

FROM CALYPSOS TO CAREERS:  
POST DANCE LIFE OF THE TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
STRUTTERS ALUMNAE

by

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## **DEDICATION**

*To my loving and patient family, Mom, Dad, and RJ. I could not have done this without you. I will be forever grateful for everything you have done for me. Love, Murry.*

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Texas State University Strutters dance team was established in the 1960s and has since produced over three thousand alumnae. The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of the Strutters organization on their alumnae in their careers, social relationships, and self-identities. I conducted fifteen in-depth interviews with Strutter alumnae who represented the program from the beginning to the present. I analyzed the interview data to understand the lasting impact the Strutters experience had on their alumnae. Generally, the Strutters experience led to positive career, self-identity, and social characteristics. The Texas State Strutters organization has a positive influence on many aspects of a Strutter alumna's life.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Texas State University Strutters dance team is the nation's largest collegiate dance team and the first four-year collegiate dance team formed in the United States (Strutters 2018). The Strutters are the Texas State University dance team composed of Texas State female undergraduate students. They were formed in 1960 when the university was still named Southwest Texas State University. The organization was founded by Barbara Guinn Tidwell, and since then has only had two other directors. The current director is Strutter alumna, Tammy Fife.. Each year, new and returning Strutters go through a rigorous tryout process to become the new Strutters team. The organization consistently keeps the number of dancers at about 100, going up to about 120 some years. With those numbers, the Strutters keep their reputation of being the nation's largest collegiate dance team.

The main styles of dance they perform are kick, jazz, hip hop, and lyrical, depending on the performance setting. The props most commonly used by the Strutters are ribbons, hoops, wooden boxes, wooden fences, and of course the signature pom poms. Some of the routines don't require the use of any props, but when they do, they make sure to use the props in the grandest ways possible. They go big and all out for the dances with props. For football games, the Strutters have a team of equipment managers that consists of about ten male students. These men are in charge of setting up props and carrying them to the field. It's an important job because without the props, the routines would not be complete.

The Strutters have performed at many college football, NFL, and NBA games, and parades across the world. They have appeared on multiple television shows and

competitions, and have their own spring and fall shows at the university for friends and family to see what they have been working on all year. Their school spirit and involvement extends into the community by volunteering at local non-profits and city events. Their most notable performances have been at the inaugural parades of Presidents John F. Kennedy in 1961, Lyndon B. Johnson in 1965, and Donald Trump in 2016, as well as the first American dance team to perform in the People`s Republic of China (Strutters 2018).

The Strutter alumnae currently have an alumnae group within the Texas State University system, named “Strutters Always” and they interact through social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Each year, the Strutter alumnae hold a “Strutter Reunion” in San Marcos, Texas to celebrate the previous and new Strutter alumnae. They also donate to the current Strutters team each year to keep up with the successful team reputation.

Becoming a Strutter alumna is a very intricate social process. Becoming a Strutter alumna is bigger than becoming a football star alumnus or a debate team alumnus. The Strutters are a world class and world-renowned organization that travels all over the world for performances, interviews, and nationally televised events. These experiences may impact the Strutter alumnae by shaping their previous and new social groups, post baccalaureate identities, and directing them towards their careers. The purpose of this study is to explore the Stutters’ lives after their collegiate dance careers have ended. I will focus on their personal and occupational activities following graduation, and the impact the Strutter experience has on their evolving social lives and self-identities.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Since university dance teams are a fairly recent phenomenon, there is little published formal research on them. However, there are several journalistic sources that have recently surfaced regarding what it is like being on a college dance team. There are also multi-media materials, such as basketball and football half time performance videos, from major college dance teams such those at Brigham Young University, Arizona State University, and the University of Missouri. I use these along with more conventionally academic resources in this thesis which is focused especially on dance team life, social group change, role transitions, and career and identity transitions.

The first theme of my research is where it all started. *50 Years of Dance and Dreams* (Fite 2009) gives insight into the world famous Strutters organization from the past fifty years, with the latest year of 2009. I will explore the personal process of becoming a Strutter and what it is like to be a Strutter during and after graduation.

Becoming a college dance team member takes a lot of passion, hard work, determination, and willingness to be recognized as an ambassador of your university. College dancers are constantly being publicized by the university, national and sometimes even international media. Being on a college dance team is much more than just dancing on a football field. It is about representing your school, maintaining school spirit, learning how to act and behave properly in a public setting, and learning how to be a better person in general behind the curtain (Feller 2018, McFerran 2018, McFerran 2017).

