



INDEPENDENT PROJECT RESEARCH JOURNAL.

**Research, preliminary timelines, collaborative
communication and the evolution of creative concepts.**



MAY 12, 2025
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ADPA6000

Plan A

“Is it time that stereotyping stops?”

This question really made me pause and reflect. Is it finally time to put an end to the stereotypes that have shaped the dance world for so long? Especially now, as I prepare to step into the professional industry, this feels more urgent than ever.

There are personal reasons why this question resonates so strongly with me. Throughout my teenage years especially as a young dancer, I experienced body shaming in ways that left a lasting impact. It began when I was competing, and I remember a judge once saying, “Don’t give up dancing, even if people say you can’t because you’re different.” At the time, I wasn’t sure if that was meant as encouragement or a backhanded comment. Later, while studying dance at college a teacher told me, “If you lost a stone or two, you’d definitely get in next time.” That moment marked one of the lowest points of my life. I was just 16. It shattered my confidence and left me questioning everything: Should I even keep going? If my teachers think this way, what will audition panels think? What about the other dancers around me? Is my body going to define my success?

That experience planted the seed of body dysmorphia, something that would shadow much of my teenage life. It was worsened by the natural changes that come with puberty, making it even harder to maintain a positive self-image. Looking back now, I finally feel that I’ve healed enough to speak up and explain why this needs to change, for me, and for the dancers coming up behind me.

In my proposal for this project, I focus on one element that plays a huge role in this struggle: mirrors. I’m particularly interested in exploring the psychological effects mirrors have on dancers in studio environments. Even now, I avoid certain mirrors at university, ones that distort my reflection and make me feel bigger, because they can derail my entire day. They impact how I dance, how quickly I pick up choreography, how focused I am, and most of all, my confidence. It makes me wonder: Are mirrors truly essential in a dance studio, or could they be doing more harm than good? When it comes to eating disorders, I know how closely they can be linked to body dysmorphia, both are serious mental health conditions. I’ve seen firsthand how these issues affect dancers, including people close to me. This is why I want to dive deeper, to educate myself thoroughly, so that I can speak about these topics with the sensitivity and understanding they deserve.

Ultimately, I believe this work could be something meaningful not just for me, but for the wider dance community. If I can channel all of this into something impactful, maybe even long-lasting, then maybe I can be part of the change.

My Concept and initial ideas for plan A.

- I'm developing a creative concept that merges both a short film and a campaign, blending documentary storytelling with the reach and impact of a social awareness movement. The idea is to create a documentary-style short film that doesn't just tell stories, but actively campaigns for change, bringing attention to the realities of body dysmorphia in the dance world.
- The heart of the project lies in real voices and lived experiences. I plan to interview dancers from a range of genres, Ballet, Hip-Hop, Contemporary, Commercial and use their voiceovers as the emotional and narrative backbone of the film. Contrasting perspectives will allow me to explore whether some dance styles are more inclusive than others or whether inclusivity is sometimes just a surface-level performance.
- I also intend to feature my own story, as body dysmorphia has significantly shaped my journey in dance. Answering some of the same questions I ask others will ground the project in personal authenticity.
- Visually, I want to experiment with mirrors, not just as reflective surfaces, but as creative tools for light, distortion, symbolism, and even as extensions of the choreography. Mirrors will represent both confrontation and clarity, illusion and truth. Movement-wise, I'll explore gestural choreography to embody the emotional narratives we hear through the voiceovers.
- The plan is to work with around 6–9 dancers, potentially including myself, although I may decide to remain behind the camera to focus solely on direction and creative execution. The result should feel visually compelling, emotionally resonant, and socially relevant—a piece that encourages viewers to reflect, question, and most importantly, start conversations. Whether it's shared on social media, screened at festivals, or picked up as part of a larger campaign, my goal is simple: to make an impact.

PLAN B:

“The effects of drug and alcohol abuse within a family unit”

Another concept I’m passionate about exploring is the use of dance as a form of healing ,specifically as a coping strategy for those impacted by drug and alcohol abuse. This includes not only those struggling directly with addiction, but also the family members and loved ones who experience its ripple effects.

This idea is personal to me. While my dad was in recovery from alcohol abuse, dance became my sanctuary. It gave me a space to process my emotions and to heal physically, mentally, and emotionally. Where words often failed me, movement gave me the freedom to release, to understand, and to begin again. Dance became a silent conversation between my body and my experiences.

I want to explore how dance can be used therapeutically across all stages of impact, as a daily coping mechanism, as a form of expression when words aren’t enough, and as a tool for rebuilding connection, resilience, and joy.

If I were to pursue this concept, I envision a short film that blends choreography with raw, emotional storytelling. The narrative would be woven together with voiceovers, real stories from survivors, loved ones, and dancers who, like me, have turned to movement to process their own journeys. One striking idea is to include a dancer portraying my story, moving to the song “Family Line” by Reuben Gray. Through this, I want to capture the layered experience of grief, hope, and healing.

I’d also love to explore this through conversations, interviewing dancers to ask: How many of us have danced through pain? How many have used movement as medicine? This adds a layer of collective storytelling, showing that while each journey is personal, there is a shared strength in how we cope, create, and recover.

Inspiration for this project is also coming from recent movements like the “I Love You Bro” campaign for men’s mental health, and podcast episodes like Diary of a CEO - "She Is Not Your Rehab", which speak powerfully on healing generational trauma and emotional resilience.

At its core, this project is about giving space to the stories that are often left unspoken and using dance to say what words sometimes can’t.

The plan I've chosen to pursue:

- Plan A is the direction I have chosen to pursue, as it aligns more closely with both my personal experience and the creative vision I have for this project.
- I find myself being able to generate more intentional, visual, and conceptually rich ideas for Plan A. This clarity of thought and creative flow made it clear that I was not only more inspired by this path, but also more prepared to engage with it on a meaningful level.
- In contrast, while Plan B holds significant emotional weight, I recognise that I may not yet be ready to explore its depths with the sensitivity it requires. However, my connection to the subject of body dysmorphia is something I fully understand both personally and within the wider context of the dance community. I am deeply aware of the impact it has on dancers, including myself, daily.
- This certainty has given me a stronger foundation from which to build a project that is not only authentic, but capable of provoking thought, inspiring conversation, and contributing to much-needed change in the dance world.

Notes and questions I need to answer for myself:

Referring to body dysmorphia disorder as BDD to make it easier and better to read for readers.

I need to ensure I know the full details of this incase someone asks me whilst im completing my project. I need to be educated.

What is body dysmorphia?

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/body-dysmorphic-disorder/symptoms-causes/syc-20353938>

<https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/body-dysmorphia/>

To ground my research in credible sources, I referred to the NHS website, a reputable and evidence-based platform. There, body dysmorphic disorder (BDD) is defined as:

"A mental health condition where a person spends a lot of time worrying about flaws in their appearance. These flaws are often unnoticeable to others."

<https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/body-dysmorphia/>

The term "flaws" is one that dancers frequently encounter, one that I hear often and upon speaking to friends within the industry they have said it probably is the most used term. In relation to technical execution, artistic expression, or physical appearance. In a dance training context, I would say a "flaw" might refer to a technical imperfection, such as a sickled foot in Ballet, or a stylistic presentation such as the style of clothes you wear. Equally, dancers are often subjected to scrutiny regarding their bodies, attire, or personal aesthetics, further expanding what constitutes a "flaw."

To deepen my understanding of this term and how it is perceived both within and outside of dance environments, I found a definition from Oxford Languages,

<https://languages.oup.com/>

which defines a flaw as *"a mark, blemish, or other imperfection which mars a substance or object."* This definition implies that flaws are deviations from a perceived standard, something that is especially relevant within the dance industry, where high aesthetic and technical expectations are constantly reinforced.

This exploration of the word's meaning aids me in reflecting on the subjectivity of what is considered a flaw. What one person views as an imperfection, another might see as a unique characteristic or strength. In the context of body dysmorphia, understanding this subjectivity becomes crucial, as individuals often internalise perceived flaws, whether real or imagined, in ways that significantly impact their self-esteem and mental wellbeing.

The definition of BDD is significant in reframing my understanding of the condition. Prior to engaging in this research, I had considered body dysmorphia more term used to describe episodes of low body confidence among dancers. However, learning that it is classified as a recognised mental health disorder highlighted the severity of the issue and its psychological implications.

How does the culture of the dance industry contribute to or influence the development of body dysmorphia?

<https://medium.com/gbc-college-english-lemonade/the-dance-industry-is-expanding-their-mind-7c579ce8af80>

“Every dancer knows what is expected in the dance industry when it comes to body standards and size.”

The presumption that every dancer is aware of and often judged by these standards raises concerns about the role of stereotyping and exclusion in professional dance environments. In my view, such statements risk perpetuating the idea that these expectations are not only normal but acceptable. My aim, through the development of this documentary, is to challenge and change what is made to be normal and acceptable things a dancer is expected of in the sense of body image. I intend to question: Why do these standards exist? Are they necessary? And what damage do they cause to dancers' mental and physical wellbeing?

