, like, the body models, like, when I see the models on the runway, like, they're too skinny but the magazine models are, like, some of them have medium bodies as well."

Some of the elite dancers displayed an approval towards the magazine models because there was a wider array of body shapes. However these statements were contrasted with those stated previously. The general consensus on body types in magazines was split between the participants as many thought the models were maintaining similar body shapes, whereas others perceived that magazines were displaying a wider variety of body types.

One comment that was stated within an interview displayed the young women's knowledge of digital enhancement while they felt that magazines were striving for more realistic images of their models. The technique of airbrushing was understood by these dancers and although they knew it occurred, they still desired blemish, pore-free skin on a beautifully smooth body. Janice stated that she felt magazines were becoming more realistic as: "there's not as much airbrushing going on". This statement was perceptive and actually very true as the technique of airbrushing photographs was slowly diminishing. However, within the media there was an increase of computer generated photographs which allowed for the photo to look more realistic due to the cutting and pasting of the model's skin to the rest of her face or body. This computer imaging allowed for the photographs to look more realistic through digital manipulation which in turn was actually less realistic as the model was continually changed through computer graphics.

These young dancers noted this perfection that was displayed on the magazine pages and although they appreciated and longed for this type of beauty, they also knew that there was a limit to perfection. The topic of plastic surgery came up during three of the interviews, which allowed the dancers to express their feelings about it. All eleven dancers expressed their discontent with the idea of plastic surgery for cosmetic enhancement, including liposuctions, breast implants, and nose jobs. The dancers empathized with people who had large birthmarks, moles or growths or if they were in an accident and felt in these circumstances it was okay to undergo plastic surgery. However, they did not agree if the surgery was to enhance your physical characteristics to become more beautiful or closer to perfection. These participants rejected the thought of 'beauty at all costs' as this type of enhancement was seen as fake when really people should accept themselves with what they were given.

Although these dancers still strive for perfection they also want to be unique individuals. All fifteen dancers stated the idea of uniqueness within their dance movement however four dancers also focused on their individuality in society. This type of uniqueness would allow these dancers to not sell out to mass marketing but rather to create a style all their own which reflects their personality.

Mary: "People want to have their own style, like, they don't want to copy someone else. It's kind of fake."

Many of the dancers desired a unique fashion style however were also consumed by the mass produced attire. Although they longed for uniqueness, they also wanted to be accepted and therefore would not go too far to be all original yet socially unacceptable. Each of these dancers desired a sense of individuality not only in their fashions but also in their dancing and personality.

***Sub-theme #4 -- "Like I want to be skinnier for dance but it's never like oh I want to be skinnier when I see all these people walking down the street and I'm like, I like my body, I feel good!"***

Within society all fifteen of these dancers perceived that their bodies were acceptable and even desirable amongst the general public. With the rise in society's obesity, twelve participants stated they not only recognized the lack exercise and poor nutrition, they also felt that people don't have the time or commitment to invest in their bodies. Through the reflection upon people's bodies in society, the elite dancers have a positive outlook on their own bodies as they contrast with the majority of people in society.

All fifteen participants felt that they were comfortable and confident with how they looked within society because they felt fit and healthy. It was also stated repeatedly that people within society were becoming more and more obese, which was disconcerting to the dancers. However all the elite dancers felt more confident about how they looked physically in comparison to other people their age:

Natasha: "I mean, like, after you're done dancing you're going to have a way better body then the average person because you're dancing everyday for like the whole day."

This was the outlook for the majority of the dancers as they felt that they were active and in shape. Dance was not only something they loved to do but it was also a lifestyle of exercising and the promotion of healthy eating.

Many of the elite dancers reflected on the importance of a good body and that their priority was to dance rather than the societal ideal. How one looks physically was always a concern among these girls however they also tried not to have these thoughts consume them:



Gladys: "I think it's pretty important, like, even though you should accept yourself the way you are, people do see if your fat or skinny or whatever, short, tall ... people judge you subconsciously, like, unknowingly..."

Gladys also explained that even though she tried not to judge people both inside and outside of the dance world, it was difficult not to. This was true for many of the dancers as they continually judged others on their commitment to bodily excellence and muscle toning. These dancers again felt judged in a different way as they did not always reflect the societal ideal. Although they felt torn at times to look more curvaceous within their street clothes through the use of push-up bras or tight fitting jeans or shirts, they valued the importance of a healthy, contemporary dance body over anything else.

Only two participants, Jennifer and Kaitlyn, stated that dance enhanced their desire for thinness. Jennifer commented on her confidence towards her body in society while being more influenced by dance culture in regards to her body shape.

Jennifer: "Like I want to be skinnier for dance but it's never like oh I want to be skinnier when I see all these people walking down the street and I'm like, I like my body, I feel good!"

Although she stated she felt good within society her desire for thinness stemmed from her connection to dance.

All these elite dancers perceived themselves as having a positive outlook about their bodies although they are also not completely satisfied as they continue to strive for excellence:

Jennifer: "When I'm in school I feel fine, I feel good actually because people, you can really tell dancers from other people."

All of the dancers agreed that they would like to work on specific areas of their bodies that they were dissatisfied with such as weak hamstrings, stomach, buttocks or thighs. Although these dancers had specific parts of their bodies they wanted to improve on, they were overall pleased

with their bodies and the way they looked. Being involved in dance did not necessarily change the fact that these participants continually strive for perfection while they buy into the media. This societal ideal displayed through the media is melded with the dance ideal to create a blended ideal model. This ideal focused on healthy bodies and nutrition while receiving a well rounded training in contemporary dance. Overall, these girls accepted their bodies whether positive or negative. Although their points of view are skewed slightly to desire an ideal that comes from classical ballet, they also consider the local examples of talented dancers as they continue to strive for a healthy and fit dance body.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Discussion**

This chapter looks at the theoretical implications and significance of the results of this study. This discussion uses the comments of the participants along with the insider knowledge of the researcher to describe the issues at hand. Although I do not know the participants thoughts exactly and can not know what they were thinking, it was through their comments and descriptions of their bodies as they relate to dance and society that my interpretations were made. This discussion highlights three main key findings within this study: Idealism and healthy bodies, Changing dynamics and priorities of dance, and Influences on the young elite dancers.