Confidence in yourself and your personal identity play a large role in finding a career after college. Anderson and Mounts explain how occupational exploration depends on the confidence level in college students:

Identity control theory researchers have found evidence for two processes of identity development (identity defense and identity change) and have theorized a third process (identity exploration). College students (N = 123) self-rated as high or low in occupational identity certainty and importance received self-discrepant feedback to induce identity disturbance, and dependent measures of identity defense, identity change, and identity exploration were obtained. As predicted, high certainty about identity standards led to identity defense, while low certainty led to identity change. Although an interaction between certainty and importance was hypothesized to predict identity exploration, results showed that the two operated independently. Low certainty predicted exploration of additional occupational areas, whereas high importance predicted exploration of self, environment, and additional occupational areas (Anderson & Mounts, 2012, pg. 90).

Therefore, one might assume that the more confident a student is in their identity and their chosen major and career path, the more likely they are to stick with that chosen career path. In this study, I will see if one dancer is more confident in their dancing ability than the other. The Strutter with more technical confidence would most likely pursue a career in dance after college as compared to the other dancer.

For those who struggle with their identity and find the need to change their career path, the process of creating their new identity is a challenge in and of itself. Manzi,

Vignoles and Regalia 2010 explain this transitional process of identity and career change, as well as how the students feel a new start:

Changes in identity toward or away from a possible future self can be expected to affect psychological adjustment in several ways. In particular, poor adjustment is likely to occur when the individual cannot achieve desired self-conceptions or cannot avoid feared ones. According to self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987), actual-ideal discrepancies in the self typically lead to dejection-related emotions, including symptoms of depression. Similarly, Markus and Nurius (1986) proposed that affect is derived from conflicts or discrepancies within the self-concept: Individuals will feel either positively or negatively about themselves depending on the extent to which they achieve particular desired self-conceptions or avoid particular feared ones. (Manzi, et. al. 2010, pg. 972).

Manzi, Vignoles and Regalia conclude with respondents' results. "Post-transition emotional wellbeing was higher among those whose post-transition identity structures more closely matched their initial desires and less closely matched their initial fears, and among those who reported a greater magnitude of identity change (Manzi, et. al. 2010, pg. 970)." The closer the respondents got to a career that went along with their initial desires, the happier they were in conclusion. Those who had to change paths and identities that weren't as close to their initial desires weren't as happy. I will discuss this identity change in relation to well-being with the Strutter alumnae and their careers after college.

Athletes from all backgrounds struggle with the transition between professional play to retirement. Football stars in the big leagues might feel the way Strutter alumnae

could feel after leaving their organization. “Retirement from sport has been recognised as a significant career transition that is associated with decreased psychological well-being for some athletes (Wylleman, Alfermann, & Lavallee, 2004 as cited by Sanders and Stevinson, 2017).” Going from a major athlete to a retired lay person can be difficult for athletes to cope with mentally. I will ask the Strutter alumnae how leaving the organization impacts their mental outlook.

Strutters belong to a world-renowned college dance team. Leaving such a prestigious group could have some psychological impact on their transitioning identity. Dominic J. Packer, Alison L. Chasteen and Sonia K. Lang (2011) conducted a study to show the effects of leaving a high prestige group and transitioning to a new group of lesser or equal importance to the individual. This goes along with the Strutters by taking them out of this world-renowned group and putting them into a career track. Will they be just as happy in a career as they were being part of the Texas State University Strutters?

Lieberman (2013) discusses the ways people can be absorbed if not consumed by their particular institutional identities. Collegiate athletes, for example, only experience this one identity while with the team, until they leave the team and experience other things in life to create a new identity (Lieberman 2013). One would expect dancers to maintain only a few identities while participating in dance. That is all they know until they leave the dance world and enter the professional world to explore new identities. Such identities would include dancer, athlete, and student, along with the typical family and friend identity. I will discuss the transition process among dancers, especially in terms of the perceived value of believing and feeling that it is okay to feel lost and confused after they end or lessen one of the only identities they have ever known.

Former athletes typically continue to love the sport they used to play. Instead of playing their sport for a college or professional team, athletes tend to resort to fandom and pickup games.

Being only an average athlete, I never played organized sports past junior high school. But I have always loved basketball, and I spent hundreds of hours in my youth playing pick-up games at local parks, schools and in gymnasiums. In college, I played in intramural leagues. Along with playing basketball recreationally, I have been an avid fan of professional basketball, specifically the National Basketball Association (NBA), America's premier professional basketball league (Carter 2016).

For dancers, there are a few ways they can keep up with their love of dance and transition into fandom. Yoga, studio dance classes, gyms, ballet performances, alumni events, and attending professional sports games with dance teams are just a few ways to make the transition more enjoyable. I will discuss some of these activities in which the alumnae might do to keep up their alumnae friendships.