Another powerful quote from the same article states: *“The ideal dancer’s body, decided by society, is slim, slender, and delicate-looking.”* This assertion implies that the pressure to conform is widespread across the entire dance industry, regardless of genre. It was this observation that inspired me to pursue a comparative exploration of body dysmorphia across different dance styles, for example, assessing Ballet dancers in comparison to hip-hop dancers, which would enable me to identify whether certain disciplines place more emphasis on body image than others.

The article also acknowledges that change is happening and has been for many years: *“Due to the desire for specific body sizes of dancers, it limits the opportunity for many who want to go professional. The industry is continuing to change by including bodies with different abilities in the professional world of dance.”* This acknowledgment of progress offers a sense of hope and reinforces the importance of amplifying diverse voices through projects like mine, hence why I have decided to now interview dancers from different backgrounds of dance, insuring I gain valuable personal insights and feedback from people who have experienced it first hand, or gathering their general interests and ideas on how we can stop body dysmorphia.

<https://www.bing.com/ck/a?!&p=80eeaa4fce6cb0039cb9ff977a2b720709df3ab0eb624679dd2bdee24a8d78a7JmltdHM9MTc0NjkyMTYwMA&ptn=3&ver=2&hsh=4&fclid=38c47030-d76d-676b-2298-6444d68d66f9&psq=How+does+dance+impact+body+dysmorphia&u=a1aHR0cHM6Ly9kYW5jZXNwaXJpdC5jb20vaG93LWJvZHktZHlzbW9ycGhpYS1hZmZlY3RzLWRhbmNlcnMv&ntb=1> **Real Talk About How Body Dysmorphia Affects Dancers**

“In fact, a study conducted in 2012 found that BDD is more prevalent in dancers than the general population”.

Josh Spell, a former dancer and a mental health consultant for Pacific Northwest Ballet: “This standard of the thin body as a dance ideal has been passed down from generation to generation,”

This article is talking about how it’s a generational thing and that this idea has been passed down from generation to generation of dancers, however it is still not ok.

“The mirror lies,” Liu states. “The mirror is a two-dimensional object, but we are three-dimensional beings.” I found it particularly interesting that, without specifically researching the psychological impact of mirrors on dancers, this concept was addressed so directly in the article. This quote strongly supports my own belief that mirrors can have a negative effect on dancers, especially given how often we are required to look at ourselves during training and rehearsal. Until I read this, I hadn’t fully considered the idea that what we see in the mirror is inherently limited and distorted due to its two-dimensional nature. This insight gave me a deeper understanding of why dancers might develop unhealthy self-perceptions. It also reaffirmed my decision to incorporate mirrors as a visual and symbolic element in my documentary. Given the implications raised here, it seems that mirrors may not only reflect our movements but also contribute to the mental health challenges dancers face.

This article suggests that dancers who have BDD can also suffer with Bulimia.

“Stroh’s battle with body dysmorphia worsened, as did her struggles with anorexia and bulimia. She became obsessive, constantly worrying about specific body features or trying to change them, whether through extreme dieting or exercise. It took Stroh many years to be able to identify what exactly she was battling” This shows to me that although there may be a lot of research out there on body dysmorphia and it shows that it can go undiagnosed for years, due to limitations but also shows that it’s a silent battle that can take years to overcome, Which is unfortunately the case in most instances

Bulimia is <https://www.healthline.com/health/bulimia-nervosa>

“Is an eating disorder. It’s generally characterized by eating large amounts of food in a short period of time, followed by purging.

Purging can occur through forced vomiting, excessive exercise, or by taking laxatives or diuretics.

Bulimia is a serious condition that can be life threatening.”

Eating disorders and BDD can often be related to each other and have similar symptoms or traits.

How is bulimia nervosa treated?

Treatment focuses on food and nutrition education as well as mental health treatment. It requires development of a healthy view of yourself and a healthy relationship with food.

Treatment options can include:

- **Antidepressants.** Currently, [fluoxetine](#) (Prozac) is the only antidepressant approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to treat bulimia. This selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor may also help with depression and anxiety. Fluoxetine is [only approved](#)  for treating bulimia in adults.
- **Psychotherapy.** Also called [talk therapy](#), this type of counseling can include [cognitive behavioral therapy](#), family-based therapy, and interpersonal psychotherapy. The goal is to help you work through potentially harmful thoughts and behaviors that contribute to your condition. Group talk therapy may also be helpful.
- **Dietitian support and nutrition education.** These can help you learn healthy eating habits and form nutritious meal plans. You may also learn to shift your attitudes toward food.
- **Treatment for complications.** This may include hospitalization, especially for cases of severe dehydration, electrolyte imbalances, and organ damage.

Successful treatment usually involves a combination of the above treatments, along with a collaborative approach between your doctor, mental health professional, and family and friends.

How are eating disorders related to body dysmorphia?

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10526212/>

“The results showed that bodybuilders, weightlifters, and other populations involved in athletic activities are the most vulnerable to the onset of this disorder”

<https://iocdf.org/expert-opinions/eating-disorders-not-the-same-as-bdd/>

“In both disorders, avoidance of places and activities are prevalent due to self-consciousness about one’s appearance. In addition, they share a delusional variant where individuals lack insight into whether their body image beliefs are distorted⁵.

Abnormalities in brain functioning and cognitive distortions occur in anorexia nervosa and body dysmorphic disorder. Both conditions share an information processing bias toward more detailed visual information rather than viewing images globally (seeing the trees rather than the forest)⁶.

Functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) experiments that directly compared and contrasted body dysmorphic disorder and anorexia suggest they may have similar, although not identical, abnormal visual system processing^{6,7,8}. Other studies indicate there are distinguishing neurobiological features between the two disorders, such as reduced dopamine receptors in body dysmorphic disorder, and lower activation of hunger and pain receptors in eating disorders”

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0149763417300519#:~:text=The%20underlying%20neuropathophysiology%20of%20BDD%20remains%20largely%20untested,disordered%20visual%20perception%20and%20emotional%20arousal%20in%20BDD.>

“The underlying neuropathophysiology of BDD remains largely untested and unknown.”

DavidAWiss@NutritionInRecovery.com

MUSCLE DYSMORPHIA

- Concerns w/ individual body parts
- Rigorous weight-lifting regimen
- High-protein diet
 - Spread across 6 or more meals
- Compulsive mirror-checking
- Comparison with others
- Convinced they look much smaller than others of comparable size
 - Delusional outlook



<https://www.bing.com/videos/riverview/relatedvideo?q=How+are+eating+disorder+s+related+to+body+dysmorphia&mid=C96AFE7D572C5D51C329C96AFE7D572C5D51C329&mcid=D44B5FD9EF094A139F0A4492B05A1CC7&FORM=VIRE> :

A youtube video telling me everything I need to know in order to understand body dysmorphia as a disorder.

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/22860238/> **The study:**

“The lifetime prevalence of BDD and ED among elite professional female ballet dancers was higher than the general population. High standards of beauty, public body exposure, and repeated exposure to mirrors in the rehearsal rooms may contribute to the development of body image disorders in this sample.”

Is body dysmorphia ever miss diagnosed or misunderstood?

https://www.bing.com/search?q=UT&pq=Body+dysmorphia+stat&sk=CSYN1CT1UT1&sc=10-20&pglt=297&q=body+dysmorphia+statistics+uk&cvid=8c1b7582b62d4e3a985727e435b6994f&gs_lcrp=EgRIZGdIKgYIAxAAGEAyBggAEEUYOTIGCAEQABhAMgYIAhAAGEAyBg gDEAAYQDIGCAQQABhAMgYIBRAAGEAyBggGEAAYQDIGCAcQABhAMgYICBAAGEDSAQ kxNzQ0NGowajGoAgCwAgA&FORM=ANNTA1&DAF1=1&PC=HCTS

“Approximately 2% of the adult population in the UK is estimated to have Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD), equating to around 1,075,980 individuals.” – this is without the people who haven’t been diagnosed due to it being missed or too afraid to speak out.

“Employment and Education: About 50% of individuals with BDD are unemployed, and nearly 60% of young people diagnosed with BDD are either not attending school or attending sporadically.

Suicidality: The risk of suicide among individuals with BDD is significantly higher, with reports indicating that suicidality is 45 times more prevalent than in the general population.

These statistics highlight the significant impact of Body Dysmorphic Disorder on individuals' lives in the UK, emphasizing the need for increased awareness and support for those affected.”

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/body-dysmorphic-disorder-bdd/symptoms/>

“It’s like being stuck in a noisy hamster wheel spinning endlessly inside a hall of mirrors.”

This statement brings clarity to what can often be a misunderstood or overlooked condition, and it helps to reinforce just how serious the mental and emotional impact of body image issues can be. Body dysmorphia isn’t just about insecurity or dissatisfaction with appearance; it’s a recognised mental health condition with significant psychological effects that can affect a person’s quality of life.

Organisations like Mind, a leading mental health charity, play a crucial role in supporting individuals dealing with mental health challenges, including those experiencing body dysmorphic disorder. Mind offers resources, advice, and helplines for people in crisis or those simply needing someone to talk to. Knowing that body dysmorphia falls under the umbrella of mental health conditions means that people experiencing it are not alone and can seek support from services like Mind.

