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# Aesthetic Sport Pressures For Men Of Suicidal Minds

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Aesthetic Sport Pressures for Men of Suicidal Minds  
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## Abstract

All experiences are unique to every person because each person perceives their surroundings individually. People living with suicidality struggle with the consistent pain which affects their cognition and perception. Pain directly influences how they perceive their experiences and their surroundings. Simultaneously, a person suffering from suicidality must face the stigmas society associates with mental illnesses. Suicide and related mental health concerns are frequently stigmatized and discourage those experiencing it from discussing the pain they feel. They are limited in receiving help as the pain is internalized. Through a creative fiction, first-person narrative account, this project investigates the pressures associated with males in aesthetic sport, such as gymnastics or dance, which complicate suicidality.

Suicidality is a pre-existing condition within the body and the pain associated with it may be triggered by internal and external pressures. Male dancers are placed within environments which harbor risk for traumatic events that can trigger such pain. As a male dancer, there is a specific aesthetic physique idealized by dancing companies. A male ballet dancer is expected to be tall, lean, and muscular but not *too* tall, *too* lean, or *too* muscular. He has a small window of what is acceptable for his body's physical appearance which contradicts the body type formed from his physical expectations. He is expected to continually dance and perform jumps, leaps, turns, and lifts without hesitation or exhaustion. However, it becomes a constant conflict between having a body physically able to complete such a task while being in the window of the ideal body type.

A man becomes entrapped by a constant pressure for the need to “fix” his body. Pressures from instructors, competitors and peers all play a role in consuming a man under such stresses.

Meanwhile, pressures from a family become complicated by having a male participate in a sport considered highly feminine. As such pressures are internalized; pressures of the self become increasingly dangerous for the suicidal mind.

The narrative demonstrates the influential power suicidal pain can have on men. Concurrently, the piece portrays how external pressures and gendered expectations may affect a male individual in such a high-stress environment. The first-person narrative provides insight for looking at and experiencing the dance world as a suicidal male may experience it. Despite the advancements made in understanding suicide, the topic is still considered taboo. Misconceptions of the suicidal mind continue to fuel society in stigmatizing the uncontrollable existence of such a mental illness. This text provides a gateway for openly discussing suicide and the intersectional issues individuals may experience with their illness. As more people discuss these issues, they may become educated, more understanding, and reduce the stigma surrounding the topic.

## Acknowledgements

This project is both a creative and formal piece which would not have been completed without the help of many others. First, I would like to thank the University of Rhode Island's Honors Program Department and Staff for allowing me to conceptualize, create, and complete this project. Without the Honors Program's support, academically and monetarily, I could not have hoped to learn about such a real and relevant topic. The subject of suicide has always been meaningful to me personally. Due to the Honors Program entirely, studying suicide has now come to influence my education and shape much of my undergraduate career.

Amongst the honors staff, I would like to offer a heartfelt thank you to Doctor Sara Murphy, to whom I am in debt completely for providing my understanding of suicide. Doctor Murphy has provided all of my instruction in the several courses that laid the ground work for this project. More importantly, she has sponsored the completion of it. Throughout the whole of my undergraduate career, she has offered academic and emotional support while I plunged into the strong and emotionally draining topic of suicide, as well as the surrounding subjects of death and grief.

I would like to thank the anonymous individuals who confided stories of suicide and discussed related events or issues with me. The creative portion of this project has been inspired by the stories and understandings these individuals have provided to me. Additionally, discussions with these individuals has helped me begin to more thoroughly grasp the issues that I have been written about and explicated. Without their input, this project could not hope to exist.

Lastly, I would like to thank the family and friends who have supported me in times of pressure and overwhelming emotions. Throughout my undergraduate career, and furthermore my

life, I have been given comfort, reassurance, and encouragement to get me through my most troubling experiences. Without the love of every person who provided it, I would not have been able to succeed through to the completion of this project.

### Dedication

This piece is dedicated to everyone who has shared their stories with me to help put this together and for all of the stories I have never heard. It is dedicated to those who endure an uncontrollable and unexplainable pain.

It has been written for anyone who wishes to understand the thoughts that plague those who suffer from suicide as to reduce the misunderstandings and the stigma surrounding the subject.

## Introduction

Suicide is not a fully conscious act in which individuals consider, attempt, or complete because they wish to die. Rather, “suicide is the outcome of a person's desire to reduce intolerable mental pain,” (Despelder and Strickland 425). Suicide has a strong connection to diseases within the brain. Recognizing that suicide is the tragic outcome of a serious illness, it challenges the conventional idea that suicide is chosen as a free and rational choice. (DeSpelder and Strickland).

Suicide is the third leading cause of death for individuals between the ages of 18-29 (CDC). Additionally, suicide remains highly prevalent in the age groups both above and below this spectrum. Society does not discuss this problem to the extent that is necessary. More prevention work and scholarly research is being done to help address the issue, but the shame and stigma surrounding the topic still influences society's notions about it. As a result, suicide remains a controversial topic as it is considered a widely taboo subject. As certified thanatologist Doctor Sara Murphy says, “There is no death in American culture as silenced, solitary, and stigmatized as a death of a suicide,” (Murphy 1).

The knowledge gap between society and suicide is considerable. While studying topics of grief, death, and suicide, I looked at an abundance of scholarly work which correlated athletes in aesthetic sport to an increased risk for having an eating disorder. Simultaneously, research has shown that eating disorders are a high risk factor associated with suicidality, or the likelihood of attempting suicide. I tied these two concepts together to recognize that aesthetic sport athletes are at an increased risk for suicide.

Sports like dance and gymnastics are considered widely feminine. Subsequently, males

within those sports tend to be critiqued and emasculated by their participation in sports with an aesthetic component. Recognizing the stigma surrounding men in aesthetic sports as well as suicide, I came to realize there is also a lack of scholarly work in those areas. I made it my objective to explore the mindset of such a person.

I conducted interviews to consult with individuals directly related to an aesthetic sport such as male participants themselves, as well as their trainers, coaches, family and friends. I discussed the external and internal pressures that may agitate suicidality which affect male participants. From these interviews, combined with my own understanding for such pressures, I wrote a series of vignettes, together titled “Inside My Mind”. The series portrays the events, thoughts, and feelings of a male dancer, Vincent. The episodes are meant to be a reflection of the disjointed thoughts which result from pressures highly prevalent in aesthetic sport. The essay portion of this project helps explicate the episodes in order to understand the background surrounding the pressures addressed and language which was carefully selected.