#### ***Idealism and Healthy Bodies***

Within the area of aesthetic sports, there is a growing concern about eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia and the struggles young athletes often face at an elite level (Davison, Earnest and Birch, 2002; Montanari and Zietkiewicz, 2000; Smolak, Murnen and Ruble, 2000; Slater and Tiggemann, 2002; Pierce and Daleng, 1998; Bettle et al., 2001). These studies focus on a small percentage of the elite population in which these characteristics occur. Within dance, there are a limited number of athletes who have eating disorders, while the majority of dancers continue to be body and weight conscious. These concerns are evident at the elite adolescent level as the dancers continue to strive for the perfection they observe in their mentors and classmates. Within the world of contemporary dance, these mentors to adolescent dancers have a wide array of body types and shapes which in turn allows for a role model that is desirable and distinct yet not necessarily a reflection of the classical ballet ideal.

Even though dancers are at high risk of eating disorders, the dancers interviewed had turned away and slightly rejected this type of waif-like ideal derived from classical ballet. Their focus on health issues and nutrition leads me to believe that there is a shift beginning within the world of dance. Although body type has always been important, there is now a movement towards favoring the issues of body shape or musculature and personal style or uniqueness. This idea that elite dancers understand the pressures on their body and yet try to accomplish a unique way to move therefore 'working with' their less desirable characteristics.

The risk of eating disorders among dancers needs to be examined further. When people think of dance, do they picture a classical ballerina in a tutu and pointe shoes doing a solo from Don Quixote? Or do they picture a variety of different types of dance such as modern or contemporary dance? Classical ballet dancers are a small percentage of elite dancers and although these dancers set the persona, not all dancers hold fast to this ideal. The fact is that not all elite dancers are purely classical ballerinas, therefore with a broader array of movement styles there can also be a more diverse range in body types.

Previous research states that dancers have a high risk of eating disorders, and it was revealed within this research that although there are some dancers within dance culture with eating disorders, none were interviewed and only two individuals, both who had recently quit dancing, were mentioned during the group interviews. This does not mean that eating disorders do not occur within these schools, but however the numbers are low, most likely due to instructors or role models and increased awareness through nutrition programs within the dance schools. This seemed to contradict the research on elite dancers, but much of this research was conducted on classical ballet dancers (Bettle et al., 2001; Montanari and Zietkiewicz, 2000; Kaufman, Warren, and Hamilton, 1996; Tiggemann and Slater, 2001; Pierce and Daleng, 1998;

Benn and Walters, 2001). Dancers (broadly defined) and modern dancers have also been found to have lower body image or self-esteem due to dance participation (Smolak, Murnen and Ruble, 2000; Davison, Earnest and Birch, 2002; Poretz, 1982). This previous research states that negative body image and dance are linked, but within this study, the opposite was found. Elite adolescent female dancers had a positive body image while striving for excellence in technical skill, health and their style of movement.

The dancers within this study, although highly aware of their bodies, were not generally dissatisfied with how they looked. These young women did understand that their bodies were changing throughout puberty however they also held a solid foundation in regards to how they perceived themselves. All of the dancers interviewed accepted the majority of their bodies and liked the way they looked. Although there were things they wanted to change such as their buttocks, hips or thighs, overall, they still found their bodies acceptable and attractive within society and the dance world.

Although the dancers demonstrated a positive outlook they also constantly deconstructed their bodies. The dancers interviewed never viewed themselves or other dancers as a whole entity but rather as a conglomeration of body parts. Each statement referred to feet, thighs, buttocks, breasts and other body parts that they desired to change. Specific body parts were objectified as their function and perfection were taken away from the individual as a whole (Slater and Tiggemann, 2002; Tiggemann and Slater, 2001). The deconstruction of body parts assisted in mentally constructing a perfected ideal for both dance and society. This idea also relates to Stephen Franzoi's (1995) concept of body-as-object versus body-as-process. The deconstruction of body parts links with dance and societal standards as the female body is seen as an ornament of beauty. This perception states that women tend to have negative attitudes

about their body parts due to a heightened scrutiny among society (Franzoi, 1995). Although these dancers deconstructed their body parts, they also viewed their bodies as having a specific function and therefore portrayed a positive evaluation of their body's abilities through dance.

The dancers also used the mirror during classes to deconstruct, evaluate and compare their abilities and bodies to their peers. The mirrors were used to compare technical skill and talent to others within their classes for affirmation and motivation. These dancers compared their abilities with their fellow classmates as they were seen as more similar than older or professional dancers (Suls, 1977; Levine and Moreland, 1987). Comparisons were made for two distinct reasons, for self-correction and incentive. Self-correction was explained as:

Natalia: "I like to see how everyone looks compared to each other doing the same thing... If someone is doing it some way that I like, I will try to do it like that."

This type of correction reflected the idea of salience and attractiveness identified by Levine and Moreland in the social comparison theory (1987). The dancers recognized the ability and attractiveness of a specific skill and would attempt to mimic these observed actions. Comparison was also seen as a form of incentive or motivation among the dancers.

Autumn: "I also think that the mirror is something kind of like, competitive cause you can just, if your doing your own thing and you don't look in the mirror at all and your arabesque is at forty five (degrees) and it feels good. Then say all of a sudden you look in the mirror and someone else is at ninety (degrees) and your like, ahhh, I'm going to get mine up to ninety... you leave everything that you're doing good at forty-five just to get up to that point so you can be like 'ha ha' I showed you."

Autumn's description of comparison as motivation looks at both technical excellence but also social acceptance within dance classes (Suls and Miller, 1977; Grogan, 1999). This comparison was observed both as self-enhancement and self-depreciation. Although Autumn used self-depreciation at first by focusing on her inferiority, she then demonstrated self-enhancement with

her comparison as she compared her arabesque to others that were not at ninety degrees yet. Comparison to peers also assisted in the dancer's confidence as they all had characteristics that were seen as desirable such as flexibility, arched feet, height or movement. Each dancer's desirable features assisted in a positive point of view of their body and its function in dance.

