

# **BODY IMAGE IN DANCERS**

An Undergraduate Research Scholars Thesis

by

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT .....	1
DEDICATION .....	3
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	4
CHAPTER	
I INTRODUCTION .....	5
II METHODS .....	7
III RESULTS .....	8
IV CONCLUSION .....	9
REFERENCES .....	10

## **ABSTRACT**

Body Image in Dancers

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### **Introduction**

Understanding how a dancer's self-perception can differentiate skilled dancers versus dancers not living up to their full potential and knowing ways to help make an environment better for dancers can help end warped thinking in the way they perceive themselves. Society may look at dancers a certain way, which can result in an eating disorders. The three measurements that were used in this study are the following: The NEO-PI Big Five Inventory, Social Physique Anxiety Scale (SPAS), and Sports Anxiety Scale (SAS). These three measurements were used to determine if there was a correlation between dancers and their body image.

### **Methods**

The subjects of this study were fifty-seven undergraduate female dancers attending a large state university in the southwest who volunteered to participate. The participants responded to a test booklet that contained a brief coversheet where they were asked to indicate their preferred dance genre (ballet, ballroom, hip hop, jazz, modern, or tap). The dancers were also asked to respond to the NEO-PI Big Five Inventory (sixty items), the SPAS (twelve items), and the SAS (twenty-one items). SAS statistical procedures were used to analyze the resulting data.

## Results

The Statistical Systems (SAS) Multiple Regression Analyses procedures were employed in order to determine the relationship between the Social Physique Anxiety Scale (SPAS), the Sport Anxiety Scale (SAS), and the Big Five Scale. The Big Five Neuroticism scale was a significant predictor of the SPAS construct ( $F_{(5,51)} = 4.97, p < .009, r^2 = .33$ ), the Somatic Anxiety subscale ( $F_{(5,51)} = 3.90, p < .004, r^2 = .28$ ), and the Worry measure ( $F_{(5,51)} = 7.92, p < .0001, r^2 = .33$ ). The Welch's t test (for unequal sample sizes and unequal variances) was used to compare the participants' Big Five scale means to T-score means ( $M=50, STD=10; n=774$ ). Created from a diverse sample of college students, the dancers scored significantly higher ( $p < .01$ ) than the normative sample on the Big Five Openness ( $M=54.0$  vs. 50) and Neurotic ( $M=56$  vs. 50) scales. No significant differences were noted between the participants and the normative sample for the Conscientiousness, Extraversion, and Agreeableness Big Five scales (the dance participants score at or very near the T-score means on these variables).

## **DEDICATION**

The researcher would like to dedicate this study to her parents, who instilled within her a desire to learn and to help others. The researcher would also like to dedicate this study to her fellow dance students who struggle everyday with body image in the world of dance.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

I am indebted to Dr. Arnold LeUnes and Dr. Anthony Bourgeois Texas A&M University Psychology Department for their more than competent advice and guidance regarding this research study.

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

Understanding how a dancer's self-perception can differentiate skilled dancers versus dancers not living up to their full potential and knowing ways to help make an environment better for dancers can help end warped thinking in the way they perceive themselves. Obviously, it could depend on the genre and age of the dancer. Society may look at dancers a certain way, which could lead to eating disorders in response to social pressures. Three measurements were used for the purpose of this study: The NEO-PI Big Five Inventory, Social Physique Anxiety Scale (SPAS), and Sports Anxiety Scale (SAS). The NEO-PI Big Five (Costa & McCrae, 1985) measures openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, neuroticism, and agreeableness; these were used to determine the personality of the subjects. The Social Physique Anxiety Scale (Hart, Leary & Rejesky, 1989) measures social anxiety related to the physique of the dancer. Additionally, the Sports Anxiety Scale (Smith, Smoll & Schutz, 1990) measures somatic trait anxiety and two cognitive trait anxieties (worry and concentration disruption), which were used to determine the anxiety level in the participants. These three measurements were used to determine if there was a correlation between dancers and their body image.

It has been observed through many years of dance training that body image in dancers is an issue. There has not been any quality research done on this topic. Of the very few studies completed, only one or two dancers have been the subject of the study, thus little reliable research has been conducted regarding this situation. Because of this lack of research, the purpose of this study is to give multiple dancers a survey questionnaire in the hopes of answering

some basic questions regarding dancers and body image. The objectives of this project are to see how this effects dancers and their perception of themselves, performance, and anxiety. It has long been thought that dancers have poor body image. The purpose of this study is to see if this theory is correct. Through this research, it is hoped that the results will explain why dancers have a poor perception of body image and themselves. These results will be measured by using the NEO-PI Big Five Inventory, the Social Physique Anxiety Scale (SPAS), and the Sports Anxiety Scale (SAS).



