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 **My Life As A Dancer Linear Version Autoethnography**

An autoethnography is a form of self-reflection and is writing that explains a researcher's personal experience on a situation, while explaining a cultural experience as well. Carolyn Ellis is a respected writer in this field and her work is revered by individuals throughout the world.  She defines autoethnography as, “research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political." My work on my life as a dancer is similar to Ellis' research as I am part of the study. I grew up as a dancer and this project is a personal experience. This project also relates to Ellis' book since the primary groups of people are performance artists. Dance is a performance art and there is a slight connection between the art of dance and performance artists.

My autoethnography is about growing up as a dancer and the influence it has had on my life. I have danced since I was two years old and the impact the art has had on my adolescence and life is enormous. I have danced up until college and continue to miss the sport terribly. This autoethnography will explore the obstacles I faced as a dancer. It will also contain interviews from my mom and her perspective on being a "dance mom", and two friends who have danced with me my entire life. Authoethnography's are filled with interviews and I believe these three interviewees capture the importance of my life as a dancer.

The first interview I conducted on this subject of dance was my sister Rachel. Rachel and I grew up as dancers. However, as we grew older we both found our niche. I stuck with dance while Rachel moved onto sports, such as basketball and softball. I conducted a video chat interview since Rachel is still at home. This stress-free environment allowed Rachel to give me the most honest and direct responses.

We started catching up on her life and her day at school. Rachel and I talk every single day and are always updated on each others lives. I decided to interview her as she represents an individual who danced for several years and then decided to quit.

I first asked Rachel to tell me about her life as a dancer. She told me that she started dancing at age 4. She would show up to her Saturday dance practices with her tutu and pink ballet shoes in hand. My mom and I would watch her through the window and she learned how to dance. "As I got older, I decided to take more serious dance classes." Rachel started dancing two times a week. She was involved on a team what prepared young dancers for the competition world. "Pre-comp gave me a basis before I experienced a more competitive world." The following year Rachel then decided to try something more intense. She joined the competition team for her age group. "I was able to meet new girls with the same love for dance that I had." The girls enjoyed spending their time together.

I then asked Rachel how dance affected her social life in middle and high school. She said, "It was difficult to find the balance between dance and friends. I would often find myself missing out on events to go to practice or because we had a competition." As Rachel grew up, she explored other sports other than dance. "I realized dance was not the sport for me." She started getting involved in other activities such as basketball and softball. "I continue to play these sports and hope to play them even in college next year."

The next question I asked Rachel was, "why did you quit dance?" She told me the reason she quit was because she did not have enough time for it anymore and it wasn't in her top priorities. She valued other activities such as basketball and softball and believed these sports would enable her to be a key component on the team. "Dance just wasn't for me" she explained. "I wasn't that good and I found two sports that I was good at." She explained to me how it made sense for her to quit dance.

I asked her if she regrets her decision and how basketball and softball have shaped her as a person. She said, "I most definitely do not regret my decision to quit dance. I believe quitting allowed me to focus on what is most important to me. I found two sports I am really passionate about and can potentially have a future with." Rachel said how the friends and experiences she's had on these two teams are unforgettable. She was even nominated to be captain of both teams her senior year of high school. "This had provided me with such valuable lessons I will bring with me to college next year and the work force in the future." Rachel explained to me how she learned how to be a leader, communicate with others, and never give up. "Our softball team has a pretty bad record this season, however, I am determined to get back up to the top and never quit." This optimist attitude is what she has learned with being on sports teams. "Dance wouldn't have provided me with the same leadership experience and friendships as softball and basketball have. So, overall, I do not regret my decision and believe I made the right choice."

I then interviewed Ilana, my co-captain during my senior year of kickline. I chose to interview Ilana as we share several of the same feelings related to dance and our high school dance team. She danced with me at Jam, our dance studio, for as long as I can remember. We were both also apart of the Hills East Dixettes, the prestigious dance team at our high school. Senior year, Ilana and I were both named co-captains for the 2012-2013 school year. We were thrilled, however,knew this would be a challenge.

I conducted the interview online since Ilana is studying at Binghamton University in New York. I figured conducting this interview in her room would be a comfortable environment for Ilana. We started by casually catching up on one anthers lives and then went into deep conversation regarding dance and kick line.

