

## Comparison in Ballet:

### Objectives:

- Understand the psychological impact of comparison
- Identify personal comparison patterns and triggers
- Learn evidence-based strategies to manage comparison
- Develop a healthier relationship with self-evaluation

### PART 1: Introduction

- "When do you find yourself comparing most in ballet?"
- "How does it feel physically and emotionally?"

Comparison is a universal human tendency, especially in aesthetic and competitive environments like ballet. Even professional dancers experience it.

### PART 2: Psychoeducation

#### The Psychology of Comparison

##### Why We Compare:

- **Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954):** We naturally evaluate ourselves by comparing to others
- In ballet, this is intensified by: mirrors, rankings, casting, body-focused culture, and perfectionism

##### Two Types of Comparison:

1. **Upward Comparison - Comparing to someone "better"**
  - Can motivate OR discourage
  - Often leads to feelings of inadequacy
2. **Downward Comparison - Comparing to someone you perceive as "less skilled"**
  - May temporarily boost confidence
  - Can create unhealthy competition or false security

##### The Comparison Trap:

- Focuses on outcomes rather than process
- Ignores individual differences (body type, training history, injury, etc.)
- Creates a fixed mindset rather than growth mindset
- Can lead to: anxiety, decreased motivation, burnout, disordered eating, injury

**The "Spotlight Effect":** Dancers often overestimate how much others notice their perceived flaws. Research shows we're far more critical of ourselves than others are of us.

"Can you think of a time when comparison helped you? When did it hurt you?"

### **PART 3: Self-Reflection Activity**

#### **Worksheet 1: My Comparison Patterns**

Complete individually, then discuss in pairs if comfortable.

#### **Questions:**

1. I most often compare myself when:
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
1. I compare myself most to:
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
1. The body parts/skills I compare most are:
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
1. When I compare, I usually feel:
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
1. My comparison thoughts sound like:
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
1. On a scale of 1-10, how much does comparison affect my enjoyment of dance?

**Identify Your Triggers:** Check all that apply:

- ☐ Looking in the mirror
- ☐ Seeing casting lists
- ☐ Watching others perform
- ☐ Social media (Instagram, TikTok)
- ☐ Before/during class
- ☐ When learning new choreography
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### **PART 4: Strategies & Skills**

#### **Evidence-Based Strategies to Manage Comparison**

##### **1. Shift from Comparison to Curiosity**

- Instead of "Why can't I do that?" try "What can I learn from watching them?"

- Reframe: "She's better than me" → "She's been training longer / has different strengths"

## 2. Practice Internal Focus

- Process Goals vs. Outcome Goals
  - Less helpful: "Be the best in class"
  - More helpful: "Focus on my port de bras quality today"
- Use personal bests and progress tracking

## 3. Limit Social Media Exposure

- Ballet social media shows highlight reels, not reality
- Consider time limits or taking breaks during vulnerable times

## 4. Cultivate Self-Compassion

- Talk to yourself like you'd talk to a friend
- Acknowledge difficulty without harsh judgment
- Remember: struggle is part of growth

## 5. Celebrate Different Strengths

- Ballet isn't one-dimensional
- Some excel in technique, others in artistry, musicality, or performance quality
- Your unique qualities are valuable

## 6. Create a "Comparison Circuit Breaker"

- Notice the thought: "I'm comparing"
- Take 3 deep breaths
- Return attention to YOUR body and movement
- Use a mantra: "My journey is my own" or "I am enough"

## Practice Exercise: Reframing

Work through examples together:

- "She has perfect turnout and I don't" → *"I'm working on strengthening my hip rotators. Her body is built differently than mine, and that's okay."*
- "Everyone got that combination except me" → *"This is challenging for me right now. I'll ask questions and practice. Everyone learns at different speeds."*

## PART 5: Action Planning

### Worksheet 2: My Personal Action Plan

This week, I will try:

1. One comparison trigger I'll work on:
2. One strategy I'll practice:

3. **A self-compassion phrase I can use:**
4. **A personal process goal for this week:**
5. **Someone I can talk to when comparison feels overwhelming:**

**Self-Compassion Check-in:** Rate yourself daily on how you spoke to yourself (1-10, where 10 is very kind)

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun

## **PART 6: Closing**

### **Key Takeaways**

- **Comparison is normal, but it doesn't have to control your experience**
- **Your worth as a dancer isn't determined by how you measure up to others**
- **Focus on YOUR growth, YOUR artistry, YOUR journey**
- **Self-compassion and process-oriented goals are powerful tools**

### **Closing Thought**

*"Dance is not a competition with others. It's a conversation with yourself, with music, with space. The only version of yourself to compare to is who you were yesterday."*