

Extraordinary People, Extraordinary Wisdom:
How Can Professional Ballet Dancers Persevere in Their Performance Career?

by

Heejin Kim
B.A., University of British Columbia, 2015

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of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

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Several studies have reported various challenges ballet dancers experience in their performance careers. However, to date, very little research has been done to understand how professional ballet dancers persevere in their performance careers in the face of the demanding nature and various challenges associated with their career. The purpose of this study was to explore perseverance of professional ballet dancers in their performance career from the perspectives of retired professional ballet dancers. Using a social constructivist lens, the research question addressed in this study was: How can professional ballet dancers persevere in a performance career? Narrative interviews were conducted with participants ($N = 9$) who had danced at one or more professional ballet companies for at least one year and had been involved in the ballet world since their retirement from their performance careers. A thematic analysis was used to analyze the data and 4 themes were identified about persevering as a professional ballet dancer in a performance career: (a) Building and Looking After Your Healthy Sense of Self and Mental Attitude; (b) Navigating Your Career Journey With Intelligence and Courage Within and Beyond One Ballet Company; (c) Growing as an Artist to Have More Than Technique and Raw Physicality to Capture an Audience; and (d) Balancing Your Performance Career by Having a Life Outside the Dance World. Implications of the findings for research, practice, and counselling are discussed.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to all current and former dancers who inspired me to undertake this study. You are extraordinary just the way you are.

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Chapter 1

Introduction & Literature Review

According to Gordon (1983), “You can lose yourself in theatre. You can believe in ballet—in the art and in the artists who practice it, for they are not ordinary people with ordinary needs and ordinary desires; they are a breed apart” (p. 7). As the agent for making this magical moment on stage for an audience, ballet dancers dedicate themselves to their career religiously and perceive their career as a calling rather than an occupation (Hamilton, 1998; Turner & Wainwright, 2003). Training and working as a ballet dancer require an extraordinary level of perseverance. Even before their performance career officially begins, most ballet dancers have maintained a single-minded career focus on ballet dancing from early childhood through adolescence (Hamilton, 1998; Kelman, 2000; Pickard & Bailey, 2009). It is usual that ballet dancers endure exceptional adversity during their training (Montanari & Zietkiewicz, 2000), and this continues into their professional performance careers (Hernandez, 2012; Kelman, 2000). For example, professional ballet dancers are expected to perform through pain and discomfort (Alexias & Dimitropoulou, 2011; Hamilton, Hamilton, Meltzer, Marshall, & Molnar, 1989; Hernandez, 2012, Grove, Main, & Sharp, 2013; Turner & Wainwright, 2003), tolerating pain significantly more than their age matched non-dancer counterparts (Tajet-Foxell & Rose, 1995).

To perform at the professional level, ballet dancers require talent, hard work, and passion (Wainwright & Turner, 2004). In the ballet world, “Art does not exist to serve life; life exists to serve art” (Gordon, 1983, p. 102). Although the performance career of ballet dancers involves constantly being seen by others, how ballet dancers navigate

challenges in their career is largely invisible. In fact, ballet dancers are encouraged to be silent about how they navigate and handle struggles in their career while being admired for their stoicism and dedication to their performance career (Hamilton, 1998).

This silence has consequently translated to little knowledge and understanding about what ballet dancers do to persevere in their performance career. The majority of the previous literature on ballet dancers has largely focused on specific aspects of a performance career, such as psychological distress (Mainwaring & Finney, 2017; Walker & Nordin-Bates, 2010), body image (Radell, Keneman, Mandradjieff, Adame, & Cole, 2017), physical injury (Smith, Gerrie, Varner, McCulloch, Lintner, & Harris, 2015; Prisk, O'Loughlin, & Kennedy, 2008), nutrition (Burckhardt, Wynn, Krieg, Bagutti, & Faouzi, 2011; Lee, Kim, & Kim, 2015), eating disorder (Archinard, & Scherer, 1995; Peric, Zenic, Sekulic, Kondric, & Zaletel, 2016), or retirement and career transition (Lee, 1988; Roncaglia, 2006; Roncaglia, 2008; Wainwright & Turner, 2006; Willard & Lavallee, 2016). Since Gray and Kunkel (2001) called attention to the lack of a more integrative exploration and representation of ballet dancers' experiences, some researchers have explored narratives of current and retired professional ballet dancers. For example, Warnick, Wilt, and McAdams (2016) reported that differences were found in the life stories and identities of current and retired dancers about agency of entering the dance field, challenges within the dance career, and interest in teaching new dancers. However, the overall literature on ballet dancers has given minimal attention to the understanding of how ballet dancers persevere in their career from the perspective of the dancers themselves. While the existing literature captures what ballet dancers may be struggling

with, little is known about what ballet dancers do to persevere in their performance career in the face of adversity and challenges prevalent in the ballet world.

The objective of the present study was to seek and explore the personal wisdom of retired professional ballet dancers for the purpose of gaining insight into what could help current and aspiring professional ballet dancers persevere in their performance career. Retired professional ballet dancers not only have insight about their ballet performance career, but also about life outside the ballet world. By exploring the personal wisdom of retired professional ballet dancers, the role that personal experience and personhood played for these dancers in learning what helped—or did not help—they persevere in their performance career is highlighted and honoured. This broader perspective and recollection from retired professional ballet dancers on how ballet dancers can persevere in their performance career will offer guidance for current and aspiring professional ballet dancers. In addition, the findings of this study will contribute to the existing literature by filling in the gap about the dancer's own perspective about what they can do to persevere in their performance career.

My research question is the following: How can professional ballet dancers persevere in a performance career? In this chapter, I will introduce background materials to situate the findings I report later in this thesis. First, I will briefly discuss and define ballet, career adaptability, personal wisdom, and perseverance. Next, I will outline a career path of ballet dancers and characteristics associated with a professional ballet performance career. Then, I will provide an overview of the existing literature on factors identified to influence perseverance of ballet dancers. Last, I will conclude this chapter

with a brief restatement of the rationale, purpose, and a question to summarize the contents of this chapter.

Setting the Context: Ballet

Ballet is a specific style of theatre dance that originated with Renaissance theatrical spectacles in 16th-century Europe, and it is usually presented with music and costumes or stage design for a dramatic effect (Craine & Mackrell, 2010). The French King Louis XIV founded the first dance institution in the Western world in 1661, and the masters at this institution codified basic classical ballet techniques, such as the conventional five foot positions, eight leg and arm positions, five arabesques, and various steps and movements (Craine & Mackrell, 2010). Although ballet was exclusively used to describe the works based on the *danse d'école* and the academic form before the 20th century, it is now widely used to refer to both non-classical and contemporary techniques (Craine & Mackrell, 2010) and styles.

There are various styles of classical ballet, such as the Balanchine, the Cecchetti, Royal Academy of Dancing, or the Vaganova. These different styles are mostly named after the ballet dancer or educator who developed that specific style. Although these different styles of ballet share the basic movements and steps, each emphasizes certain aspects over others. For example, while the Cecchetti method promotes the use of simple and clean movements, the Vaganova method encourages the use of big extensions and upper body movements (Hamilton, 1998). Most ballet companies favour one style over others, and it is important that aspiring ballet dancers consider what kinds of job opportunities would be available in the particular style that they are trained in (Hamilton, 1998). In the ballet world, it is considered prestigious to have been trained by a

distinguished teacher when a specific style is noticeable in the dancer's movements (Wulff, 1998).

In Canada, ballet is the 4th most popular type of dance following modern dance, ballroom and social dance, and European traditional and folk (Canada Council for the Arts, 2014). Based on the Canada Dance Mapping Study, the Canada Council for the Arts (2014) identified three teaching organizations for classical ballet: the Royal Academy of Dance, The Society of Russian Ballet, and the Cecchetti Society of Canada. There are over 1,000 ballet teachers who belong to these teaching organizations across Canada. There are also a number of professional ballet companies, such as Alberta Ballet Company, Atlantic Ballet Theatre of Canada, Ballet BC, Ballet Victoria, The National Ballet of Canada, or the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, across the country, and each company has between 10 and 79 dancers at different levels, such as corps de ballet, soloist, or principal. Some ballet companies also have an apprenticeship program for dancers in their late teens or early 20s, who are interested in joining a professional ballet company after completing their training program.

Training to Become a Professional Ballet Dancer

Aspiring ballet dancers often start their ballet training at an early age (Hamilton, 1998; Hamilton & Hamilton, 1991; Pickard & Bailey, 2009; Pickman, 1987; Pulinkala, 2011; Wainwright & Turner, 2004), and attend a ballet school or program for a number of years prior to performing on a professional level. Aspiring ballet dancers are required to learn approximately 200 steps in classical ballet to increase their ballet literacy regarding forms and movements during their training (Pickard, 2012; Wulff, 1998). In the survey conducted by the Canada Council for the Arts in 2014, 80% of professional

dancers in the sample reported an average of 9.5 years of dance training prior to their career in dance. Due to the demanding nature of the ballet training, aspiring ballet dancers dedicate much of their youth to dancing (Sandham & Nicol, 2015; Turner & Wainwright, 2003). Attending classes and auditions takes up much of young dancers' time outside school (Alter, 1997; Pickard & Bailey, 2009, Pickman, 1987). Therefore, dancers often sacrifice their social time with their friends or pursuit of their interests outside ballet (Buckroyd, 2001; Hamilton, 1998; Hamilton & Hamilton, 1991). In reality, most aspiring ballet dancers leave their training for various reasons before they reach a level of performing as a professional ballet dancer. For example, Dunning (1985) noted that 95% of the children who started their ballet training at the School of American Ballet dropped out of the program before they complete the entire 9 years of training. Nonetheless, ballet dancers aiming for a professional performance career are required to sustain their deep sense of commitment to and single-minded focus on ballet from their early childhood to adulthood (Hamilton, 1998; Kelman, 2000; Pickard & Bailey, 2009).

Yet another important condition to succeed in ballet and possibly be accepted into a ballet company is having a certain type of body ideal for ballet (Hamilton, 1998; Hamilton, Hamilton, Marshall, & Molnar, 1992; Kelman, 2000; Pickard, 2007): turnout of pelvis, flexibility, a long legged vertical body proportion with a short torso, arched feet, and a slim body (Hamilton, 1998). It is extremely challenging to become a professional ballet dancer without the ideal body type for ballet (Hamilton, 1986; Hamilton, 1998, Pickard, 2007). Moreover, the presence of anatomical deficits that compromise dance techniques is a predictor for the likelihood of physical injuries and dropping out of the advanced training among aspiring dancers (Hamilton, Hamilton,

Warren, Keller, & Molnar, 1997). Aspiring dancers, however, have little or no control over their physique and anatomy because genetics is mainly responsible for them.

To sum up, dancers are renowned for their extraordinary dedication to their pursuit (Hamilton, 1998; Hamilton, Solomon, & Solomon, 2006), and talent, hard work, and passion for dancing are necessary for them to be able to reach and perform on a professional level (Wainwright & Turner, 2004). Based on her interviews with dancers at New York City Ballet, Gordon (1983) characterized ballet dancers as being “a breed apart” (p.7). In particular, in their interviews with Gordon in 1983, ballet dancers often described themselves as being seen as fantasy creatures that mechanically dedicate themselves to their career with a diminished sense of personhood (Gray & Kunkel, 2001). Dedication, physical talent, and anatomical characteristics influence whether an aspiring dancer has a career opportunity in the professional ballet world. Generally, the importance of persevering is not only critical for professional ballet dancers, but also for aspiring ballet dancers. Although perseverance alone may not be sufficient to guarantee a professional performance career for aspiring ballet dancers, it is unlikely that they can perform on a professional level without persevering.

Professional Ballet Dancing as a Career

The ballet company’s hierarchy. Although nine out of 10 aspiring dancers in training dream of being a professional dancer, only about a third of them will have a professional performance career in dance (Hamilton, 1998). Ballet dancers typically begin their ballet career with an audition at a professional ballet company in their late teens (Hamilton, 1998; Pulinkala, 2011; Wulff, 1998). Some ballet dancers join a professional ballet company as an apprentice upon completing their schooling (Hamilton,

1998; Pulinkala, 2011) and are later offered a contract with a company (Wulff, 1998). Earnings are lower for apprentices than for dancers with a company member contract. For instance, the National Ballet of Canada pays their apprentices half of what their first year Corps de Ballet dancers are paid for the duration of their 8-month apprenticeship (The National Ballet of Canada, 2017). When new ballet dancers who have never danced professionally start their career at a professional ballet company, almost all of them are hired as a Corps de Ballet member.

Although there are some variations, the highest rank among dancers is commonly called “Principal” in English-speaking countries. In between the Principals and Corps de Ballet, there are Soloists. Some dancers may be promoted to Soloist from Corps de Ballet. Generally, the progression of a dancer’s career is unpredictable in ballet, and seniority does not guarantee status or promotion (Hamilton, 1998). On rare occasions, some dancers get promoted quickly by catching a director’s eye, but the majority of the dancers who are competent, motivated, and capable of performing better roles may be overlooked or ignored (Hamilton, 1998; Wulff, 1998). Very few dancers reach the level of Principal in their ballet performance career (Hamilton, 1998).

Principal dancers represent a small, top tier in a professional ballet company. When I counted the number of dancers in each rank on the websites of different ballet companies, such as American Ballet Theatre, Bolshoi Ballet, The National Ballet of Canada, and Paris Opera Ballet, around the world, principal dancers make up approximately 7 to 19 % of all the dancers at these professional ballet companies in 2019. For example, at the National Ballet of Canada, out of 79 dancers, there are 15 principal dancers. The American Ballet Theatre has 95 dancers, and there are 15 principal dancers.

At Paris Opera Ballet, principal dancers are called *étoiles*, and out of 156 dancers, there are only 16 *étoiles*. In Russia, Bolshoi Ballet has 16 principal dancers out of 236 dancers.

Despite being the minority in number within a professional ballet company, principal dancers get the most publicity. Most interviews in dance magazines or books feature principal dancers and include their voice. However, in navigating a ballet performance career, the experiences of principal dancers may be different from those of lower level dancers in a number of ways. As ballet dancers become more established and get promoted to a higher status within the company, they begin to gain more privileges, ranging from a longer stretch time on the stage to requesting a specific ballet master to coach them (Wulff, 1998). Although a ballet performance career generally offers little job security and unemployment benefits are not a common feature of the professional dance career (Krasnow, Mainwaring, & Kerr, 1994), principal dancers may experience less job insecurity compared with lower ranking dancers.

Within a ballet company, there are rigid social structures in the hierarchy (Gordon, 1983). The ballet management is at the top of the ballet company's hierarchy (Gordon, 1983, Wulff, 1998), and the dancer's whole career may be "entirely in the director's hand" (Hamilton, 1998, p. 118). The ballet management, including the artistic director, is in charge of recruiting new dancers and organizing a casting list (Wulff, 1998). Therefore, the director has an enormous influence over how a certain dancer's career pans out. Most directors were ex-principal dancers at a professional ballet company, and their prominent performance career carries its "symbolic capital" even after their retirement as a dancer (Wulff, 1998, p. 78). While many ballet dancers, especially in the early stages of their career, attempt to learn about what the director is

looking for, such information is not always available to dancers in the lower levels of the company hierarchy (Wulff, 1998). In addition to the director of a ballet company, choreographers and ballet masters also have influence over which dancer is chosen to dance a particular role or taken out of a role (Gordon, 1983; Kelman, 2000; Wulff, 1998). However, although the directors, choreographers, and masters often exert more power on dancers off the stage (Gordon, 1983; Wulff, 1998), dancers exercise their agency regarding their movements on the stage or during the early stages of choreography. For example, from her fieldwork with four professional ballet companies, Wulff (1998) shared a few examples in which ballet dancers slightly changed choreography against the instructions of the masters or requested that choreographers change certain steps.

The cost of becoming extraordinary. To understand the characterization of ballet dancers as “a breed apart” (Gordon, 1983, p.7), it is important to learn about the extraordinary efforts required to persevere in a ballet performance career. As I noted earlier, the ballet world is demanding, and it can be stressful for dancers physically and psychologically (Buckroyd, 2001; Gordon, 1983; Hamilton, 1997; Hamilton, 1998; Hamilton & Hamilton, 1991; Hernandez, 2012; Kelman, 2000; Mainwaring & Finney, 2017), as well as financially (Canada Council for the Arts, 2014; Hamilton, 1998; Jeffri, Schriel, & Throsby, 2015; Kelman, 2000). Nicholas (1976) attempted to measure the physical demand of different sports and physical activities, reporting that ballet dancing is more physically strenuous than playing professional hockey or basketball. Even when dancers graduate from their pre-professional training program and make a *début* as a professional, they continue to rely on daily classes to maintain their balletic body. Professional dancers spend over 6 hours a day to prepare and train their body for a

performance (Pulinkala, 2011; Wyon, 2010), and their regular participation in the class is considered crucial by both ballet management and dancers (Wulff, 1998). During the ballet season, professional ballet dancers work 6 days a week (Gordon, 1983), and their day often begins with a morning class and ends late at night with rehearsals and performances (Hamilton & Hamilton, 1991; Kelman, 2000). It is also common that professional ballet dancers tour for weeks with their company nationally or internationally during the ballet season (Gordon, 1983; Kelman, 2000; Wulff, 1998).

This schedule, paired with high levels of physical and mental stress, leave little or no room for exploring interests outside the ballet world, and ballet dancers often develop a “tunnel vision” because their lives revolve exclusively around ballet (Gordon, 1983, p. 106). The need for maintaining a single-minded career focus on ballet dancing from early childhood through adolescence (Hamilton, 1998; Kelman, 2000; Pickard & Bailey, 2009) and busy schedules of professional ballet dancers (Buckroyd, 2001; Hamilton, 1988) affect the range of social experiences dancers can have in their life (Kelman, 2000). This lack of social experiences may influence different areas of a dancer’s life for at least three reasons. First, ballet dancers often wait or give up on taking on another life role, such as a parent or spouse until they retire (Gordon, 1983; Hamilton, 1998; Hamilton & Hamilton, 1991); and even when they do have relationships with their friends, family, or significant other, it can be difficult to maintain these relationships with busy schedules and performance tours (Gordon, 1983). Second, it is common that dancers sacrifice their education outside ballet due to the demand of their dance training, and this combined with their lack of social experience outside the ballet world makes it difficult for dancers to cope with life stress (Kelman, 2000). Third, the social network of

dancers may be predominantly made up of other dancers (Greben, 1999; Hamilton, 1998), possibly in part because it is difficult for dancers to develop friendships outside the ballet world due to their busy schedule as well as the unique nature of their career (Buckroyd, 2001; Hamilton, 1998). This single-minded focus on ballet poses challenges for professional dancers when they retire from their performance career. Given the short duration of a ballet performance career (Turner & Wainwright, 2003), it is concerning that dancers may not be ready for their career transition due to a lack of life experiences outside ballet (Greben, 1992; Wulff, 1998).