Because of this, I feel it's important to include the Mind helpline at the end of my documentary. Not only would it show viewers that support is available, but it also reinforces the seriousness of the topic I'm addressing. Providing this kind of information could be a first step toward someone reaching out for help, and that’s exactly the kind of impact I want my project to have.

What treatments are there for body dysmorphia?

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg31/chapter/Recommendations#steps-35-treatment-options-for-people-with-ocd-or-bdd>

Obsessive-compulsive disorder and body dysmorphic disorder: treatment:

Upon exploring the website above, I found that there is treatment available for people diagnosed with BDD. I discovered a step-by-step explanation of how individuals are diagnosed with Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD) or obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), both of which share similar traits and treatment approaches. The site outlines not only the diagnostic process but also the treatments available and how they are implemented. For example, it states:

"Adults with BDD with mild functional impairment should be offered a course of CBT (including ERP) that addresses key features of BDD in individual or group formats. The most appropriate format should be jointly decided by the patient and the healthcare professional."

Adults with BDD with moderate functional impairment should be offered the choice of either a course of an SSRI or more intensive individual CBT (including ERP) that addresses key features of BDD."

Adults with BDD with severe functional impairment should be offered combined treatment with an SSRI and CBT (including ERP) that addresses key features of BDD."

This information highlights that BDD is treated in stages, mild, moderate, and severe, with varying levels of intervention depending on the severity. It's eye-opening to realise that someone could be experiencing mild symptoms without even recognising them until they escalate. This staged approach makes it clear how important early recognition and treatment are

<https://www.bing.com/newtabredir?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.stormontvail.org%2Fbody-dysmorphia-overcoming-the-struggle-with-body-image%2F>

“Overcoming the Struggle with Body Image”

Body image throughout my research I have realised is something that can take years to finally recover from especially if you do have BDD, its becoming aware, the therapy and then the working on it after, its all a long journey. There is a lot of help out there though for people when they need the help.

“BDD is a complex disorder that, like other psychiatric disorders, arises from a complex interplay of environmental factors, genetic predispositions, and neurobiological disturbances. Overall, we hypothesise that the neurobiological contributions of BDD involve systems of detailed visual processing, cognitive control, and emotion processing. Specifically, we speculate that the brain network is disturbed such that overactive detailed processing occurs early in the visual processing stream”

Articles relating to body dysmorphia that I can look at for information if needed:

“What we need to avoid is an unhealthy fixation with some kind of physical ideal” <https://www.danceplug.com/article/your-body-might-change-and-thats-fine-how-to-handle-body-dysmorphia>

<https://www.thecrimson.com/column/backstage-at-the-ballet/article/2020/11/3/ballet-body-dysmorphia-backstage/>

How do I make a good documentary?

<https://brilliantio.com/how-do-you-structure-a-documentary/>

Because I have decided to create a documentary with no background in film making, editor or directing a project of this scale I also need to research into how to make the final product as good as I envision it to be.

“Here are three key strategies: Start with a strong hook: It’s not enough to have an interesting subject; you need to introduce it in a way that grabs your audience’s attention from the get-go.

Use storytelling tools: One of these includes conflict, which can be between individuals or ideas, creating tension that needs resolution.

Make it personal: Incorporate interviews or personal stories to create emotional connection.”

Along the process of making my documentary I will refer back to these 3 points each time so that I am aware and know that I am making it as interesting/compelling as it can be.

Ethical interviewing: <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/ethical-interviewing> : <https://engl105sp2020.web.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/22033/2020/03/Quick-Guide-to-Interviews-and-Observations.pdf>

10 Principles of Ethical Interviewing and Observing

1. **Accuracy:** Your job is to present factual—not fabricated—information. Do not misrepresent the intended meaning or message of your interviewee or of the people you observe. Also, recognize and acknowledge that your study might not be representative of this entire subculture.
2. **Fairness:** Present facts, not indictments; do not surprise your interviewee or observation subjects with the final product. Don’t let interviewees give anonymous indictments of others.
3. **Completeness:** Tell the full story; reflect the true complexity of the world.
4. **Honesty:** You must be genuine and candid with everyone with whom you work on the project.
5. **Independence:** Ensure your primary allegiance is to the issue at hand, not yourself or anyone else.
6. **Impartiality:** Be aware that you might introduce or encounter personal bias or strong disagreements with your interviewee or observation subjects. Consider if you are being impartial in your representation of them. Consider if they are being impartial in their representation of others.
7. **Transparency:** Give your interviewee, your observation subjects, and your audience tools to follow up on your work, fact check, etc.
8. **Accountability:** This is your work, not anyone else’s, so take responsibility for it.
9. **Respect:** Everyone deserves to be treated with dignity and compassion, even those with whom you may disagree. You cannot pick and choose to whom you give respect. This involves not just your interaction with your interviewee and observation subjects but also the way in which you represent them.
10. **Excellence:** Do excellent work; marry important truths with engaging narrative.

<https://www.bing.com/videos/riverview/relatedvideo?&q=video+editing+software+for+preimer+proo+&&mid=D9D985DE7FD306FD2725D9D985DE7FD306FD2725&&mcid=AEE291CD366F4846B02AC4C7796E0A1F&FORM=VRDGAR>

Mirrors and how they affect people.

The history of mirrors: *“The history of the mirror is a long one. The earliest known manufactured mirrors date from 8000 years ago in Anatolia, now south central Turkey. Yet even before that time the very first mirrors were pools of water in natural bodies of water or vessel containers. Men as well as women stared at themselves either to admire their appearance or to see how to correct it.”*

<https://iadms.org/media/3586/iadms-resource-paper-mirrors-in-the-dance-class.pdf#:~:text=For%20dancers%2C%20the%20mirror%20provides%20immediate%20visual%20feedback%3B,and%20to%20assess%20the%20line%20of%20their%20bodies.>

I want to analyse and understand mirrors and all its possibilities, in relation to psychological effects on a person but also its positives as they do have them. In my interviews I defiantly want to ask each person what THEY think on mirrors as I personally think (aside from the facts/statistics) mirrors, and having potential issues with them is such a personal thing and can't be expressed or based off of what someone else is stating.

“While mirrors can have positive effects, excessive or obsessive use of mirrors can contribute to body image issues, self-criticism, and self-esteem problems. It's important to maintain a balanced and mindful approach when using mirrors.”

<https://www.stylinga.co.uk/blogs/news/the-psychology-of-mirrors-harnessing-their-reflective-power#:~:text=While%20mirrors%20can%20have%20positive%20effects%2C%20excessive%20or,a%20balanced%20and%20mindful%20approach%20when%20using%20mirrors.>

“mirrors can aid in personal development. They offer a visual feedback mechanism, allowing us to observe ourselves and gain insights into our nonverbal cues and body language.” i've never really thought about mirrors too deeply, but it's fascinating to realise how much they can teach us. They're not just tools for checking our appearance they're like personal feedback systems. Just by looking at ourselves, we can pick up on nonverbal cues, body language, even our emotional state. It's wild to think that something as simple as a reflection can help us grow and understand ourselves better. We literally learn by seeing ourself, thats a powerful concept

Mirrors can make us more emotionally intelligent: *“Mirrors activate mirror neurons in our brains, enabling us to empathize with others' emotions and experiences. By observing someone in a mirror, we can better understand their perspective and cultivate empathy towards them”*

“excessive or obsessive use of mirrors can contribute to body image issues, self-criticism, and self-esteem problems. It's important to maintain a balanced and mindful approach when using mirrors.” This would explain why a lot of dancers often feel insecure or have BDD, They are subjected to having to look at themselves each day through mirrors seeing imperfections consistently and forgetting to see the beauty they have.

“For dancers, the mirror provides immediate visual feedback; it allows them to evaluate the height and shape of their movement, to correct their placement, and to assess the line of their bodies.” From an article: *Mirrors in the Dance class: Help or Hindrance*

A study : *“One study 18 reported that university dance students who learned a dance phrase with the use of the mirror had better movement retention over a two week period than students who learned the phrase in a non-mirrored dance classroom. It was also found that the use of the mirror for dancers with less than ten years of dance training may be distracting and delay the learning process 19. Other researchers 9-10 found that beginning ballet students who learned and practiced an adagio phrase without the mirror developed stronger technical skills in their performance of the phrase than a comparable group of students who learned and practiced the same adagio phrase using a mirror.”*

“Research 4, 8, 10 shows that dancers taught without mirrors, especially higher skilled dancers, felt better about their bodies. Dancers taught with mirrors, on the other hand, felt worse about the appearance of their bodies. Dancing without the mirror, for the higher-skilled students, may encourage them to be less selfcritical, less distracted and thus feel more satisfied with their bodies.”

