

Independent Project:**Personal reflection:****ADPA6000****Phoebe Clark****2205530.**

For my Independent project my aim was to explore the question: "Is it time that stereotyping stops?" This question guided both my creative and intellectual process throughout. Reflecting Briefly, I feel a strong sense of pride and gratitude for having reached this point. Completing the project required meaningful, personal engagement which led to discovery, and I am satisfied that I approached the entire process with authenticity. The process challenged me to push myself in familiar areas while also encouraging new forms of growth and self-awareness. This essay will reflect on the development of the project, the challenges encountered, the growth achieved both academically and personally.

I chose this theme because I wanted to create something that pushed for real change in something that felt personal whilst also being necessary within the current dance industry. Exploring both Plan A and Plan B as proposed in my journal, helped me to figure out what direction to take, Plan A clearly reflected my own experiences and seemed to help me find my creative voice. Working on this topic has been emotional but incredibly rewarding. It allowed me to connect with others with similar passions, have important conversations, and begin to let go of things I'd been holding onto consciously. The process challenged me in new ways, becoming director, choreographer, and editor. It was intense at times and as a perfectionist I put immense pressure on myself however, I've come out of it with a stronger sense of who I am as an artist and what I want to say through my work.

I quickly realised how important it was to first build an understanding of body dysmorphia as a psychological condition, outside of its link to dance. I began by researching the disorder in a broader sense, looking at its characteristics across the general population, which helped me to form knowledge.

Throughout the research process, it became concerning to discover just how many people; dancers and non-dancers experience similar and distressing thoughts in relation to insecurities about their appearance. Learning about this made me think differently about the internal pressures people carry, and how much our own self-perceptions can impact our self-worth and behaviours, even when others may see none of our "imperfections" that we are all continuously worrying about. This stage of research gave me important context for my project moving forward it allowed me to

approach the topic not only from a personal and creative place but also with more understanding and empathy.

As my work progressed, I came to the realisation that I may be experiencing symptoms of Body Dysmorphic Disorder, I was experiencing most if not all the symptoms of BDD. "Someone with body dysmorphia may feel so consumed with thoughts about their looks that they neglect other areas of their life. They may even avoid school, social events, dating, or work out of fear of being judged for their looks. It can lead to significant impairments in daily functioning, including difficulties in work, school, and social interactions" Body Dysmorphia: Symptoms, Examples, and How to Help Laura Darwart, March 24th 2025 - <https://www.verywellhealth.com/body-dysmorphia-5272235#toc-symptoms>

This recognition was difficult but crucial, as it allowed me to reflect critically on the impact these perceptions have had, and continue to have, on both my personal wellbeing and my development as a professional dancer which in return inspired me to generate movement material and ideas. Regular meetings with my personal tutor, Tori Johns became a support mechanism during the creation period. These discussions provided a safe space where I could (if needed) articulate ideas and the emotional vulnerability I was experiencing; an aspect of the project I had not expected when I first chose the topic.

One statement I came across during this early research phase stayed with me throughout the project: "Every dancer knows what is expected in the dance industry when it comes to body standards and size." This quote, from an article titled "*The Dance Industry Is Expanding Their Mind*," <https://medium.com/gbc-college-english-lemonade/the-dance-industry-is-expanding-their-mind-7c579ce8af80> stood out because of its honesty, and because it captured a truth that many dancers experience but don't say out loud. It made me reflect on how deeply rooted and normalised these body expectations are within the dance world, and how easily they can influence dancers' relationships with their bodies. This realisation strengthened my motivation to explore these issues through my project, and to reflect critically on the ways the dance industry both creates and sustains harmful stereotypes, because it is harmful. This is when I had the realisation that my documentary should become more of a movement within the industry, instead of just a documentary.

I had to engage with a level of honesty and openness that I had not anticipated, both with others and with myself. While I initially believed I would be able to approach the topic of body dysmorphia and stereotypes within the dance industry from a purely objective, research-based perspective, it quickly became apparent that the subject matter resonated with me on a much deeper, personal level. Throughout the process, I

found myself encouraging others to consider change, while at the same time struggling with the challenge of shifting the way I perceive and speak about myself.