The positive outlook on the dancers' bodies can be attributed to a number of different factors such as multi-disciplinary involvement, health education and training. Poretz (1982) stated that modern dance might have a negative effect on an individual's body image, and could be "possibly damaging" (p. 183). Poretz's study observed beginner dancers at a college level instead of an elite level. The Poretz study (1982) corresponds with Frenchy's statement regarding involvement within dance and the attire they are required to wear:

"we've all been wearing tights and a bodysuit since we were a lot younger... basically, if someone was to join dance now, it might be a bigger shock for them."

Since these elite dancers have been dancing for an average of seven years, their involvement within the sport reflected a comfortable perception of their bodies in their uniforms. Also many of the dancers felt the most comfortable in their contemporary dance attire as it was standard for all students and it was something they were used to.

The elite adolescents involved in dance viewed their experiences as positive because of their training, discipline, skill development and performance opportunities. Their participation in dance gave them confidence, skills and motivation to become better at their art form. The dancers who were interviewed portrayed a high self-confidence, and felt fortunate to be involved in this art form.

Health Education was also a major theme that gave these dancers a positive outlook on their bodies. Benn and Walters (2001) stated that professional ballet dancers lacked the

nutritional education and awareness to identify risks, and also that dancers were reluctant to change their nutritional habits. The adolescent dancers within this study had a breadth of knowledge about health and nutrition and deemed both to be important in their lives. Health Education is a relatively new concept within dance, and is a result of an outcry from professionals, teachers and students for healthier dancers.

The third contributing factor to the elite adolescent female dancer's positive self-confidence and body image relates to training. Both schools focused primarily on proper technical training which was taught in an optimistic way through positive reinforcement and high marks within competitions and examinations. This type of training gave the dancers a sense of accomplishment and ability as they displayed their skills. The dancers reflected a sense of bodily empowerment as they discussed dance culture and societal norms.

The results of this study identified the generally positive image the dancers have of their bodies and although they do not view themselves as perfect, they were basically content with themselves. The idealistic physique within the dance world and society alike is out of reach for many adolescent dancers. However, the classical ballet ideal is becoming more and more discouraged among contemporary dance professionals. Even though these dancers are constantly re-evaluating their bodies, they also continue to strive for bodily acceptance, nutritional health, and style uniqueness.

A reoccurring theme among the participants was body acceptance based on genetic make-up and technical training. Almost all the dancers interviewed stated they accepted the body shape they were given and were using their body to the fullest potential in terms of muscle development and proper nutrition. The dancers continually stated that a healthy, toned body was more important to them than a specific body type. Although muscularity tends to be viewed as



inappropriate for females (Choi, 2000 in Grogan et al., 2004), the dancers stated that lean, toned muscles were essential for the sport they participate in and for their own positive body image.

With the emphasis on better nutrition, the participants had a greater understanding of types and amounts of food to eat within their daily nutritional intake. With this improved knowledge comes amplified concerns and control towards what they are consuming within their bodies (Brumberg, 1997). Along with the knowledge of healthy eating comes the concern and awareness of fat. Fat, although highly important to our bodies, is seen as the enemy as it creates bulges, or 'blubs' in areas of our body where they are not wanted. Fourteen of the dancers saw fat as unsightly especially when it was flaunted in inappropriate ways. Miranda's comment summed up their perspective: "As long as it's engaged then it's not gross". Fat was perceived to be blamed for being slow and lethargic, uncommitted and unhappy with oneself. However, it is this fear of fat that assists in constantly being cautious and monitoring food consumption (Brumberg, 1997).

Only one dancer stated that people need to be happy with themselves however they look. Janice stated that the way she looked was important however she also continuously affirmed that one can be beautiful through their confidence, and dressing appropriately. Throughout her interview she accepted the fact that everyone was different and you were "born as you are". This was a sophisticated point of view for a teenager which stood out among the participants.

With healthy perspectives becoming dominant in many avenues of society such as McDonald's Healthy Choice menu or June being Bike month, people are becoming more and more concerned with their physical and dietary wellbeing. The shift to healthy choices has also recognized the implications of dieting and is likely to assist in better nutrition (Brumberg, 1997). This is a positive change that has occurred within society, however with the greater emphasis on

the body and its health this can allow for individuals to become more attentive to their bodies and in turn, more body conscious if it does not reflect the ideal (Brumberg, 1997).

The dancers within this study were extremely conscious of the types of food they eat however did not appear concerned with the amount of food they consumed. This could be a major concern among the dance population as it is possible that many of its members might not get enough nutrients throughout the day. With the amount of hours these dancers are active and with a limited food intake, elite dancers are at risk of malnutrition without even realizing it. Although the food they are consuming is for the most part healthy and nutritious, they may be using up the nutrients from their recommended daily intake with their extensive dance schedule. Therefore these elite dancers would not get enough calories for their dance participation levels however this would need to be examined in further research.

Through constant re-evaluation of eating habits and nutritional intake these dancers readily reflect that what Foucault (1979) and Duncan (1994) have described the kind of self-monitoring via the panoptic gaze. The panoptic gaze is related to the nutritional intake of food as these young women are constantly monitoring not only what they eat but they also critically reflect on what they should eat. This monitoring also concurs with Joan Jacobs Brumberg's idea of healthy nutrition in that it is positive that young women know the importance of good nutrition, but now they are striving to compare physiques (or muscle tone) so intensely that they become consumed with how they look and what they eat (1997).

Although the dancers interviewed were conscious and perhaps mentally consumed by their eating habits they also displayed an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the problem of eating disorders within dance. Some of the dancers had witnessed friends or acquaintances, both in and outside of the dance world, struggle to become thinner through dieting or self-

starvation. These young women also displayed a sense of pride towards their bodies through hard work and dedication to dance. Although these dancers were consumed with thin bodies they also endure a positive view of themselves. The participants were continually striving to become more skilled in dance however also recognized the pressure for thinness. These dancers reflected on these pressures and stated that genetics play a vital role and they must accept all parts of their bodies. It is this sense of positive self-acceptance that is beginning to take hold within the contemporary dance world in the Vancouver area and therefore creating a change in priorities amongst dancers in regards to an ideal body type.