The Broken Mirror: Understanding and Treating Body Dysmorphic Disorder : A book By Katharine A. Phillips **(Author): <https://www.amazon.co.uk/The-Broken-Mirror-Understanding-Dysmorphic/dp/0195167198>**

“She includes common clues to BDD - such as frequent mirror checking, covering up with clothing, and excessive exercise. Four new chapters on treatment contain updated information and recommendations on how to effectively treat BDD - as well as frequently obtained treatments that should be avoided. A revised chapter offers helpful advice and reassurance for friends and families of BDD sufferers”

Some statements that stood out for me from this book:

“What BDD teaches us is that perception is not always reality and that our minds can distort the mirror far more than the glass itself ever could”. I felt this was an interesting way of putting it, it shows that what we see is not what others see and it is true that the imperfections that some of us may spend hours or days worrying about, giving us endless thoughts and continuous ones, others really don't see all of that when they look at us, It also suggests that the mirror doesn't actually reflect what people see either, because actually, we don't look at ourselves in the mirror, our minds do.

“Recovery is possible. With the right therapy and support, individuals can begin to see themselves with clearer, more compassionate eyes.” Compassion is a good use of word, as I feel that everyone who suffers from BDD just needs more compassion, not necessarily from others, but indefinitely from themselves.

“The suffering caused by BDD can be as debilitating as that from major physical illness. The pain is invisible, but no less real.” This statement captures the fact that it's a hidden illness, People don't see it, if people are suffering from BDD they may not even know it themselves for a while. But because it's a hidden illness, that cant take away from the severity of it, and the seriousness of it, its hard to overcome it, and it can take over someone's way of living on a day-to-day basis.

In the book there is also a whole section based on mirrors and their effects of individuals, (this is not a study based on dancers- but the general public)

“For people with BDD, mirrors become both obsessions and enemies, tools for endless scrutiny, but also sources of emotional pain.”

Overcoming Body Image Problems including Body Dysmorphic Disorder (Overcoming Books) Paperback – 29 Jan. 2009 by Alexandra Clarke (Author), David Veale (Author), Rob Willson (Author)

https://www.amazon.co.uk/Overcoming-Problems-including-Dysmorphic-Disorder/dp/1845292790/ref=pd_lpo_d_sccl_1/260-2952238-1525122?pd_rd_w=7eGJw&content-id=amzn1.sym.bb13d3fc-af40-4fff-a822-e0e4c415da96&pf_rd_p=bb13d3fc-af40-4fff-a822-e0e4c415da96&pf_rd_r=E4X7WJH3MDQ2TWGCZF6W&pd_rd_wg=y1pvJ&pd_rd_r=28ee3dc0-6d18-4d80-a164-fd8f6034f5c3&pd_rd_i=1845292790&psc=1

An interesting standpoint that this book has is the mind of those who have BDD and the thoughts that consume them, how they think about pleasing everyone and getting approval from their friends, family or people around them in anything they do, People with BDD often become perfectionists, hence why some people often get diagnosed with OCD. "One major step in overcoming body image issues is questioning the automatic thoughts 'I must look perfect' or 'people will reject me if I look this way' and learning to replace them with more balanced ones." I think its interesting because, its real and it made me sit back and think and reflect on times that I have done this, people often feel the need to change the way they dress or look to suit others needs or to gain approval.

"Body image problems are often maintained by a vicious cycle of negative thoughts, feelings, and behaviours the more you focus on flaws, the more prominent they become in your mind" It's a cycle that needs breaking.

"Frequent mirror checking doesn't help it reinforces the belief that there is something wrong, keeping anxiety high and attention focused on appearance" In the book this is a part called 'The Mirror Trap' and I feel as though mirrors are traps. They pull you in and seem like they have something good to offer and withstand, however they have very bad side effects.

Communications/Conversations I've had:

Dancers who I have contacted within the university:

Myself

Katie

Maisie

Isobel

Casey

Lydia

Aimee

Elle

Artists I have reached out too for either an Interview or to gather more findings.

Phoebe Henderson

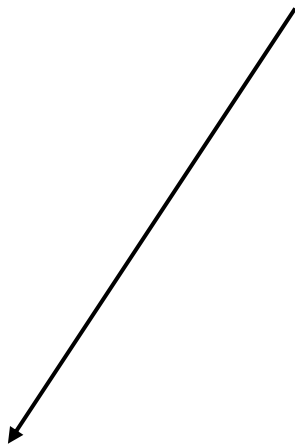
Kane Silver

Liam Wallace

Tori Johns

Darnell Williams

Tommy Davies (Boost)



Kane unfortunately is too busy to be a part of the interviewing and the whole project however he explained that I can use his podcast and kindly sent me the interview that specifically relates to mine (I can use this apart of my research and use it to help me gather more information) another plus is that its also from a male's perspective.

During my second year, I participated in a data collection study led by Emma Morgan, who was researching mental health issues within the dance community. This experience was invaluable, not only in expanding my understanding of the field but also in facilitating meaningful academic connections. Emma generously provided me with the contact details of her PhD supervisor, Dr. Sanna Nordin-Bates, a leading expert in dance psychology. This has opened further opportunities for engagement and has significantly supported the direction of my own research. In addition, Emma invited me to participate in her upcoming study on self-compassion in undergraduate students, which is set to begin in January. I believe this will further inform and enrich the work I am conducting in my current project.

I have also established a connection with Terry Hyde (MA MBACP), a retired professional dancer turned psychotherapist, who expressed interest in my research after reaching out to learn more about my focus. His dual expertise in both dance and mental health makes him a particularly valuable contact, and I look forward to potentially involving him in the project.

These communications and collaborations have deepened my understanding of the psychological dimensions of dance, and they continue to positively inform my research and findings

Interview questions:

1. Which dance genres, in your opinion, discriminate the most?
2. Which Dance genre, in your opinion, is the most inclusive? And why?
3. Which Genre of dance do you specialise in?
4. Do you believe it is appropriate to teach dancers that success is contingent on their appearance?
5. If you're willing to share, could you tell us about your college experiences, your time working in this field, and, if you attended conservatoire training, your experiences there?
6. Would you say that, in contrast to your training experience, the industry takes a different stance on body stereotypes while you are employed? Now that you are regarded as a working professional, do you receive different treatment?
7. Do you think mirrors are destroying dancers?
8. How can we stop stereotyping and fix this problem, in your opinion?
9. Is it time to look beyond the mirror and look at talent over aesthetics?

A rough, initial timeline for creative process purposes.

1, FRAME A
FACE AND
SHADOW
FADE INTO
AN
INTERVIEW
TO GET TO
THE POINT
QUICKER.

2. Into choreographed
dance, could be solo
or group.

At the end of the group,
I want it to fade or
cross shadow, whether
that's into a frame
such as a Ballet scene
in dark lighting and
start having solo parts
edited in whilst certain
styles are mentioned.
Example – If
commercial is being
talked about show

3. show interviews and
have poignant
questions asked.

Use interviews as a
soundscape, also
using the sound
scores I've had ideas
with that are either
relevant to the idea or
experimental (so no
copy-right) for
example, Scars to your
beautiful.

4. Into the group
dance with mirrors
and have a song
added in.

End with the name
of the
documentary.

Campaign/ documentary name ideas

Create an animation of the documentary name for the beginning of the documentary:

Talent over aesthetics.

Will my body type change the success of my career?

What's more important, image or talent?

Is it time that stereotyping stops?

Does my body define success?

DOES MY BODY DEFINE SUCCESS?

Beyond the mirror

BEYOND
THE
MIRROR

Entries/Reflections/ Notes

20/01/25

I have already begun developing phrase material using a visual structure involving mirrors arranged in a circle, with each dancer interacting with their own mirror. A pivotal moment in the piece will involve all dancers gravitating toward a single mirror—potentially representing mine, or that of a designated soloist. This mirror will feature body-shaming words and phrases drawn directly from the interviews conducted during my research, serving as a visual metaphor for internalised criticism and distorted self-image. In contrast, the remaining mirrors will remain unmarked to symbolise the difference between how we see ourselves and how others perceive us, both literally and metaphorically.

Rehearsal Reflection –

03/02/2025.

Today marked the beginning of the practical process with all selected dancers present in the studio. We successfully completed the first section of choreography, which incorporates the use of mirrors as a central prop. I chose to retain my original musical inspiration, “Scars to Your Beautiful”, as its lyrical content aligns with the overarching theme of self-perception and societal pressures surrounding body image.

Building on this foundation, I am now considering the addition of written text as a symbolic layer to the piece. Specifically, I intend to inscribe words or phrases—representing personal insecurities or stereotypes the dancers have encountered—on the reverse side of the mirrors. This moment will culminate in a powerful closing image: the dancers standing in a line, stepping forward with affirming and empowering words written on their skin, representing growth, reclamation, and resilience. These final visual aims to provide a sense of closure and emotional resolution for both the performers and audience.

Choreographically, I have drawn inspiration from Liam Wallace’s movement style, using it to inform several key phrases that appear particularly effective when performed in unison. I have made a conscious effort to explore the spatial dynamics of the mirrors, ensuring they are not only functional but integral to the narrative and aesthetic of the piece.

