



The Slow Regard of Silent Things: Building Mental and Emotional Resilience for Dancers



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Abstract

To many, the purpose of dance science is to alleviate physical health stressors for dancers. However, more recently, mental health stressors have come to light. With the rise of COVID-19 bringing anxiety and depression, new levels of awareness of and emphasis on mental health have been circulating among the dance community. Authors such as Kathleen McGuire Gains with “Minding the Gap,” currently in pilot testing at Point Park University, and Lynda Mainwaring’s program, “The Delivery of a Short-Term Psychological Skills Training Program to College Dance Students,” conducted in 2019, help bring dancers’ stories forward in quantitative research and qualitative anecdotes. This study will use the RAND Mental Health Inventory to survey university level dance majors’ students at Florida State University School of Dance using a convenience sampling method. This allows data collection from a sample reflective of the broader population of undergraduate dance majors in BFA programs. The Help4Dancers app, developed by British psychotherapist, Terry Hyde: MA MBACP, will be implemented with a focus group of 6-12 dancers. The intervention will be assessed using three methods, a knowledge base quiz, the RAND Survey, and behavioral observation to determine artistic and academic performance. From this, a baseline can be established confirming the existence of mental health stressors within the School of Dance. Ultimately, the purpose of this study is to document the prevalence of mental health stressors within the Florida State University School of Dance and assess an intervention targeted at building mental and emotional resilience through increasing awareness.

Background/Introduction

Mental health is an ever-growing topic, more relevant than ever due to not only the evident atmosphere of increased stress and anxiety that we see arise within the members of Generation Z, but also is amplified with the era of COVID-19. Dancers are concerned with both keeping up with physical demands of the sport but also the mental aspects such as the competition, criticism, and performance stress, can bring about thoughts of depression, anxiety, body dysmorphic disorder, among other mental health concerns.

Regarding prior studies conducted to evaluate the state of dancers’ mental health, Lynda Mainwaring and Catlin Finney’s systematic review of “Psychological Risk Factors and Outcomes of Dance Injury” presented a study by Andrea Kozay and Jatin P. Ambegaonkar in 2020 revealing an inconsistency between the way health resources are provided to dancers, compared to the way they are perceived by dancers. The study highlights how dancers felt that resources are not accommodating to the psychological needs of dancers while paradoxically, mental health is regarded as “extremely important” by the dancers (Kozay 120). Furthermore, the work of Everheart et al. 2020, found that internal factors to consider when evaluating dancers’ mental health include personality traits, self-motivation, coping, social support, athletic identity, optimism and self-efficacy, fear avoidance in response to pain, depressed mood, and health related quality of life (Everheart 2020).

Ultimately, the purpose of this study is to document the prevalence of mental health stressors within the Florida State University School of Dance and assess an intervention targeted at building mental and emotional resilience through increasing awareness.

Methods

Two groups of 3-6 dancers are observed at least twice a week. Behavioral observation sessions include during academic dance theory courses and technique classes noting the frequency of certain behaviors. The behaviors observed during classes include engagement with the instructor and engagement with movement as well as class material. The behaviors observed are those that indicate symptoms of anxiety and depression. Results of these observations are displayed in Figure 1, Figure 2, and Figure 3.

The *RAND Mental Health Inventory* is utilized to survey university level dance majors, both graduate and undergraduate at Florida State University using a convenience sampling method, allowing data collection of demographic information and mental health status from a sample reflective of the School of Dance.

Methods (Continued)

The *Help4Dancers* app, developed by British psychotherapist, Terry Hyde: MA MBACP, was implemented with a focus group of 6-12 dancers. The activities of the application include a mental health check-in and modules providing information and resources regarding symptoms of depression, anxiety, and eating disorders specifically formulated for dancers. The behavioral observations are also an integral part of the six-week mental health intervention.