### ***Changing Dynamics and Priorities in Dance***

As stated earlier, previous studies within dance noted that the greatest concern for young dancers was linked to the epidemic of eating disorders (Benn and Walters, 2001; Montanari and Zietkiewicz, 2000; Bettel et al., 2001; Kaufman, Warren, and Hamilton, 1996; Tiggemann and Slater, 2001; Pierce and Daleng, 1998). In this study, the dancers stated that although they knew only a few people with an eating disorder, many of those people did not do any forms of exercise, let alone dance. The negative stigmatism surrounding body image is trying to be changed within many schools, especially the ones within this study through individual meetings, and nutritional classes.

Dance has received a poor reputation due to the high demands for thin athletes that look aesthetically pleasing. These expectations are coming from a variety of sources, both in dance culture and teen culture and these can be reinforcing. Critics and society tend to accept people who are thinner and in good physical condition (Grogan, 1999; Brumberg, 1997). It is these

societal demands along with the people within dance culture and the aesthetic appeal of thinness that can have an effect on dancers' eating habits and body image concerns.

In regards to the point of view that dancers and eating disorders going hand in hand, the results of this study disagree with previous research in regards to eating disorders and body image. The majority of the dancers interviewed had a positive outlook on their bodies not only for dancing but also in comparison to others within society. Although their outlook within dance was focused on good technique and movement, they all desired to be healthy. Against the norms of society, these dancers accepted and liked their bodies as they more closely reflected a healthy, functional body.

Therefore, although eating disorders are continuously linked to classical ballet, this issue should be further studied before being related to all forms of elite dance. Although it is easy to put a stigmatism on a specific group, the dance world is extremely diverse and dance does not necessarily connote an eating disorder. It also should be noted that individual schools provide different guidance to young adolescents that dream of a career in dance and in turn it is these highly influential people who can lead to an increase in eating disorders. An example of this is elite ballet schools training pre-professional ballerinas usually have a different focus on nutrition and health then a recreational school which focuses on enjoyment. Autumn stated that the last school she attended focused on nutrition differently then Dance Max:

“they would, like, tell us don’t eat cookies, like, lose some weight, like, they weren’t very nice and they didn’t treat you like a person they treated you like some ballerina from, like, Russia who, which none of us were...”

Each dance school and teacher focuses on different priorities and these guidelines can become

highly influential to students. Within this research the dancers had many opportunities for support and education from the dance curriculum, teachers, parents, and peers that assisted them in their healthy lifestyle.

The dancers interviewed revealed a distinct manner of body acceptance. This was not only in their speech but in their body language and conversations but also revealed a lot about personal and cultural dress codes. This was summed up nicely by Natasha

“I think well, this is just the dancers I’ve seen around Dance Max but they really respect their bodies more, like, they’re not like, I’ve never seen anybody going around in like skimpy little things and like, they kinda have more dignity than that.”

Although they did not like all aspects of their bodies, the dancers continually stated that they were healthy, toned and had a respect for themselves that other girls within their educational schools did not have. This respect was reflected in what types of clothing one would or would not wear within a social setting.

The dancers interviewed did state that there were parts of their bodies they did not like but they also tended to over-exaggerate their features (See Appendix A and B). This links with Grogan’s (1999) statements in regards to body image and the whole and part body estimation techniques. This distortion is due to the “discrepancy between actual size and perceived size” (p. 40). Although the dancers within this study were concerned with their body size and shape, they maintained a higher emphasis on health. These dancers are most likely similar to or provide less concern about their bodies in comparison with other adolescents their age.

With regards to the importance of health and increased muscle tone, the dancers clearly stated that throughout all their exercise they still desired to remain feminine. The importance of a toned, muscular, and ‘in-shape’ body was highly regarded as it applied to the sport they

participated in and also their health. While striving for toned muscles, these young dancers were also very conscious of 'bulky' muscles and tried to avoid them if all possible. Although the muscular, toned body is becoming a new goal for many women, these dancers particularly want to avoid fleshiness yet still remain feminine-appropriate (Bordo, 1993; Grogan et al., 2004).

The dancers put a high value on muscularity and thinness, however there was an appropriate amount that was necessary for acceptance. During the interviews, the dancers stated that there was a difference between skinny and thin. Thinness was acceptable and basically meant that the person was slender or in-shape, however if one was skinny, then this person was extremely thin, scrawny, or waif-like. The distinction was made in all the interviews that thinness was desirable but extreme thinness or skinniness was not. The appropriate size argument also rings true for muscularity. These dancers disagreed with large, bulky muscles and instead desired a long, strong, yet thin musculature. Therefore although the stronger, bigger muscles would allow these dancers to perform powerful movements and higher jumps, it would also increase the masculine look of the dancers. The increase in muscle size would reflect an image that was not feminine appropriate (Grogan et al., 2004).

The striving for femininity within the field of dance was something all of these elite dancers were concerned with. Although they participated in a 'female-dominated' sport, they still desired to look feminine not only within a dance setting but also within society. Femininity can be a source of beauty and gratification (Davis, 1991) and the dancers strived to achieve a complex ideal of being muscular, lean, healthy and feminine simultaneously.

Since these dancers have been raised in a western culture, the importance of body appearance has already infiltrated their societal norms (Loland, 2000). The dancers portrayed a comfortable and confident demeanor in regards to their bodies and their individuality however

were also continually striving for perfection within their art form. Dance was not participated in solely to improve their bodily appearance but was done as a form of exercise and enjoyment. These young women were also positively influenced as they were displaying features that were seen as beautiful within society such as femininity and a toned musculature.