Throughout the session, I applied choreographic devices such as canon, varied levels, contrast, and rhythmic changes to create depth and variation within the structure. I am working to remain both intentional and experimental in how I shape the movement and thematic progression of the piece.

03/03/25

While driving, I found myself reflecting on potential new directions for my research. In conversation with a friend who is also a dancer, an intriguing idea emerged: how what we wear can profoundly influence the way we perceive our bodies. They shared that, in ballet, dancers are often required to wear skin-coloured tights and leotards to allow teachers to clearly see body alignment and structure. This uniform, while practical from a technical standpoint, also exposes the dancer's form in a way that can be emotionally confronting.

This sparked a personal realisation: perhaps the reason I've often felt disconnected from ballet isn't the movement or the discipline itself, but rather the way I feel about my body in the clothing expected of me. On the occasions when I've enjoyed ballet, I noticed it was often when I wore something that made me feel more confident or comfortable clothing that flattered how I view myself, rather than exposing what I might be self-conscious about.

Although my research currently explores different genres within the dance industry, this line of thought has opened a new avenue worth exploring. Could the expectations around dance attire contribute to body dysmorphia? Are the clothes we're required to wear shaping how we see ourselves—for better or worse? This intersection between costume, identity, and body image presents an important and deeply personal angle to consider as I continue my inquiry.

I.E – heels, Ballet, Hip hop, Commercial, Tap Jazz.

Following this line of thought, I developed a choreographic idea inspired by the concept of self-perception and how it is influenced by clothing. In the initial session, the piece I began creating opens with the dancers standing in front of a mirror, confronting their reflections. Building on this, I envision an edited sequence that functions almost like a visual flash—a series of rapid cuts showing each dancer in a variety of outfits, ranging from traditional dancewear to everyday clothing. This sequence would capture subtle shifts in body language and facial expression, offering insight into how clothing can alter one's sense of confidence, vulnerability, or discomfort.

This moment would then transition back into the main choreography, creating a juxtaposition between external presentation and internal experience. The intention behind this visual motif is to represent the often-unseen internal dialogue individuals have with their bodies, a quiet, yet powerful narrative that many people carry but rarely express. By incorporating this element, the piece could serve not only as a creative exploration of movement, but also as a commentary on body image, self-perception, and the psychological impact of societal and professional expectations around appearance.

04/03/25

In my next rehearsal session, I aim to enter the space with a clear and intentional direction for the development of the piece. Rather than focusing heavily on large group routines, I've been exploring the idea of creating shorter, more intimate vignettes that highlight individual dancers and styles. So far, I've completed the opening group piece involving all nine dancers, including myself, using mirrors as symbolic props to reflect themes of self-perception.

23/03/25

Moving forward, I envision a more cinematic structure. For example, during interview-style segments—such as a conversation with Tori discussing ballet—I plan to overlay that dialogue with haunting visual imagery: dancers at the barre under dim, misty lighting, conveying the darker, more emotionally taxing side of ballet. This contrast will help underscore the emotional weight and expectations often embedded in classical training.

I also want to interweave short solo or duo sequences to showcase the individuality and diversity of each dancer: Maisie leaning into a jazz-influenced style, exploring contemporary movement in a duet or solo with Armelle. Visually, I'm interested in experimenting with close-up panning shots. Running across the mirrors whilst the dancers look into them with the camera - to add a textured and a 'wow' element/ layer to the work. Given the time constraints due to my involvement in Rocky Horror, I believe this more fragmented and stylised approach will allow me to maximise impact while remaining practical with rehearsal time.

Interviews:

The interview process has begun and has been easier than I had initially imagined, I am interviewing 3 people this week.

Liam Wallace: Tommy Boost: Tori Johns; I decided to then interview myself along with honey and Maisie.

22/04/2025:

A new idea that has sprung to mind is that I could film each dancer saying one word – for example

7 dancers: 7 words.

It's time to look beyond the mirror

One person gets one word each, this could open the documentary – and it'll be edited so it sounds like one sentence fully spoke – just with the different voices and can flash

and show their face on the screen – kind of like an introduction to them as dancers but without saying who they are and why. Just the one word.

Then could break into a free style of dance in front of a mirror or an interview with shadowing of dancing in the background.

It needs to be a captivating opening, which I think this could be.

28/04/25

I had a studio session today and decided that the best way to rehearse the piece was in slices, so I cut the piece into three different sections. This helped in allowing the dancers to fully relax into the choreography which meant that they could fully express and make the movements fuller. Armelle was unwell and I made executive decision to take her out of the piece and look at more of a solo position with her and show her skill set off.

We decided for the documentary to film a commercial section, choreographed by jesse Thornton (which I will credit)

I also asked the rest of the dancers to prepare some skills or sequences their happy to have recorded as part of the edit for the documentary.

30/04/25:

Today I had a rehearsal within the studio with all dancers, it was very valuable as it was in the theatre and i was able to fully envision what I want for filming and lighting. This rehearsal produced a positive mindset as I realised, I am at an extremely good place. I used this space and time to film bits that's id like to have embedded within my documentary that I perhaps don't want to film during real filming and tech time. This pushed me further along and allowed me to again start the editing process.

29/04/25

During the filming I decided that after the interviews and all the content I had, I didn't need to film the dancers speaking the words as the content I had was already impactful enough, and I kind of like that their 'voice' throughout the documentary is through movement.

Choreographic elements, Visual elements and potential sound

scores at this stage :

For the soundscore of this piece, I intend to use the instrumental version of “Scars to Your Beautiful” as it offers a powerful emotional tone and dynamic range that supports the focus of body image and self-perception through its lyrics. Allowing for more interpretative freedom, enabling me to explore choreographic devices, such as canon to manipulate the dynamics of the movement vocabulary.

I aim to explore layering/ merging different dance styles to create a captivating visual experience that reflects the diversity within the dance community. For instance, improvisational sections will feature dancers showcasing their unique movement languages; This not only enriches the visual texture but also supports my inquiry into how different genres approach and respond to issues of body image.

Side note: It is essential that I approach this subject with sensitivity, care, and patience, acknowledging that individuals may engage with the topic in varying ways. Some may find it easier to discuss, while others may experience emotional discomfort or feel triggered. Throughout this process, I must remain open and honest with myself, maintaining a reflective and empathetic stance.

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. However, by adopting a creative and resourceful mindset, I aim to overcome these limitations. Ideally, the project would benefit from the use of a gimbal, an external microphone, a high-quality camera, and reliable editing software to ensure a professional standard of production.

I aim to interview 4-6 people, who are either dancers or creatives within the industry. This is to gain real life aspects and to give the documentary a real feel, I want people from different backgrounds and styles of dance to prove that there is a stigma no matter who you are.

Notes from session 4 with Tori.

In this process aim to answer: How do we make the change? What can we all do to promote and embrace different body types.

-Make a practical start.

-Create a schedule for interviews – be flexible

-create interview questions

- Get the content, timeline of the film will start to become clearer.
- Sound system, put the music over the film.
- Rehearsal schedules create one, timetable stays same until 24th of Feb.
- Create a plan of attack right up until next week. So can start working.
- What is my opinion on the research I've found, evaluate the research, and analyse it. How do I make it relevant and link it to what my project is about.
- QR code at the end of vid to gather more info to take it forward with questions people can answer.

Was able to complete the timeline (attach it below) , I need to make sure I start in a practical way now that ive started some researching and have some ideas already, I just need to ensure I try and create those ideas now. Producing practical work will help me encourage myself to complete the other tasks as ill feel inspired. I completed the interview questions however I have not yet managed to create a schedule to do the interviews I think ill do that next week or the week after as I need to be sure on who I want to interview and I also want to have more knowledge and ideas behind me in order to move on to that process of the documentary and project.

Inspiration and idea:



In my documentary I hope to play around with the editing and I Invision someone standing and looking in the mirror but seeing themselves as a different shape/size. Showing body dysmorphia in its true light. I can perhaps use distortion as an editing tool. IF I can't perfect this editing tool, I want to have the mirrors prominent in my documentary.

Using the mirrors as a reflection like we do on a daily basis will play as a cool visual in the film.

BODY DYSMORPHIC DISORDER CAN LOOK LIKE

- Being extremely preoccupied with a perceived flaw in appearance
- Seeking plastic surgery or cosmetic procedures with little satisfaction
- Strong belief that the "flaw" makes you ugly or deformed
- Belief that others take notice of the "flaw" in a negative manner
- Frequently seeking/ needing reassurance about your appearance
- Constantly comparing your appearance to other people
- Feeling anxious, ashamed, and depressed
- Trying to hide or fix the "flaw" with styling, makeup, loose clothes, photo editing, etc.
- Constantly checking yourself in the mirror or avoiding mirrors altogether



UNDERSTANDING BODY DYSMORPHIC DISORDER (BDD)



WHAT IS IT?

Body dysmorphic disorder (BDD), or body dysmorphia, is a mental health condition where a person spends a lot of time worrying about their body image.



MISCONCEPTIONS

Having BDD does not mean you are vain or self-obsessed. BDD can vary in severity from person to person and may make it difficult to go out in public or see other people.



WHO DOES IT AFFECT?