I first asked her to tell me about her life as a competition dancer. She stated, "it was a completely different childhood." She talked about how a lot of her childhood friends were athletes and involved in school sports such as soccer or basketball and she was always known as the dancer. I completely agreed as I was one of the few who was in her shoes. She reminded me of the long, hard hours that went into competition dance. We would have practice several times throughout the week for several hours. Doing homework and catching up with friends was definitely difficult, she stated. There were times my social calendar was limited due to dance. I would have practice on Friday nights and was not able to go out with friends or celebrate peoples birthdays. She concluded her opinion on competition dance by stating that she wouldn't change it for the world and that it has truly shaped the person she is today.

The next question I asked Ilana was, "how were you able to integrate competition dance into your high school schedule along with kickline?" She really needed time to think about this question. We both had very similar answers to this! She started by saying how arduous it was to do both competition dance and kickline. "There were several times I would leave kickline hysterically crying complaining how I wanted to quit." "I just didn't have enough time to do it all!" I found this an enormous issue in my high school experience as well. There was simply not enough time for dance, school work, friends, and kickline. It was very difficult to find the balance between all the activities a teenager wants to do, she stated. There were times I debated quitting either kickline or competition. However, I knew quitters never get anywhere in life and I remained on both teams until senior year.

I then asked her, "how can you explain being captain of the Dixettes?" "Indescribable", was the first word that came out of her mouth. I completely agreed. This experience was unlike anything we've ever experienced and are forever grateful. "It has taught me so many valuable lessons such as friendship, commitment, positivity, and creativity." She told me how she had the ability to interact with girls she never thought she would have friendships with. Her personal creativity was also put to the test. As captain, she choreographed dances to perform and had the responsibility to teach the younger girls on the team. "I felt like I had a huge impact on the team as a whole." I agreed! We worked long hours meeting and discussing how to increase enthusiasm within the team. Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday practices were no longer dreaded, but looked forward to. We wanted to make every girl special and have a voice. We both believed we did just that. Everyone was able to voice their opinions and the skills we learned as captains will carry with us for our entire lives. She stated that the most memorable experience was after our pep rally dance when the entire audience gave us a standing ovation. Teachers, students, and administration were all in awe as we completed our routine. "The work that goes into creating such a routine is often overlooked, but from this applause it was evident that the work that went in was much appreciated." We couldn't stop talking about the endless memories we had at kickline. "Those were the times I wouldn't change for the world. They made me a better person and taught me such valuable lessons such as time management and dedication." These skills we will carry with us into the work force and throughout our entire lives. It is thanks to kickline that we have matured as individuals learned such vital lessons.

I figured interviewing my mom would give a unique perspective into my dance career. She has been with me through it all, starting with dance at age two all the way to kickline at age 18. My mom and I never really sat down and discussed how bring a dancer influenced her life. It was interesting to see from her perspective what it was like having a daughter who danced.

The first question I asked my mom was, "why did you choose dance for me?" "It's actually a funny story" she said. She explained how at first she enrolled me in soccer and my sister in dance. Every Saturday morning my sister, Rachel, would attend dance class. I would stare at the girls in class in awe and wish that was me. Every Saturday my mom would bring me to the dane studio to watch Rachel and her friends. I was so fascinated that I would go home and teach myself the routine to "I'm Getting Married In The Morning." It was days before the recital and the dance teacher, Michele, called my mom over to speak to her. She said, "Denise, would Alex be willing to participate in the recital? One of the girls just dropped out and we have an uneven number of performers." My mom did not know what to say. She asked me and I said yes without hesitation! This was my chance to perform in front of a large audience, something I've longed to do for a very long time. This is how I started to dance.

I then asked her "how does it feel being a dance mom?" She laughed as the first thing that came to her mind was the lifetime show. "It's definitely much different than the show I might add." She explained to me how it is a high-maintenance sport and is very costly. There are charges for classes, extra practices, costumes, and professional pictures. "I loved watching you on stage. Your energy and enthusiasm lit up the room. That is probably why you had a solo and received several special awards." She told me that similar to my dance friends, she too made dance mom friends. "Being a dance mom was definitely social." She explained how she and the other girls' moms would go out for dinner and drinks, as well as with the choreographers. "I became close with several interesting woman I wouldn't have met otherwise." This is a sport that unlike soccer, requires much more than moms being responsible for bringing the end of the game snacks or cheering on their team. It requires energy and love for your child, and the maintenance that goes into raising a dancer is extremely tiring.