My research journal became a crucial part of this project. It started as a simple notebook and evolved into a key place for recording ideas, research, reflections, and creative developments. It tracked the project's progression, including choreographic ideas, survey analysis, and reflections from creative sessions. Practically, it kept me organized with rehearsal schedules, interview plans, and deadlines. Over time, I realized the journal wasn't just a tool, but an integral part of both my creative and academic journey, bringing together all elements of my planning and thought process.

What made this even more rewarding was the response from some of the dancers involved, showing genuine interest in the process behind the documentary. I chose to print and share copies of the journal with those who wanted to learn more, for them to be able to see the process of the project that they were apart – (from the outside looking in). This interaction highlighted the importance of transparency in creative practice.

There were several key stages to the development of my final project, each presenting unique challenges and learning opportunities. One of the first major concerns I encountered arose quite early in the process; when I had decided that I wanted to produce a high-level documentary. In an early entry in my research journal, I wrote: *“One of my concerns is the potential lack of access to appropriate technical equipment, which may pose a challenge to the quality and success of the outcome.”* This concern became more prominent following a conversation with Tori, during which I was informed that our primary filming resource would be iPads. This raised significant worries for me, as I initially feared that the creative standard, I had envisioned for the documentary would be compromised due to these limitations. However, this challenge prompted me to explore alternative solutions. A cohort member, who was facing similar concerns, had chosen to invest his course bursary in professional equipment, including gimbals and microphones. He generously offered to lend me some of this equipment, a gesture that had a positive impact on the technical quality of my project. In addition, Tori was able to source filming lights for my interviews, which were scheduled for use prior to the timetabled filming and tech weeks. These additional resources allowed me to begin the editing process earlier and refine the documentary's structure well in advance of filming the dance sections.

This collaborative and resourceful approach not only alleviated the initial technical stress but also enhanced the overall production value of the documentary. The professional setup established during the interview phase was particularly significant, it created a polished visual aesthetic and elevated the final product, contributing to what I

often described as a "Netflix feel." I recognise the value of adaptability and peer support in overcoming challenges, and how limited resources can inspire more innovative, problem-solving mindsets. Ultimately, this phase of the project reinforced my ability to remain committed to a creative vision, even when faced with unforeseen limitations.

My initial aim was to interview 6–8 dance practitioners; however, as the deadline approached, I realised I could have been more organised in scheduling them earlier. Several people I approached were unavailable, which made me anxious about not having enough content. Despite this, it worked out in the end. I was able to interview Tori Johns, Liam Wallace, Tommy Boost, myself, and two cohort members. Each interviewee brought honesty, and authenticity to the project, offering powerful insights that shaped the documentary into an emotionally impactful and meaningful piece. It made it real.

Time management became a significant challenge for me throughout this process. Most days I felt in control; on others, I experienced overwhelming pressure and anxiety as deadlines approached, having being a perfectionist I now realise I was spending too much time on one area of the project, neglecting others. This contrast led me to reflect on the importance of improving my time management skills, especially as someone balancing multiple commitments. I recognised that strengthening this skill would benefit both my academic and personal life moving forward. To support this, I explored strategies and found a website offering practical, visual guidance; particularly valuable for me as a visual learner. One strategy that stood out was creating a daily to-do list ("The easiest way to start planning your workday is by making a to-do list with all of your daily tasks" - 18 Effective Time Management Strategies and Techniques, Upwork <https://www.upwork.com/resources/time-management-strategies>). Though a small change, this practice had an impact. Writing a list each night helped reduce my anxiety and allowed me to approach each day with more focus and a calm energy, easing the pressure to complete tasks outside of what I had prioritised.