### III. THEORY

Identity theory, role exit theory, and existential self theory are key factors in assessing what it is like to be a Strutter alumna. Incorporating these theories into my findings will help explain the role transition process of exiting the Strutter organization.

#### **Identity Theory**

“Identity theory is principally a microsociological theory that sets out to explain individuals' role-related behaviors... (Hogg, et. al. 1995, pg. 255).” In terms of the Strutters, identity theory helps explain the characteristics of being a Strutter and how they are incorporated into their new life. This is useful to acknowledge while interpreting the results of my interviews because it gives greater insight of the roles of a Strutter and how their characteristics help the alumnae succeed in their post grad careers.

#### **The Existential Self**

The *existential self* is a concept in sociology that focuses on a particular relationship between the self and society: the self *confronts* society (Kotarba 2014). Existential sociology sees the experience of self in contemporary society as an ongoing process of development and change:

(Traditional socialization theory) argues that we go through life acquiring the roles that society provides for us. It is easy to understand how the research that supports socialization theory is conducted largely with children and adolescents, the groups most susceptible to imposed definitions of the self. Socialization

theory tends either to ignore adults or to assume that the experiences of self is lastingly shaped early in life (Kotarba 1984).

Over the course of a lifetime, individuals are likely to encounter situations which threaten if not damage the security of one's sense of self. According to the existential self model, the notion that our sense of self is well-developed at the point at which we enter adulthood is a traditional and somewhat out-of-date perception of the self process. I prefer to see change and disruption as an experience of *adult puberty*:

Since the experience of becoming is inherently problematic (i.e., unpredictable), we are liable at various times in our lives to encounter discrete yet critical episodes that severely threaten the security of self and often require massive reconstruction of one's sense of being. The dramatic experience of meaninglessness has been a reoccurring topic of interest among writers as they attempt to come to grips with it by means of concepts like reflexivity (Mehan and Wood, 1975 as cited by Kotarba 1984) and absurdity (Lyman and Scott, 1970 as cited by Kotarba 1984).

Among the many reasons for self change in adulthood, perhaps most relevant for our purposes is the way the social groups to which we belong suddenly disappear, not because we do not like them anymore, but because we outgrow them. The Strutters may experience this change through graduation from the university, after being part of a world class organization that was most likely the best and most rewarding years of their lives so far. In this study, I will examine how the transition from such a prestigious role and identity to what may appear to be a second class status in society is experienced.

## **Role Exit Theory**

Role exit theory is a useful tool for examining the transition from Strutter to Strutter alumna. Exiting one role to transition into another can be a difficult process, especially if you have been in a previous role for many years (Ebaugh 1984). There has been little research conducted on role exit, which makes it even more important to discuss and acknowledge in this study:

The process of role exiting involves tension between an individual's past, present, and future. Past identification with a social category or role lingers in one form or another throughout the lives of role exiters as they struggle to incorporate past identities into present conceptions of the self. Exes tend to maintain role residual or some kind of 'hangover identity' from a previous role as they move into new social roles. This role residual is part of self-identity and must be incorporated into current ideas of self (Ebaugh 1984).

The prefix "ex" in sociology usually refers to an individual who leaves one social role for another role. In my study, I will explore this "to be or not to be 'ex'" phenomenon (Faccio, Mininni and Rocelli 2018; Ebaugh and Merton 1984). Faccio, Mininni and Rocelli describe being an "ex" of something as different from being without something:

Although it is widely used and has many different facets, the preposition 'ex' does not take root in all soil. We may find nouns which will never become 'ex': if a woman loses her husband, she does not become 'the ex-wife of her dead husband', but the 'husband's widow'. In this case, even in the presence of the meaning 'is no more', we do not use 'ex', but instead, totally change the noun: so that the wife becomes widow... Whenever we use different nouns (as in the

examples given), we modify reality, since we can call on a different linguistic configuration than the former one, and we put the accent on what is new: the present. The former role no longer exists, since it is not evoked. When the former noun persists and is supplemented by ‘ex’, the given remains (Faccio, Mininni and Rocelli 2018).

By using the prefix of “ex,” the Strutter alumnae are emphasizing that they still remain a dancer in some form or another. It’s just that the “former role” of performing as a Strutter no longer exists. I will examine how the Strutters feel about the term “ex Strutter” in their interviews.

Role exit theory is a valuable tool to consider because of what occurs during a major life change, which is what these Strutters went through. Nobody gives you a syllabus or a guide to transition from college student to a professional job, which is an unnerving time for most college students and the Strutters, and why it should be researched and normalized. I will discuss this transition from Strutter to Strutter alumnae, as well as transition to careers and new social groups in my interviews.