The next question I asked her was, "are you happy that I stuck with dance?" "How could I not be" she cried! "It's something you love and you're good at." Although she would have loved for me to keep singing and acting, she knew dance was always embedded in my genes. "The leadership roles you've acquired from being a dancer are incredible and have taught you such valuable lessons no other experience would have taught." My mom loved watching me practice in my room or at the studio and was fascinated with the choreography I would create for the girls on kickline. "The relationships you've formed and the bonds you've created are unforgettable and have shaped who you are as a person. It is with this that I would not change the face that you grew up as a dancer." She was extremely happy that I stuck with dance and found an activity I was passionate about.

We then discussed dance at Emory. She was disappointed that I am not enrolled in any dance classes or apart of the Emory Dance Company. She understands that it's a huge commitment and that freshman year is hard enough. However, within the next years, she hopes I start participating and regain my passion and love for dance.

Dance has been around for thousands upon thousands of years. There are so many different variations and genres of dance, that the art is becoming extremely popular. Several scientific research studies have been done on the correlation between eating disorders and dancers.

The BBC released an article titled, "Ballet and eating disorders: 'Unspoken Competitiveness' adds pressure to be thin." This article is about Victoria Ferguson's experience and desire to be thin. This is widespread among dancers who feel a certain pressure to look a specific way. Ferguson put a strain on herself that eventually developed into an eating disorder. She states how there is an unspoken competitiveness between dancers and this makes eating disorders more prevalent amongst dancers, similar to the modeling industry.

The prevalence of eating disorders is 10 times higher than in non-dancers. Victoria falls right into this category and is apart of the 1.6 million others in the UK who are affected by eating disorders. Victoria was a dancer her entire life. She developed bulimia at age 15 and her obsession with her weight only got worse once she joined a professional dance school. Several studies and experiments have been conducted on the correlation between eating disorders and dancers. There is a strong positive correlation between the two. Eating Disorders Hope published an article stating, "ballet dancers have a significantly higher risk of developing eating disorders than their non-dancing peers." Perfectionism plays a key role in the relationship between ballet and eating disorders. Dancers are there on worst enemies, but the teachers play a large role too. There are several teachers who fire dancers who are not skinny enough. This provokes eating disorders among dancers.

Switching gears, the art of dance has really changed throughout the years. Today, the public thinks of competition dancers and instantly thinks of Lifetime's "Dance Moms." Speaking from experience, competition dance is nothing like the show. I think it is a disgrace that how the public views dancers and their moms is based off of the show.

Being a dancer my entire life has definitely left its footprint. I have learned several valuable lessons that I hope to carry with me for as long as I can. Teamwork, dedication, and communication are three important skills I have acquired throughout my life as a dancer. Teamwork is an effective characteristic that will come in handy in the work force. It is important individuals know how to work well with others and that there is no "I" in team. This cliché phrase is true and imperative to the working world. There are always times where individuals of a company have to work together and collaborate ideas in order to carry out the most effective plan. I believe that being on dance teams my entire life has taught me how to be a good team player and incorporate everyones ideas to best complete the final task. Dedication is something dance has also taught me. There were several obstacles with my high school dance team, such as getting new coaches and girls wanting to quit. I remained loyal to the team and the Dixettes and never quit. Even when times got tough junior year of high school, I stayed on the team when several of my peers decided they had enough. This lesson has taught me to never give up on anything I do. I have recently used this lesson related to school. Although some of my classes are extremely difficult, I have been raised to never quit. I remained in these arduous classes and worked hard to overcome this challenge. Lastly, communication is a skill I have learned from being a dancer. I have learned how to effectively communicate with older individuals, such as dance teachers, coaches, and administration, as well as girls my age and younger. Learning to communicate is perhaps the most important skill I was able to learn from dance. As captain, I had to communicate with the girls on the team, the coaches, and administration. This has increased my public speaking and social skills, which are vital to my future. Dance has truly taught me several valuable lessons and skills that I aspire to possess in my future.