People of any age can develop BDD, but it's most common in teenagers and young adults. It affects both men and women and can cause emotional distress.



YOU MIGHT HAVE BDD IF YOU:

- Obsessively check your appearance in mirrors, or avoid mirrors completely.
- Compare your looks with other people all the time.
- Seek constant reassurance about your appearance and body shape.
- Brushing or styling your hair obsessively all the time.
- Frequently weigh yourself.
- Pick at your skin to make it feel 'smooth'.
- Excessively use tanning beds and/or tanning products.
- Feel as if you need cosmetic surgery to change a part of your body.



TREATMENTS AVAILABLE:

- Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is a form of talking therapy that aims to identify connections between your thoughts, feelings and behaviours.
- Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) are a type of antidepressant. The most commonly used to treat BDD is called fluoxetine.
- You may find different treatments or self-care techniques beneficial, either on their own or alongside other treatments. The Body Dysmorphic Disorder Foundation provides further information about treatments for BDD on its website.

Survey for the public: Findings and statistics.

The survey: <https://forms.gle/Bn6ogb1zaP6SQKTC9>

Survey and findings:

As part of my research, I felt it was essential to include the voices of the public, particularly the current generation of dancers and creatives who are working in the industry. To gather a wide range of perspectives and personal experiences, I chose to conduct a survey rather than individual interviews (my original intention), as it was a more efficient method. A total of 90 dancers and creatives participated, allowing me to reach a broader audience and engage with a diverse community, allowing me to explore different genres within the industry. This approach enriched my research development and helped raise awareness about the documentary I'm creating on this subject. I shared the survey through platforms such as Cardiff Dance and my personal Instagram to maximize visibility and participation.

Survey Theory:

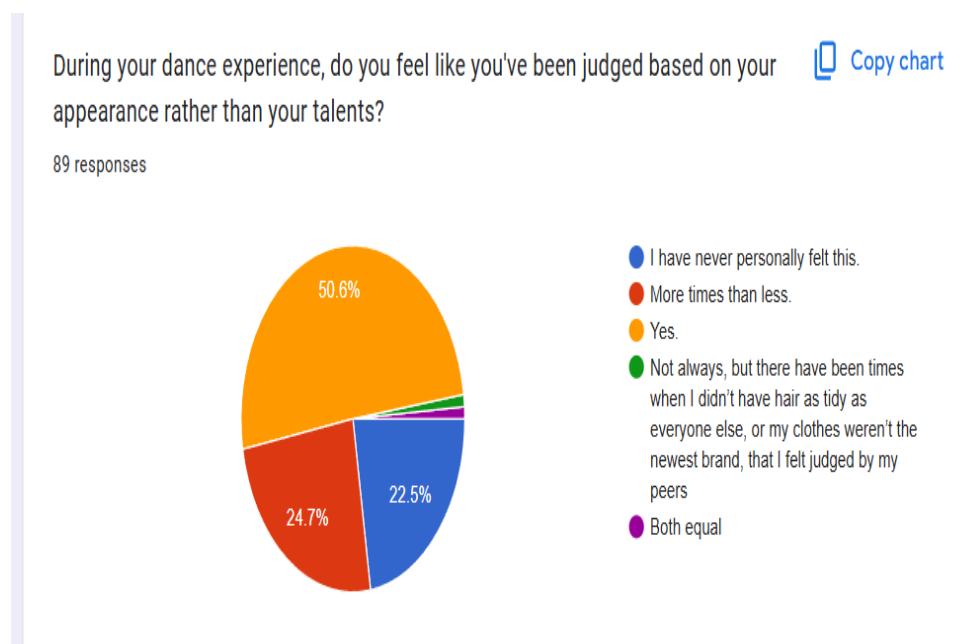
My survey became a valuable research method, particularly during the final stages of my documentary project. Through reviewing other sources and drawing inspiration from similar works, I recognised that surveys are often highlighted as effective tools for collecting both qualitative and quantitative data.

Why is it the correct methodology for this project?

Using a survey as a primary research methodology was highly appropriate for my project, as it enabled me to gather a broad spectrum of perspectives from individuals with varying experiences in the dance industry. Given the sensitive and deeply personal nature of my topic (body image, self-perception, and stereotyping) it was important to collect data in a way that allowed participants to share honestly anonymously. The survey format offered flexibility in responses (each question was optional to answer) and encouraged a level of openness that may not have been achieved through other methods such as interviews. It also allowed me to identify recurring patterns and opinions, which helped to validate my personal observations and shape the final narrative of my documentary. Overall, the survey provided valuable insight into shared experiences and attitudes, making it a key tool in supporting the aims and depth of my research. Below are the findings and final statistics from the survey. A concluding summary is provided at the end to reflect on the overall results and insights gained.

The survey responses revealed that 87.8% of participants (79) identified as female, while the remaining 12.2% (21) identified as male. Although there was an imbalance in gender representation, I found it encouraging that both male and female-identifying individuals engaged with the survey, I had initially anticipated a much smaller scale of male participation based on previous personal experiences. This response inspired my thoughts and demonstrated to me that concerns surrounding body image and stereotyping may be more widely shared across genders, perhaps more than I had expected. Furthermore, 75.6% of respondents indicated that they consider dance as a professional career, while 24.4% view it as a hobby. This diversity in engagement with the dance sector added to the data, capturing insights from both aspiring professionals and recreational dancers helped, as I wanted to compare the industry to a hobby.

One question asked: “During your dance experience, do you feel like you’ve been judged based on your appearance rather than your talent?” The responses were revealing and saddening. While I assumed the responses I’d get, it was still difficult to see. Over half of the respondents (50.6%) answered “yes,” while positively, 22.5% reported never having felt judged in this way. 24.7% indicated that they felt judged based on appearance “more times than not,” These statistics underscore the prevalence of aesthetic judgement in the dance industry and affirm the relevance of this documentary. The data not only reinforced the central themes of my documentary but also offered validation of my own lived experiences, positioning them within a broader community narrative.

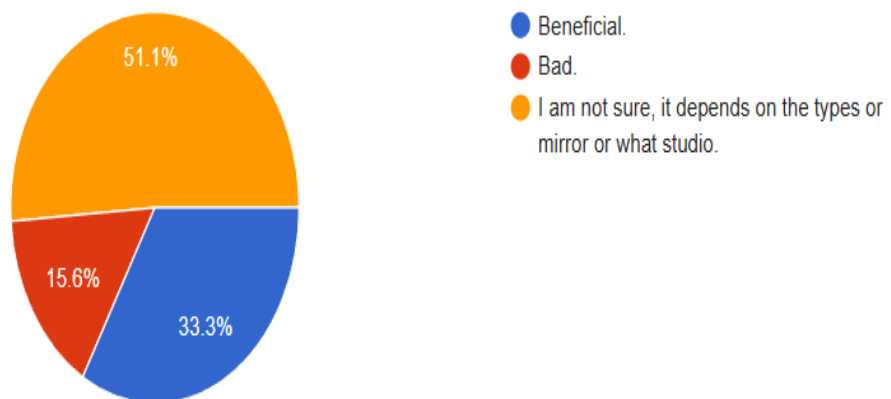


The next question I chose to examine focused on the psychological impact of mirrors in the studio: “Would you believe that mirrors have had a bad or beneficial impact on your mental health as a dancer when training in a studio setting?” The responses revealed a diverse range of experiences and perceptions. A significant 51.1% of participants expressed uncertainty, noting that the impact of mirrors depends on factors such as the type of mirror or the specific studio environment or type of day they are having as an individual. Meanwhile, 15.6% reported a negative impact, and 33.3% indicated a positive effect. This distribution suggests that the role of mirrors in dance training is a complex conversation and holds highly subjective opinions and thoughts. Mirrors appear to influence dancers differently based on individual thoughts for example, self-perception, and the context in which they train. The divided responses reflect an ongoing tension within the dance community between the mirror as a tool for technical refinement and as a potential source of self-criticism or body image concerns.

Would you believe that mirrors have had a bad or beneficial impact on your mental health as a dancer when training in a studio setting?

 [Copy chart](#)

90 responses



“do you believe the dance industry has caused you to be dysmorphic or critical of your weight or specific features?” I would say this would be one of the most important questions of my survey, considering this is what my project is based on. 82.1% said Yes, and that they believe the industry is the place that’s caused them these internal issues, and only 9.5% said they had never been personally affected. Controversially, 8.3% said they understand the reasoning behind the stereotypes in the industry. Honestly, this makes me wish I could have more conversations with those people. I’d love to hear their side and really understand where they’re coming from. Talking to them could give me a completely different perspective, almost the opposite of what my project is aiming to highlight, but still valuable in helping me see the full picture.

My next question felt extremely personal and I was unsure I would get responses however I hoped due to it being anonymous I would. Although optional the full 90 people answered this question, however only 83 answered the previous analysed question. “Have you ever tried to lose or gain weight only to fit in with others who are regarded as having the “perfect dancing body”? Although my personal answer would be yes and that feels completely normal to me; seeing that 84.4% of respondents (a striking 76 people) also said yes hit me hard. It was another clear reminder that this topic is not only relevant but urgently needs to be discussed and acknowledged as a real issue. On the other hand, only 14 people said they hadn’t felt the need to alter their appearance, and I genuinely hope that remains the case for them in the future.