Career Adaptability

Given the lack of literature on how ballet dancers navigate and persevere in a performance career, I wondered if the theoretical and psychosocial construct of career adaptability would be able to, at least in part, explain how ballet dancers persevere in a performance career. Career construction theory conceptualizes human development as being driven by adaptation to a social environment with a focus on person-environment integration; that is, *career adaptability* affects how individuals connect with their social environment and regulate their own work behaviours (Savickas, 2013). As a construct, career adaptability is the readiness and availability of psychosocial resources to adapt to both predictable and unpredictable job tasks, changes, and challenges in one's career as well as to potentially stressful work situations (Savickas, 1997), and is essential in workplaces that offer little security (Hartung & Cadaret, 2017). Therefore, career adaptability has been considered as a critical psychosocial meta-capacity for coping with ongoing career changes and stressful employment conditions (Hartung & Cadaret, 2017; Johnston, Luciano, Maggiori, Ruch, & Rossier, 2013; Porfeli & Savickas, 2012). When

faced with unfamiliar problems presented by career developmental tasks, career transitions, or work trauma, individuals need to cope by using their self-regulatory and psychosocial resources, which are developed through interactions between an individual and environment (Hartung & Cadaret, 2017; Savickas, 2013; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). That is, career adaptability is a dynamic mechanism that facilitates and regulates the interaction between dispositional traits and career adapting behaviours (Nilforooshan & Salimi, 2016; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Furthermore, career adaptability moderates the relationship between individual personality traits and work engagement by regulating the expression of dispositional personality traits at work (Johnston et al., 2013; Rossier, Zecca, Stauffer, Maggiori, & Dauwalder, 2012). Therefore, career adaptability is the capacity to practice and use psychosocial resources to make changes in self as well as situation for career satisfaction and success (Hartung & Cadaret, 2017).

Career adaptability includes four resource domains that help translate individual dispositional traits into positive career adapting behaviours: namely, concern, control, curiosity, and confidence (Johnston et al., 2013; Rossier et al., 2012). These four dimensions of career adaptability are demonstrated in attitudes and behaviours of individuals, allowing them to “master, negotiate, or resolve” career tasks, changes, and challenges (Hartung & Cadaret, 2017, p. 22). *Career concern* is associated with the capacity to orient to and plan for the occupational future with optimism and hopefulness (Savickas, 2013). For example, professional ballet dancers with career concern would be aware of how their current work behaviours and experiences relate to their future in a performance career, thereby making career goals accordingly with a hopeful attitude about the future. *Career control* involves taking personal responsibility for one's career

development or transition processes with persistence and decisiveness with a sense of agency (Savickas, 2013). For instance, professional ballet dancers with career control would actively engage in their career development processes and negotiate career transitions with a sense of ownership over their career, being conscientious and making career choices independently and decisively upon self-directed exploration. *Career curiosity* refers to a tendency to seek information on one's work environment and to explore one's personal fit with the environment with information about career possibilities and options combined with self-awareness. For example, professional ballet dancers with career curiosity would take initiative to learn new repertoires in their company and gain knowledge into their personal competencies and areas for improvement. *Career confidence* reflects feelings of self-efficacy about one's ability to master and resolve career-related challenges and to take ownership of career decisions one makes, and it can be developed through experiences of solving problems in various aspects of one's life inside or outside the world of work (Savickas, 2013). For example, professional ballet dancers who have more experiences performing on stage as an aspiring dancer may have more career confidence and successfully manage symptoms of performance anxiety when dancing in front of a large audience. These four career adaptability resources are not stable traits, but rather, they are self-regulatory capacities that change over time and situations through different factors within the person, environment, and interaction between the person and environment (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). With interventions and training targeting each domain, individuals can develop and grow their career adaptability resources (Savickas, 1997).

Although there is no previous research exploring how career adaptability is

related to perseverance in a professional ballet performance career, a number of past studies have identified career adaptability as beneficial to one's career development process. For example, Johnston et al. (2013) reported that career adaptability, and the domain of career control in specific, mediates the relationship between orientations to happiness involving engagement, pleasure, and meaning as well as stress at work. Thus, individuals may be more engaged in their work, focused on pleasure, and cognizant of the meaning of their work through the domain of career control, which in turn, contributes to reduced stress at work. Moreover, Porfeli and Savickas (2012) found that career adaptability is positively associated with vocational identity and negatively associated with self-doubt. Therefore, individuals with higher levels of career adaptability are more likely to seek and make career decisions that are in line with their identity, while experiencing lower levels of anxiety and uncertainty regarding their career choice and commitment (Porfeli & Savickas, 2012).

Career adaptability is, therefore, a pertinent construct when exploring how ballet dancers can persevere in their professional performance career. Specifically, the ballet performance career generally offers little job security (Krasnow et al., 1994) and involves frequent changes in terms of individual capacities (e.g., injuries) or expected tasks at work (e.g., roles in performances). Persevering in a performance career requires dancers to utilize their adaptability to build resilience and successfully navigate career tasks, transitions, and stressful situations in their performance career.

Personal Wisdom

While personal wisdom was first introduced as a concept in the late 1990s (Staudinger, 1999b), most psychological conceptions of wisdom do not explicitly

differentiate between personal and general wisdom; rather, they implicitly emphasize one or the other (Staudinger, 2013). Personal wisdom is a type of wisdom based on insight gained from one's own lived experience (Staudinger, 1999a). Although general wisdom and personal wisdom often overlap, personal wisdom differs from general wisdom. Specifically, Mickler & Staudinger (2008) noted that personal wisdom focuses on insight based on firsthand experience or personal foresights (e.g., What would I personally need to do in a given situation?) rather than insight into life in general (e.g., What would people generally need to do in a given situation?). Therefore, the main difference between personal and general wisdom is ontological: Personal wisdom uses the first-person ontology and refers to people's insight into their own life, and general wisdom uses the third-person ontology and takes an observer's perspective about life in general, or that of others' (Mickler & Staudinger, 2008; Staudinger, 2013). For example, if dancers are sharing their wisdom with other dancers, they may mention widely used stress management practices (general wisdom). In doing so, the dancers are most likely to discuss their insight based on their personal experiences with managing their stress in their dance career (personal wisdom).

These two different ways of conceptualizing wisdom are correspondingly measured and operationalized in research. Here, I briefly introduce the Berlin measure of general wisdom (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Staudinger, Smith, & Baltes, 1994) and the Bremen measure of personal wisdom (Mickler & Staudinger, 2008). These two measures each include five criteria, and two of the five criteria overlap conceptually: The Berlin measure of general wisdom includes Relativism of Values and Life Priorities (tolerance towards individual differences in values and life priorities) and Recognition and

Management of Uncertainty (acceptance towards the inevitable uncertain nature of human life; Staudinger, 2013; Staudinger et al., 1994); the Bremen measure of personal wisdom contains criteria for Self-Relativism (ability to evaluate self and others fairly with tolerance for different values and life styles) and Tolerance of Ambiguity (ability to recognize and manage uncertainties in one's own life; Mickler & Staudinger, 2008).

The Berlin (General) wisdom paradigm defines wisdom as expertise in deep insight and reasonable judgment about the fundamental human condition. There are five criteria, including Relativism of Values and Life Priorities and Recognition and Management of Uncertainty mentioned above: Rich Factual Knowledge (knowledge about human nature and development); Rich Procedural Knowledge (strategies to handle the conduct of life and conflicts); and Lifespan Contextualism (situating the life problems in relation to the broader context and recognizing how past, present, and future perspectives are interrelated; Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Staudinger et al., 1994).

The Bremen measure of personal wisdom developed by Mickler and Staudinger (2008) is based on the Bremen (personal) wisdom paradigm. Mickler and Staudinger adapted the Berlin wisdom paradigm to capture personal wisdom using developmental psychologist Erik Erikson (1968)'s concepts of personal development and maturity. In addition to Self-Relativism and Tolerance of Ambiguity, the Bremen measure includes three other criteria to index personal wisdom: Rich Self-Knowledge (deep insight into self), Heuristics for Growth and Self-Regulation (strategies to express and regulate feelings in difficult situations and develop social relationships), and Interrelating the Self (ability to engage in self-reflection to understand possible causes of one's behaviour or feelings with an awareness about one's dependency on others; Mickler & Staudinger,

2008).

General and personal wisdom are crucial components when discussing the construct of wisdom, and they are closely related to each other (Staudinger, 2013). Given the tight link between personal and general wisdom, I did not necessarily aim to exclude general wisdom from my study or analysis of my data. Rather, my aim was to highlight personal wisdom based on the lived experiences that retired professional ballet dancers shared with me.

Perseverance

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *perseverance* as “steadfast pursuit of an aim, especially in the face of difficulty or obstacles” (Perseverance, 2018, n.p.), and previous research on perseverance in career has also defined this concept similarly as a tendency to endure and persist despite adversity (e.g., Markman, Baron, & Balkin, 2005). Perseverance has been linked to better work performance and work behaviours (Littman-Ovadia & Lavy, 2016). For example, in an international sample of 686 working individuals, Littman-Ovadia and Lavy (2016) found that workers who endorsed perseverance were more likely to have better work performance and less likely to engage in counterproductive work behaviours, and the association between perseverance and work performance was the highest among 24 different qualities, including creativity, bravery, social intelligence, leadership, self-regulation, and humour. It appears that while perseverance does not guarantee success, it may not be possible to attain success without perseverance (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Another concept similar to perseverance is *persistence*, and one of its definitions offered in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is “The fact of continuing in an opinion or

course of action in spite of difficulty or opposition” (Persistence, n.d, n.p.). Most previous researchers have used perseverance and persistence interchangeably to refer to the same concept (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). However, while the definitions of perseverance and persistence share similar characteristics, the connotation of each is different (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Perseverance implies an element of willpower of an agent who is demonstrating it. That is, a person who perseveres is resolute, while a person who persists may or may not have a clear sense of purpose for potential positive outcomes. For example, dancers can be persistent and aimless at the same time in their ballet training with sheer stubbornness. In other words, perseverance is not used in situations where individuals are continuing their actions without a determination to achieve a positive goal.

Although perseverance has been explored in previous studies, it is important to point out that there is no dominant tradition of theoretical and empirical work on perseverance. Previous research has rarely focused on understanding perseverance as its main purpose (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), and perseverance is often presented as a component of a different or conceptually overlapping construct that was of researchers’ interest (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). For example, constructs that conceptually overlap with perseverance include *conscientiousness* (e.g., Roberts, Jackson, Fayard, Edmonds, & Meints, 2009), *learned industriousness* (e.g., Eisenberger, 1992), or *grit* (e.g., Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007). Based on their factor analysis of items from different scales measuring conscientiousness, MacCann, Duckworth, and Roberts (2009) argued that perseverance is one of the components of conscientiousness (in addition to industriousness, perfectionism, tidiness,

procrastination refrainment, control, cautiousness, and task planning). Perseverance is also an outcome variable in the theory of learned industriousness, and Eisenberger (1992) argued that when effort is rewarded, various species, including humans, tend to subsequently show more perseverance. The trait of grit includes perseverance and passion, and is defined as the sustained interest and focus on a goal over a long period of time (Duckworth et al., 2007).

Some of the constructs that include a facet of perseverance have been associated with performance outcome. For example, conscientiousness has been consistently found to be related to accomplishment of job tasks in all occupational groups studied (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Salgado, 1997). Duckworth et al. (2007) argued that grit can predict success outcomes, and reported that individuals scoring higher on grit were more likely to achieve higher levels of education and grade point averages and attain higher points in the Scripps National Spelling Bee than their less gritty peers. Therefore, perseverance appears to play a role in task achievement across various domains.

On the other hand, it is worth noting that perseverance is only beneficial when the likelihood of successful goal attainment is reasonable (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). For example, past organizational success often increases the chance of the organization attempting to persevere with their previous strategies, even after these strategies became obsolete with a shift in environment, and ultimately, this “dysfunctional persistence” leads to performance declines (Audia, Locke, & Smith, 2000, p. 837). Thus, it is critical that individuals are able to make an accurate appraisal of whether it is advisable to persevere (i.e., if it is likely that perseverance in the face of obstacles will eventually lead to success).

There were four reasons why I chose to use perseverance as my construct of interest for this study: (a) I chose perseverance over persistence due to its more consistently positive connotations in previous literature (Peterson & Seligman, 2004); (b) I chose to focus on perseverance rather than other related constructs, such as conscientiousness, learned industriousness, or grit, because perseverance is a shared component among these different constructs associated with better performance outcomes; (c) given the lengthy and demanding training required for becoming a professional ballet dancer, perseverance is assumed to be one of the qualities that ballet dancers possess. Dancers are familiar with the belief that perseverance is necessary in their pursuit of perfection in ballet (Aalten, 2005); and (d) perseverance is especially critical in challenging work settings because it affects resilience and endurance of individuals facing setbacks (Markman et al., 2005), and professional ballet companies can be an example of such work environment. In this study, perseverance of professional ballet dancers is defined as keeping on working as a professional performer while navigating various difficulties associated with maintaining a performance career.

Literature Review: Factors Influencing Perseverance of Ballet Dancers

In 1983, Gordon noted that there are no statistics about the length of professional ballet dancers' careers. Moreover, there is a dearth of research exploring what influences perseverance among dancers in their career from their perspective. A small body of previous literature on helpful factors for persevering as ballet dancers exists, but it is mainly focused on injury prevention and recovery for dancers (e.g., Adam, Brassington, Steiner, & Matheson, 2004; Noh, Morris, & Andersen, 2005; Noh, Morris, & Andersen, 2007; Patterson, Smith, Everett, & Ptacek, 1998).

Although decades have passed since Gordon's observation, large-scale official statistics on the length of professional ballet dancing careers have not been compiled. It is, therefore, impossible to know the average length of a professional ballet performance career and what constitutes premature retirement. Many authors in previous publications have, however, noted that professional ballet dancers retire by mid-30s on average (Gordon, 1983; Hamilton, 1998; Pickman, 1987; Roncaglia, 2006; Wulff, 1998). Anecdotally, it is common to hear about professional ballet dancers leaving their performance career well before their mid-30s.

Professional ballet dancers retire for various reasons. For example, Lee (1988) reported how struggles to conform to the ballet aesthetic, concerns regarding injury, the competitive atmosphere in a company, and the lack of opportunity to develop personal identity or pursue relationships outside a company can lead ballet dancers to consider retirement. In a study conducted by Jeffri and colleagues (2015), out of 171 retired dancers, 35% reported health as a reason for ending their career. Some professional ballet dancers in a previous study described their reason for retiring from their performance career as "involuntary" (Roncaglia, 2006). For example, one dancer shared in his interview how the ballet management stopped casting him for roles he used to dance as he got older, despite no significant change in his physical abilities and techniques (Roncaglia, 2006).

As I discussed earlier, there is little information and understanding about what ballet dancers do to persevere in their performance career. The literature has focused mostly on what factors are thought to interrupt or end performance careers. Of these factors, injury has received the most attention in the literature. Although injuries are an

inevitable feature of ballet dancing, serious injuries can lead professional ballet dancers to face a loss of a company position and time in performance (Garrick & Requa, 1993; Grove et al., 2013; Mainwaring & Finney, 2017) or even to retire from their career prematurely (Wainwright & Turner, 2004). Therefore, I provide a review on factors related to dance injury to learn more about the role of injury in persevering in a performance career. At the same time, I was particularly interested in mentorship and career advice given my personal experience of its relative absence at a point in my life when I struggled and left the ballet world. The anecdotes dancers in my personal network shared in our conversations about how instrumental receiving mentorship and career advice was for them to persevere in their dance training also added to my interest in the role of mentorship and career support.

Injury

Unfortunately, injuries are far too common among dancers. For example, Kerr, Krasnow, and Mainwaring (1992) reported that 97% of dancers in their sample experienced a serious injury during a period of 8 months. It is well known that dance techniques can cause extreme musculoskeletal strain (Alderson, Hopper, Elliott, & Ackland, 2009; Prisk et al., 2008; Westblad, Tsai-Felländer, & Johansson, 1995), and physical injury has been extensively researched as a challenge that professional ballet dancers face in their career.

Many factors in the existing literature have been associated with dance-related injuries in professional ballet dancers. Most certainly, dance injury is associated with anatomical characteristics of dancers. Dancers with anatomical characteristics ideal for ballet are less likely to experience dance injury (Hamilton et al., 1992; Hamilton et al.,

1997). Since ballet involves constant repetition of steps, dancers with even minor anatomical or functional issues, including less turnout or decreased ankle motion, are more likely to experience injuries (Hamilton, e al., 1992). However, it is not possible for dancers to modify their anatomy with efforts. Some studies have separately explored the role of various psychosocial factors, such as stress, coping strategies, social support, or personality, in dance injuries (Adam et al., 2004; Mainwaring, Kerr, & Krasnow, 1993; Noh et al., 2005; Noh et al., 2007; Patterson et al., 1998). The culture of silencing (Hamilton, 1998) also plays a role in dance injury. Arguably, understanding these psychosocial factors can help dancers persevere in their career by decreasing the frequency and duration of dance injuries.

Silencing injury in the ballet world. As I stated in the introduction of my thesis, ballet dancers are encouraged to be silent and stoic (Hamilton, 1998). In a professional ballet company, ballet dancers are often discouraged from reporting their injuries (Wulff, 1998), and are less likely to seek medical attention for their pain or injuries (Mainwaring et al., 1993). This expectation placed on ballet dancers to perform through pain and discomfort is prevalent in the ballet world (Alexias & Dimitropoulou, 2011; Hamilton, Hamilton et al., 1989; Hernandez, 2012, Grove et al., 2013; Turner & Wainright, 2003). As a result, remaining quiet about their injuries and tolerating pain and discomfort to perform delay injury recovery at best and increase the risk of further injury at worst. Therefore, the overuse and an extensive range of motions are not the only reasons that are responsible for the likelihood of injuries in dancers.

Moreover, Kelman (2000) argued that the perceived lack of control that stems from the environment in the ballet company, where the ballet management has control

over the dancer's roles and positions in performance, makes ballet dancers more vulnerable to injuries. Therefore, the culture and norms in the ballet world also play a role in dance injury. Other psychosocial factors that play a role in dance injury in the existing literature are stress and personality, coping strategies, and social support—each of which I now turn to.

Stress and personality. It was reported that as a dancer's stress level associated with negative changes in life increases, the duration of an existing dance injury lengthens (Mainwaring et al., 1993) and the chance of experiencing injuries increases (Patterson et al., 1998). In addition to stress, the personality of dancers influences the likelihood of dance injury. For example, in the study of 29 professional ballet dancers, Hamilton (1989) reported that ballet dancers who had a personality characteristic of an "overachiever" experienced more injuries when physical stress was present (p. 266). Also, dancers who are highly motivated and have higher expectations of themselves are more likely to experience burnout or overtraining, and therefore, have a higher chance of being injured (Koutedakis, 2000).