## **CHAPTER II**

### **METHODS**

The subjects of this study were fifty-seven undergraduate female dancers in the Texas A&M University Dance Program who volunteered to participate. The researcher chose all three levels of ballet classes for participation of the study (this was because ballet is the core dance for all dance genres). Once the researcher arrived, she handed a confidentiality sheet which required a signature in order to participate in the study. After the researcher collected the sheets, she then passed out the booklets and provided the dancers with black ink pens to keep each participant anonymous. Then, she explained the instructions for the booklet containing all of the tests. The participants responded to a test booklet that contained a brief coversheet where they were asked to indicate their preferred dance genre (ballet, ballroom, hip hop, jazz, modern, or tap). Once the participants answered their preferred dance genre, they were asked to respond to the NEO-PI Big Five Inventory, which contained sixty items, to determine the personality type they possess. They also completed the SPAS test, which had twelve items to answer. This test is used to detect if the participant has issues with body image in herself. Lastly, the participants had to respond to questions listed in the SAS test, which held twenty-one items. This test was used to showcase different sports and if they correlate with anxiety. The SAS statistical procedures were used to analyze the resulting data. The completion time took between fifteen and twenty minutes. Once the dancers completed the tests, they were allowed to return to ballet class.

## CHAPTER III

### RESULTS

The Statistical Systems (SAS) Multiple Regression Analyses procedures were employed in order to determine the relationship between the Social Physique Anxiety Scale (SPAS), the Sport Anxiety Scale (SAS), and the NEO-PI Big Five Scale. According to the data, the prediction of dancers scoring high on neuroticism was indeed correct. This data also showed the dancers displaying higher levels in body image distortions as well as being prone to having high levels of worry. The Big Five Neuroticism scale was a significant predictor of the SPAS construct ( $F_{(5,51)} = 4.97, p < .009, r^2 = .33$ ), the Somatic Anxiety subscale ( $F_{(5,51)} = 3.90, p < .004, r^2 = .28$ ), and the Worry measure ( $F_{(5,51)} = 7.92, p < .0001, r^2 = .33$ ). The Welch's t test was used for unequal sample sizes and unequal variances to compare the participants' Big Five scale means to T-score means ( $M=50, STD=10; n=774$ ). Created from a diverse sample of college students, the dancers scored significantly higher ( $p < .01$ ) than the normative sample on the Big Five Openness ( $M=54.0$  vs. 50) and Neurotic ( $M=56$  vs. 50) scales. The researcher was not astonished by the results regarding Openness. Since dancers appear to be more creative and open to new experiences, it was expected that their score would be higher in this area. No significant differences were noted between the participants and the normative sample for the Conscientiousness, Extraversion, and Agreeableness Big Five scales. The dance participants score at or very near the T-score means on these variables.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

Dancers, in general, tend to be perfectionists. Dancers strive to do well during rehearsals, performances, and in classes. Because dancers yearn for perfection, body image is an important component of their lives. After analyzing dancers who belonged to the Dance Program at Texas A&M University, there were major differences between them and the Welch's t Test. No significant differences were made regarding the SAS or SPAS scales; however, there were significant differences in the Openness scale and the Neuroticism scale from the Big Five. The dancers scored higher than average on the Openness score. This would be obvious since dancers tend to be more open to new experiences, are willing to try new and creative ideas, and possess a desire to be unique. The dancers also scored higher than average on Neuroticism. High on the Neuroticism scale means that the dancers are more relaxed, calm, confident, and are generally happy beings. This was interesting and proved the hypothesis incorrect. After asking the dancers why they thought the group in general was higher on the neuroticism scale, many answered, "Dance has made me confident," "Without dance, I would not be a happy person," and "I am happy with my body because dance takes me away from being self-conscious." In order to fully understand dancers and poor body image, the next task is to look into age as a factor. The sample size for this study was small and only focused on college students. Distributing this study to dancers of all ages may have a larger impact on this study to see if there is a relationship between dancers and body image. Another task is to explore professional dance companies. This study will be represented to Ballet Austin, a professional ballet company. More research needs to be conducted to determine an accurate assessment.

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