

## The Problem with Perfection

It's 6:30 in the morning. My alarm goes off, same time as always. I reluctantly roll out of bed and make my way to the bathroom. Before I commence my daily routine of brushing my teeth and washing my face, I quickly throw my hair into a bun. As I look at the embarrassingly messy bun in the mirror, I am brought back to a time when I would get scolded for looking so unpresentable. My dance teacher loved to remind us that, "A dancer's foremost job is to look perfect at any given time." I glance in the mirror again and laugh at how ridiculous that sounds. But as an eight year old, I wholeheartedly believed her.

With my transition from recreational to competitive dance, I also made the transition from studio three to studio one. The first thing I noticed about studio one was the startling number of mirrors. We were told they would be great "tools" on our journey to perfection. Turns out they were more of a gateway to a life filled with self-deprecating habits. Mirrors quickly became my greatest enemy.

Ballet class was the worst. When little girls fantasize of becoming ballerinas, as I once did, I now feel obligated to tell them it isn't quite as magical as it may seem. The reality is, you pay people to nitpick every detail about you, and, when they aren't doing it, you're expected to do it yourself. Your foot will never be pointed enough. Your leg will never be straight enough. Your head angle will always be off by at least five degrees. And all of these critiques are constantly placed right in front of you on a shiny platter that we refer to as a mirror.

Out of the five mirrors that conjoined across the front of the studio, there was one in particular that ever so slightly elongated the reflection... "the skinny mirror". The skinny mirror was everyone's favorite. There would often be arguments regarding who gets the privilege of standing in front of that magical mirror. Seeing as I was significantly younger than most of my peers, I didn't initially understand why. However, I quickly came to understand that, in an environment where you are constantly reminded of your flaws, it's only natural to search for an outlet which makes you feel good about yourself. The type of mirror didn't matter to me personally, each and every one made me appear just as marred as the last. It was as if I was constantly staring into the same type of distorted mirror you would find at a carnival. I had completely convinced myself that I would never look the way a ballerina should, even in the "skinny mirror".

By my teenage years, I found myself constantly looking into my bathroom mirror, searching for any imperfection I could amend. But instead, all I could see was a young girl who had lost any sense of confidence she once had. At this point, I began to recognize the unhealthy habits that dance had instilled in me. The point of competitive dance is to compete against *other* dancers, so how did *I* end up becoming my biggest competitor? And when did perfection become my main goal?

I now understand that perfection isn't attainable, and that will never change. My outlook on perfection, however, has changed. My dance teacher was right when she said mirrors are tools, but she was wrong about how they should be used. The reflection that a mirror provides is a gift that enables continuous self-improvement. Humans are ever-evolving beings, and mirrors

should be used to assist this process, not hinder it. I now recognize that my potential, regardless of the endeavor, is bound to remain unreached if I'm infatuated with the idea of perfection. For that reason, I'm perfectly fine being imperfect.