Results

Figure 1: Percent of behavioral occurrences of participant one over a seven-week observation

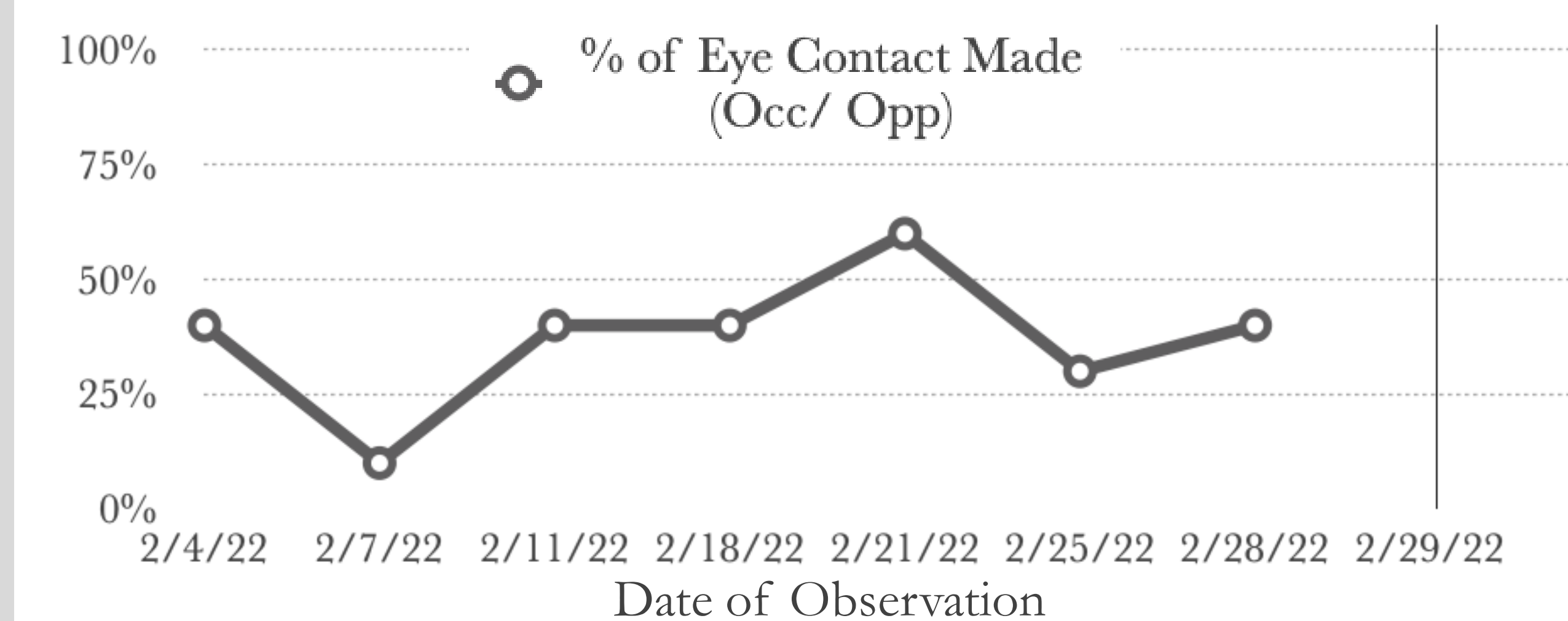


Figure 2: Number of behavioral occurrences during technique class for Participant 2