The dancers interviewed stated that the instructors whom they trained under portrayed an appreciation and acceptance for dancers that were different in body shape and size. Although there was a variety of body shapes and sizes, these elite adolescent dancers were all relatively slim and muscular. Their bodies differed in the factors of shapeliness and bone structures however were observed as in-shape with not a lot of deviation in level of fitness between them. However, it is also worth mentioning that there was a greater variety of body shape and size (somatotypes) within the schools I studied as opposed to classical ballet schools (which tend to be more ectomorphic).

The dancers interviewed perceived that there was a change in how they were being instructed. This was based on their perceptions of comments, corrections and demonstrations that the teachers performed. The interviewees stated that they felt comfortable within a dance class as they felt accepted both for their body shape and their work ethic. However, within the participant observation it was noticed by the researcher that a teacher demonstrated an exercise on a more flexible, thinner dancer. During one class the instructor used one girl to demonstrate an arabesque and when the teacher corrected movements and the results were not obvious to on-looking dancers, the instructor switched to a more flexible and thinner dancer to show the difference. Although the dancers did not acknowledge the difference between the instructor's comments or demonstrations, it did seem to occur during some of the observed classes. All in all, the instructors were also observed providing constructive criticism, corrections and positive

comments to all dancers within the classes. These comments highlighted the dancer's abilities instead of emphasizing her faults. This provided a safe, and yet comfortable environment that all the dancers were at ease with.

### ***Influences on the Elite Dancers***

Within the contemporary dance culture, there is a broad variety of body types that are infiltrating the dance scene. Similar to early modern dance, contemporary has modified the classical ballet ideal and attempts to achieve a healthier ideal that is attainable through proper training and a hard work ethic. There is a greater diversity in body types within contemporary dance as it focuses on toned muscles with a major emphasis on individual style and movement. This broader array of body types within professional contemporary dance also enables younger elite dancers to observe a conglomeration of dancing bodies and in turn break down the stereotypes about professional dance.

Although one's bodily appearance is considered significant in western culture (Loland, 2000), the diversity of body types in dance is narrowed. This diversity looks at dancers with toned, lean muscles that may not have the desirable thinness or bone structure of a classical ballet dancer but rather has good technique, movement and musculature. Therefore this does not mean that anybody can become a professional contemporary dancer but rather that the possibilities are more readily available for elite dancers regardless of a specific body type.

Having a professional career within a ballet and a contemporary company are distinctly different. Ballet companies tend to use classical ballet training and repertoire for their performances whereas contemporary companies would use ballet, modern, and contemporary



dance styles to assist in their training and repertoire. Classical ballet and contemporary dance careers differ in body type selection, movement style, and diversity of technical training.

Individuality is a characteristic that is strong within contemporary dance as you can have a distinctly different body type but still be a talented dancer with unique style and movement patterns. Therefore contemporary dancers can still participate in ballet and other forms of dance but do not have to conform to the body ideals perceived in classical ballet. Instead they use ballet technique to train their bodies while also creating their own unique style to accompany their technical training.

Many young dancers within the Vancouver area look towards professionals within companies such as Ballet BC and the Source as mentors not only for dance style and trends but also for what is needed to succeed as a professional within the dance world. These companies, which are similar to other contemporary Vancouver companies, have a wide range of body types and backgrounds. With a wider array of shapes, sizes and training, these young dancers are not necessary focusing on the specific body type of an ectomorph but rather specific qualities that will enhance them as a dancer, such as personal style and proper training. The young women interviewed continually stated that up and coming dancers needed to have some kind of talent but that they did not need to have it all; as style and personal determination could assist with masking undesirable qualities.

All of the elite dancers studied were relatively thin individuals, however almost all did not reflect the 'ideal' ballet body whether it was in muscle size, height, bone structure or appearance. This could be why they rejected the idealism of ballet but they also stated they thought the ideal body for dance was not always ideal for society. This dichotomy between dance and social cultures was carefully bridged in these dancer's minds and they wanted to be

ideal within both cultures. Since these cultures are similar there were only a few things they would need to compromise on such as breasts, buttocks and hips. Dance culture rejects these features whereas the general consumer culture favors them. These features were constantly referred to throughout the interviews but the dancers usually compromised with a happy medium between social and dance ideals.

Professional dancers and teachers serve as role models and mentors for young elite hopefuls through performances, school involvement, and daily classes. Through observing a variety of body types at a professional level, young dancers can be continually reminded that the waif-like ideal is not always desirable for all forms of dance. The array of body types are continually being observed among these young elite dancers within the professional world through local company performances and the increased popularity of contemporary dance.

Since the city of Vancouver does not have a classical ballet professional company but rather a ballet company that excels in contemporary dance with a strong ballet foundation, the young adolescent dancers see an array of different body types among professional dancers. Many of these professionals are seen as role models within the younger dance community as the professional dancers stay connected to elite dance schools through workshops and guest teaching positions. Therefore within the local region of Vancouver, the adolescent dancers focus more on contemporary dance as this style is dictated through the local scene (Bennett, 2000). It is most likely that if there was a distinctly classical ballet company and a distinctly modern company within the area of Vancouver, the younger dancers might seek out one form or another. However, with a dominance of contemporary dance within Vancouver, the local scene is inspiring a younger generation of dancers to expand their horizons beyond only one form of

dance. Through the interpretations of the local scene, dancers get an understanding of the appropriate skills, body types and forms of dance throughout their locality.

Although dance is continually bombarded with negative connotations that are linked to tall and skinny bodily ideals, the times are beginning to change. The sport of dance has been thought to have anorexic young women continually striving to become thinner and although dance is not immune to anorexia, there are preventative measures in place to decrease the number of young dancers with this problem. With a greater emphasis on bodily perfection among women, the world of dance is trying to encourage healthy nutrition among their participants through education. Although this is distinctly different from dance ten years ago, educators have recognized the problems of the past and have come up with solutions to make healthier athletes.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Conclusion**

This study looked at how elite adolescent female dancers view their bodies both in dance culture and society and how these perceptions shape their individual practices. As the sport of dance continually demands strong muscles, young women participating in dance within the Vancouver area are proud of their toned calves and sculpted arms. The dancers within this study viewed their body image in a relatively positive way. These girls were not one hundred percent satisfied with their bodies, but appreciated and accepted the bodies they were given and were willing to work with their imperfections. By working with a 'non-perfect' body part the dancers stated that they strive for uniqueness, creativity of movement, diligence and determination that most dancers with the ideal bodies lack. This correction of 'non-perfect' parts is an example of the self-objectification that occurs among these participants within dance. Although they recognized their bodies were not necessarily ideal for dance, they were also not reflecting the cultural ideal in society. The lack of 'curviness' displayed was not a disconcerting factor for many of the subjects, rather the dancers stated they continually compromised the social ideal to mix with the dance ideal. This blending of the two ideals allowed the young dancers to feel proud of their toned, muscular bodies even though the curves of the breast and hips weren't as prominent as non-dancers their age. All in all, the dancers appreciated the way they looked and also the functionality of their body movement within dance.