Coping strategies. How ballet dancers respond to stressful situations can decrease the adverse impact of stress. For example, ballet dancers who scored higher levels of coping skills on the seven subscales (e.g., Coping With Adversity, Peaking Under Pressure, Goal Setting and Mental Preparation, Concentration, Freedom From Worry, Confidence and Achievement Motivation, and Coachability) of the Athletic Coping Skills Inventory-28 (ACSI-28; Smith, Schutz, Smoll, & Ptacek, 1995; Noh et al., 2005) or who practiced interventions, such as imagery, self-talk, or relaxation, to develop coping skills (Noh et al., 2007), were less likely to be injured and recovered faster when

injured. In particular, the use of broad-based coping skills rather than the exclusive use of relaxation technique was found effective (Noh et al., 2007). Therefore, it may be beneficial to teach ballet dancers different coping strategies against stress to decrease the likelihood of dance injury.

Social support. Previous research has reported mixed results regarding the role of social support in moderating the relationship between stress and dance injury. For example, while some researchers noted that dancers receiving a higher level of social support experienced a lower frequency of dance injury (Adam et al., 2004; Patterson et al., 1998), Noh et al. (2005) found no relationship between social support and dance injury in their sample of dancers. The inconsistent findings regarding the association between social support and dance injury may be related to different operational definitions of social support used in the previous studies (Mainwaring & Finney, 2017). For example, while Adam et al. (2004) measured general social support that dancers receive from their family, dancing and non-dancing friends, and community, Noh et al. (2005) examined the social support within the ballet social networks. Taken together, the findings of previous studies suggested that the social support from people outside the ballet world appears to be helpful for ballet dancers in managing their stress, thus preventing dance injury. As another form of social support, I turn now to the idea of mentorship.

Mentorship

Mentorship is defined as a type of learning experience through a relationship between two persons: a mentor who is more knowledgeable or more experienced and a protégé (Severinsson, 1994) who receives both vocational and psycho-social support

from a mentor (Kram, 1985). While I could not find any previous research focusing on examining the role of mentorship in perseverance of dancers, Wulff (1998) noted that informal mentorship takes place in the ballet world. In addition to ballet educators, older students feel responsible for younger dancers' development as a dancer, and they teach and socialize younger dancers in the ballet world (Wulff, 1998). Despite the lack of research in the ballet world, the advice and support from informal mentors, such as more experienced ballet dancers, can surely help their successors. For example, Peters (2010) noted that the informal mentoring relationship between an older and a younger tap dancer not only serves as a mechanism for knowledge transmission and role modelling, but also provides opportunities for social support and socialization into the field. More generally, mentors play an important role by providing advice and support for talented young individuals in their process of reaching an outstandingly high level of performance (van Rossum, 2001).

Career Advice

Although there is lack of research in the scholarly literature on career advice for dancers about perseverance, other forms of publications have explored career advice for dancers about career success. Some books (e.g., Hamilton, 1998; Minden, 2007) included suggestions for both aspiring and professional ballet dancers about being successful as a dancer, and addressed various areas, such as employment, training, injury prevention, or mind and body connection. These books attempted to represent the voice of dancers. For example, as a former dancer at New York City Ballet and a psychologist working with dancers, Hamilton (1998) included some quotes from dancers who she has worked with in her book. In addition, Minden (2007) noted that she interviewed various

ballet dancers and dance teachers for her book to learn about what is helpful for ballet dancers to practice from their perspectives. However, suggestions and advice for dancers in these books (e.g., Hamilton, 1998; Minden, 2007) tend to highlight general, rather than personal, wisdom of dancers. For example, Hamilton (1998) outlined what dancers need to include in their applications for audition at a professional dance company, and suggested general guidelines for formats and components, such as photos or cover letters. Her advice focused on what most dancers generally do to prepare for their audition package rather than what individual dancers would do based on their personal experiences with auditions at a professional dance company.

There have been some magazine and newspaper articles (e.g., Bennington, 2012; Feeney-Hart, 2013; Rudolph, 2014) asking famous principal dancers to share their strategies for success in the ballet world. Some of the advices highlighted in these interviews are based on general wisdom. For example, the ballet tips Lauren Cuthbertson at the Royal Ballet shared in her interview with the British Broadcasting Company include, "Never look back, Work like a dog, Practise and use imagery" (Feeney-Hart, 2013). Other advice does, however, appear to be based on personal wisdom. For example, Misty Copeland at American Ballet Theatre, discussed the importance of mentorship in the ballet world for her as an ethnic minority dancer in an interview (Bennington, 2012). These articles and interviews give voice to dancers to share what they believe is helpful for a performance career. However, there are several limitations. These articles and interviews tend to be short in length, which limits the depth of exploration on how the advice ballet dancers are sharing fits in with their lives. In addition, only famous principal dancers, such as Lauren Cuthbertson, Misty Copeland, or

Alicia Graf Mack, were interviewed. While these are dancers who have achieved objective career success in dance, they are a minority in number and their experience may not be the most representative or relatable to most ballet dancers.

Summary

In the current academic literature, other than a few studies exploring how stress management using coping skills and social support decreases physical injuries in dancers, little attention has been given to what ballet dancers can do to persevere in their performance career. A few studies that discussed coping skills and social support have a number of limitations. These studies did not include the voice of dancers or explore coping skills and social support from the dancer's perspective. When studies on professional ballet dancers did include the dancers' voice, they focused on challenges that the dancers experienced in their career regarding one specific aspect, such as injury and body (Turner & Wainwright, 2003; Wainwright & Turner, 2004; Wainwright & Turner, 2006) or career transition and retirement (Lee, 1988; Roncaglia, 2006; Roncaglia, 2008; Willard & Lavalley, 2016). Therefore, the narrow focus on one specific aspect chosen by the researchers limits the integrative exploration of how ballet dancers persevere in their career from their personal perspectives. While physical injury is an important factor that influences career longevity of dancers, dancers struggle with and persevere through other challenges in their performance career as well.

Although I was not able to find any study that specifically addresses how mentorship could be helpful for ballet dancers to persevere in their performance career, I believe it is important to mention how it can be beneficial for more experienced dancers to pass down their wisdom onto a younger generation of dancers (e.g., Peter, 2010; van

Rossum, 2001). While the wisdom of more experienced ballet dancers has been previously presented in a form of advice in books, magazines, or newspaper articles, most of these only included perspectives of female principal dancers. Therefore, the wisdom of male ballet dancers as well as ballet dancers at lower levels (who make up the majority of all ballet dancers) is not represented. Furthermore, how the wisdom dancers are sharing has impacted their own career development or is related to their personal experiences was not explored in depth due to the focus on the general wisdom in these publications.

Research Rationale, Purpose, and Question

Research Rationale

Professional ballet dancers put extraordinary amount of efforts into their pursuit of their passion for ballet, leading Gordon to describe ballet dancers as “a breed apart” (1983, p. 7). Professional ballet dancers face many challenges in their career (Hernandez, 2012; Kelman, 2000) and there is wealth of literature on specific challenges ballet dancers commonly experience. Despite the demanding nature of their career, ballet dancers often see their performance career as a calling rather than an occupation (Hamilton, 1998; Turner & Wainwright, 2003). There is a dearth of research exploring the processes and factors that help ballet dancers persevere in their performance career, meaning that little attention has been given to understanding what ballet dancers find helpful in order to persevere in their performance career from dancers’ perspectives. The lack of a more integrative exploration of ballet dancers’ experiences (Gray & Kunkel,

2001) has translated into little knowledge about personal wisdom of ballet dancers about perseverance in a performance career.

One potential source of support for current and aspiring professional ballet dancers in navigating challenges in the ballet world is, therefore, the personal wisdom of retired professional ballet dancers. The personal wisdom of retired professional ballet dancers based on their experience and recollection of their career may benefit current and aspiring professional ballet dancers in how to persevere in a performance career. For example, learning about how former ballet dancers managed anticipated (e.g., harsh criticism) or unanticipated (e.g., transition from one ballet company to a different one) challenges will help current and aspiring ballet dancers to develop strategies to contextualize and overcome different challenges associated with a performance career. For example, Jeffri et al. (2015) compared perspectives of current and retired professional dancers about their retirement and career transition, reporting that there was a discrepancy between what current professional dancers expect and what retired professional dancers experience in terms of retirement from a performance career. By highlighting the perspectives of retired professional ballet dancers, current and aspiring professional ballet dancers will be able to develop more realistic expectations and coping strategies to be resilient in their performance careers.

More generally, when considering how career development progresses through interactions with other people, members of a career community can share their “knowing-why, knowing-how, and knowing-whom” to contribute to career success of others in the same field (Parker, Arthur, & Inkon, 2004, p. 497); even indirect career support not targeted at a specific individual from a virtual career community can play an important

supplementary role in the career development (Parker et al., 2004). For example, Cotton, Shen, and Livne-Tarandach (2011) examined the content and structure of career developmental networks described in National Baseball Hall of Fame induction speeches, highlighting how members of a virtual career community, including retired professional baseball players who never had direct contact with the inductee, were often acknowledged for their contributions to the inductee's success as distant role models. Consequently, by sharing their personal wisdom, retired professional ballet dancers can become an important part of a career community of current and aspiring professional dancers. Specifically, the dissemination of findings from this study will indirectly result in the nine retired professional ballet dancers in this study becoming a part of a 'virtual career community' for current and aspiring professional ballet dancers to help them in how to persevere in a performance career without direct interpersonal contact.

The construct of personal wisdom is relevant and important for the exploration of the current study, and the focus on the narrative of this study fits well with personal wisdom. Ferrari, Weststrate, and Petro (2013) stated that narrative is at the core of personal wisdom, and individuals can identify insights and life lessons for future application when they engage in reflection and reasoning through their own lived experiences retrospectively. The identification of personal wisdom from the exploration and analysis of the insight, anecdotes, and recollections from the direct perspective of retired professional ballet dancers on how professional ballet dancers can persevere in their performance career will be a novel contribution to the literature. The findings of this study will contribute to the existing literature and knowledge about ballet dancers, and help current and aspiring professional ballet dancers, dance educators, and healthcare

and helping professionals working with dancers better understand what supports professional ballet dancers to persevere during their performance career.

Research Purpose

The purpose of the present study was to identify the personal wisdom of retired professional ballet dancers based on their own lived experiences to gain insight into what could help current and aspiring professional ballet dancers persevere in their performance career.

Research Question

In light of the rationale and purpose of this study, my research question is the following: How can professional ballet dancers persevere in a performance career?

Chapter 2

Research Methodology and Method

In this chapter, I will describe the theoretical background that guided my study and specific procedures that I followed to answer my research question: How can professional ballet dancers persevere in a performance career? First, I will provide an overview and rationale for choosing a qualitative research approach and using a constructivist paradigmatic framework and a phenomenological research design. Next, I will describe the recruitment methods, participant inclusion criteria, data collection processes using narrative interviewing, and thematic analysis procedures as my method for data analysis. Following this, I will locate myself within the topic of this study to inform readers of the lens through which I approach every step of this study. Finally, I will explore the criteria for study trustworthiness in qualitative research and describe my reflexive process used in this study.

Methodology and Methods

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is a mode of inquiry that focuses on investigating “the nature, quality, and meaning of human experience” (Willig, 2016). The goal of qualitative research is to provide a holistic and descriptive understanding of the human experience within a specific context (Harvekamp & Young, 2007; Morrow, 2007). Qualitative researchers treat each participant as an expert who can inform them about a specific phenomenon of interest through reflection and discussion (Hunt, Chan, & Mehta, 2011), empowering participants to share their accounts and interpreting them in a way that is the most consistent with how participants understand them (Creswell, Hanson, Clark, &

Morales, 2007). Descriptive data, including “people’s own written or spoken words and observable behavior” (Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault, 2016, p. 17) are collected and analyzed in qualitative research. In this regard, qualitative researchers are interested in how people subjectively understand, describe, and navigate a phenomenon that is of interest to the researchers (Willig, 2016). In doing so, qualitative researchers often attempt to give a voice to people whose perspectives are underrepresented (Taylor et al., 2016).

While it is important to understand that quantitative and qualitative research approaches exist on a continuum rather than being dichotomous (Creswell, 2009), they differ on philosophical assumptions and methods. For example, quantitative research collects quantifiable data to see if the hypotheses, derived from a research question, are supported, whereas qualitative research yields descriptive data by exploring a topic of interest with a guiding research question (Creswell, 2009). The goal of quantitative research is to generalize the findings and explain a relationship between variables. Data are collected and analyzed deductively to test hypotheses and assess preconceived theories. On the other hand, qualitative research aims to provide a detailed, in-depth description of a phenomenon and uses an inductive approach to develop theories or themes directly from observed patterns in the data (Taylor et al., 2016). Another difference between quantitative and qualitative research is that the process of quantitative research is more linear in contrast to a more iterative process in qualitative research (Haverkamp & Young, 2007). Qualitative researchers are flexible in how they conduct their studies, and they co-construct knowledge rather than validating preconceived ideas as in quantitative research (Taylor et al., 2016). Therefore, it is imperative for qualitative

researchers to reflect on and clearly document how their own position, values, and biases influence their interpretation of the findings (Creswell, 2009).

I chose to use qualitative research to conduct my study because qualitative research entails an exploratory nature, accounts for the researcher's co-construction of knowledge, as well as emphasizes the importance of providing rich descriptions of participants' subjective experiences in regard to a specific context. Therefore, qualitative research is highly relevant to my research purpose, which is to explore the personal wisdom of retired professional ballet dancers about how ballet dancers can persevere in a performance career. By using qualitative research, I provided a forum to retired professional ballet dancers whose voice is often missing from the psychological and career literatures, and in turn, learned from how they make sense of their experiences from their own perspectives regarding persevering in a professional performance career. In doing so, I engaged in a reflexive process to see how my own location and values as a researcher influenced my interpretation of what participants shared with me.

Constructivist Paradigmatic Framework

As this study uses qualitative research, it is important to provide an overview of a paradigmatic framework that identifies philosophical foundations (Haverkamp & Young, 2007). The constructivist paradigm takes a relativist position in terms of ontology (Ponterotto, 2005), asserting that there are multiple, mutually valid realities at any one time (Haverkamp & Young, 2007). From the constructivist point of view, reality is subjectively constructed by each individual based on their experiences (Ponterotto, 2005), and there are as many realities as there are research participants (Morrow, 2007). My goal for this study is to explore and understand the perspectives and experiences of

retired professional ballet dancers about persevering in a performance career, while appreciating individual participants' experiences as equally valid realities. Therefore, constructivism and its relativist ontology align well with my own ontological beliefs for this study.

The epistemology of constructivism sees the nature of knowledge as subjective and transactional; thus, research participants and the researcher co-construct knowledge through their interactions (Haverkamp & Young, 2007). The constructivist paradigm recognizes how each participant is unique, and it focuses on understanding the lived experience of participants from their perspective, as they are the experts of their own experiences (Mahoney, 2003). I recognize that each participant has knowledge they brought into this study based on their lived experience as a retired professional ballet dancer, and I also believe that I, as a researcher, participated in this meaning making and knowledge producing process with the participants. My own values and lived experience as an aspiring ballet dancer influenced my interaction with participants as well as my exploration and interpretation of meanings that each participant assigned to their lived experience. Hence, this subjective and transactional position of the constructivist epistemology fits well with my own epistemological beliefs for this study.

Phenomenological Research Design

Phenomenology places emphasis on the content of subjective, personal consciousness of a phenomenon (Creswell et al., 2007; Groenewald, 2004), and aims to understand the lived experiences of participants regarding a specific phenomenon (Creswell et al., 2007) to provide “a composite description of the essence” of the participants' experience (Creswell et al., 2007, p. 252). There are two branches of

phenomenology: Husserlian descriptive phenomenology and interpretive hermeneutic phenomenology, and they have different philosophical assumptions regarding personal knowledge of a researcher conducting a phenomenological study (Cohen & Omery, 1994). For example, descriptive phenomenologists strive to refrain from influencing the study with their expert knowledge or personal biases regarding a phenomenon of interest by constantly assessing and shedding their pre-conceptions about the phenomenon of interest (Tymieniecka, 2002). On the other hand, interpretive phenomenologists consider prior personal knowledge of researchers in relation to a phenomenon of interest as a valuable and useful guide to inquiry, recommending researchers to make those pre-conceptions and personal biases that influenced the study explicit rather than actively stripping them (Geanellos, 2000).

Although both phenomenological and grounded theory designs are commonly used to explore the lived experience of participants from their own perspective, the purpose of each is different. One of the main purposes of utilizing grounded theory is to generate a theory that explains the processes embedded in the lived experience of participants rather than describing the common experience shared by participants in regard to a phenomenon of interest (Creswell et al., 2007). I chose phenomenology to inform my study due to my interests in working closely with “specific statements and experiences” that participants share rather than “abstracting their statements” for a theoretical model (Creswell et al., 2007, p. 252).

Phenomenological researchers focus on understanding the perspective of people who are directly involved in the phenomenon of interest (Welman & Kruger, 1999). Since the purpose of this study is to understand what facilitates a professional ballet

dancer's perseverance in a performance career by identifying and drawing on the personal wisdom of retired professional ballet dancers, I deemed phenomenology the most appropriate research design for conducting this study. More precisely, given my prior experience and personal knowledge as a former pre-professional ballet dancer, I used an interpretive phenomenological approach for my study. Likewise, this focus on the subjective understanding and meaning of a phenomenon aligns with the relativist ontology and transactional and subjective epistemology of constructivism used for this study.

Participant Recruitment and Study Participants

Recruitment. I obtained ethical approval for this study from the University of Victoria's Human Research Ethics Board. Following the confirmation of ethical approval in February 2018, my thesis supervisor and Astrid Sherman, the Artistic Director of Pro Arté Centre and a sister of my supervisor, shared information about this study with retired professional ballet dancers in their personal networks. Additionally, I contacted Canadian professional ballet companies, such as Ballet BC, The National Ballet of Canada, and Royal Winnipeg Ballet, to send out information about this study to dancers on their email list-serve. Two professional ballet companies responded to my request, and one major professional ballet company in Canada circulated my recruitment poster (Appendix A) and letter of invitation (Appendix B) to 229 ballet dancer alumni, who had danced with and left this ballet company, on their email list-serve. Therefore, I recruited participants with specific knowledge and experience as retired professional ballet dancers for my study with the help from the people who know this particular sample. In addition to this means of purposive non-probability sampling, I also used

snowball sampling; that is, I encouraged my participants to share information about this study with other retired professional ballet dancers who may be interested in participating in this study.