#### **IV. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

I am posing four research questions in my thesis:

- What is the personal process of becoming a Strutter?
  - How one person becomes a Strutter might be different from how another person might become a Strutter.
- What is the process of role transition from being an active Strutter to a Strutter alumna?
  - How long did it take to obtain a job after graduation, and how do they maintain contact with other Strutters?
- Do Strutter experiences impact post Strutter social lives, identities, and career choices?
  - How does being part of the Strutters organization impact their everyday lives?
- What are the similarities of occupational outcomes following the Strutter experience?
  - I am comparing what their jobs are and if the Strutters organization influenced their decision towards a specific job.

All four questions will be answered in terms of the respondents' experiences and perceptions.

## V. METHODS

Prior to my thesis research, I had completed a project for my seminar in qualitative research at Texas State University on the Strutters. I obtained permission to observe Strutter practices for two months from the head captain at the time, after getting her contact information from a former Strutter whom I know personally. This experience led to the idea for this thesis.

For the qualitative interview method, I chose to use a semi-snowball method. “Snowball sampling is a recruitment technique in which research participants are asked to assist researchers in identifying other potential subjects.” (Oregon State University, 2017). I have five respondents that I already knew who have agreed to my study, and the other ten were selected by a Strutters Always board member.

Immediately after receiving the IRB letter of permission to start my project, I contacted the Strutter alumnae group, Strutters Always, through Facebook. I told them what my project was for, what it was about, and why I decided to research the alumnae. Within one hour, I received an email from one of the board members who helps run the Facebook page. \*Sydney (\*all names changed to protect privacy) was intrigued by my message and wanted to help me with my project as soon as she read what it was about. She wanted a little more information about whom I wanted to talk with, so I suggested that it would be helpful to talk to a variety of fifteen alumnae from different decades and officer rankings. Sydney began looking for alumnae who would fit my criteria and would like to participate. After only two days of her contacting alumnae, I had all fifteen respondents agreeing with Sydney and me to meet with me for an interview after Thanksgiving. Ten respondents were recruited by Sydney, and five respondents were

personally known Strutter alumnae that had said they would love to help me out and be involved.

The week after Thanksgiving, I began contacting my respondents to schedule interviews. I went through the list Sydney gave me, called all ten respondents, but only two of them answered my call. I was not surprised because not very many people answer unknown phone numbers, especially since my phone number is from out of state. I left voicemails for the respondents who did not answer, and they called me back soon after. There were three respondents I emailed and two I sent text messages. After the initial meeting was scheduled over the phone, all of them preferred text messages to communicate afterwards.

Each interview was scheduled for a range of twenty-five to thirty minutes, with twelve questions to be asked. The shortest interview lasted twenty-five minutes, and the longest was fifty-one minutes. The middle ranged between about thirty to forty-five minutes. Nobody had a problem with going over the initial set time, they were all very interested in what questions would ask.

I told each respondent I would meet them at a location of their choice for the interviews. Most of the interviews were held at the schools where they worked, and only three were at Starbucks. Two respondents were not able to meet or call me for an interview, so they preferred to email their answers to me when they had time.

Going to high schools around Austin and San Antonio was a little challenging, because I am not familiar with the area, but it was also nostalgic to go to a couple schools I have been to for my high school dance and color guard competitions.

Sydney was the first respondent whom I interviewed, along with another board member immediately following at the same location. They were very welcoming and excited to be part of my research. These interviews were some of the longer ones which was beneficial for me to see how I should set up and be prepared for my upcoming interviews.

Each interview was more informative than the last, largely because I would be more prepared and knowledgeable of how they should go with each passing time. At first, I used my iPad to look at my questions during the interviews, but after the first two interviews, I decided to print out my questions and mark next to them after I asked a question. The iPad looked professional, but I felt having the paper copy in front of me helped with the organization.

I did not interview any Strutter alumnae outside of Texas, because neither Sydney nor I had any contacts outside of Texas. This leads to the value of the past identity of a Strutter when discussing Strutter alumnae that also maintain their Texan identity.

The respondents were impressed by my questions, making them think a little for a few, and reminiscing on good times for others. They all appreciated what I was doing and looked forward to reading the final product.

## VI. FINDINGS

*“I had an interview with my job even before I graduated because of putting ‘Strutter*

*Alumna’ on my resume”*

*“I am Still a Strutter, and always will be.”*

In reviewing my interviews, I found a few major themes within the alumnae answers. I will discuss the themes of identity characteristic progression, career preparation and placement, and daily life impact, as well as some random runner up themes the women pointed out in their interviews.