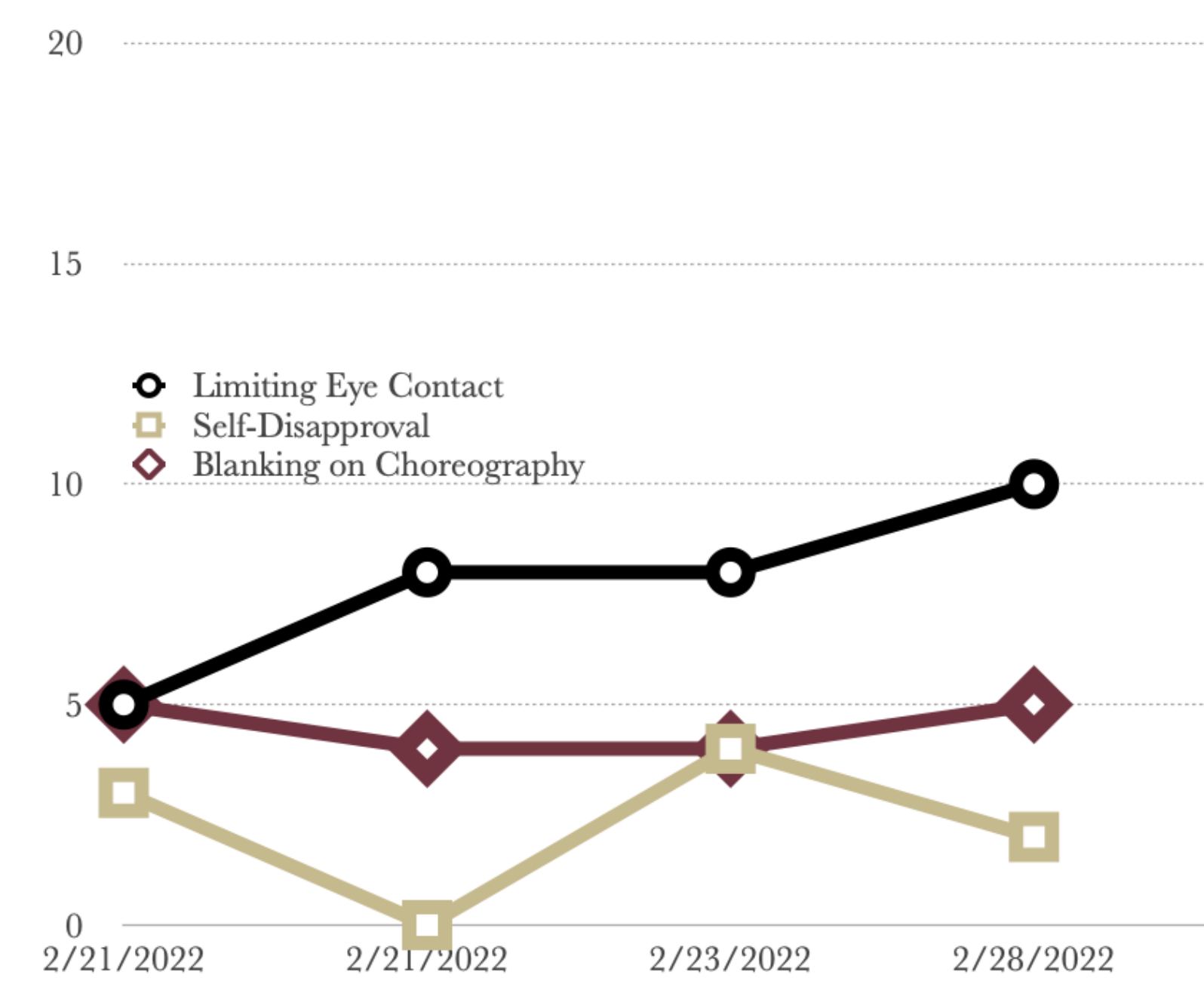
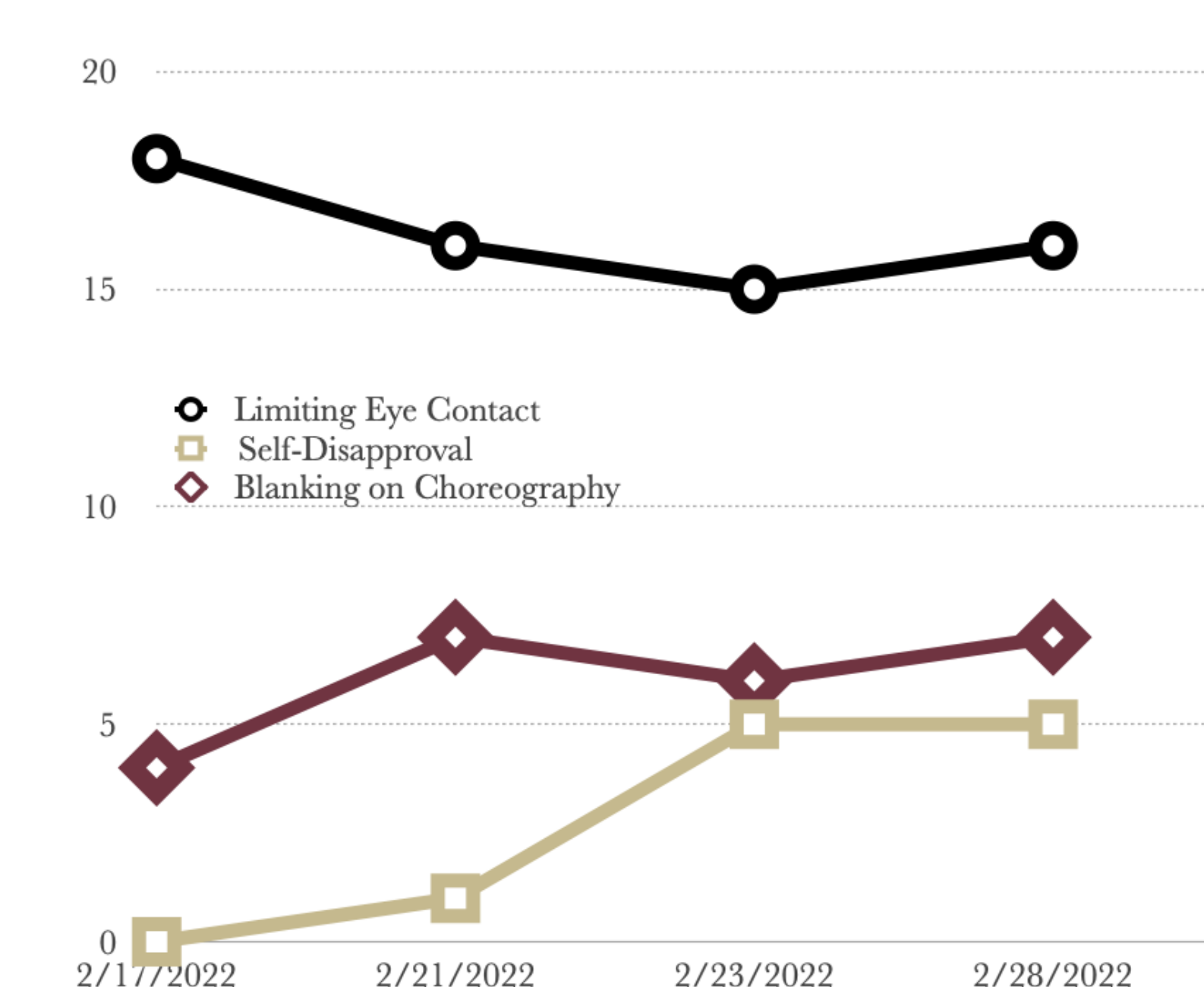