The recruitment poster stated that I was interested in conducting one-on-one interviews with retired professional ballet dancers about what advice from their performance careers they would like to share with current ballet dancers. The recruitment poster included my contact information and inclusion criteria for my study: (a) participants were proficient in English, (b) participants had danced at one or more professional ballet companies for at least one year, and (c) participants had retired within the last 5 years from a professional ballet performance career or had been involved in the ballet world—as a dance educator or choreographer—since retiring from their ballet performance career. I decided to interview retired professional ballet dancers as opposed to current professional ballet dancers because I was interested in their personal wisdom based on retrospective reflections on their lived experiences as a professional ballet dancer. The development of personal wisdom is attached to personal narrative of individuals, and one of the ways to explore personal wisdom is to engage in reflections and reasoning on past life experiences retrospectively (Ferrari et al., 2013). Therefore, retired professional ballet dancers were invited to explore and share their wisdom about persevering in their performance career for this study. Furthermore, to ensure that participants in my study were familiar with the current ballet world, and therefore, able to share wisdom relevant for current and aspiring professional ballet dancers, I specified that prospective participants had retired from working as a professional ballet dancer in the last 5 years or that they have been involved in the ballet world since their retirement.

Retired professional ballet dancers interested in participating in this study contacted me via email. Following this initial contact, I sent them an email introducing myself as a graduate student and a former aspiring ballet dancer conducting her thesis research and explaining the purpose, inclusion criteria, interview process, and potential implications of this study. I also encouraged them to ask me any questions or express any concerns they had about this study. In addition, I emailed them a copy of the consent (Appendix C) and demographic (Appendix D) forms. After dancers confirmed their eligibility and interest in participating, I scheduled a one-on-one interview with each retired professional ballet dancer. In total, 14 dancers contacted me to express their interest in participating in my study. One dancer was not eligible because she was still performing in a professional ballet company. I was unable to schedule an interview with four dancers either due to their scheduling conflict or lack of response. Out of 14 volunteers, I scheduled interviews with nine participants who met the inclusion criteria and agreed to participate.

Study participants. Participants were nine retired professional ballet dancers (6 female, 3 male) who had danced for 1 to 18 years ($M = 11.78$, $SD = 6.59$) as a professional ballet dancer in one to five professional ballet companies ($Mdn = 3$) in Australia, Canada, Germany, Peru, Singapore, South Africa, and/or the United States. The average age of participants was 53 years ($SD = 6.75$, range: 45–63) at the time of the interview. The average age that participants started ballet training was 6.83 years ($SD = 3.61$, range: 3–15), and the average number of years that participants trained to become a professional ballet dancer was 11.11 years ($SD = 3.22$, range: 5–14). Participants reported that their ballet training took place in Australia, Canada, England, Germany,

Portugal, South Africa, and/or the United States. Two participants indicated that their highest position as a ballet dancer in a professional company was a member of Corps de Ballet; three participants identified their highest position in a professional company as a Soloist; and four participants reported that their highest position was a Principal. One participant indicated that the decision to retire from a professional ballet performance career was half planned, and noted the need for new career for personal growth as a reason for retirement. The rest of participants were split in half in terms of whether their retirement was planned. While participants with unplanned retirement from a professional ballet performance careers named mental/emotional breakdown or abuse, injury, or the disbandment of a ballet company as reasons for retiring, participants who identified their retirement as planned provided age or new career ambition as a reason for their retirement from a professional ballet performance career. Participants had been retired from dancing in a professional ballet company for 8 to 40 years ($M = 23.22$, $SD = 10$), and have been involved in the ballet world as a choreographer, dance educator, dance notator, or artistic director since their retirement. All participants were proficient in English in order to communicate with me.

Data Collection and Analysis

Narrative interview. I chose to collect data by conducting narrative interviews with my participants. A narrative is not a collection of events in a participant's life, but it is how the narrator links different events together in terms of time and meaning (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016). Narrative interviews ask how, why, and what questions, and provide participants an opportunity to tell their stories from their perspectives (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016). Therefore, researchers using narrative

interviewing ask a broad guiding research question about a phenomenon of their interest, and see what insight participants decide to share, rather than imposing a specific, fixed agenda (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016). Once the narratives have been shared, follow-up questions can be asked to seek more details or fill the gaps in the shared narratives (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016).

Another method of data collection commonly used in phenomenological studies is a semi-structured interview (Limberg, 2008), where researchers select topics and questions they believe are important to explore with participants ahead of time and create a pre-formulated interview guide (Ayres, 2008). Semi-structured interview methods work well with research questions where topic-related constructs and relationships between them are somewhat well established (Ayres, 2008). For example, one of the studies that used semi-structured interviewing explored the value of dance interventions offered in hospital-based mental health programs in the National Health Service (NHS; Froggette & Little, 2012). The relationship between participation in arts projects and major elements, such as hopefulness, in a recovery approach in mental health had already been established in previous research (e.g., Spandler, Secker, Kent, Hacking, & Shenton, 2007). Therefore, Froggette and Little (2012) built on the findings of previous research by specifically focusing their exploration on how hopefulness can be fostered through participation in dance interventions in the acute mental health settings in the NHS. The understanding of constructs established in previous studies helped researchers identify what questions they would like to include in their interview guide.

On the other hand, when using narrative interview methods, researchers pose general, open questions to allow participants to determine the direction of an interview to

avoid imposing their own viewpoints on participants (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016). Therefore, researchers using narrative interview methods are working more inductively with a focus on understanding the participant's perceptions and perspectives. Given the exploratory nature of my research topic and my focus on understanding participants' lived experiences from their own perspectives, I chose narrative interviewing over semi-structured interviewing to collect data for this study.

Data collection for this study took place between April 2018 and June 2018. When scheduling, I encouraged participants to pick a space that they would feel comfortable sharing their personal experiences in their performance career with me. I interviewed four participants in person, and asked them to either sign the consent form and complete a demographic form at the time of the interview or email me the signed consent form and completed demographic form before the interview. Five participants who were interviewed via telecommunication technology (Skype) were asked to email me the signed consent form and completed demographic form prior to the interview. I encouraged participants to ask any questions about the consent form or demographic form via email. Before I started the interview, I asked participants if they had a chance to read the consent form, reviewed the informed consent and their rights as a research participant, and I asked if they had any questions. I reminded participants that they can ask me questions before, during, or after the interview. I started the interview after participants confirmed that they understood the consent form and had no further questions.

One-on-one interviews with each participant lasted between 50 to 90 minutes. The interviews were audio-recorded using a portable audio recorder. I began each

interview by asking participants this open-ended guiding question: “If we had a current professional ballet dancer in this room with us, or if you could go back in time and share your wisdom with your younger self about persevering as a professional ballet dancer, what would you like to share?” The use of a single open-ended guiding question offered flexibility and allowed participants to share their perspectives and experiences in a way that was meaningful for them. I provided active listening and minimal guidance, and asked probing or clarification questions (e.g., “Can you provide an example?”; “Can you tell me more about that?”) to deepen my understanding of the lived experiences of participants with rich details or to encourage participants to share their experiences in its entirety. At the end of each interview, I asked participants if there was anything that they would like to add or share, and encouraged them to contact me via email if they had any other thoughts that they believe were important to share with me after the interview.

During the interview, I wrote memos in a notebook when there were additional observations or information, such as facial expression of participants when sharing a certain aspect of their experience, which may have been challenging to notice from the audio recording of the interview. In addition to the research memo, I wrote field notes, which included my own emotional, cognitive, and bodily experience as well as any reflection or question about the interview. Mulhall (2003) suggested that there are benefits to both immediate field notes (e.g., ensuring details or accuracy) and delayed field notes (e.g., capturing patterns). For example, writing field notes shortly after the interview enables researchers to record details, while short- or long-term reflection on

reactions to what participants shared during the interview may bring new perspectives over time (Mulhall, 2003).

I used both immediate and delayed field notes for this study. Immediately after each interview, I recorded field notes. For example, after my interview with Lise and Astrid, I wrote how they emphasized the importance of the role that pre-professional ballet training plays in helping dancers persevere, and how I felt conflicted about it. On one hand, I agreed with them that fostering perseverance is important with aspiring ballet dancers during their training as well as it is with current professional ballet dancers in a company. On the other hand, I wondered if in-depth discussion on the current training practices for pre-professional ballet dancers would be out of the scope of this study. In addition to my immediate field note, I occasionally went back to the field notes, and added more reflections or questions that came up for me after some delay. For example, after I completed my data collection, I went back to my field notes on perseverance and pre-professional ballet training, and wrote, “Perhaps, the advice on perseverance for current professional ballet dancers is somewhat applicable to aspiring ballet dancers as well. Would perseverance take the same form and shape for both though?” During my data analysis, I revisited these memos and field notes.

Interview transcription. To ensure familiarity with the data, I conducted and transcribed all the interviews. The adequate format for interview transcription depends on the type of a qualitative research design, theoretical paradigm, and some practical considerations for the context of each study (Kvale, 1996). Oliver, Serovich, and Mason (2005) considered interview transcription as “a powerful act of representation” (p. 1273) and encouraged researchers to reflect on how their transcription decisions influence their

participants and findings. Two most commonly used modes for transcription practice are naturalism and denaturalism. In naturalism, every utterance is transcribed as verbatim as possible and in denaturalism, idiosyncratic elements of speech (e.g., stutters, involuntary vocalization, pauses, nonverbals) and incorrect grammar are omitted or corrected. Naturalism and denaturalism often represent either end of a continuum that includes various transcription styles (Oliver et al., 2005, p. 1273). Oliver et al. (2005) recommended that the transcription style should be chosen based on objectives of a given study, and if the study aims to understand the meanings and perceptions associated with a phenomenon of interest, a more denaturalized transcription style is employed, rather than a naturalized transcription style appropriate for conversation analysis.

During my process of making my transcription decisions, I reflected on my chosen research design, theoretical paradigm, as well as the purpose of the current research. The purpose of my study is to understand how ballet dancers can persevere in their career drawing on personal wisdom and lived experiences of retired professional ballet dancers. Given the focus on representing the perspectives of participants in the phenomenological research design, I believed that it is important to transcribe how participants described their lived experience in their own words to give the findings of this study credibility and validity. In addition, considering the phenomenological research design of my study, I believed that it was important to use the exact wording of the participants or to bracket my own belief or interpretation during the data collection to let them tell their narratives in a way that was meaningful for them.

Upon this reflection on my research design, I chose to transcribe the interviews verbatim, except for filler words, such as “ums, ahs, like.” I not only transcribed the

speech of the participants, but also noted noticeable pauses in speech, context, or observation by using brackets (e.g., [pause for 5 seconds], [participants clears throat], [participant chuckles]) and any emphasis a participant placed on a particular word by capitalizing that word (e.g., SO PAINFUL). Although I did not record filler words that did not seem meaningful in speech, I did record certain filler words accompanying a pause or hesitation. The phenomenological research design emphasizes capturing the essence of the shared experiences among participants, and by omitting some filler words, the emphasis is placed on what their narratives are about in relation to the phenomenon of interest, rather than how this exchange of speech happens between a researcher and a participant regarding their narratives (Oliver et al., 2005). Using a social constructivist paradigm, I believed that I participated in the process of co-constructing the data, and my beliefs on the use of filler words influenced my transcription decision, and subsequently, the data prepared for analysis. Each interview took approximately six to ten hours to transcribe verbatim. After I completed each transcript, I reviewed it while listening to the recorded interview to ensure its accuracy. Additionally, I inserted observational information based on the research memos I took during the interview in brackets (e.g., [teared up]).

Data analysis. The unit of analysis refers to the subject of analysis in a study (Keller, 2010). For this study, the primary unit of analysis is retired professional ballet dancers. Specifically, the unit of analysis refers to retired professional ballet dancers as a whole in contrast to individual retired professional ballet dancers in this study; that is, the focus is on exploring the shared experiences presented by the participants, in line with the phenomenological research design for this study. To analyze the data, I used thematic

analysis, which can be used across various qualitative research designs and epistemological frameworks. Braun and Clarke (2006) have recommended that researchers need to explicitly discuss their analytical decisions for their study. For this study, I focused on identifying themes— “a detailed account of one particular aspect”— related to my research question rather than providing a rich description of the entire data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 11). What counts as a theme in this study is largely dependent on its relevance to the research question (e.g., Does this pattern of responses answer my research question?) rather than its quantifiable prevalence, as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006). While a code is the smallest unit of information that is meaningful for the phenomenon of interest (Boyatzis, 1998), a theme is a pattern of relevant codes that answers a research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). There are two levels that themes can be identified: semantic level (“explicit, surface meaning of the data”; “description”) and latent level (examination of “the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualization” that shape what is shared in the data; Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 13). I initially coded transcripts on a semantic level by focusing on how participants described their experiences. For example, one participant stated, “Find a mentor,” and this was semantically coded as *seeking mentorship*. However, as I progressed through the data analysis, I used a more latent approach to interpret what my participants were sharing rather than focusing exclusively on how they communicated it semantically. For example, one participant stated, “Maybe not to take [ballet] as seriously. On one hand, you can’t succeed if you can’t take it seriously, but you also have to be a person.” Initially, I coded this quote semantically as “taking ballet less seriously” and “focusing on personhood.” Upon further reflection, I came to code this latently under a theme labeled

balancing your performance career by having a life outside the dance world. I believe the latent coding of this quote represented the core of what this participant was sharing. While I used both semantic and latent approach to identify themes in my data, my final analysis primarily employed a latent approach. Furthermore, I identified themes in my data using an inductive analysis instead of a deductive analysis. The inductive data analysis involves coding the data without pre-formulated codes or specific analytic assumptions, while acknowledging that theoretical and epistemological positioning of a researcher influences how data is coded (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this research, my constructivist framework guided my data analysis process.

After reflecting on analytical decisions for this study, I utilized six steps suggested by Braun and Clarke to identify themes in the data, which include: (a) “familiarizing yourself with your data,” (b) “generating initial codes,” (c) “searching for themes,” (d) “reviewing themes,” (e) “defining and naming themes,” and (f) “producing the report” (p. 87). Following the data collection and transcription, I read the interview transcripts several times to immerse myself in the data. I started to generate initial codes, which was kept semantically as close as possible to the words that participants used. I began to notice some preliminary patterns across responses of different participants, and I highlighted quotes that I believed were representative of these patterns. Once I developed codes, I brought them back to my supervisor and my committee member. The process of identifying themes was iterative. Codes were grouped into a theme through consultation, and as new themes were identified, I checked if any themes could be amalgamated into one. Finally, I named and defined my themes, and ensured that they were exclusive to each other. This process of naming and defining my themes involved

several rounds of the consulting and refining process with my supervisor as well as my committee member. Finally, I selected relevant quotes that represent the essence of each theme. This process necessitated situating interpretations of the data based on the data analysis in the bigger context (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Therefore, in my report of findings, I made connections between themes identified in the data set to the existing literature. Throughout this process, I engaged in reflexivity to reflect on how my values, biases, beliefs, and experiences influenced my lens through which I analyzed my data.

Researcher Location

It is important for researchers to be aware of the role they play in the research process and how their experiences may influence their collection and analysis of data; this awareness will help mitigate their personal values and biases during research process (Chenail, 2011; Horsburgh, 2003). Therefore, I believe that it is important to discuss my experience in the ballet world and how this could potentially influence this study.

Although it may not be apparent at first sight how this study on ballet dancers is personally relevant to me as a novice researcher and a counselling trainee, I pursued a career in ballet throughout my childhood and adolescence. I began my recreational ballet classes in Seoul, South Korea at the age of 5, and after seeing *Nutcracker* performed by the Korean National Ballet at the age of 7, my fascination with ballet grew exponentially. Wulff (1998) would call this moment of watching *Nutcracker* and falling in love with ballet as my “ballet revelation,” a particular moment of being mesmerized by ballet art that is compared to “a conversion” (p. 1). After this ballet revelation, I started to attend group and private ballet classes and participated in several national ballet competitions in order to pursue a career in ballet. From the ages of 12 to 17, I trained at a pre-

professional level, attending a high school of fine arts specializing in ballet, Korean traditional dance, and contemporary dance. My life revolved around ballet as a child and adolescent with rigorous daily training of at least three hours in a studio.

During my years in the ballet world, I dedicated myself religiously to my development as a dancer. I was prepared to sacrifice other aspects of my life and my personhood for ballet. This level of discipline and dedication is often what differentiates dancing adolescents from their non-dancing peers (Sutherland, 1976). I often noticed that my non-dancing friends were astonished at the amount of training that I was going through. Similar to the young female dancers who participated in a qualitative study by Stinson, Blumenfield-Jones, and Van Dyke (1990), I did not mind this difference from non-dancing friends. Rather, I felt special that I had the level of self-discipline and specialized knowledge that my non-dancing friends did not possess at that age. On the other hand, although I enjoyed dancing and loved how painful and delicate ballet was for me, I often felt confused about how I could navigate different challenges, such as physical injuries, abusive practices, or competitiveness, in the ballet world.

Each year, many aspiring ballet dancers stop their training to seek a career outside of ballet for various reasons (Hamilton, 1998). Eleven years ago, I was one of those aspiring ballet dancers who left the ballet world before starting my professional performance career. I fell ill at the age of 18, and could not train as extensively and intensely as I used to, while my friends in the ballet world were auditioning for professional ballet companies. Ballet was my whole world, and I had committed myself rigorously to it for over half of my life at that point. Therefore, I felt extremely devastated and lost. This devastation led me to leave the ballet world and seek higher

education in Psychology in hopes of understanding resilience.

Although it has been 11 years since I left the ballet world and I never went back to pursue a performance career, part of me still remembers what it feels like to dance. Wulff (1998) noted that children who learn to dance and dance for many years have a formative experience that dancing is inscribed in their bodies. For instance, even after they leave the ballet world, their body experiences the same feeling when they are reminded of their dancing years by the music they used to dance (Wulff, 1998). At the age of 22, I returned to ballet recreationally, joining the competition team of the UBC (University of British Columbia) Ballet Club. I approached ballet with a different attitude—less dedicated and more relaxed—because ballet did not define my identity or self-worth anymore, and I was no longer bitter about my decision to leave the ballet world. However, I still wondered at times if I could have done something differently to persevere in the ballet world, and what that would have looked like. I wondered what dancers with a fulfilling performance career have done when facing challenges and what helped them persevere in their pursuit of their performance career. Therefore, I am personally invested in the topic of this study because I believe that personal wisdom of professional ballet dancers would have been helpful for me when I was an aspiring ballet dancer.