My survey became a valuable research method, particularly during the final stages of my documentary project. Through reviewing other sources and drawing inspiration from similar works, I recognised that surveys are often highlighted as effective tools for collecting both qualitative and quantitative data. They allow for the gathering of a wide range of perspectives, helping researchers to identify trends, opinions, and personal experiences. For my project, the survey enabled me to gain first-hand insights from dancers and individuals with experience in the dance industry. In total 90 people, who have either experienced parts of the industry or who are working in it, responded. This broader range of voices helped bring depth my documentary as it gathered a wide-spread of dancers, from different genres of dance and it ensured the final piece reflected not just my story, but a shared reality within the dance community.

I wanted the full process to feel professional and to seem professional to outsiders, this meant that upon interviewing I needed to provide them with forms, that I would require

signatures on so that I would have full permission to use their interviews for my documentary. This aided me in growing skills such as organisation, communication but also enhanced my professionalism within a working environment.

By allowing myself to trust in my creative ideas, I began to recognise that I have a strong sense of what works visually and musically for example, working with the mirrors, led me to working with reflections not just with the dancers' bodies, but with light too which looked visually appealing and creative on the final edit. I have always been a highly self-aware individual; often to a fault, as my self-critical tendencies can affect my mental wellbeing. However, within the context of this project, I found that me being able to critique served me well. It enabled me to make quicker, more decisive choices when it came to choreography, editing, and overall direction. My ability to assess the work with honesty and precision ultimately helped raise the standard of the outcome.

In the early planning stages, I had intended to work with a cast of 6 to 9 dancers. I initially settled on using 9 dancers, as I felt that having more bodies in the space would allow for greater creative potential in terms of formations, spatial dynamics, and group work. I was also mindful of the importance of representation in my project, particularly about body shape and size throughout my casting choices. It was essential for me to cast dancers of varying body shaped to relate to the message I was aiming to convey: that all bodies are capable of movement, expression, and working at a high skill standard, regardless of weight or appearance.

For the first rehearsal, two dancers failed to communicate their absence, which was extremely disappointing as it was the first session, a time I had planned for open discussion in relation to the project, creative chances, and a chance to understand each other more. This moment made me realise how crucial communication and reliability were going to be throughout the entire process. It also prompted an important shift in mindset: I began to understand that I couldn't rely solely on others' commitments and needed to have contingency plans in place. This was a valuable, albeit difficult lesson in leadership and resilience. I felt inspired by a quote ("Resilience is a precious skill. People who have it tend to also have three underlying advantages: a believe that they can influence life events" A quote from Article Top 25 resilience quotes (of 246): A-Z quotes <https://www.citethisforme.com/cite/edit/8b401991-3d31-436c-a091-3b81f2e9891e>).

A particularly challenging moment came when one of the original dancers decided to drop out, an hour before rehearsal, I found this disheartening on both a personal and professional level, especially as I had considered her a friend, Plus I had spent time choreographing and brainstorming ideas which had included them within. In response, I sent a message to the remaining cast, making it clear that anyone unsure about participating should feel free to withdraw at that point. I wanted to ensure that those involved were fully committed to the project and its aims.

Since that message, Communication and collaboration improved significantly during the process. I sensed a new level of respect from the dancers, and they began to show genuine investment in the project. They offered creative suggestions, such as incorporating cardboard signs with written statements during the final section of the performance, although not an idea that I kept; the offerings were always welcome. They also demonstrated a willingness to experiment with movement ideas that were new or unfamiliar to them. This collaborative energy became a highlight of the process and reaffirmed the importance of mutual trust and openness in creative environments.

In total, I held five rehearsals, each lasting between two and three hours. I approached each session with clear choreographic intentions, structured planning, and specific goals, which enabled us to make strong progress in a relatively short timeframe. Their commitment within the rehearsal space allowed us to develop the work meaningfully and in a quick manner, getting work done within an appropriate time frame. This part of the project taught me valuable lessons in adaptability, leadership, and perseverance. It highlighted for me; the emotional and logistical challenges that come with directing a project but also demonstrated the strength that comes from creative collaboration and maintaining a clear artistic vision.

