

The Impact of Mirrors on the Female Dancer's Body Image

Cara M. Paley

Introduction

- Body image dissatisfaction among female dancers is a well-documented phenomenon (Danis et al., 2016; Radell et al., 2017; Zoletić & Duraković-Belko, 2009).
- Training in a mirrored environment has been shown to negatively impact female dancers' thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of their bodies (Radell et al., 2004, 2017).

Purpose

- The purpose of this study was to explore ways in which the use of mirrors, within various forms of dance, influence body image among adult female dancers with 10 or more years of dance training.
- A secondary goal of this study was to investigate dancers' behavioural body image in regard to eating patterns and habits.

Methods

- Body image satisfaction was assessed using Cash's (2018) 34-item Multidimensional Body-Self Relations Questionnaire-Appearance Scales (MBSRQ-AS).

Figure 1

MBSRQ-AS Excerpt

	1	2	3	4	5
	Definitely Disagree	Mostly Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Mostly Agree	Definitely Agree
_____ 1.	Before going out in public, I always notice how I look.				
_____ 2.	I am careful to buy clothes that will make me look my best.				
_____ 3.	My body is sexually appealing.				
_____ 4.	I constantly worry about being or becoming fat.				
_____ 5.	I like my looks just the way they are.				

- In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants in order to gain insight into the lived experiences and perceptions of dancers regarding mirror usage, body image, and corresponding eating behaviours.

Results

Table 1

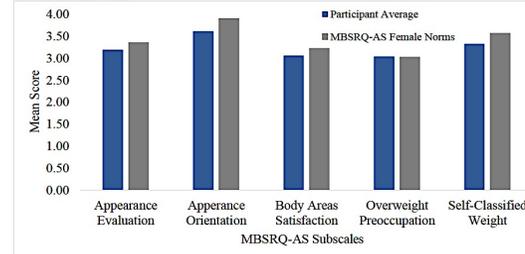
Average Scores Obtained by Dancers on MBSRQ-AS Subscales Compared to MBSRQ-AS Gender-Based Norms

MBSRQ-AS Subscale	Participant Average	MBSRQ-AS Female Norms
Appearance Evaluation	3.19	3.36
Appearance Orientation	3.61	3.91
Body Areas Satisfaction	3.06	3.23
Overweight Preoccupation	3.04	3.03
Self-Classified Weight	3.33	3.57

Note. The average scores obtained by female dancers in this study are compared to the MBSRQ-AS female norms for subscales of Appearance Evaluation, Appearance Orientation, Body Areas Satisfaction, Overweight Preoccupation, and Self-Classified Weight. Subscales are scored using a five-point rating scale.

Figure 2

Average Scores Obtained by Dancers on MBSRQ-AS Subscales Compared to MBSRQ-AS Gender-Based Norms



Note. The average scores obtained by female dancers in this study (represented in blue) are compared to the MBSRQ-AS female norms (represented in grey) for subscales assessed in the MBSRQ-AS.



Theme 1: Costumes/attire, instructors, and mirrors have the ability to increase as well as decrease body image satisfaction.

"[The mirror] could be a double-edged sword, it could be great, could be not good, depending on how you view yourself that day and your mindset" (dancer 2).

Theme 2: Mirrors in the dance training environment are thought to enhance skill acquisition as well as body surveillance.

"I really like having a mirror, like I can be quite visual when I'm learning, so I like being able to see things and adjust accordingly" (dancer 1).

"Does my tummy look flat? Do I look good in this outfit? Do I look good in the way I'm standing? It would always be automatically gone right to my midsection. . . that's always where my eyes would go first and once I was happy with how that was looking, then it would just kind of branch out from there" (dancer 2).

"We're always looking at the mirror. . . for hours on end each day. I always like to look in a mirror to see how I look and I'm very, like, OCD and picky" (dancer 4).

Theme 3: Eating (or not eating) for dance performance or to obtain the 'ideal dancer's body'?

"If I'm eating healthier and like eating more protein and whatnot, I just feel better which kind of makes me dance better" (dancer 3).

"I would not eat for like, a few hours before I went to dance. And even when I was at dance, I would rarely take like a snack break. Or drink a lot of water, enough water, just because I was worried about like bloating. And then like looking like I was like, you know, had a big belly or something" (dancer 4).

Discussion

- Quantitative data reveals the female dancers in this study generally experience slightly greater body image dissatisfaction than females within the general population.
- Qualitative findings demonstrate the relationship between mirror usage within the dance environment and body image is one that is complex and non-linear for dancers in this study.

Conclusion

- This study suggests it is not mirrors in and of themselves which create body image dissatisfaction among dancers. Instead, mirrors within the dance training environment have the potential to amplify underlying thoughts and feelings one already has of their body, while also influencing behaviours associated with appearance, such as eating patterns.
- Findings are limited by this study's small sample size and are not generalizable to the entire female dance population.
- Future studies should draw upon a larger number of dancers and compare body image satisfaction among dance styles. Additionally, related research should look to extend investigation beyond the female gender to consider the experiences of individuals who identify as male and gender non-binary.

References

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