My experience in and familiarity with the ballet world may have helped me when building rapport with retired professional ballet dancers who participated in this research and understanding the stories they share with me. In addition, my personal experiences and preconceptions about being a ballet dancer may have influenced how I collected my data and interpreted the findings. By practicing reflexivity through consulting with my

thesis supervisor and keeping a reflection field journal, I tried to remain open to the collected data and existing literature with the awareness of my own assumptions and biases. This reflexivity was critical in assessing the quality and trustworthiness of the narrative interviews I had with the participants, the data I collected, and the findings I reported in this study. Reflexivity not only helped me monitor how my personal beliefs and biases influenced my interpretation and construction of findings, but also aided me in accounting for my personal beliefs and biases in the findings (Cutcliffe, 2003).

Study Trustworthiness

Williams and Morrow (2009) argued that there is still a doubt in research communities that qualitative research compile a collection of anecdotes that has no scientific grounding. This concern regarding trustworthiness highlights how critical it is for qualitative researchers to demonstrate that they committed themselves to establishing trustworthiness in conducting their research by providing a rationale for the study, clearly describing their data collection and analysis methods, and articulating their description and interpretation of their data (Willams & Morrow, 2009). While validity and reliability are commonly used to evaluate trustworthiness in quantitative studies, they are less applicable in qualitative studies due to a variety of epistemological beliefs, methods, and procedures of research paradigms (Ponterotto, 2005).

While Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria for evaluating trustworthiness of qualitative research, which parallels the criteria of reliability, validity, generalizability, and objectivity, commonly used in quantitative research, have been the most widely cited, several researchers (e.g., Morse, 2015; Sparkes & Smith, 2014) questioned if it is reasonable to use the criteria for trustworthiness that contradict the epistemological and

ontological positioning of qualitative research. To provide criteria for trustworthiness of qualitative research that address the issues of applicability across different research paradigms, I selected to follow Williams and Morrow's (2009) prescription for trustworthiness: (a) data integrity, (b) balance between subjectivity and reflexivity, and (c) communication and application of findings.

Data integrity. Data integrity refers to the adequacy or dependability of the data (Williams & Morrow, 2009). There are several required steps for qualitative researcher to achieve data integrity. First, researchers need to describe the research procedures in detail to enable others to replicate methods and analytical process (Williams & Morrow, 2009). To address this, I have used this chapter to provide detailed information about the research procedures, including participant recruitment, data collection, and analysis methods, of this study. Second, researchers need to demonstrate that both quantity and quality of the collected data are adequate (Williams & Morrow, 2009). As a novice researcher, I consulted with more experienced researchers, such as my supervisor and committee member, to ensure that the sample size and richness of my data are adequate, as recommended by Williams and Morrow (2009). While some researchers (e.g., Guest, Bruce, & Johnson, 2006) noted that data saturation may be achieved by as little as six interviews in a study with a sample population with a high level of homogeneity, the depth of data is more important than the size to evaluate the sufficiency of the sample size in qualitative research (Burmeister & Aitken, 2012; Morse, 2000). Therefore, I used data saturation, which involves continual sampling in a study until redundancy of the data has occurred (Guest et al., 2006) to evaluate the adequacy of my data. Data saturation is widely used among qualitative researchers to assess whether the depth and breadth of the

collected data are adequate (Walker, 2012). As this is a phenomenological study, the experiences of participants regarding the specific phenomenon of interest, persevering in a professional performance career, shared in the interviews would become repetitive once data saturation is attained. Themes were identified by the seventh interview out of the total of nine interviews conducted for this study, and no new code was identified in the last two interviews in relation to the research question. Therefore, I believe this study reached data saturation. Lastly, when sharing my interpretations of the data, it was important to ground them in evidence to judge the integrity of the data (Williams & Morrow, 2009). For example, I present direct quotes from participants when I discuss my findings in the following chapter. In addition, Williams and Morrow (2009) highlighted the importance of aligning how evidence is presented with your choice of research design. My selection of quotes which fit my interpretation of the data was guided by a phenomenological research design for this study, which aims to capture the essence of the shared experiences among participants (Creswell et al., 2007).

Balance between subjectivity and reflexivity. The second criteria for evaluating trustworthiness of qualitative research looks at whether the study achieved a balance between subjectivity and reflexivity (Williams & Morrow, 2009). While acknowledging that it is inevitable for a study to reflect subjectivity of a researcher, it is also important to clearly distinguish what a participant shared (subjectivity) from interpretations of the researcher (Williams & Morrow, 2009) by practicing reflexivity, engaging in continuous reflections to recognize and explain how the researcher's own biases influence the research (Dowling, 2008). I maintained a reflection field journal throughout this research to reflect on my experiences, thoughts, and feelings about this

study. For example, I wrote how I felt this overwhelming urge to cry when I was transcribing an interview with one of my participants, Emma who was sharing how she would like to remind ballet dancers that they should be treated with respect and she said, “[A]s a young dancer learning, you don’t need to be bullied to learn. People want perfection from you, but sometimes, good is good enough.” It felt both sad and comforting to hear what I would have desperately wanted to hear when I was an aspiring ballet dancer. I discussed this experience with my thesis supervisor, and given my strong emotional connection to this part of the data, I paid close attention to how I code this quote.

Morrow (2005) also emphasized that the criteria for appraising trustworthiness in qualitative research should be congruent with an epistemological framework chosen for a given study. Using a constructivist research paradigm in this study, I believe that there are multiple, equally valid realities, and subjectivity of both researchers and participants is recognized, and my values as a researcher is reflected in my research process (Haverkamp & Young, 2007; Morrow, 2007; Ponterotto, 2005; Williams & Morrow, 2009). Therefore, the use of certain practices, such as member checking (asking participants for feedback on the researcher's interpretation) or external audits (Morse, 2015) do not align with my philosophical framework for this study. However, I focused on providing a detailed and rich description of what participants shared by using quotes to situate my interpretation in context, and I elucidated my location as a researcher to identify my experiences and beliefs that could influence my interpretation of the data. Furthermore, I engaged in ongoing consultations with more experienced researchers, such

as my supervisor and committee member, to ensure that my own biases reflected in my interpretation of the data do not go unnoticed.

Communication of findings. The final criterion for evaluating trustworthiness in qualitative research as suggested by Williams and Morrow (2009) is clearly articulating your findings and its significance in a way that the target audience of the study can understand. To do so, the researcher needs to highlight the context in which the lived experiences of the participant take place (Williams & Morrow, 2009) and offers a thick description, which refers to the researcher's interpretation of the meaning and the context of the participant's experience (Maxwell & Mittapalli, 2008). Throughout this thesis, I have attempted to clearly state the purpose and significance of this study, and when I discussed my findings in the next chapter, I presented participant's quotes to support and situate my interpretations. Additionally, I provided and described the existing literature on ballet dancers and how they can persevere in their professional performance career in the first chapter to make connections between this study and the literature on ballet dancers.

In addition to clearly communicating research findings to assist the readers to understand interpretations of the researcher, qualitative research is required to have social validity (Wolf, 1978) to be trustworthy. Studies that have social validity have value to people affected by the findings (Wolf, 1978) through highlighting limitations in current approaches, improving outcome, encouraging further exploration and dialogue on a topic, identifying a new course of action, or promoting social justice and change (Williams & Morrow, 2009). In this study, I called attention to gaps in the existing literature on how ballet dancers persevere in their performance career, and identified the personal wisdom

of retired professional ballet dancers on persevering in a performance career.

Additionally, I attempted to give a voice to ballet dancers who are often silenced both in the ballet world and in the literature in this study. I hope my findings which represent the perspectives of nine retired professional ballet dancers regarding how to persevere in a performance career will help current and aspiring ballet dancers improve their current approach to their training and career to persevere in their own journey as a performance artist. I also hope that this study will lead to further explorations and conversations on the topic of perseverance in the ballet world, which is currently missing from the existing literature.

Chapter 3

Findings

In this chapter, I present the thematic findings that answer my research question: How can professional ballet dancers persevere in a performance career? The four themes identified from the narrative interview data were: (a) Building and Looking After Your Healthy Sense of Self and Mental Attitude; (b) Navigating Your Performance Career Journey With Intelligence and Courage Within and Beyond One Ballet Company; (c) Growing as an Artist to Have More Than Technique and Raw Physicality to Capture an Audience; and (d) Balancing Your Performance Career by Having a Life Outside the Dance World. I will describe each theme with direct quotes from participants. Some participants chose to use pseudonyms for anonymity, therefore, the names presented in the study include both pseudonyms and given names of participants. The names of companies, places, and third party individuals were replaced with a descriptor in square brackets (e.g., [BALLET COMPANY]).

Themes

Theme 1: Building and Looking After Your Healthy Sense of Self and Mental Attitude

All nine participants spoke to how critical “knowing yourself” (Robert) and mental attitude are for a dancer. It appeared vital for a dancer to “develop as a person” (Emma) by “build[ing] your own sense of self, [not as a matter of] arrogance, but [of] determination and pride in who you are” (Bev), looking “at what we do, who we are, what we are capable of, and judge it with a certain distance” (Robert). A dancer needs to “understand that you’re not just your body. You’re not just a dancer” (Emma) and to

acknowledge that you are “valuable” (Michel)—to be able to say, “I’m enough. I’m enough just because I’m enough” (Emma). Participants’ advice on how dancers can build and look after a healthy sense of self and mental attitude involved strategies and ways of being that were internal (practicing self-compassion, practicing acceptance, pursuing one’s best rather than perfection, acknowledging and believing in one’s capabilities, focusing on the joy of dancing); as well as interpersonal (seeking counselling, demanding fair treatment from others).

To develop and maintain the healthy sense of self in their performance career, participants identified practicing self-compassion as helpful. When reflecting on her personal experience in her ballet performance career, Bev shared,

In retrospect, in hindsight, in the perfect world, if I had known then what I know now, I would have approached [my performance career] very differently, and probably had a longer career, and not had been so hard on myself [teared up].

Participants understood that “it’s so ingrained in us as dancers to always see what’s wrong with us, to always be over critical, to always be satisfied if we are giving 100%, 150%. That’s very hard to let go of” (Emma). Not letting go and being “always so hard on yourself,” said Emma, comes at the cost, perhaps, of not being able to “be as happy as you could [be].” Bev suggested keeping “perspective” as one way to practice self-compassion—“step[ping] out of yourself for a moment and saying, ‘Okay, you didn’t do that pirouette, but you did the one afterwards.’” Not only Bev reflected on the ways she had been hard on herself (e.g., by catastrophizing “one thing that goes wrong [as] an absolute disaster”), but also on how being hard on oneself puts “very bad energy” into a dancer’s body. This relation of self-compassion to persevering in a performance career

was echoed by Russ who said, “If you beat yourself up constantly, you’re not going to go to the next audition. You stop dancing, and that will be the end of your career.”

In addition to practicing self-compassion, participants thought practicing acceptance was important in developing and maintaining a healthy sense of self and mental attitude. For example, Bev straightforwardly said,

Psychologically, I think it’s acceptance. If you accept who you are and are willing to work with that, I think it creates much healthier, much healthier psychological environment for you. If you can’t do that, and you’re all striving to be someone who you cannot be, that ideal image who we should be like, you will never, never, be mentally healthy.

Michel spoke about how, mistakes, like injuries, are “tough to accept,” but accepting that “everybody has a bad show sometimes [is] part of the show.” Although dancers “are always afraid of making a mistake” (Lise) or “something kind of go[ing] wrong” (Michel), participants reminded dancers that they “learn from mistakes [and] [m]istakes are not to be eliminated” (Lise). Participants believed that seeing mistakes as “an opportunity to learn” (Michel) and “part of the game of learning and growing” (Lise) helps dancers “persevere [and] learn a lot more” (Michel) in their performance career. Emma made a special note of the competitive environment of companies and how it “can be a very cruel place,” stressing the value of accepting how “you can’t change how other people are, you can only change your reaction to them. Learn how to live within that environment. . . . Don’t just necessarily run away from the culture.”

Practicing acceptance also involved understanding that perfection is not attainable and that pursuing one’s best is a more realistic, self-compassionate, and helpful way of

being for persevering in a performance career. While Russ was compassionate in understanding dancers' push for perfection and how hard dancers are on themselves, saying, "[e]ven your best performance, you see it three days later on video when they show it to you, when they do the company report back with feedback, you see that your one foot was too sickled," he was also candid about the importance of accepting that "nothing is perfect," saying "It's life." Lise echoed Russ by saying "[p]erfection will never be attained," but also provided a strong example of using a shift in attitude to focusing on always working to improve their "game" as a strategy for managing the internal drive and external push for perfection: "[t]he game and the fun is in working towards that." Michel spoke about how dancers can work towards perfection in a more realistic and, while he did not say it, more self-compassionate way:

I think the thing is when you rehearse it, you do it many, many, many times in a row. Each section, you will do perfectly at one point, but it's just a matter of bringing all those perfect points together at the same time.

Referring to the idea of a dancer holding onto their sense of worth, Emma made the point that "[p]eople want perfection from you, but sometimes, good is good enough."

While encouraging dancers to practice accepting limitations and good-as-good-enough, participants also encouraged dancers to acknowledge and believe in their capabilities and achievements in their performance careers. Robert said, "You stop and have to give yourself credit for what you've achieved, and say, 'This is what I earned. No one can take away from me. This is what I think I'm capable of.'" Similarly, Astrid said, "I had gifts that would've taken me far if I'd had the confidence to know that." The consensus among participants was that being self-compassionate and accepting of their

limitations as well as acknowledging and believing in their capabilities and strengths foster dancers' respect for themselves and make dancers more resilient in the face of challenges in their performance career.

One of the shifts in mental attitude participants spoke about was for dancers to focus on the joy of dancing. That is, for dancers to refocus on the essence of their performance career by finding their centre: dancing. For example, Russ shared a moment where he focused on the joy that dancing brings:

One thing I've learned with age is that there's emotional maturity that comes out that you never had when you were 18, 19, 20. . . .[E]ven last year, I had to go back. Well, I didn't have to. I went back. I chose to do a charity benefit. The comfort that happened when I walked on the stage, and if I can take that back to when I was 18, I would have been an amazing dancer because I walked onto the stage thinking, 'I'm so happy to be here' as supposed to going 'You need to do this, this, this, and this, and if this doesn't happen, this is your alternative option. Make it happen.'

Further to this idea about focusing on the joy of dancing, participants discussed how the essence of a performance career is about dancing, not a ranking in the company. As Bev said, "[W]e're all dancers in our own right, whether we do principal roles or not, we have value. We have full value to offer the company." Michel echoed this sentiment by saying that "the Corps members are very valuable and dance a lot of ballet," giving his "life as an example" to show how he approached his career by focusing on dancing:

If I said to myself, 'I wanna be a Soloist and dance less', I would probably say, 'No. I will stay in Corps and dance more' because what I really wanted to do is to

dance. It's nice on paper to say my name with a Soloist, and it looks nice maybe now, 10, 20 years later to say 'Soloist.' But when I think back on my dancing, I wanna remember my dancing, not that I was a Soloist. I wanna remember the roles I did and people I worked with. . . . That means more to me than having the promotion.

Realistically, "everyone can't be a soloist. Everyone can't be a principal" (Michel). Instead of feeling "bitter" and "not good enough" (Emma) about not achieving a higher ranking in a company, Emma advised dancers to say, "This is as far as I'm gonna get in the company, but I'm doing what I love. Someone's paying me to do what I love to do." Lise shared an example of her friend "who was in the Corps de Ballet for 14 years" and who used to say, "I'll be in the Corps de Ballet until I retire." Lise used this example to make the point that her friend had accepted the ceiling of her capability to be that of a Corps de Ballet dancer. This acceptance helped her persevere in her performance career and Lise described her as "very happy": "She was totally fine where she was. She did very well for herself." The shift in the mental attitude to refocus on their centre, dancing, can help dancers "have some balance" and to experience "less stress" (Emma), contributing to perseverance.

This attunement to the joy of dancing and finding their centre to refocus themselves reaffirms dancers' decisions to pursue a performance career and to persevere in it. Placing the focus on the joy of dancing can help dancers realize "why [they] are there from the beginning and what makes [them] go back every day" (Russ). Michel also described how he stayed in love with ballet throughout his career: "I've always loved dancing and exercising and music and all that part of it, so for me, even though it's a job

and it's work, it's a lot of fun." Michel encouraged dancers to keep themselves motivated by having a forward-looking attitude or perspective by "looking for those moments" when "every year [whether] it's a new creation [or] they just bring back the ballet . . . that's just wonderful to dance." Doing this, said Michel, is "what keeps you kind of spark. That's what keeps you kind of motivated to keep doing more" in a professional performance career.

The personal wisdom shared by participants on what professional dancers can actively do to build and look after a healthy sense of self and mental attitude to help them persevere in a professional performance career not only involved intrapsychic, or internal, psychological processes, but also the interpersonal strategies dancers can use to learn how to interact with their environment. Two interpersonal strategies offered by participants were demanding fair treatment and seeking counselling.

Demanding fair treatment meant professional dancers respecting and believing in themselves enough to have the "integrity" (Bev) and "confidence to be able to speak out" (Astrid), "stand your ground" (Bev), or "take a stance" (Emma). For example, to demand respect from others by "say[ing] no to abusive practices," as Lise put it. Participants discussed how maltreatment (e.g., "visiting choreographers [being] verbally abusive" [Tania], attitudes and behaviours of disrespect, dismissal, authoritarianism) from the ballet management during their performance career was detrimental to developing and maintaining their healthy sense of self and mental attitude, and how it is important for dancers to resist maltreatment when they encounter it. Emma said,

Don't let people in authority and the same with choreographers, with directors, it's very easy to be intimidated because you feel so privileged to have that job, but

I think we as dancers need to take a stance and say, ‘This is just not how we want to be treated.’

As Astrid pointed out, “you have to balance that with how much you respect yourself and to remember that you do have rights. You do have a voice and people can't treat you that way.”

Seeking counselling was a strategy participants suggested that could aid dancers to build and look after their healthy sense of self and mental attitude. Emma, for example, described how stressful the environment in a professional ballet company can be, and said, “The only thing, again, is to go get counselling around it. . . . What tools do you need to survive in that environment?” Bev shared a similar reflection about how “counselling helps. Just to change the way of your thinking.” Reflecting on her performance career, Suzanne noted that “it would have been nice to have some sort of counselling within the structure of the company.” While counselling facilitates reflection, introspection, clarity, and emotional relief, counsellors also provide tools and skills for dancers to use outside of the counselling hour. For example, Lise spoke about “meditation and journaling” as ways that dancers can “take the time to reflect.”

To summarize, *building and looking after a healthy sense of self and mental attitude* reflects the advice of retired professional ballet dancers that it is important for ballet dancers to: (a) be aware of what they need to hold onto, fight for, and let go to build their sense of self; (b) stay true to who they are by taking a stance, standing up to various inside (e.g., perfectionism) and outside (e.g., abusive practices in a ballet company) forces that devalue them; and (c) to keep returning to the joy of dancing as a way to find their centre to refocus themselves. Standing up for themselves foster respect

for a healthy sense of self and helps dancers manage emotional and psychological stress and expand and reinforce their personhood. Focusing on the joy of dancing reaffirms dancers' commitment and purpose to persevere in their performance career.

