



A 180° VIEW OF TURNOUT

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As a young child, I broke a lot of Barbie dolls. I would dress the dolls up in ballet costumes and try to make them dance like the professionals I saw in pictures. Sadly, no matter how hard I tried to get a Barbie's leg above her head or to get her in another dance position, the Barbie could not do it. I would push and pull her legs to help her stretch like I did in ballet class, most times accompanied by a sudden snap, leaving me with a limb in my right hand and a broken doll in the other.

At first, I could not understand why the Barbie dolls could not perform these various dance positions. It was not until my parents explained to me that the dolls were not built to do so. Over the years, I have come to learn that humans are similar to Barbie dolls, given that our bodies are not built to form various positions. Standing in dance class at the barre, it is anatomically impossible for me to get my feet to create a 180° angle. There is only a certain amount of rotation that my hip sockets will allow before my femur bone cannot move anymore. I can force my turnout, breaking down my bones and putting strain on my body, eventually resulting in pain and injuries.

During my fifteen plus years dancing, I have trained at various dance studios and attended a number of summer intensives. Though the style of ballet at these institutions varied, one aspect remained fairly consistent: the desire and continued focus on obtaining 180° of turnout. As a young dancer, this ideal came as second nature. In every ballet class, I would strive to hold each of my feet at a 90° angle from the start of pliés through reverence. It was not until I took my first anatomy class at the University of Utah my sophomore year that I finally learned that our hip joints are not made to sustain such an extreme range of motion. Being curious, I experimented with finding my anatomical range of external rotation and the muscles used to support it. Some of my teachers were supportive throughout this process, however, a few did not understand my exploration, sticking to the long-time belief that everyone can achieve 180° of external rotation in the hip joints.

To better educate dancers and teachers on the subject of turnout, this paper addresses the concept of turnout in ballet technique and the importance that it holds within the art form. I argue that the ballet world has taken the concept of 180° turnout to an unnecessary extreme. By focusing on the evolution of turnout and the anatomy behind it, I will show how turnout has reached this extreme and the consequences that come as a result. My paper will challenge the idea that all ballet dancers should have 180° turnout, demonstrating that there is more to appreciate in ballet than a flat 5th position and perfectly pointed feet.