The demographics of my research are followed:

The age range of the alumnae are from twenty-two years old to sixty-five years old. Current occupations of the Strutter alumnae are dance team director, assistant dance team director, cheerleading coach, marketing specialist, principal, and high school teacher. The ethnicity of the alumnae are nine Caucasian females, and six Hispanic females. The amount of alumnae with families are ten married with kids, two married and no kids, and three are single.

### **Identity Progression**

The identity of a Strutter includes being a student, a daughter, a sister, a friend, and an ambassador of Texas State University, of the State of Texas, and of our country. Now, twelve of the fifteen alumnae still think of themselves as Strutters and their former friend and family roles, just with some new additions.

## **Social Groups**

Ten of the fifteen respondents are married with children. Each of these ten respondents told me they feel their role as a mother is the most important role they play in their lives. One respondent began crying while discussing their family because they mean so much to her, which I thought was very heartwarming. She kept saying she was sorry about crying during the interview and that it was unprofessional of her, but I insisted that it was not a problem and I loved hearing stories about her beautiful children, of whom she had many sweet pictures in her office. Most of these respondents emphasized if they had ever felt like they could not carry out their directing abilities because of something going on within their families, they would step down from their positions because it would not be fair for their students or themselves. The family relationships within these twelve alumnae are the most important thing to them, and it was clearly shown in the voice and eyes of the alumnae.

## **Career Placement**

Pursuing a career in the dance field was the plan for only half the alumnae I interviewed. The rest of them wanted to be teachers and one of them ended up as a business woman. The seven I interviewed that did not want to or did not plan to be a director did not have much time to explore other options. They all applied to be a teacher, or were going to apply as a teacher, but as soon as the hiring director saw “Strutter Alumna” on their resumes, the alumnae were asked to be the director, assistant director, or cheer coach assistant for the school they applied to. A few of them were hesitant at

first to accept the position, because that was not their plan, but eventually they accepted and were very happy they did.

Typology of Dance Director careers:

- Wanted to be a dance director, was a dance major in college.
- Wanted to be a dance director, was not a dance major in college.
- Did not want to be a director, applied as a teacher and ended up a director.
- Did not want to be a director, applied as a teacher and ended up an assistant.
- Dance director
- Assistant dance director
- Cheer coach
- Assistant cheer coach

A dance director is the coach of the dancers, similar to a football coach to the football players, but more personal because of all the performances that occur in the dance world. The director makes sure every practice and performance is up to Strutter standards, as well as other school and community events. All of the backstage preparation that goes into performances is very personal. The alumna that become dance directors to high school students take on multiple roles, not just director. They become mom, friend, enemy, advice giver, teacher, counselor, nurse, and your number one fan. Your dance director knows almost everything about you, good and bad, and they will always cheer you on even after you graduate.

There is a lot of pressure put on the Strutters to perform on and off the dance floor, and even now as alumnae, these women still feel like they would let down their director, team, and school if they walked out of the house with jeans on or without

makeup on. They know how to strike up a conversation and keep it going. One respondent told me a story of how she could talk to anyone about anything and keep it going for hours just based on what the other person would say about themselves. That takes a lot of public speaking practice, which is what happened during their time as a Strutter. All of the backstage practice and preparation for the performance world and the real world was one of the biggest takeaways from being a Strutter. Each year the Strutters would go through manners classes covering how to behave in certain situations, and those classes are still remembered by the alumnae today. The officers had extra backstage training that dealt with the financial and planning aspect of the Strutters organization. They would keep the books on all of the financial obligations for the year, planned some school and community events, made sure the dancers knew what to wear and where to go for practices and performances, and much more things a director would normally do. The director does do these things with the officers, but she also has other major performances and athletic aspects to take care of. Another great career characteristics the Strutters obtained while on the team was leadership skills. The ability to run a practice, be in charge of a line of over twenty dancers, and maintain contact with Strutter managers were a few aspects in getting these women ready for leadership roles.

## VII. ANALYSIS

*“I was proud of myself while on the Strutters team, but now I am proud of my own dancers”*

*“The Strutters helped me become confident in myself enough to pursue my passion of dance”*

I have conducted four types of analyses:

- First, I examined and analyzed the personal process by which these women become Strutters and post/ex Strutters.
  - How one person becomes a Strutter might be different from how another person might become a Strutter.
- Second, I examined and analyzed the previous and new identities and characteristics in which the Strutter alumnae maintain and obtain.
  - What were they as a person on the Strutters and what are they now as a Strutter alumna?
- Third, I analyzed the impact of Strutter experiences on social groups and careers.
  - How did the organization prepare these women for their careers and how do they maintain their Strutter friendships?
- Fourth, I generated a typology of contrasting careers as a post/ex Strutter.
  - I am comparing what their jobs are and if the Strutters organization influenced their decision towards a specific job.