Theme 2: Navigating Your Performance Career Journey With Intelligence and Courage Within and Beyond One Ballet Company

All nine participants encouraged dancers to “be smart about” (Tania), “proactive” (Lise), and courageous (Emma) in “go[ing] through the steps” (Bev) in their career. “Going through the [professional ballet] company is a journey” (Bev) and dancers need to be proactive about “[t]he concrete details of how [they] move through [their] career” (Robert) to persevere in their performance career. In navigating a performance career journey in a professional ballet company, participants encouraged dancers to proactively (a) educate themselves about job opportunities and options and be open and flexible about moving to a different company that offers a better work environment; (b) reach out to seek mentorship and guidance and to communicate their vision for their career to others; as well as (c) step outside their comfort zone by diversifying their training and challenging themselves to improve.

When highlighting the importance of educating themselves about job opportunities and options in the ballet world, Suzanne “assume[d]” that dancers “have the ability to research and check out others [i.e., companies].” Some participants shared concerns about the dancer’s lack of knowledge about dance companies: When Suzanne asked “young dancers who want to dance professionally, ‘What is it about that company?’”, she was “surprised” that “[t]hey have no idea [and] they have never seen [the company’s performance].” Robert also pointed out that “most dancers don’t do the

work to understand what art institutions are out there,” saying dancers need to be “educating [themselves] in [their] career.” In doing research and navigating their performance career journey more strategically, Robert encouraged dancers to explore these following questions for themselves:

What companies are around you? What are your opportunities? Where should you put your efforts? Where should you apply? What is your focus? How do you apply? What kind of material do you send?

Lise also spoke to the importance of “know[ing] what’s going on in the world because there are many dance companies out there, and there are auditions all the time.” While acknowledging that it can be “scary” (Lise) to think about and be open to the idea of moving to a new ballet company, understanding “[t]here is no guarantee that you’re gonna get into another company” (Bev), participants also reminded dancers of two things: that “it’s better to be in an environment where you’re appreciated” (Lise) and to “leave the company” that has a “miserable environment” (Bev). Doing this, said Bev, will help dancers retain “some sense of achievement and satisfaction in pursuit of [their] career” before they “give up” their career because “[t]hey can’t stand [it] anymore.” Robert noted that sometimes “it’s simply a bad fit,” and dancers need to realize that “[i]t’s time to move on” when “it is too much” and they feel “truly unhappy” in their performance career, highlighting the importance of “planning” and “being prepared for that point” when they need to make a transition into a different company with a better work environment. Robert said that what some dancers do is to “flee out of bravery or stick through it out of some kind of tenacity to an unhealthy situation.” To counter this, he urged dancers to “know yourself, analyze, use your intellect, use your heart to know

the situation, but be proactive. Learn what's out there. Make contacts. Open your network. Prepare yourself, so that you have flexibility and options available.”

In addition to dancers educating themselves about and researching job opportunities and options, participants highlighted how it is vital for “their development as a dancer” (Bev) to reach out to seek mentorship and guidance as well as to communicate their vision for their career. It helps to “have a mentor [or] [j]ust a guide” (Bev) for dancers when navigating their performance career because “[n]obody does it alone . . . without the support and help of numerous people” (Robert). Astrid shared that if she had to do her ballet performance career again, then she would “work smarter.” When I asked Astrid to elaborate on what she meant by being “smarter,” she said it is “asking for help” because “people want to pass on their knowledge, and if you’re respectful and you ask, they can’t wait to share their knowledge.” Participants believed that mentors for dancers are someone who “has wisdom and knowledge, who you admire, and whose qualities you seek to own as well in your way” (Lise), who “see you through the difficult times and celebrate the good times with you” (Bev), and who “answers to some of the questions you will have as you make your way through your dance career” (Lise). Emma explained how mentors can help dancers learn

how to train out of the box, where to go for extra help, what is it that your issue is, [and] what is it that maybe is blocking you from being more than just staying in a Corps de Ballet.

Robert also pointed out that “[n]obody goes through their career without having at least 10 people that they have to thank for being a great part for either support or the opportunities that opened that were definitely due to these people and their activities” and

encouraged dancers to be “able and willing to identify who are the people [they] have affinity to.”

The advice for dancers to communicate their vision for their career to others in addition to reaching out for mentorship and guidance meant that participants advised dancers to “ask for what [they] want” (Lise) in their career, having “a conversation with ballet management of a company if [dancers] feel like things aren’t going the way [they] wanted to” and communicating their “vision of what [they] want [themselves] to do in a company” (Michel). For example, Michel recommended dancers to “have [a] conversation with the director” by saying, “I know I’m young and I know there are so many people here, but I feel like this is what I wanna do with my career, and I wanna do it here.” Michel went on to say that it is important for dancers to show that they are “[not] just a physical dancer, but an intelligent dancer”:

If you wanted to do a special role that you’re not cast in, you can maybe say, ‘Can I attend those rehearsals? Can I be in the back and learn those roles? I’m not expecting to do any shows, but I would like to learn it. I would like to be in those rehearsals.’ If the director says, ‘Yea. Of course. If you don’t have anything else, then of course you can go.’ It also shows the director that you’re eager because they can only see so much in class. They see talent, but they don’t know about the drive inside, and what a person is made of. . . . Showing that kind of initiative shows intelligence and all that kind of thing, which are also important.

Bev also shared a time in her professional ballet career that she firmly communicated her wish to perform a certain role: “There was one incidence where I went upstairs. I went to the office [of the ballet management], and I said, ‘There’s absolutely no reason why I

can't do this role.' They put me in it graciously." While Bev recalled that "there wasn't much grace" about asking for this role, she earned herself an opportunity to prove that she was indeed "the right type" for that role by speaking up. Michel also remembered a time when taking initiative to let others know that he was a "[s]mart, intelligent [dancer] that can cover and learn things quickly" brought him an opportunity in a new ballet company he joined:

I first joined [BALLET COMPANY], I came back in the summer, and they had already started rehearsing the shows, so I sort of said, 'Is there anything I can do?' It was almost like 'I mean there's no point in really doing because the show's in like 3 days, so just miss the shows and join us afterwards', and the director gave me the video tape, and said 'Look, you can learn the spots, but we don't have any rehearsals for you. We already have everything.' So I went to the studio by myself and learned that spot. The next day, I said, 'I know it', and I had one rehearsal. One rehearsal. That was it, and it went really well, and [the director] said, 'Great. You have a show. I will give you the show. You can have one.' Even back then, the director sort of said, 'That was kind of amazing that you just learned it on the video, and then ready to just to go and do it.'"

Participants also encouraged dancers to step outside their comfort zone by diversifying their training and challenging themselves to improve. "Being challenged and stimulated," said Russ, protects dancers from becoming "bored" because it takes them "out of [their] comfort zone" and makes them "want to push for the better." "Cross-training" (Emma, Robert, Suzanne) was one example of how dancers can step outside their comfort zone to "keep [themselves] physically in good shape" (Emma) in

their performance career. Robert defined cross-training as “some other form of physical activity which brings general health, a balance to the body, and counteracts, perhaps, a little bit of extreme nature of dance to help your body stay healthy and balanced” and offered examples, such as “going to the gym, doing yoga, [or] swimming,” saying “Everyone has to find their own.” Participants reported benefits of cross-training, helping dancers “excel[. . .] in areas that [they] never thought possible based on the cross-training” (Suzanne) and “balance extreme dynamics of dance” (Robert). Reflecting on her experiences in a ballet company, Suzanne explained how increased “body awareness” through cross-training can lead dancers to “do incredible work,” and she stated that she wished she “had the opportunity to do more cross-training” in her performance career. Robert echoed Emma’s point earlier that cross-training can help dancers stay physically healthy in their performance career:

[W]e are all right-handed or left-handed. Choreographers tend to focus on one direction or one arm, sometimes very often, one foot, one calf, one hip, one extension, and when you are working for two or three choreographers your body gets wrecked if you don’t have the chance to work out that balance with cross-training, yea?

Stepping outside a comfort zone in a ballet performance career requires “courage” (Bev) from dancers, and Emma noted that it is not possible to “be a dancer without being courageous.” Bev discussed how ballet dancers need to “always want to try and have the courage to go one step further, one little extra thing” and how staying “complacent and safe” leads dancers to “never develop or grow.”

Altogether, participants believed that dancers will be more likely to persevere in a performance career if they are proactive in educating themselves about job opportunities and options and are open and flexible about moving to a different company that offers a better work environment; reach out for mentorship and guidance and communicate their career vision; and step outside their comfort zone by diversifying their training and challenging themselves to improve. By doing these, dancers increase their employability, mitigate their stress, and reaffirm their commitment and purpose for their career decision to enter the professional ballet world and for their ongoing decisions to persevere in a performance career. Navigating a performance career in this way with intelligence and courage within and beyond one ballet company is a way of “[k]eeping your options open” (Robert).

Theme 3: Growing as an Artist to Have More Than Technique and Raw Physicality to Capture an Audience

Seven of the nine participants emphasized that dancers need to commit to their process of “enrich[ing] [their] contribution as an artist” (Lise), “enlarging their world” (Astrid) beyond ballet technique and raw physicality by focusing on artistry and artistic expression and exposing themselves to other dance forms. Artistry “captures [an] audience” (Bev). Astrid asked professional ballet dancers: “Your technique is there. Now, what can you do about your artistry?” Michel noted how he has met dancers who “should have had a very long career and a successful career because physically, they are so talented,” explaining that these dancers could not persevere in their performance career because “it takes more than that to be good at something. . . . It can’t just be a pure physical talent.” Michel listed “artistry” as one of the requirements for professional

ballet dancers in their performance career. Participants, therefore, believed that being an artist involves more than being a dancer with good technique. For example, Bev described what it means to be an artist:

You want to create the magic on stage, and that's what being an artist is. So however and whatever means you can do that, then you can call yourself an artist. You can grab an audience. You can capture an audience. For that moment, those two hours, you create a magical evening of experiencing performing arts. You're an artist.

To develop themselves as artists, participants encouraged dancers to “go and see as many performances outside of their company as possible” (Lise) and to “[be] influenced by experience of watching other aspects of dance and all of its forms” (Robert). Russ compared focusing exclusively on ballet, rather than exploring other dance forms, to “only speaking one language, only living in one country,” and advised dancers to “experience as much as [they] can.” This exposure to other dance forms is required to grow “as an artist” (Robert)—“don't be an elitist,” said Emma. Robert explained:

You also simply, as an artist, are influenced by experience of watching other aspects of dance and all of its forms. Butoh! Why not? Flamenco! Why not? See dance in all of its facets. . . . Get out and see as much dance as possible.

In addition to this exposure to other dance forms, participants urged dancers to shift their attention from their technique to artistic expression. For example, Emma noted:

I think as a dancer, you have to be mindful that it's not necessarily about your leg being up here [gestures; her hand close to her head], but maybe how you get your leg up there, how you emote when your leg is up there [gestures; her hand close to her head].

Bev also emphasized how ballet dancers express their emotions through movement with artistry, expressing her frustration that some ballet dancers appear to value “their athletics [and] acrobatic ability rather than their artistry.” Similarly, Emma cautioned dancers by saying, “We have to be very careful about [that] we don't push the dance genre to a point where it becomes so athletic, not artistic. It leaves you cold.” Participants believed that exploring “the multiple forms of dance” (Robert) and focusing on artistry to grow as an artist can help dancers persevere in their performance career by becoming more “versatile” (Russ) and offering more than raw physicality. Emma gave a thoughtful comment on why artistry helps dancers persevere in a performance career. Notably, that she thought Veronica Tennant was a good example of an artistic dancer because “she didn't have everything genetically given to her. . . . but she was such an artistic dancer and such an intelligent dancer that she had a long career.”

In sum, focusing on artistry and artistic expression beyond technique and physicality and exploring other art forms and dance genres help dancers grow as a “versatile” (Russ) artist, expanding their skill repertoire as well as their artistic identity. In turn, *growing as an artist to have more than technique and raw physicality* increases dancers' employability, expands their sense of personhood, and reaffirms their

commitment and purpose in their performance career, thereby helping them persevere as a professional dancer.

Theme 4: Balancing Your Performance Career by Having a Life Outside the Dance World

All nine participants urged dancers to have a life outside their performance career because their interests and relationships outside dance will help them have a more “balanced” (Emma) life as a dancer and as a person. Astrid described a single-minded focus on dance as a “very seductive . . . powerful mind trap” that is compared to being addicted to “a drug,” recalling “how powerful and how righteous” it felt to dedicate herself fully to ballet. At the same time, she sarcastically commented, “Healthy? Probably not.” To mitigate this, participants shared that their interests and relationships outside dance helped them develop identities outside the dance world, “[k]eep[ing] a broader perspective,” and “manag[ing] to get through” (Tania) stressful times in their performance career. Bev shared an example of a professional ballet dancer who found a balance in his life by working as a spin instructor while navigating his performance career:

One of the dancers I know in [CITY], he’s in the company. He’s been there for 5 or 6 years. Now . . . he teaches a spin class. He just loves it, right? He said to me, ‘Oh my god. Spin—It changed my whole perspective. I realized that I’m still a dancer. I can still work in the company, but it gave me something else to balance my life’s worth. So I know I have distraction. If things are not going well in the company, I know I’m going tomorrow evening or I’m going in the evening and teach a spin class. Everybody’s gonna put their music on and

ride. . . . It's gonna be something that I won't have to think about what's going on in a company, just for a couple of hours.'

Astrid also echoed the importance of “hav[ing] outside interests” and relationships to manage stress in a performance career:

Have some outside interests, then your world doesn't become so insular. If you enjoy plants or [pause for 2 seconds] just find something else besides ballet to help keep you from becoming too wrapped up in one field because your world becomes too small. Because your friends—the hours dictate that we spend a lot of time with the same people. So the harder you try to have outside people, the better off you're going to be after and actually even during because you have outside influence to balance what's happening in your life within the company, which can be very stressful.

Similarly, Michel discussed how there are “down moments” in a performance career when dancers are “not happy”, and encouraged dancers to “take joy in other things . . . [their] outside life”, such as “a partner, girlfriend, boyfriend, or other things; seeing movies or dinners or something like that,” to help them persevere in their performance career. Bev was adamant that finding “a balance” between the work day and after work protects a dancer against “go[ing] home [to] ruminate about what's happened during the day.” Suzanne shared how “meeting wonderful people . . . who were not dancers” grew her “confidence as a person” when she was going through a rough time in her ballet performance career, and how her relationship with people outside dance was “one of the best things.” When reflecting on her experience, Tania also spoke about the benefit of having relationships outside the performance world: “I found a place with three

housemates, and that was the best thing. To me, it was. Like I said, I had normal [chuckles] people doing other things. It just kind of keeps your perspective a little.” Bev believed that dancers need to “interact with others who are not dancers” to “become who [they] are” as a person, “show[ing] a part of [themselves] that’s not a ballerina.”

Participants shared that it is “super important to be able to see what’s happening out there, outside of your little bubble in order to define what you like and define what you don’t like” (Lise) because the single-minded focus on ballet “from [ages] 13 to 27 [is] too much of [dancers’] life behind them” (Robert). Robert considered having “a life outside of the dance” as a way for dancers to “balance their personalities and balance facets of who they are as a person.” Participants identified that “hav[ing] a broad spectrum of the world” (Tania) by “keep[ing] one foot out,” having interests and relationships outside dance, not only helped them persevere through “stressful” (Astrid) and “down moments” (Michel) because “[they] don’t get to the point that [they] sort of feel like [they]’re out of balance”, but also gave them a “better chance of even staying in” (Emma) their performance career. In sum and moreover, balancing a performance career by having a life outside the dance world not only allows dancers to persevere in their performance careers, but also “to start to prepare [themselves] for [their] second career” (Lise).

To persevere in a performance career, participants emphasized that it is crucial for dancers to develop as a whole person, not just as a dancer, by expanding their interests and relationships outside the dance world to make their world bigger. Dancers’ relationships and interests outside dance not only expand their personhood, but also help

them manage their stress and reaffirm their commitment and purpose to persevere in their performance career.

Summary

In this chapter, I have presented the findings from my thematic analysis of the participants' narrative interviews in relation to my research question: How can professional ballet dancers persevere in a performance career? I described four themes: (a) Building and Looking After Your Healthy Sense of Self and Mental Attitude; (b) Navigating Your Career Journey With Intelligence and Courage Within and Beyond One Ballet Company; (c) Growing as an Artist to Have More Than Technique and Raw Physicality to Capture an Audience; and (d) Balancing Your Performance Career by Having a Life Outside the Dance World. I provided supporting quotes from participants for each theme. In the following chapter, I will provide my examination and interpretation of these findings in comparison to the existing literature and discuss implications of my findings for future research, the dance world, as well as counselling practice.

Chapter 4

Discussion and Conclusion

Various physical and psychosocial challenges faced by ballet dancers during their performance career have been explored in the previous literature. However, little attention has been given to how professional ballet dancers can persevere in their performance career. To my knowledge, this study is one of the first to focus on how professional ballet dancers can persevere in their performance careers from the perspective of retired professional ballet dancers themselves. In this final chapter, I discuss the findings of my study which explored the personal wisdom of retired professional ballet dancers about persevering in a performance career, comparing the findings with the existing literature. The findings of my study make a novel contribution to the existing literature on ballet dancers by highlighting the importance of developing career meta-competencies as well as a sense of personhood outside dance. After discussing the limitations and strengths of my study and offering suggestions for future research, I provide implications and applications of my findings for practice of dancers, dance educators, and dance company management as well as for counsellors working with dancers, and end this chapter with concluding remarks.

Summary and Discussion of the Findings

To answer my research question for this study: How can professional ballet dancers persevere in a performance career?, I collected narrative interview data from retired professional ballet dancers to explore the personal wisdom of participants about persevering in a performance career based on their own lived experience of having had a performance career as a ballet dancer. I used thematic analysis to analyze the data and

identified four themes: (a) Building and Looking After Your Healthy Sense of Self and Mental Attitude; (b) Navigating Your Career Journey With Intelligence and Courage Within and Beyond One Ballet Company; (c) Growing as an Artist to Have More Than Technique and Raw Physicality to Capture an Audience; and (d) Balancing Your Performance Career by Having a Life Outside the Dance World. See Table 1 for a summary of the four themes, their definitions and codes, and examples of supporting quotes from participants.

There are four overarching pathways or links that I identified as potential mediating pathways, linking the four thematic findings to perseverance: (a) Managing and Mitigating Stress; (b) Increasing Employability; (c) Expanding Personhood; and (d) Reaffirming Commitment and Purpose. Please see Figure 1 where I illustrate the relationships between the four thematic findings and perseverance of professional ballet dancers in a performance career, being mediated by the four potential mediating pathways. I now turn to discuss each theme in depth in relation to the existing literature.