On reflecting upon my journal, I was pleased to see that most of my original ideas remained and were explored and pushed to a high standard. I chose to use my original musical inspiration, “Scars to Your Beautiful”, as its lyrics aligned with the theme of my project. I successfully created a goose-bump making 2-minute routine, using the mirrors as a way to show the idea of how we are expected as dancers to constantly look at ourselves and see parts that we perhaps don’t like. I applied choreographic devices such as canon, varied levels, contrast, and rhythmic changes to create depth and variation within the structure.

The rehearsal and tech week marked a pivotal stage in the process. I was timetabled one rehearsal in the filming space and a three-hour filming slot. Unexpected challenges arose when I was informed that one dancer, Casey, was injured, and another, Armelle, was unwell. Rather than panicking, I approached the situation with adaptability. I revised the choreography and formations to suit the dancers present and reimagined Armelle’s as a soloist. This shift not only resolved a logistical issue but added a new layer of depth to the piece.

Standing in the theatre during that first rehearsal, I was overcome with a sense of fulfilment and gratitude, witnessing a vision I had imagined for nearly six months come to real life. I also took the opportunity to deepen the documentary’s individual focus by asking each dancer to contribute a short phrase or freestyle in their own style. This decision enriched the texture and diversity, making space for personal expression within a shared vision and allowed room for demonstration of styles of which were talked about within the documentary. Working with lighting and the designer Nick further

enhanced the experience. We explored how lighting could shift the tone of each section, from warm, hazy lights paired with mirrors to vibrant green and pink tones for the breakdance segment.

Choosing the title *Beyond the Mirror* felt significant, as it captures the core theme of the piece. The title was inspired by a close friend's comment urging me to stop judging myself through the mirror and instead told me to "look beyond" to see what others see and in that moment I knew. This perspective deeply resonated with me and became a guiding force throughout the creative process.

Throughout the development of this project, I remained both intentional and experimental in shaping the movement and direction. I took inspiration from artists such as Liam Wallace, Yukiko Masui, and my own movement vocabulary, while also responding to the unique styles and input of the dancers in the studio. I found the directing and creative process highly rewarding. The editing phase felt intense at times due to the deadline, it progressed smoothly, and I acquired new technical skills using premier pro software that will benefit future projects that I create or work on, I used over laying and shadowing, which offered a chance to see both perspectives whilst I had dancers being shown, you could also see the interviews.

This experience has been deeply enriching and personally meaningful, it's been full of learning and realisations. A space for creative expression and reflection, allowing me to heal from past experiences. Working under pressure reignited my drive and deepened my commitment to the project. It affirmed my passion for this subject matter. I felt motivated not just by academic goals, but by a genuine belief in its message. I now feel a strong desire to continue developing this into a broader movement within the industry now that I am fully educated on the matter, one that prioritises talent over aesthetics. I was overwhelmed by emotion when I saw the outcome; it surpassed my hopes and expectations, becoming more powerful and captivating than I had imagined, and I gained positive and commending feedback from viewers. This experience ignited a new sense of confidence in me, allowing me to truly believe in both myself and the value of my ideas. I hope, in time, to contribute to a shift in how dancers are valued.

Bibliography:

(Date unknown) *Top 25 resilience quotes (of 246): A-Z quotes* (Author- UNKNOWN)
<https://www.citethisforme.com/cite/edit/8b401991-3d31-436c-a091-3b81f2e9891e>
(Accessed 12 February 2025.)

(Published: 24/03/25) *How to help someone with body dysmorphia*, Laura Dorwart, Very well Health. <https://www.verywellhealth.com/body-dysmorphia-5272235#toc-symptoms> (Accessed 27 March 2025)

(Published: 17/12/21.) *The dance industry is expanding their mind* Catherine Lau GBC College English-Lemonade, <https://medium.com/gbc-college-english-lemonade/the-dance-industry-is-expanding-their-mind-7c579ce8af80> (Accessed 18 December 2024).

18 Effective Time Management Strategies & Techniques | Upwork (Author – UNKNOWN)
<https://www.upwork.com/resources/time-management-strategies>. (Accessed 10 April 2025.)