It is important to go through and analyze the process of becoming a Strutter and exiting the Strutters organization in order to get the full detail of how being a Strutter

impacted them in their careers. It is also necessary to analyze the differences and similarities in their post dance life careers to see if being part of the Strutters organization persuaded the dancers to go a specific route in their careers. The Strutters are involved in more extravagant experiences than other typical athletic teams, so I will discuss these experiences and analyze the respondent's answers to see if these experiences impact their choices in social groups and careers. Analyzing previous and new identities as well as the characteristics of Strutter alumnae will contribute to the discussion of how leaving a secular role for a career role can impact and change their social lives and how they see themselves after leaving the Strutters. All respondents were part of the Strutters ranging from one year to five years.

### **Becoming a Strutter**

My first analysis was into the process by which these women became Strutters and post Strutters. I asked them questions about their dance career length, and why they became Strutters. Nine respondents started dancing when they were around age five, and six respondents started dancing in middle and high school. The older generations started closer to high school, and the younger generations started closer to elementary age. Four respondents went on to dance after college for a city ballet company or for the San Antonio Spurs Silver Dancers. Thirteen respondents became dance directors or assistant dance directors and teachers.

All respondents said they became Strutters because they missed dancing from high school, so they went on to perform in college. A couple of the older generations said Mrs. Tidwell encouraged them to tryout even if they were not planning on it. They knew

Mrs. Tidwell (the original Strutters director) from high school and around San Marcos, she was a family friend to them. Trying out and being on Strutters was more of an obligation to some of the older generations than it is now. Some respondents also wanted to be a Strutter to get involved with Texas State, and make new friends at school. I had a few respondents tell me they tried out for the Kilgore Rangerettes and the Apache belles, which are also well-known college dance teams in Texas. The reason why they ended up choosing the Strutters was because of them either not making the other teams, not wanting to transfer from those two-year schools to Texas State eventually, or because they liked the location of San Marcos.

### **Ex and New Identity**

My second analysis was the examination of the previous and new identities and characteristics in which the Strutter alumnae maintain and obtain. I asked questions about the identity characteristics of a Strutter, what identities best fit them now, and what they gained from Strutters that helps them now in their careers.

Being a Strutter means that you represent more than just a dance team. At school events you represent your school, at national events you represent your team and school, and at international events you represent your team, school, and country. There is a specific persona which these women have been trained to emit. Up until about the late 1990s, the team would hold a manners class to learn how to speak to the public, behave in public, and eat properly. They were not allowed to wear jeans until the 2000s, and even then, they were not allowed to wear Strutter shirts with jeans. Strutters were not allowed to go tubing in the San Marcos river because it was thought of as unladylike.

They still uphold all of these values as they did back in the 1960s, but they are becoming more lenient as the times change. These values have been engrained into the alumnae and have helped them carry themselves to their highest potential throughout every aspect in their lives. This organization has helped them in their daily lives more than just having the ability to dance extraordinary.

School was the most important thing for these women, because without it, they would not have been on the Strutters, and would not have succeeded in their careers afterwards. The identity of student was the most prominent identity in their lives at the time, followed by family and friend relationships, and Strutters. Their identity of a student has evolved into dance directors, teachers, principals, business women, wives, and moms.

Some characteristics of their evolving identities include pride, passion, timeliness, and confidence. Strutters enhanced and gave these women the tools to be the best version of themselves that they can be. Most respondents said pride when discussing these characteristics. They said the pride they had for themselves evolved into the pride they have for their students, dancers, and family. They grew their confidence in themselves to be able to go out in the world and be the successful alumnae that they are today. Their passion for their jobs has grown because of their start in Strutters. When discussing timeliness, I got the exact same answer from each respondent. "If you are not fifteen minutes early, you are late." I personally believe in this motto as well, because of my time as a dancer being under the direction of a Spurs Silver dancer and a Strutter alumna. This just goes to show that these alumnae bring what they learned as Strutters and incorporate it into their new lives with their dance teams.

I asked the respondents about the “ex” phenomena, and what they thought about the term “ex” Strutter compared to Strutter alumnae. Twelve respondents indicated that “ex” Strutter sounded negative as compared to Strutter alumnae. A few said ex-Strutter sounded like they got kicked off the team and Strutter alumnae sounded more professional. Three respondents did not have an opinion on ex, they did not care if they were called ex-Strutter or Strutter alumnae.