Theme 1: Building and Looking After Your Healthy Sense of Self and Mental Attitude

Retired professional ballet dancers who participated in this study noted the importance of building and looking after a healthy sense of self and mental attitude for dancers to persevere in their performance career. To stay “mentally healthy” (Bev), dancers need to know and stand for who they are as well as hold or adopt mental attitudes by resisting internal (e.g., harsh self-criticism, wanting perfection from themselves) and external (e.g., harsh criticism from others, perceiving others expecting perfection from them) forces. This will help dancers persevere in their performance career with dignity

and desire. The foundations for building and looking after a healthy sense of self and mental attitude were practicing self-compassion and acceptance, pursuing one's best rather than perfection, acknowledging and believing in one's capabilities, seeking counselling, demanding fair treatment from others, and focusing on the joy of dancing.

Participants spoke about the need to practice acceptance and self-compassion in relation to injuries, mistakes, perfectionism, recognition/promotion, and the culture of a ballet company as these can impact a healthy sense of self and mental attitude of dancers. Participants spoke at length about perfectionism. Perfectionism, as an internal and external force, is prevalent in the culture of professional ballet companies (Hamilton, 1998; Hamilton & Robson, 2006; Pickard, 2012), and ballet "is a perfection art" as one of the participants, Suzanne put it. In the field of performing arts, the pursuit of perfection—from self or others—to achieve extraordinary levels of performance is often normalized, encouraged, or even admired (Hall & Hill, 2012), despite the pressure and the negative impact of the pursuit of perfection on dancers (e.g., injuries [Hamilton, 1989], debilitating imagery, cognitive and somatic anxiety, lower self-confidence [Nordin-Bates, Cumming, Aways, & Sharp, 2011], adverse physical and emotional difficulties [Cumming & Duda, 2012], and burnout [Hernandez, 2012]). While there is no single agreed-upon definition of perfectionism used in previous research, Hill, Witcher, Gotwals, and Leyland (2015) reported that their sample of performing artists, including dancers, identified "high achievement/performance standards, an 'obsessive' approach to improvement, rigid and dichotomous thinking, and recurring dissatisfaction with current performances or works" as features central to being a perfectionist in their performance career (p. 242). Although some researchers reported the beneficial impact

of perfectionism on performance, Flett and Hewitt (2014) argued that previous studies reporting the positive association of perfectionism with better performance outcomes may be reflecting achievement behaviours mixed with some elements of perfectionistic tendencies rather than true perfectionism. Achievement behaviour, which is an aspect of perfectionism, can be helpful, while other negative aspects of full-blown perfectionism are not (Flett & Hewitt, 2014). Alternatively, better performance might reflect conscientiousness rather than perfectionism. Conscientiousness is the quality of “wishing to do one’s work or duty well or thoroughly” (Conscientious, n. d.), not perfectly. In this light, conscientiousness relates to achievement striving. Nonetheless, dancers interviewed in previous studies about their experience in the dance world reported perfectionism as either the biggest challenge in a performance career (Warnick et al., 2016) or an inevitable feature of their dance training (Sandham & Nicol, 2015). Perfectionism is likely, therefore, a significant challenge, or occupational stressor (Hernandez, 2012), that dancers need to manage both internally and externally. Participants shared much personal wisdom about managing perfectionism as a source of stress and challenge in relation to building and looking after a healthy sense of self and mental attitude. Specifically, participants advised dancers to practice acceptance and self-compassion as well as seek counselling.

Participants discussed using acceptance and self-compassion to help dancers refrain from and let go of requiring perfection from themselves and to keep perspective on improving incrementally to the degree of “good enough” (Emma). Participants believed doing this would help dancers manage and mitigate stress by acting as a buffer against the stressful impacts of self-criticism and dissatisfaction that rise from

perfectionism. One strategy suggested by participants was for dancers to not be so hard on themselves. This relates to the component of self-kindness Neff (2003a) described as one of three components of self-compassion (i.e., mindfulness, self-kindness, common humanity). Neff (2003a) defined self-kindness as being kind and understanding to self rather than being harshly self-critical in the face of a failure or difficulty. Participants in my study emphasized how self-criticism could make dancers less likely to persevere in their performance career. For example, Bev noted that she wishes she “had [not] been so hard on [her]self,” which she believed would have led to her to “have a longer career” as a professional ballet dancer. In other words, Bev thought practicing self-kindness would have helped her reaffirm her commitment and purpose as a ballet dancer. In a previous study, Neff (2003b) reported that more self-compassionate individuals were less likely to show unhealthy perfectionistic tendencies while maintaining higher personal standards for themselves. That is, when self-compassionate individuals fail to meet their personal standards, they are more accepting and experience less stress without lowering their standards for themselves. This finding of Neff (2003b) is in line with what participants said: Practicing “acceptance” (Bev) of imperfection while striving for improvement and better performance by keeping perspective and “work[ing] hard” (Michel) to incrementally bring “all those perfect points together at the same time” (Michel) on stage will help dancers persevere in their performance career. Furthermore, practicing acceptance and self-compassion is associated with increased motivation to improve in the face of a failure (Breines & Chen, 2012). One participant, Russ, summarized the relationship between acceptance, self-compassion, motivation, and perseverance in a performance career by saying, “If you beat yourself up constantly, you’re not going to go

to the next audition. You stop dancing, and that will be the end of your career.”

Therefore, although participants understood the benefits of striving for better performance with higher standards (achievement behaviours), they also acknowledged the cost of fixating on attaining perfection and encouraged dancers to maintain a more balanced, healthy mental attitude to manage this source of stress. This relates to what Hall, Hill, and Appleton (2012) stated about perfectionism in athletes: While perfectionism may be beneficial in a short term to motivate athletes to improve and attain goals, over time, perfectionism leads athletes to a sense of emotional exhaustion, perceived dissatisfactory achievement, and devaluation of their career due to the self-critical style used to evaluate their achievement and impossibility to meet perfectionistic standards (Hall et al., 2012).

While it may be difficult, if not impossible, for individual dancers to change how predominant it is to ask for perfection from dancers in a performance career, they can work on changing their own mental attitude towards this, affirming self-respect and expanding their personhood. For example, Emma, encouraged dancers to resist this culture of perfection in the ballet world by saying, “People want perfection from you, but sometimes, good is good enough.” However, it is common that various distorted beliefs central to being a perfectionist are tied with an individual’s identity (Blatt & Zuroff, 2002), leading perfectionists to feel reluctant to change their current beliefs and behaviours. Participants in this study also discussed distorted beliefs and perfectionism as a part of who they were as well as the rigid and dichotomous thinking described by Hill and colleagues (2015) as a feature of perfectionism. For example, Bev shared that “what happens for a lot of dancers is that one thing goes wrong and they fall apart

because mentally [they] just thought, ‘Oh my god. This is an absolute disaster. It’s not even worth trying.’” Bev encouraged dancers to “change [their] perspective” by challenging their high performance standards, or what might be, distorted beliefs: “You’ve done 3-act ballet, right? On one stage for 3 hours. One thing went wrong. Why would you think that the whole performance is ruined by that? Why?” Participants understood the connection between thoughts and behaviours, and discussed how counselling can help dancers “change the way of [their] thinking” (Bev) to resist perfectionism prevalent in the ballet world. Overall, the wisdom from participants on this issue of perfectionism was for dancers to pursue their personal best rather than perfection. I believe the advice to pursue their best can be likened to conscientiousness.

Interestingly, conscientiousness is considered to include a facet of perseverance associated with performance outcome (MacCann et al., 2009). Additionally, conscientiousness has been consistently found to be related to accomplishment of job tasks in all occupational groups studied (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Salgado, 1997).

In addition to resisting internal forces that hinder dancers to build and look after their healthy sense of self and mental attitude, participants also suggested dancers to stand strong for themselves by demanding respectful treatment from others. While participants did not actually use the term ‘bullying,’ the way they spoke about the authoritarian culture of ballet companies and the examples they provided, certainly sounded like bullying (e.g., Tania’s example of verbal abusive visiting choreographers). Previous studies have reported that workplace bullying can lead to psychological and psychosomatic complaints (Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2001), health outcomes (Vie, Glasø, & Einarsen, 2011), and burnout (Bowling & Beehr, 2006). The demoralizing nature of

workplace bullying makes it difficult for victims to defend themselves (Vega & Comer, 2005) and decreases their sense of self-worth and competence at work (Leymann, 1990). Participants in this study spoke about how abusive practices in a ballet company—especially by management—are intimidating and are detrimental to a healthy sense of self and mental attitude of dancers, highlighting the importance of having “integrity to know that you can stand on your own” (Bev) and “confidence to be able to speak out for yourself” (Astrid). Lise went so far as to suggest that “ballet also needs Me Too Movement to say ‘no’ to abusive practices.” Although some past studies have portrayed dancers as a passive body, not expressing their personhood or feelings and putting up with instructors who dehumanize them (Gray & Kunkel, 2001; Stinson et al., 1990), a more recent study exploring dancers’ narratives stated that dancers in their sample expressed that such inhumane treatment towards them in their performance career is neither welcome nor tolerated (Warnick et al., 2016). Similarly, the advice from participants in my study was that unfair, abusive, or inhumane treatment are not to be tolerated, but resisted. Perhaps, dancers who have a strong sense of self and assertive mental attitude will resist unfair treatment from others and manage this occupational stress, and therefore, be less likely to experience the detrimental impacts of workplace bullying and harassment on their sense of self-worth, motivation, competence, and burnout, and subsequently, more likely to persevere in their performance career. Developing and using a strong sense of self and assertive mental attitude relate closely to the control component of career adaptability, involving having a decisive and assertive attitude with a feeling of agency (Hartung & Cadaret, 2017). Developing or using a decisive and assertive attitude will not only contribute to a healthy sense of self and

personhood, but also build and positively affect a dancer's confidence. This confidence is also the fourth aspect of career adaptability, defined in part as having the confidence to construct the future by acquiring skills and strategies by believing in one's ability to deal with challenges (Hartung & Cadaret, 2017).

Although current and retired dancers who participated in the Warnick and colleagues (2018) study reported strong desire for positive recognition from others in their performance careers, participants in my study advised dancers to shift their attention from seeking "affirmation" from others, such as "artistic directors, newspapers, reviews, and audience . . . [or] fellow dancers" (Bev), to recognizing their capability, achievements, and enjoyment in their performance careers. Doing this, suggested participants, will increase the likelihood of persevering in a performance career. One example of the positive recognition from others in a performance career is a promotion to a higher ranking in a dance company. Previous researchers (e.g., Hamilton, 1998; Wulff, 1998) noted how difficult it is for dancers to get promoted in a company, sometimes, regardless of their capability. Not only is positive recognition from others hard to attain in the ballet culture, but is also a fragile commodity for a dancer to base their sense of identity on. For example, Bev cautioned dancers not to rely on other people's recognition to build self-esteem because self-esteem will then be easily "broken." Participants shared a few examples of the dancers in their personal networks who accepted that they would not get promoted to a higher ranking in their dance company, but who recognized that they were "doing what [they] love" (Emma). Focusing on what they love and the realistic appraisal and acceptance of capability and opportunities for promotion in rank

will reaffirm commitment and purpose, and foster perseverance for dancers in a performance career with “some balance . . . [and] less stress” (Emma).

Focusing on the joy of dancing was highlighted by participants. Interestingly, the research by Lazaroff (2011) has forwarded the idea that it is more helpful for dancers to focus more on intrinsic rewards (e.g., enjoyment, perceived improvement) than on extrinsic rewards (e.g., promotion, praise from others) to motivate themselves in their performance career because, as one of the retired dancers in Warnick and colleagues’ (2016) study stated, “positive recognition is a hard prize to come by” (p. 37). This suggestion was strongly evident in my data too. Participants pointed dancers to focusing on the joy and love of dancing as part of who they are or an attitude they bring to their performance career to affirm and maintain intrinsic motivation, which will help dancers persevere in a performance career despite difficulties. When dancers are intrinsically motivated, feelings of satisfaction or enjoyment become an intrinsic reward for them to keep engaging in the activity (Lazaroff, 2001). Eisenberger (1992) explained in his theory of learned industriousness that individuals are more likely to exert effort on difficult tasks when it is followed by a reward. This, of course, is the definition of perseverance. Putting learned industriousness and dance training together, Lazaroff (2011) asserted that the theory of learned industriousness can help us understand how dancers stay motivated in their training regardless of the physical and cognitive stress. Thus, focusing on “love” and “fun” of dancing (Michel) and “giv[ing] yourself credit for what you’ve achieved” (Robert) can help dancers reaffirm their commitment and purpose to persevere in their performance career. That is, maintaining their focus on the joy of dancing and acknowledging their own capability, rather than a promotion or external

recognition, can both fuel intrinsic motivation and reaffirm dancers' decision to pursue and persevere in a performance career.

In sum, practicing self-compassion and acceptance, pursuing one's best rather than perfection, acknowledging and believing in one's capabilities, seeking counselling, demanding fair treatment, and focusing on the joy of dancing are what participants considered would help professional ballet dancers build and look after a healthy sense of self and mental attitude. Having a healthy sense of self and mental attitude will, in turn, help dancers manage and mitigate stress, expand personhood, and reaffirm their commitment and purpose to persevere in their performance career.

Theme 2: Navigating Your Career Journey With Intelligence and Courage Within and Beyond One Ballet Company

To persevere in a performance career, participants encouraged dancers to be proactive in their career development by educating themselves about job opportunities and options; being open and flexible about finding a different company with a better work environment; diversifying their training as a professional ballet dancer; challenging themselves to improve; having the courage to communicate their vision for their career; and seeking guidance and mentorship. Although previous literature has described how ballet management has enormous power over the way a dancer's career evolves (Gordon, 1983; Hamilton, 1998; Wulff 1998), participants in this study believed that to persevere in their performance career, dancers need to be responsible for being proactive in "point[ing] themselves in the right direction" (Robert). Rather than passively waiting for ballet management to notice their talent, participants encouraged dancers to take strategic

actions in their career development, mitigating stress and increasing their employability in their performance career.

In the career development process of dancers, fostering and using self-awareness, self-knowledge, and introspection was highlighted by participants as critical. In the existing literature, Hall (2004) also noted that *career meta-competencies* which consist of self-awareness and adaptability prepare people to be independent in developing new, relevant career skills and learning from their experience to navigate their career journey. It is worth mentioning that the presence of both components of career meta-competencies (self-awareness and adaptability) are crucial. For example, Hall (2004) noted that people with high adaptability and low self-awareness may not be able to carve their own career paths reflecting their career identity or personal fit, whereas people with high self-awareness and low adaptability may avoid taking actions to navigate their career development processes. Consistent with the findings of Hall (2004), participants in my study also highlighted the importance of self-awareness in taking initiative in their career development processes.

Although there is a lack of research on how career meta-competencies of dancers influence their perseverance in their performance career, participants in this study discussed different aspects of navigating a performance career in a ballet company which closely align with some of the resource domains of career adaptability: career concern, control, curiosity, and confidence. Career adaptability is defined as a psychosocial capacity for coping with career developmental tasks, transitions, changes, and stressful work environments (Hartung & Cadaret, 2017; Johnston et al., 2013; Porfeli & Savickas, 2012; Savickas, 2013), and the four resource domains of career adaptability appear to

facilitate perseverance of dancers in their professional performance career based on my findings. The career adaptability, combined with self-awareness, or career meta-competencies (Hall, 2004), of dancers helps them persevere in their performance career by mitigating stress associated with career developmental tasks, transitions, or the stressful work environment of a ballet company, as well as by increasing the employability of dancers. For example, to persevere in a performance career, participants encouraged dancers to gather information about job opportunities and options by “do[ing] the work to understand what art institutions are out there” (Robert), understanding the trends in the field of their performance career in relation to their own career vision. This particular aspect appears to be in line with the *career curiosity* domain of career adaptability, defined as seeking information on and exploring personal fit with work environment. In keeping with this aspect, one of the dancers and musicians who participated in the Bennett (2009) study on career resilience of performing artists also put emphasis on “the importance of maintaining ‘knowledge and awareness of current trends’” (p. 316) to stay employed in a performance career.

This knowledge about job opportunities and trends provides an opportunity for dancers to find a better work environment before they get to a point where they feel dissatisfied, disheartened, or distressed in their performance career. In other words, dancers can utilize *career control*: taking personal responsibility for their career development with agency by moving to a new ballet or performance company before their stress accumulates out of their control, helping them stay in a performance career. Therefore, career curiosity and career control can assist dancers to find “an environment where [they]’re appreciated” (Lise), thereby mitigating their stress, increasing their

chance of maintaining their employment, and reaffirming their commitment to and sense of purpose in their performance career. Consistent with the findings of my study, Johnston et al. (2013) discussed how individuals are more likely to be engaged in their work, focusing on pleasure at work, and making more meaning out of their work when using the career adaptability domain of career control. The use of career control, therefore, mediates the relationship between orienting to happiness at work and experiencing work stress (Johnston et al., 2013).

Participants in my study also emphasized the importance of being prepared for career transition in a performance career. For example, dancers typically sign a contract for their position in a dance company, and if their contract does not get renewed, they need to move to a new dance company. Therefore, the resource domain of *career concern* can play a role in helping dancers orient themselves to the future of their career and plan accordingly with a hopeful attitude. Given the lack of job security for professional dancers in their performance career (Krasnow et al., 1994), career concern is especially crucial for dancers to use to increase their employability and mitigate potential stress that can arise from unknown.

Participants cautioned dancers against staying in a miserable work environment “out of some kind of tenacity to an unhealthy situation” (Robert). In regard to this, it is worth discussing the literature on passion, defined as internalization of an activity into one’s identity (Vallerand et al., 2003). There are two types of passion: harmonious passion and obsessive passion. Vallerand and colleagues (2003) defined harmonious passion as motivating autonomous engagement in an activity and obsessive passion as internally pressured engagement in an activity. For example, dancers with harmonious

passion are not compelled to dance but, rather, freely choose to do so; and while dancing is significant to their identity, it does not conflict with other life domains, therefore, being in harmony with other aspects of their lives. In contrast, dancers with obsessive passion about dancing feel compelled to dance, and often do so at the expense of other life domains because certain internal or external contingencies (e.g., self-esteem, approval from others) are attached to dancing. While both types of passion lead individuals to persevere in the face of difficulties, obsessive passion makes individuals rigidly persist even when it is unlikely that they will yield a positive outcome by continuing the activity (Vallerand et al., 2003). This “dysfunctional persistence” (Audia et al., 2000, p. 837) causes performance declines. The accurate appraisal of whether perseverance is likely to lead to positive outcomes buffers people from displaying dysfunctional persistence (Audie et al., 2000), and this appraisal was one of the features of the healthy adaptation resulting from harmonious passion (Vallerand et al., 2003). Therefore, taking the existing research and the findings of my study together, it can be speculated that the domains of career curiosity, control, and concern can promote harmonious passion, which in turn, helps dancers persevere in their performance career through reaffirming their commitment and purpose to their career.