The dancers were observed in their social context to better understand contemporary dance culture. As these dancers socialized and interacted with their peers they continually described their reality they were a part of. The meanings and values the dancers stated throughout this study, such as thinness and toned muscularity, reflected similar perceptions of

their bodies and dance culture (Beal, 2002; Blumer, 1969). These dancers portrayed a positive correlation to symbolic interactionism as the meanings and values that they put on dance culture or their social reality highly shaped their surroundings and attitudes. Also as these dancers are involved in two cultures, dance and society, their meanings and values were adapted depending on the culture they were a part of. This builds on the theory of symbolic interactionism as one's social reality is constantly changing depending on which social context you are immersed in.

This study was performed in the Vancouver area, where the prominence of contemporary dance is prevalent among professional companies. Vancouver was also recently the site of the 2004 and 2005 Contemporary Dance Festival in which contemporary dance companies and soloists spent two weeks in and around Vancouver performing and attending workshops and shows. Since there is no classical ballet company within Vancouver, this area tends to lack role models within the classical ballet spectrum. This allows contemporary dance to flourish within this location. The location of this study leads me to believe that Vancouver is becoming a significant contributor to the world of professional dance while also providing a variety of role models with various body types and shapes who are able to move and dance at an elite and respectable level. Vancouver's dance population contributes to a healthy perspective within the field of dance as the young dancers begin to recognize specific qualities that are respected such as hard work, proper training and movement abilities instead of the traditional body shape or size. As elite adolescent female dancers in this local scene begin to see a difference in body health and nutrition intake among professionals and continually observe it occurring, they will be less likely to reduce nutritional intake but rather to provide a healthy alternative through nutritional education and proper training.

Vancouver is not only leading the way with a variety of body shapes within the dance world but also is beginning to take strides toward a more health conscious dance industry. Within the schools interviewed, both had a nutrition program of some sort presently being implemented. At Janelle's Dance Academy, the teachers promoted a positive way of eating by providing healthy alternatives or nutritious suggestions. Dance Max provided nutrition classes where they learned about proper eating habits and foods. This type of health class was implemented among all the elite dancers within the school therefore making their health a priority within the curriculum. It was also within Dance Max that the items in the vending machines were changed from chocolate bars to granola bars and chips to all fruit snacks. This nutritional change assisted the young dancers in making a healthier choice for a quick snack. By furthering nutritional education among dancers the hopes are that dancers will choose a healthy lifestyle in combination with elite dancing that will allow them to be successful instead of intense dieting or poor nutrition.

### ***Further Research***

This study looked at elite dancers from the perspective of body image as opposed to eating disorders. The results contradict previous dance research at the elite level and further studies need to be conducted within this area. Little elite dance research has been done on contemporary dance. Classical ballet tends to be studied more as there is a significant health concern regarding eating disorders among ballet dancers. Although this phenomenon is often examined, the precursor of negative body image has not been looked at in depth among elite adolescent dancers. By further understanding these issues particularly the self-confidence young dancers have with their bodies not only within the mirrored studio but also at school, parties, or

with friends, we are able to get a more detailed point of view of how a dancer views herself during adolescence.

The suggestions for further research attempt to increase knowledge about body image in contemporary dance, and in local dance scenes. This would include a more detailed study of nutrition programs, dance involvement, and role models at the professional levels and how these factors contribute to a young dancer's body image. The first recommends is to look at an older age category to allow the researcher to see if aspirations to become a dancer at the professional level damage one's body image. The research would look at the pressure young hopefuls put on their bodies due to their dreams of becoming a dancer. If these dreams are not fulfilled, this research would look at how it might jeopardize the dancers' health.

This recommendation could also look at older dancers who do not make the professional ranks and therefore drop out of dance. Since many of these elite dancers participate in physical activity over twenty-one hours per week and they become accustomed to eating a certain way and also having regular scheduled classes to attend, when this routine is taken away, the dancers need to adjust with proper diet and exercise patterns. This research would look more at 'retired' elite dancers' body images and how they change between participating or not participating in dance.

The third recommendation for further research is to do a longitudinal study of the same elite dancers over a period of three to four years. This time period would allow for the dancers to open up and provide hind sight to their experiences while they mature. The age range for an optimal longitudinal study would begin at thirteen or fourteen years old and continue until seventeen. Usually at eighteen years of age most elite dancers are attempting to audition for jobs

within the dance world and therefore this study would provide a scope of how they perceive their bodies at a particularly vulnerable time in their life.

Another recommended study to build on this one would be a study of the difference between classical ballet training and contemporary dance training within the same age category (12-16 years). This type of research would allow the researcher to compare the different environments and assess the differences between the schools. For example, a comparison between a dance school that has implemented a health or nutrition program and one that has not. Some issues that could be examined are: the atmosphere of the school, tone and type of teachers or role models, and the influences of training methods or performance opportunities on one's body image.

The final area of research would be a study of the issue of location. It was concluded that Vancouver was becoming a model city for healthy dancers through positive role models both within the schools and through local contemporary dance companies. By completing a Canada-wide study on the top dance schools across the nation and looking at the body image of dancers, one would be able to compare the impact of different dance environments and scenes on adolescent dancers. Before beginning this study, the researcher was given information regarding body image on the East coast being negative in many young dancers (both classical and contemporary) as they strive to make it professionally. This type of research would assist in looking not only at the schools and the programs they administer but also at the trends of dance within Canada.