### **New Social Groups and Careers**

My third analysis was examining the impact the Strutters organization and experiences had on the alumnae social groups and career choices. When I asked the alumnae about the length of time to find a job after graduation and their desire to be inside or outside of the dance world, they all became very interested and excited to talk about this specific question. Every alumna has their Strutter experience on their resume, which turns heads in interviews. Interviewers around Texas know about all the hard work, dedication, morals, and values the Strutters organization instills in these women, so they automatically are drawn to a job candidate with Strutter experience. Eight respondents expressed gratitude when talking about how they had gotten jobs even before they graduated from college just because of that Strutter emphasis on their resumes.

The way most of them had gotten their teaching and dance director jobs was by putting Strutters on their resumes. Some of them were not planning on becoming dance directors, but instead teachers, but because they had dance experience their schools wanted them to become part of the dance department. A couple were reluctant at first, but

because of their pride, passion and commitment to dance in the past, they became directors and fell in love.

Alumnae are still friends with other alumnae, whether they became friends during their time as a Strutter, or after. Some examples of how they made friends with other Strutters are from old high school friends joining Strutters, training camp, dorm room assignments, height lines, class ranks, and officer ranks. The most common way was from dorm room assignments and height lines, because that is where they spent most of their time with each other. Alumnae continue to get together for dinner, football games, yoga sessions, and Strutter events such as gallery work and Strutter reunions. I asked the respondents if they mix their work friends and their Strutter friends, and all of them said they do not mix them, as in they do not go out at the same time, they do not mingle at the same time. They keep their Strutter friends separate from their work friends and others. This makes sense to me because of the specific similarities they share within each group, and they like to keep those similarities apart from each group.

### **Difficult Transitions**

There were a few respondents that did not have an all-around great experience being on the Strutters team, but with over 100 girls on a single team per year, there is bound to be a few not-so-great experiences. There was tension between a director and some officers and team members during a couple of different generation experiences. Some backstage conflicts that led to a few alumnae not going all four years on the team. It wasn't that they did not like dancing or performing or did not do so well performing compared to others. There were a couple of times where a team member would be late

and have a valid and personal reason as to why they were late. The director at the time would seem understanding about the situation, but then announce the personal aspect to other team members when they should not have. These alumnae did understand that the director was under a lot of stress and their experiences could have been just random bursts of stress, but it was just enough to keep them from coming back the next year.

Drawing from the existential self theory, the alumnae who did not have a great experience on the team may have had a sense of disillusionment, which could make them question whether or not they wanted to pursue a career in the dance field. I discussed this possibility with the disappointed alumnae, but they seemed to have taken their bad experiences and turned them around to benefit their future in the dance world.

What they did learn most importantly to them was what they wanted to be or not to be as a dance director. They wanted to make sure their dancers worked hard but still had fun. They wanted their dancers to have pride in whatever they did, whether it be to continue as dancers or to be something else. The way they went about being a director was the most important thing they learned as a Strutter, because they did not want any of their dancers to feel the way they did as a Strutter.

### **Gender Roles and Transitions**

Leaving a sport you have played for many years can be a difficult transition from athlete to athletic support. Athletes, specifically men, might often have a more difficult time leaving their sport and becoming a fan, which could lead to a sense of depression. Within my interview answers, I have determined that these women have a smooth transition process of becoming an athletic supporter. The Strutters maintain their Strutter

identity following graduation by keeping up with Strutter activities, such as attending alumna events like the reunions, and maintaining relationships with other Strutter alumnae.

Current studies suggest a strong value in examining the gender roles among the Strutters. The Strutters have an equipment management team consisting of ten Texas State University male undergraduate students. The reason for this is not just because men are more physically capable of carrying large props such as fences and boxes, but because the organization does not want to damage the uniforms that the dancers wear. If the dancers carried their own props, the uniforms might get snagged on the props, leading to “pilling” of the uniforms and loose strings. The uniforms cost the dancers approximately two thousand dollars each year, and they do not want the wooden props to damage them.

When the Strutters first became an organization, their purpose was merely for entertainment value. Now, the Strutters has grown into an organization committed to excellence, on and off the dance floor. The organization has a purpose to create groups of women that are prepared for whatever life has to offer them by getting them ready for their future careers, whether it be within or outside of the dance world.

### **Typology of Strutter Alumnae Careers**

My final analysis was to examine the typology of similar and different careers post Strutter. There is only one respondent who has not been involved with teaching or dance at all within my respondents. All of the others are either dance directors, assistants, assistants and teachers, or teachers/principals. Fourteen out of fifteen alumnae stayed

within the realm of dance and school in some form, even the ones who did not plan to be part of the dance world after they graduated. The Strutter alumnae who decided to pursue careers outside of the dance field have many passions in life other than dance. Dance to them was more of a hobby than a career, which is why these alumnae did not pursue a dance related career. The career characteristics the alumnae obtained as a Strutter has carried them through their careers whether they work for a marketing and advertising business or are dance directors.