“Do you agree that some styles are correct for having specific criteria, such as ballet, where dancers are required to be “lean” and “petite”?”

58 people said “Dancers should be healthy but healthy needs to be recognised as more than just petite and lean” whilst 28 people said they didn’t agree at all and people should have the freedom to dance and to do the style they wish to do.

Upon asking which style is more accepting, 40.7% said Hip-hop dance, 25.3% said commercial, and 17.6% said contemporary dance. Ballet ranked the lowest voted with 0 votes. This question paved the way for more creative intention and direction behind my documentary, I decided to have a section dedicated to hip hop being the most accepting. This added a sense of uplifting in my documentary so it wasn’t so doom and gloom.

The next question to analyse, “Do you believe that the way people are judged should be changed? Is it time to see past the mirror?” 68.1% said Yes, its time for change, and 15.6% said they hope to be educated thorough my dcoumentary to make a decision.

The next stage of my survey, I left an open box where the respondents could suggest ideas or offer their opinions on this subject. I had a lot of replies that inspired thought and intention behind my documentary, one that specifically had an impact would be

“Dancers should be considered as athletes who specialise in an art. It should be understood that we have to be strong and athletic to keep up with the demands of the sport, such as dancing for a long period of time, have the strength to hold our legs up and be able to be light on our feet. But this does not need to be pushed as being stick thin with bones showing. Dancers will be muscly. Dancers should be safe in what we do, this includes not being pushed to lose weight so that we lose our periods and normal body functions but also includes only suggesting people to lose weight *if it is dangerous for them to continue being the weight they are*. We should celebrate what we can all achieve and strive for greatness by focusing on realistic cardio and strength goals, not on aesthetics.”

This made me pause and reflect, as I do agree to some extent. While the core message of my project is to promote the idea of "talent over aesthetics," I can understand the reasoning behind certain industry expectations. That said, the way these expectations are currently enforced cannot continue. The belief that dancers need a strong body and high stamina is valid, as it directly relates to safety and performance. However, the focus of my movement is to challenge the penalisation of dancers based on weight, body shape, or size. As Tori Johns powerfully stated, “We are going to miss out on a lot of talent if all we look at is weight.” This quote really resonated with me and helped solidify my message. It also made me think carefully about how I present my documentary—how I can push for change while remaining open to differing opinions. The comment itself presents both positive and critical perspectives, but both are equally important and appreciated in shaping a well-rounded discussion

Do you have any ideas for how change can be implemented?

37 responses

Long train journey so Here's a few Ideas:

I. Educating and Empowering Dancers:

- * Focus on Functionality over Aesthetics: Emphasize the physical demands of dance – the strength, power, endurance, and flexibility required for complex movements. Frame training and physique in terms of what the body can do rather than just how it looks.

- * Strength and Conditioning Education: Integrate comprehensive strength and conditioning programs into dance training. Educate dancers on the benefits of building muscle for injury prevention, improved technique, and enhanced performance.

- * Nutrition Education: Provide dancers with accurate and accessible information about fueling their bodies for optimal performance and recovery. Emphasize balanced nutrition rather than restrictive dieting.

- * Body Positivity and Self-Acceptance Workshops: Facilitate discussions and workshops that promote body positivity, self-acceptance, and a healthy relationship with their bodies. Challenge internalised biases and societal pressures.

- * Highlighting Diverse Body Types: Showcase successful dancers with various body types who demonstrate exceptional strength, athleticism, and artistry. This helps to broaden the definition of a "dance body."

- * Open Dialogue and Safe Spaces: Create environments where dancers feel comfortable discussing body image concerns and challenging harmful stereotypes without judgment.

- * Leadership by Example: Dance educators and choreographers should model healthy attitudes towards their own bodies and avoid making comments that reinforce the "thin ideal."

All ways we can improve from this:

Functionality over Aesthetics.

Strength and conditioning.

Nutrition, Injury Prevention.

Self acceptance workshops.

Do you have any ideas for how change can be implemented?

37 responses

II. Transforming the Dance Community:

- * Curriculum Reform: Integrate strength and conditioning, injury prevention, and nutrition education into dance curricula at all levels.
- * Diversifying Casting and Representation: Intentionally cast dancers with a range of body types in performances. This visually challenges the narrow definition of a dance body for both audiences and aspiring dancers.
- * Choreographic Choices: Choreographers can explore movement that emphasizes power, dynamic shifts, and groundedness, showcasing strength rather than solely focusing on lightness and elongation.
- * Language and Feedback: Consciously shift the language used in rehearsals and feedback. Focus on movement quality, strength, and dynamic execution rather than solely on aesthetic lines and thinness.
- * Professional Development for Educators: Provide ongoing training for dance teachers on topics like body image, healthy training practices, and how to foster a positive body culture in their studios.
- * Promoting Dancer Well-being: Prioritize the overall well-being of dancers, including mental health support and resources to address body image issues and eating disorders.
- * Collaboration with Sports Science Professionals: Engage with experts in sports science, nutrition, and sports psychology to inform training methodologies and educational initiatives.

III. Influencing Public Perception:

- * Media Representation: Actively engage with media outlets to promote a more diverse and accurate portrayal of dancers. Highlight their athleticism and strength in interviews, articles, and visual media.
- * Social Media Campaigns: Utilize social media platforms to showcase the strength and athleticism of

Do you have any ideas for how change can be implemented?

37 responses

- * Social Media Campaigns: Utilize social media platforms to showcase the strength and athleticism of dancers through dynamic movement videos, behind-the-scenes glimpses of training, and personal stories. Challenge hashtags and narratives that promote unhealthy ideals.
- * Educating Audiences: Provide program notes, pre-show talks, or online content that educates audiences about the physical demands of dance and celebrates the strength and athleticism of the performers.
- * Highlighting the "Athlete" in Dancer: Frame dancers as athletes who require rigorous training, discipline, and physical prowess. Use language that emphasizes their athleticism in marketing and promotional materials.
- * Partnerships with Sports Organizations: Explore collaborations with sports organizations to cross-promote the athleticism inherent in both dance and sports.
- * Challenging Stereotypes in Popular Culture: Actively speak out against stereotypical portrayals of dancers in film, television, and other forms of popular culture.

Key Principles for Long-Term Change:

- * Consistency: This is not a quick fix but requires sustained effort and commitment across all levels.
- * Collaboration: Effective change requires collaboration between dancers, educators, choreographers, artistic directors, media professionals, and the wider community.
- * Inclusivity: Ensure that the movement towards a "strong and athletic" ideal doesn't create a new narrow definition of the dance body. Celebrate the diversity of strengths and abilities within the dance world.
- * Focus on Health: Ultimately, the goal is to promote a healthy and sustainable approach to dance training and body image, prioritizing the well-being and longevity of dancers' careers.

In conclusion, the strong level of engagement with the survey indicates that this topic resonates with a wider audience than I imagined which means this documentary has the potential to reach and impact many within the dance and creative communities. It reinforces the importance of addressing these issues and highlights the urgency for meaningful change. While over 60% of respondents identified as female which reflected a common demographic within the dance industry, it was particularly valuable to include male perspectives. Their responses suggest that similar experiences and challenges may be shared across genders which I was surprised by during the process, and it emphasized the need for a more inclusive and comprehensive conversation around body image and mental well-being in dance. It was highly engaged with and had a positive impact on the development of my process and the progress I made. It made me pause and reflect on my decisions that I was making and really thought about the intention behind everything I was offering. In Reflection, this Survey served its purpose and gave me the knowledge in regards to how people feel in the current dance industry in relation to body image and stereotypes.

Scheduling.

for myself:

Activity	Date	Location	Time
Interviews.	24 th april	Studio theatre	11 am for set-up.
Interviews	25 th april	Studio Theatre	11am for set-up
Rehearsal	28 th April	Studio	6.30pm
Filming	30 th April	Studio theatre	12.30- 1.45pm
Filming	1 st of May	Studio theatre	9-11.45am.

For the dancers: notes Please Turn up to both tech and filming, with make up on (minimal, natural please) Will send you a debrief on what clothes to wear. Please arrive 15 minutes early so we can start on time and be warm and ready to go. Thankyou for working so hard with me on this!

Activity	Date	Location	Time
Rehearsal NO filming or tech (no make up or anything needed)	28 th of April. Please revisit the video before rehearsals.	Will confirm what studio.	6.30pm
Rehearsal Filming/tech	Wednesday 30 th April	Studio Theatre	12.30- 1.45pm
Filming / Tech	Thursday 1 st may	Studio Theatre	9am- 11.45am

Ask the artist that I am interviewing to turn up 15mins before, to brief them and get them to sign the paperwork to have their permission for the documentary and be able to give them all correct information that is required.