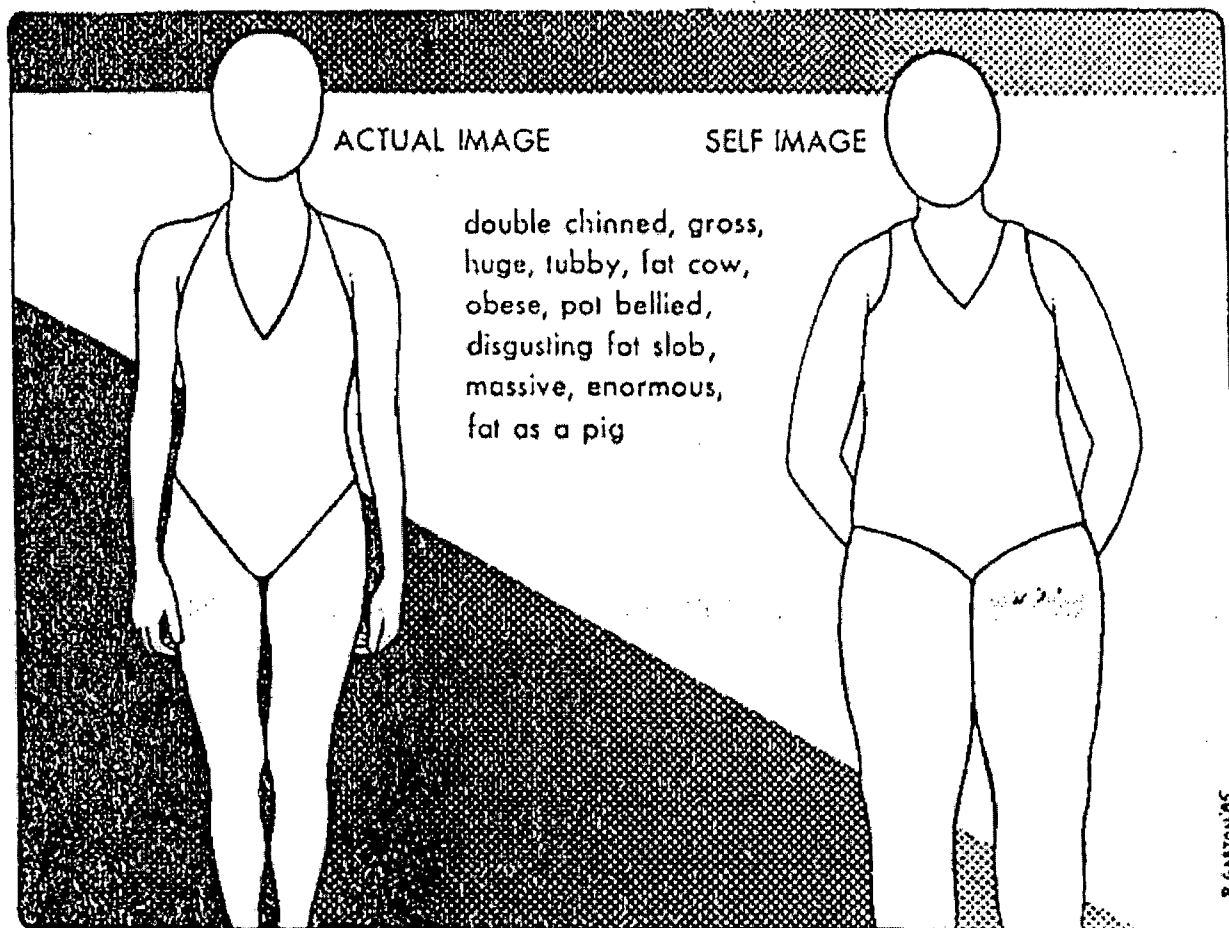
The west coast and east coast of Canada are often compared by dance professionals regarding body types, health and eating patterns. One perspective given by a well known teacher and choreographer at the elite youth level, Beverly Atchison, was that dancers within Vancouver



tend to be focused on healthy means to train their bodies instead of resorting to eating disorders. She also stated that most schools she encounters on the west coast of Canada tend to hold similar values on healthy dancers. Although this statement is one person's perspective, Ms. Atchison, an east coast dance educator, is highly involved within the elite youth dance world across Canada and provides a national perspective on the issues of dance, health and eating. This statement on health and nutrition in regards to location within Canada would make for intriguing further research for elite youth dance nationwide.