<b>Description of Career</b>	<b>Number of Alumnae in Career</b>
Dance Director	9
Cheer Coach	1
Assistant Dance Director	2
Assistant Director and Teacher	1
Business and Marketing	1
Principal	1

## **VIII. CONCLUSION**

Whether the alumnae were on the Strutters for one year or five, good experiences or bad, there is clear evidence to say the Strutters experience generally has a positive impact on their dancers, inside and outside of the dance room. The total commitment to being a Strutter is at least partly the result of the totality of being a Strutter: physical, emotional, intellectual, social, and aesthetic.

### **Personal Process of Becoming a Strutter**

Each alumnae shared their experiences of becoming a Strutter, and each experience was different and unique to them. Some of them wanted to continue dancing from high school, some wanted to make new friends at school, and some just wanted to please their director by joining. Each way the alumnae joined was special to them and their experience as a Strutter.

### **Role Transition Process**

The transition process for each Strutter alumnae was quite similar. Every alumnae had “Texas State Strutter” on their resumes, which led to their increased chances of getting jobs, even if they did not take the dance field route, and even if they did not have a great experience on the team. Having “Strutter alumna” on their resumes showed their employers the determination and persistence they had, even before formally interviewing them for a job. This just shows that employers all over Texas know how hard these women work while on the team, and they carry it to their careers.

### **Strutter Organization Impact on Daily Lives**

The Strutter organization has a positive impact on the daily lives of a Strutter alumna. They have benefitted in their careers by learning many positive career aspects such as manners, public speaking and performance, and clerical work. Their friendships from their time on the team have grown into adulthood friendships, participating in wedding ceremonies and baby showers. Their identities as a Strutter remain, as well as some new identities they have accumulated since graduation such as dance director, wife, and mother.

### **Occupational Outcome Similarities**

A majority of the alumnae interviewed (14 of 15 alumnae) stayed within the dance field with their careers. Even the ones who did not have a positive experience on the team ended up pursuing the career of a dance director because they still had a passion for dance. Leaving a sport you have been involved with for many years can be tough, but if you can take your passion for sports and turn it into a career, which is what these alumnae did, you can almost guarantee a lifetime of career happiness and fulfillment. The alumnae expressed immense pleasure with being in their career of choice, because dance is their passion and now their careers.

### **Strutters Always**

The manners and morals, and the life and career characteristics these women learn while on the Strutters show that this team is much more than just for dancing. The great value in joining the Strutters is tough to give up. They become a part of this prestigious

dance team that is known all around the world for their precision and size, then they have to graduate and go off into a world that does not immediately recognize them as a Strutter unless they tell them. This takes a toll on the transitioning identity crisis the alumnae may experience. Although it is difficult to transition from Strutter to Strutter alumna, the Strutter organization makes sure their dancers are prepared for the hard work ahead of them in their future careers. The manners and morals they are taught, as well as the financial and organizational training they go through prepares them to be successful leaders. The passion for dance is what started their Strutter career, and the passion for excellence is what continued within them as they graduated.

## APPENDIX SECTION

### Interview Questions for Strutters Alumnae

1. How long was your dance career (including before high school, high school, and college)?
2. Why did you become a Strutter?
3. How did you make friends with other Strutters, and are you still friends with them? (tryouts, camp, grade level, etc.)
4. What was the transition from college dance career to post-collegiate work like? (What is your job, length of time to find a job, desire for a job inside or outside of dance life, etc.)
5. Do you still think of yourself as a Strutter even after you stopped dancing? Why or why not?
6. How do you feel about the term “ex-Strutter” compared to “Strutter alumnae”?
7. Do you participate in any Strutter related activities? If so, like what?
8. Do you think dancing with the Strutters and the experiences has helped you transition from college to a career? (Describe mental/career characteristics you might have obtained from Strutters)
9. What are the components to the identity of a Strutter, and did you share those same characteristics? (Characteristics such as passionate, reliable, etc.)
10. What are some characteristics and identities you feel best fit you now? (If different from Strutter characteristics) (Business woman, mom, wife, teacher, lawyer, etc. As well as hard working, family oriented, social butterfly, homebody, etc. Career and life in general.)

11. How do you feel about being in your career compared to how you felt about being a Strutter? (Which do you like more and why?)
12. In what ways did your social groups change/evolve from Strutters to post Strutters? (Strutter friend groups evolve to regular friends/or slowly disappear, new work friends introduced to old Strutter friends, etc.)

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