Interviews:

Who	Date	Location	Time
Tommy Boost (Davies)	25/04/25 Friday.	Studio Theatre.	12pm.
Liam Wallace	24/04/25 Thursday	Studio Theatre	12pm.
Tori Johns		Studio Theatre	
Darnelle Williams	25/04/025 friday	Studio Theatre	1.30pm.

Supporting videos and
pictures as evidence for
the rehearsal process.

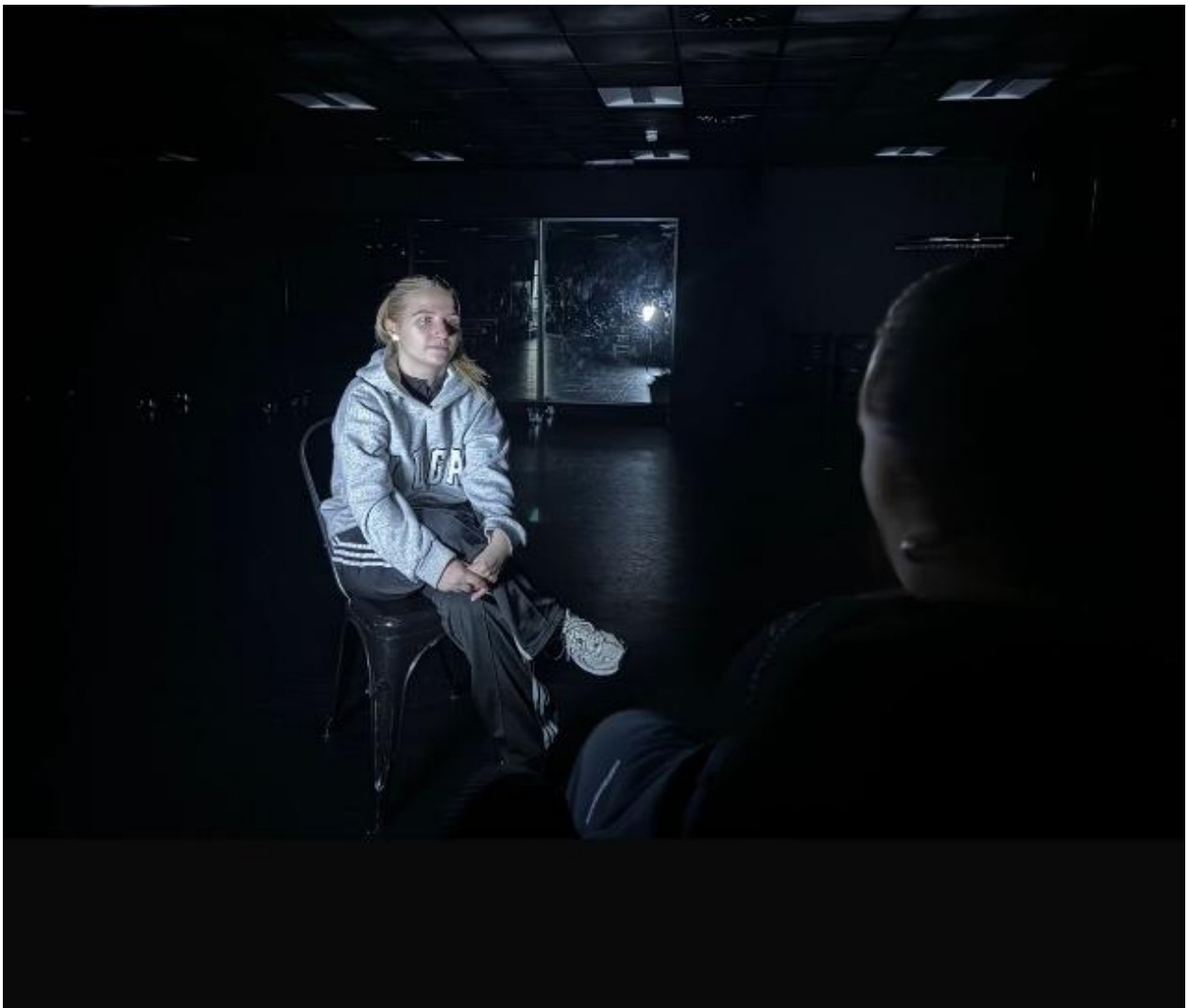


Interview setup:

Mirrors in background – Relates back to some of my research and relates the whole documentary back to the root issue, as it's set up in a dance studio.

Dark lighting- Setting a serious tone- Almost like ITV news or a Net-flix Documentary.

One camera that shoots the person who is speaking.

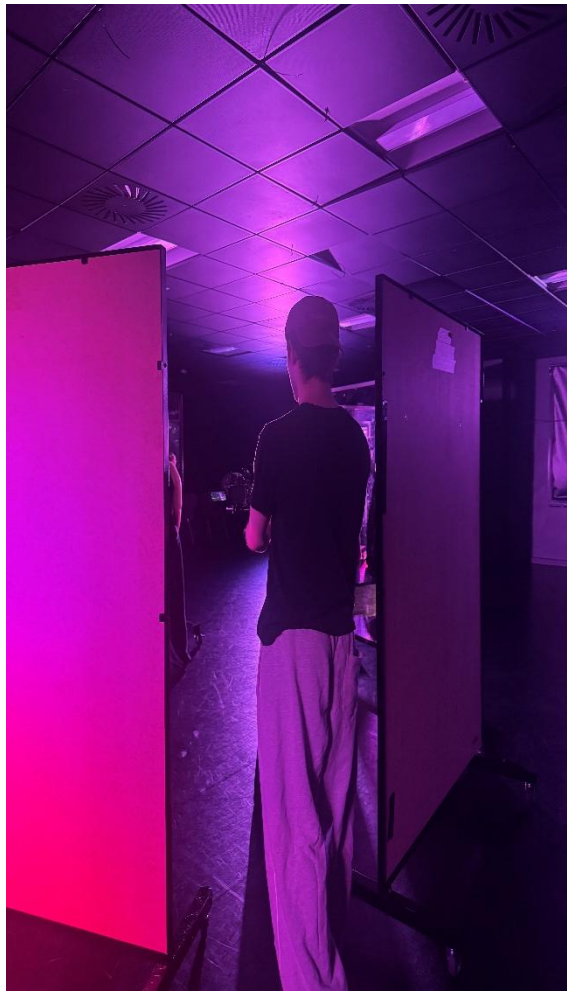


Video Links from rehearsals and tech days:

<https://youtu.be/4BQCzlytwr0>

https://youtu.be/vi_0Fi6hET4?si=8oY350f0f9XbyGlZ

<https://youtu.be/UZHXXKGnI3q0>





NOTES FOR TECH AND EDITING:

Lighting and filming notes:

Direction of the filming session to enable everything being done.

- Film the first three sections with the mirror (dark but yellow warm lighting and bouncing or glaring off the mirrors.
- Film Armelle solo – pan around in send out of the circle – lighting can be like blue or hint of green, mood lighting colours.
- Record each solo part
- Record jesse commercial piece
- Then quickly into ballet clothes to ensure we get that footage at the ballet barres/
- Ghosty lighting/ set serious tone.
- Get footage of me directing and giving any corrections.
- Pink – green- blue- and white lighting.

It was suggested I make sure my documentary is as academic as my journal looks and to include research and findings within that, to embed it in the documentary, using voice over or text.

SONGS:

The vow

Family affair

Pink n White

Scars to your beautiful.

Voice overs to record for the documentary:

“Beyond the Mirror is a powerful call to action. Inspired by true stories and undeniable facts, this documentary shines a light on the silent battle with body image in the dance world. It uncovers the pain behind the perfection and dares to imagine a future where strength, diversity, and authenticity take centre stage. This is more than a film. It’s the beginning of a movement, and hope for change.”

As part of my research, I believed it was essential to amplify the voices of the public — particularly those of the current generation of dancers and creatives working within the industry. To gain authentic insights, I conducted a survey, receiving 90 responses that offered valuable and diverse perspectives:

When asked, ‘During your dance experience, have you felt judged more for your appearance than your talent?’ the responses were both revealing and heartbreaking. 50.6% answered ‘yes,’ while 24.7% reported feeling judged based on appearance ‘more times than not.’ Only 22.5% said

they had never felt this way. These statistics exposed a troubling reality in the dance industry — one that demands urgent attention and change.

When asked, ‘Which dance style feels the most accepting?’ 40.1% of respondents chose hip-hop, followed by 24.4% for commercial and 17.8% for contemporary. While other styles received votes, hip-hop stood out as the leading choice — celebrated for its sense of freedom, inclusivity, and acceptance across all areas

The term “flaws” is one that dancers frequently encounter, whether in relation to technical execution, artistic expression, or physical appearance. In a dance training context, a "flaw" might refer to a technical imperfection, such as a sickled foot in Ballet, or a stylistic presentation. Equally, dancers are often subjected to scrutiny regarding their bodies, attire, or personal aesthetics, further expanding what constitutes a "flaw."

Prior to engaging in this research, I had considered body dysmorphia more as a term used to describe episodes of low body confidence, particularly among dancers. However, learning that it’s classified as a recognised mental health disorder highlighted the severity of the issue and its psychological implications.

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