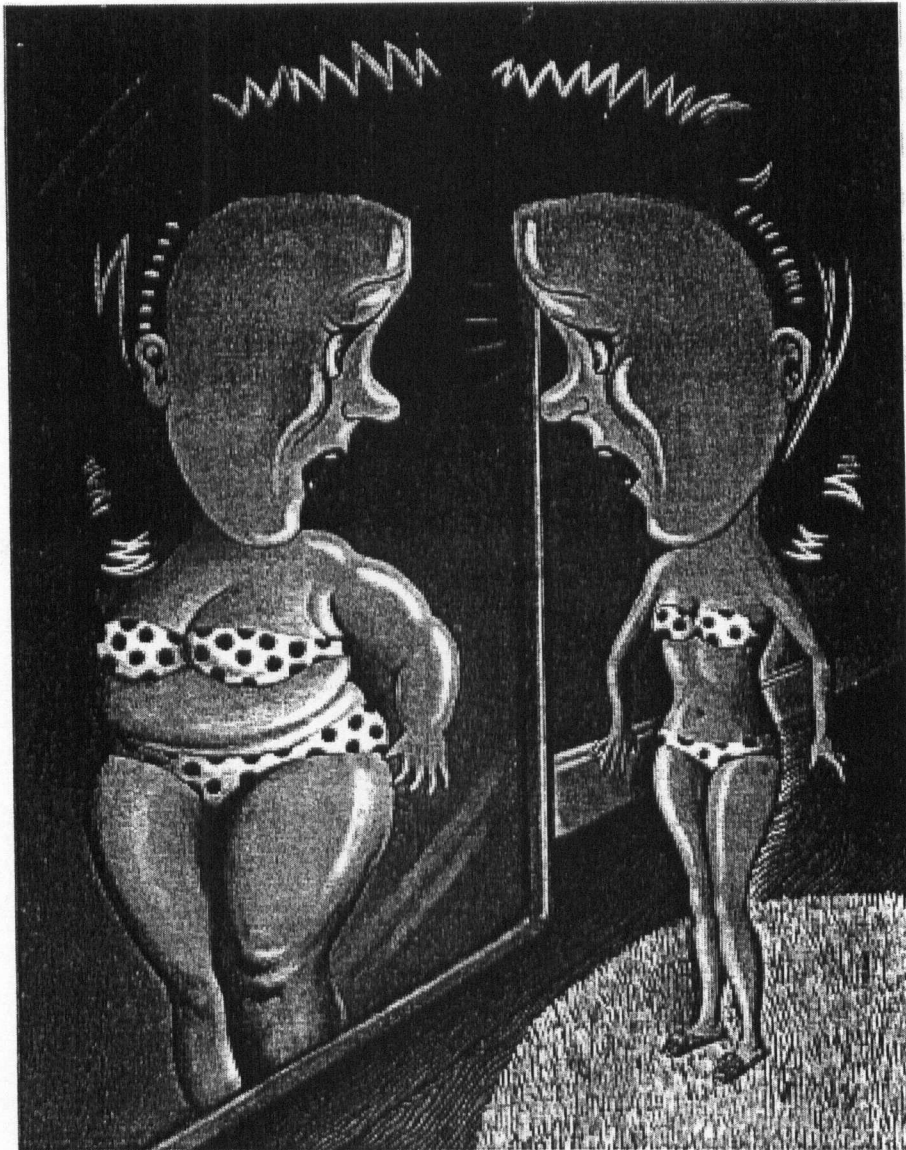
In conclusion, this study was an eye-opening experience as I did not expect I would find these changes occurring within the world of dance. Through insider knowledge and personal experiences, I hypothesized that the dancer's body image would be negative and they would be more concerned with the way they looked. Although many of the dancers were content with their bodies both for functionality and performance characteristics, they also all stated that there was something they would like to improve. However, these improvements did not directly change how they viewed themselves but rather were for more functional reasons that related to dance such as an arabesque position. All in all, it was encouraging to meet these young dancers. There was real evidence here of the benefits of implementing a health program and introducing positive role models within a dance curriculum and of how this type of program can assist in educating dancers to be healthy now and for years to come.

## Appendix A -- Patients Self-Image vs. Actual Image



(Birmingham, 1989).

## Appendix B – Image by Sheba Ross (1988)



This image, drawn by Sheba Ross for *Ms.*, became the symbol of anorexia nervosa and has been repeated with many variations in publications about the disorder. In reality, the image of the thin woman who sees herself as fat captures the predicament of most American women of the middle and upper classes. Among women aged eighteen to thirty-five, 75 percent regard themselves as fat even though only 25 percent are overweight. Psychological and cultural studies confirm that weight is women's "normative obsession" and that American society is obesophobic.

*Sheba Ross, Ms. (October 1983); courtesy of Nina Sklansky.*

**Appendix C**  
**Group Interview Outline**  
**Questions for Elite Adolescent Female Dancers**

***Introduction***

- Is there a difference between dancers and gymnasts? What are the differences or similarities and why?
- Name some characteristics that make dancers or dance unique.
- Who are some of the people you look up to in life? And Why? (dancers or non-dancers)
- In your opinion who is an example of a great body?
- Approximately how often do you look in the mirror during a class?
  - What do you use the mirror for? (corrections, monitoring, etc)
  - Where did you learn this from?
- How important is your body and how you look in society?

***Body Image and Satisfaction***

- Do you ever compare yourself with others in your dance class? What do you most often compare?
- What about school? Is there a difference on how you view yourself in dance vs. school? Why?
  - Older girls? Younger girls? Which ones do you compare yourself with more and why?
- Do ever compare your self to someone who, in your mind, does not look at good as you? Why? (superiority)
- How do you feel in your dance clothes in comparison to your sweats or with what you wear at school? Is there a difference?

- How does wearing your tights and body suit (dance uniform) make you feel? Why?
- Does your body image change each day, week or month? If yes, what are some things that trigger that change?
- Describe a competition scene. How do you or other girls act? What is it like during competitions?
- If there was one thing you could change about yourself what would it be and why?
- In your opinion do you monitor your eating? In what ways? How does this make you feel? (change of eating habits).
- Describe the ideal dancing body. What does it look like?
  - Is this ideal attainable? Would you be committed enough to try to obtain this ideal?
- What do you think about professional dancers such as Evelyn Hart, Chan Hon Goh, Karen Kain, or Martine Lamy (professional Royal Winnipeg Ballet and National Ballet of Canada Ballerinas)?
  - Do you ever want to look like them?
  - Do you ever compare yourself with professional female dancers? Why or why not?
- Can a dancer succeed within the dance world without the ideal body? Why or why not?
- Any other comments you would like to make about your satisfaction towards your body or body image?
- If you were the researcher what are some questions you might ask on this subject?

**Appendix D**  
**Body Image and Body Satisfaction in Elite Dancers**  
**Questionnaire**

*Please fill out the following questions. You **do NOT** need to put your name on this paper.*

How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your racial descent? (circle one)    Caucasian    African Canadian

Asian          Filipino          Latin Canadian    Middle Eastern

How long have you been dancing? \_\_\_\_\_ years

Types of dance you participate in? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

On average, how many hours do you dance a week? \_\_\_\_\_ hours

On a scale from 1 to 10, how would you generally rate the way you look (1= do not like the way you look and 10= love the way you look).

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

When did you become serious about dancing and why?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Would you like to dance as a career either professional or teaching?

\_\_\_\_\_

Thank-you for your time to fill out this survey and take part in the group interview, it is greatly appreciated.

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