Figure 3: Number of behavioral occurrences during technique class for Participant 3



These figures present baseline data of individual participants regarding the number of times they have exhibited behaviors that are common indicators of anxiety and depression prior to the implementation of the mental health intervention. Figure 1 monitors the behavior of one participant in the academic class setting. Figure 2 and 3 each display the behaviors of participants in a technique class setting.

Discussion

As this research project is in the preliminary stages, to date, no participants have begun the intervention. The *RAND Mental Health Inventory Survey* providing generalized statistics regarding the demographic information and mental health status of the undergraduate and graduate students of the department, indicates a range of sentiments from those with few issues with their state of mental health to those grappling with more mental health issues. The behaviors observed are shown as indicators of symptoms of depression and anxiety. As participants begin the mental health intervention, we will be able to compare any increase or decrease of behaviors that exhibit improvement of mental health state.

Future Projections

After obtaining stable baseline data from dancers’ class, course observations and surveyed data, students will utilize *Help4Dancers* application for a six-week intervention with the objective to build mindful awareness mental health will be introduced to the participants. It will be conducted following a cumulative treatment method, where the intervention is introduced with a few participants at first. More participants will be added throughout the treatment group. There will be three types of measurements to assess the effect of the intervention. A knowledge-based quiz evaluating the dancer’s knowledge of mental health, the *RAND Mental Health Inventory Survey*, and continual observations during academic and technique classes. As the intervention is implemented with the participants, changes in their behaviors will be monitored, as to indicate any effects of the intervention. Our hypothesis includes that the intervention will provide an increase in mental health stability, indicated by a decrease in behaviors that are associated with anxiety and depression as well as supplemented information provided from the *Help4Dancers* app.

References

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Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Dr. Tom Welsh, Dr. Jon Bailey, ABA Research Group, Terry Hyde, Kathleen McGuire Gains, Florida State University School Of Dance