At the same time as using career control to make independent decisions in their career developmental process with a sense of ownership over their performance career, it is also essential for dancers to “keep [themselves] physically in good shape” (Emma) to persevere in their career by remaining employable. A dancer’s body is the most important tool in their performance career, and dancers often see their bodies as “tools on which they invest” (Alexias & Dimitropoulou, 2011, p. 87). The significance of a

dancer's body in their performance career perhaps explains why there is such a wealth of literature on dance injuries, reporting how injuries can end or shorten the length of a dancing performance career (Garrick & Requa, 1993; Grove et al., 2013; Mainwaring & Finney, 2017; Wainwright & Turner, 2004). Although the physical anatomy of a dancer's body is impossible to change, the findings of a longitudinal study on dance talent among pre-professional dancers revealed that physical characteristics (e.g., turnout, hamstring flexibility) of dancers changed over time with training (Redding, Nordin-Bates, & Walker, 2011). The findings of my study also recommended dancers cross-train by engaging in other forms of physical activity that bring dancers "a balance to the body" (Robert). Cross-training mitigates the impact of physical stress on a dancer's body and, in this way, contributes to both the longevity of dancers' physical ability and to employability in their performance career.

Participants in my study also urged dancers to step outside their comfort zone to challenge themselves and improve. In their process of career development, challenges can be seen as problem-solving and solution-finding opportunities, helping dancers develop a new skill or use existing adaptive problem-solving abilities. Michel discussed how he dealt with the unexpected challenge of having to move from the company where he had trained as a pre-professional and danced as an apprentice, and from where he had anticipated he would be offered a contract. Michel described this experience of having to leave and move to another company in an unfamiliar city, as one of the examples of stepping outside his comfort zone, noting how navigating this unexpected career transition "helped [him] become a better dancer." Previous experience of navigating and resolving a challenge in their career helps dancers become more confident in their ability

to cope with other career-related challenges, demonstrating the resource domain of *career confidence*.

Participants highlighted how assertive communication is not a part of the ballet culture: “In ballet, [dancers] don’t speak” (Lise). Dancers are “so used to just communicating with [their] body, not expressing certain things verbally or not knowing how or being really good at it” (Tania). However, the findings of my study strongly recommended dancers to proactively initiate conversation with ballet management of a company to communicate their career vision. A previous study on pre-professional dance training reported how dance students desperately seek approval from their instructor (Stinson et al., 1990). Lise echoed this by saying, “the better you follow instructions, the more pleased the teacher is.” Given the long years of dance training that focuses on “follow[ing] instructions” of others, asking for what they want in their performance career may be challenging for some dancers, requiring “dancers being courageous” (Emma). Nonetheless, participants in my study shared a few examples of the time when taking initiative to communicate their desire or speak to ballet management in their performance career resulted in career opportunities to perform a new role on stage (e.g., Bev; Michel), improving their employability and reaffirming their commitment and purpose to persevere in their performance career.

Another interpersonal example that participants noted as helpful for dancers in navigating their career development to persevere in their performance career was to seek mentorship and guidance. Although I could not find any previous study that specifically focused on how receiving mentorship influences dancers’ perseverance, the finding of my study is in line with the rich literature on how mentorship can facilitate the career

development process. The results of a meta-analysis on mentoring research affirmed that mentorship is beneficial on career development of protégés (Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, & Lima, 2004). The findings of the current study suggested that the profile of mentors and the kind of support that they offer, are diverse: mentors provided career support and role modelling as well as psychosocial support.

Consistent with the findings of the current study, Shen, Cotton, and Kram (2015) reported that the supporting network structure of individuals requires a range of people who support them in their personal and career development, and identified six types of people who serve in a supporting network structure, namely: “personal guides, personal advisors, full-service mentors, career advisors, career guides, and role models” (p. 82). All of these types present in a supporting network provide psychosocial and/or career support with varying frequencies and different types of interactions. Shen and colleagues (2015) also discussed how people adjust their developmental networks over time to address their specific needs based on self-awareness and the gaps in their current developmental network structure in relation to a composition of its members and the type of support they can provide. Therefore, in seeking mentorship and guidance, it is realistic for dancers to expect to experience different types of support and interaction. Psychosocial support from mentors mitigates stress, while career support provided by mentors increases employability of dancers in a professional performance career.

By educating themselves about job opportunities and being open about moving to a different company with a better work environment, diversifying their training, stepping outside their comfort zone to challenge themselves to improve, communicating their vision for their career to ballet management, and reaching out for mentorship and

guidance, participants believed dancers can navigate their performance career journey with intelligence and courage. Separately and together, these will all help dancers mitigate stress, increase their employability, and reaffirm their commitment and purpose to persevere in their performance career.

Theme 3: Growing as an Artist to Have More Than Technique and Raw Physicality to Capture an Audience

Participants emphasized that dancers need to commit to their process of developing and expanding as an artist with a sense of responsibility to their audience by focusing on artistry and artistic expression beyond mere technique and physicality, enriching what they can offer to the audience by exposing themselves to other dance genres and art forms. Wulff (1998) noted that while the mastery of traditional ballet technique is emphasized in pre-professional training and early stages of a performance career, dancers are rewarded for developing their personal style of dancing as they progress in their performance career, thereby, starting to create rather than simply duplicating. In line with this expectation of experienced ballet dancers to develop personal style of dancing, one of the participants, Astrid also echoed that the mastery of techniques is not enough for ballet dancers to persevere in their performance career by asking, “Your technique is there. Now, what can you do about your artistry?” Although a previous study noted that the technical component is relatively more vital than artistry for dancers compared with other performing artists (Noice & Noice, 2006), the findings of my study suggested that artistry in “how [dancers] emote” in their execution of technique is what makes dancers “create the magic on stage” (Bev) for their audience. Relating to

this point about dancing as an art form being more than mere technique or physicality, a famous dancer, choreographer, and artistic director, Erik Bruhn (1968) once noted:

Behind the discipline and the form, behind whatever is the specific thing you are trying to express, there must be a mind. . . . [I]t isn't that the body is so different—it didn't fall out from Mars or from the moon. It came from where everybody came from, only somewhere along the road the mind began to take it someplace (p. 13).

While physicality and technique of dancers may be largely dependent on their body and training, both the findings of the existing literature and current study revealed that it is unclear how artistry and artistic expression are developed in dancers. For example, participants in my study acknowledged that it has to be “a very special dancer” (Bev) to be able to move an audience with their artistic expression. Based on their personal correspondence with dance artists and educators, Noice and Noice (2006) also stated that there appears to be no formal methods of training for the expressive components in ballet, although some dancers may be coached by a more experienced dancer about a specific role in a dance company or take acting class on their own initiative. Furthermore, some of the common tangible factors that people associate with better performance outcomes of dancers, such as their training, experience, or motivation, do not appear to be related to an ability to demonstrate artistry and artistic expression, which led Noice and Noice (2006) to call for more future research on understanding the nature of artistry of dancers. While the findings of the current study do not specifically address the essence of and processes involved in developing artistry, they suggest that

artistry also plays a role in helping dancers persevere in their professional performance career.

In addition to artistry, the findings of this study encourage dancers to expand their identity as an artist by exposing themselves to other art forms and dance genres by “see[ing] as many performances outside of their company as possible” (Lise). As the repertoire is becoming increasingly diverse in ballet, the exposure and training to become “versatile” (Russ) in various dance genres not only make dancers grow as an artist, but are critical for dancers to maintain their employability. Consistent with this finding, in the previous study on dance artists, performance skills were identified as an important factor in career resilience of artists, and one of the dance artists in the sample emphasized “skills in a variety of genres” to maximize their employability (Bennett, 2009, p. 316).

To summarize, participants believed that dancers can grow as an artist to capture an audience by focusing on artistry and exposing themselves to other dance genres. Having more than mere technique and physicality expands the sense of artistic personhood of dancers as well as increases their employability as a professional dancer, which contribute to dancers’ perseverance in a performance career. Furthermore, developing artistry can reignite love of dancing for dancers, thereby, reaffirming their commitment and purpose to their performance career.

Theme 4: Balancing Your Performance Career by Having a Life Outside the Dance World

Participants recommended that dancers have a life outside their performance career because their interests and relationships outside dance help them mitigate occupational stress in their performance career, reaffirm their commitment and purpose in

their career, and expand their personhood, thereby, assisting them to persevere in their performance career. In contrast to previous research identifying a single-minded focus on ballet as a necessary condition for success in ballet training and performance careers (Hamilton 1998; Gordon, 1983; Kelman 2000; Pickard & Bailey, 2009), the findings of my study highlighted the importance of having a life outside of the dance world and developing a sense of personhood for dancers to help them both navigate and persevere in their performance career. Given the demanding nature of ballet training (Montanari & Zietkiewicz, 2000), the single-minded focus on ballet and sacrificing other areas of a dancer's personal life may be necessary for dancers to develop essential skills to advance into a professional performance career (Pickard & Bailey, 2009). However, the findings of my study questioned whether it is sustainable for dancers to continue maintaining a singular focus on improving ballet technique without a sense of their identity outside their performance career. For example, Astrid described a single-minded focus on ballet as unhealthy, likening it to an addiction. I suggest that the single-minded focus on ballet that Astrid was talking about relates to what Vallerand et al. (2003) defined and described as an obsessive passion. Irrespective of this, notion of a single-minded pursuit of performance excellence relates back, of course, to the issue of perfectionism versus conscientiousness I described and discussed earlier within the context of Theme 1.

Previous studies (e.g., Roncaglia, 2006; Willard & Lavalley, 2016) reported how the single-minded focus on ballet poses challenges for ballet dancers after retiring due to the need to reconstruct their identity. However, very little attention has been given to whether the single-minded focus on ballet helps dancers persevere in their performance career. The findings of my study indicated that dancers need to expand their sense of

personhood with interests and relationships outside dance. These interests outside dance can help dancers “balance what’s happening in [their] li[ves] within the company, which can be very stressful” (Astrid). In addition to mitigating occupational stress, another impact of having interests outside dance on dancers is growth as a whole person. For example, Robert urged dancers to “have other hobbies” to “balance their personalities and balance the facets of who they are as a person.”

Regarding this development of personhood, Miller and Kerr (2002) noted that the fields of sport psychology and elite athlete training need to resolve the gap between personal and performance excellence, so that personal excellence is not compromised in the process of pursuing performance excellence. Instead, personal excellence, referring to achieving developmentally appropriate tasks in one’s life and obtaining qualities that promote optimal health and well-being, should be a necessary condition for achieving performance excellence (Miller & Kerr, 2002). In the face of the legitimate demand for performance excellence from ballet dancers, pursuing personal excellence may not only seem remote, but also alien. By this I mean that the sheer number of hours across years that dancers have devoted to their training and art, is likely to have become the normal. In my study, Suzanne shared an example of a time in her performance career when she started to meet people outside dance after dedicating much of her youth and early adulthood to ballet training, describing this experience as “what a lot of people had the opportunity to do right out of high school.” Although Suzanne did not specifically identify this experience in terms of achieving personal excellence, she reported that it was “wonderful,” helping her mitigate stress from her life in a performance career as well as expand her personhood. Taken together, the findings from my study pointed out that

dancers need to mitigate their stress as well as expand and reinforce their personhood through seeking interests and relationships outside dance to persevere in their performance career, which is different from the description of ballet dancers as mechanically dedicating themselves to their career with a diminished sense of personhood (Gordon, 1983; Gray & Kunkel, 2001; Stinson et al., 1990).

In addition, previous studies on stress and dance injuries have reported that while social support from people outside dance decreases the chance of dancers experiencing injuries (Adam et al., 2004), receiving social support from dance peers or within the dance social networks did not mitigate the relationship between psychological stress and dance injury (Noh et al., 2005). Although Astrid did not specify that relationships outside dance will decrease the likelihood of experiencing dance injuries, she highlighted the association between receiving social support from people outside dance and managing stress in a performance career. Participants also shared how having a personal life with interests and relationships outside dance helped them reaffirm their commitment and purpose to persevere in their performance career. For example, Michel shared benefits of having interests and a sense of personhood outside ballet by explaining how there was a reciprocal relationship between having interests outside ballet and fully committing himself to his ballet training and performance career. Specifically, Michel said that it was because he “really loved” doing ballet that allowed him to have other things outside of dance that balanced his life for him. My impression from Michel is that while he loved his ballet, he was not consumed by it. In other words, he had a healthy relationship with his performance career and ballet did not conflict with “hav[ing] other things outside of dance,” which “made [his] life a bit more balanced.” This sounds like

what Vallerand and colleagues (2003) defined and described as harmonious rather than obsessive passion.

In short, this fourth and final finding from my study reflects the urging of participants for dancers to have a life outside of dance. By this, participants meant for dancers to develop and nurture interests and relationships outside of the dance world as a way to balance their performance career and mitigate stress, expand their sense of personhood outside dance, and reaffirm their commitment and purpose to persevere in their performance career.

The Importance of Career Adaptability for Dancers' Perseverance

Overall, my thematic findings suggested that participants inadvertently advised ballet dancers to draw on the attitudes and behaviours of career adaptability (career concern, control, curiosity, and confidence) to persevere in their performance career. For example, maintaining a hopeful attitude about one's career future (career concern) and self-efficacy beliefs in resolving career challenges (career confidence) can help dancers manage and mitigate various psychological, physical, and occupational stressors experienced in their performance career, while career confidence combined with an inquisitive attitude to explore possibilities and options (career curiosity) is relevant for dancers to expand their personhood through exposure and exploration of other areas of their performance career as well as lives. In addition, career control, or planning and making one's own career decisions decisively and assertively with a sense of responsibility and agency, combined with career concern, confidence, and curiosity help dancers increase their employability in their performance career by navigating their work

environment and tasks with confidence and resilience and reaffirm their commitment and purpose to persevere in their performance career.

To conclude the discussion of my findings, I now turn to briefly summarize and highlight the potential mediating pathways that I have alluded to and pointed out in my discussion of each theme above, highlighting what I believe are four processes mediating the relationship/s between the four thematic findings and perseverance.

Potential Mediating Pathways to Perseverance

Although the purpose and design of this study is inappropriate to infer a causal relationship between variables of interests, I believe it is worth discussing the potential processes describing how the four themes of this study relate to dancers' perseverance in a performance career. I would like to acknowledge that the four mediating pathways I identified by relating the findings of this study with the existing literature are hypothetical rather than conclusive. My hope is, however, that discussing these potential mediating pathways on this topic will be further explored in future research. As noted earlier, the four potential mediating pathways between the findings of this study and perseverance are illustrated in Figure 1, and include: (a) managing and mitigating emotional, physical, psychological, and occupational stress associated with a performance career; (b) increasing employability to remain in a performance career; (c) expanding personhood to achieve personal excellence and develop as a whole person; and (d) reaffirming a sense of commitment to a performance career and staying purposeful. In brief, I summarize the relationships between potential mediating pathways and thematic findings that participants implicitly and explicitly highlighted in my study.

Managing and mitigating stress. Participants suggested that (a) building and looking after a healthy sense of self and mental attitude; (b) navigating a career journey with intelligence and courage; and (c) balancing a performance career by having a life outside the dance world lead dancers to manage and mitigate emotional, occupational, psychological, and physical stress in their performance career, increasing their chance of persevering as a professional ballet dancer.

Increasing employability. This mediating pathway was a result of (a) navigating a career journey with intelligence and courage as well as (b) growing as an artist to have more than technique and raw physicality that participants identified in my study. Increased employability, in turn, was believed to help dancers persevere in their performance career.

Expanding personhood. Expanding a sense of personhood was related to (a) building and looking after a healthy sense of self and mental attitude; (b) growing as an artist to have more than technique and raw physicality; and (c) balancing a performance career by having a life outside the dance world. Participants assumed that dancers with a stronger sense of self both as a dancer, an artist, and a person will be more likely to persevere in their performance career.

Reaffirming commitment and purpose. All four thematic findings of my study—(a) building and looking after a healthy sense of self and mental attitude; (b) navigating a career journey with intelligence and courage; (c) growing as an artist to have more than technique and raw physicality; and (d) balancing a performance career by having a life outside the dance world—related to reaffirming commitment and purpose of dancers to their performance career. Participants believed that each of these thematic

findings of my study contributed to dancers reaffirming their commitment and purpose in their performance career, in turn, persevering as a professional ballet dancer.

Limitations and Strengths of the Study

It is important to note that the present study is not without limitations. Given the qualitative design of this study, the findings cannot be generalized to a broader population of professional ballet dancers or be representative of experiences of all professional ballet dancers and it is not possible to establish a causal relationship between my findings and perseverance. However, the choice of using qualitative research methods was intentional, helping me achieve the purpose of the study by providing rich descriptions based on in-depth exploration of the topic: dancers' perseverance in a professional performance career. Using a social constructivist framework, the findings I have presented reflect perceived realities about persevering in a performance career rather than an absolute truth. Although some may argue that this transactional and subjective nature of the findings of my study is a limitation, I believe I strived to represent the commonality and essence of what participants shared with me to the best of my ability.

Using purposive and snowball sampling, one participant referred me to three other retired professional ballet dancers in her personal network and my other five participants were all recruited through one major ballet company. Although the demographic information participants reported showed several different dance companies they danced at, there is a possibility that participants may have shared a certain commonality due to the nature of their shared experiences. I was, however, unaware of this in conducting this study.

Due to the lack of literature focusing on factors facilitating perseverance of dancers, this study was designed to be largely exploratory, highlighting different aspects that retired professional ballet dancers shared with me about persevering in a performance career. This exploratory nature of the study and a lack of dominant literature or theory to connect the findings together may be considered as a limitation of my study. It was, however, for this reason that I became interested in the theoretical and psychological construct of career adaptability and included a discussion and review of the literature on career adaptability in Chapter 1.

Finally, the time constraints of a Master's thesis are another limitation of this study. For example, although I reached data saturation with nine interviews, meaning no new code emerged in last two interviews, I wondered about a possibility of new themes emerging from the data set, if this had been a large-scale investigation with a bigger sample size. Additionally, as a relatively novice qualitative researcher in training, it is possible that my unfamiliarity with qualitative research influenced the quality of my collection and analysis of the data. To overcome this limitation, the research process was closely monitored and guided by my thesis supervisor, and I sought consultations from my committee member. These two scholars who provided supervision and guidance are well-versed in qualitative research, mitigating any impact on my study originating from my inexperience in conducting qualitative research.

Given the gap in the literature, the fact that the present study explored how professional dancers can persevere in their performance career is the overarching strength of my study. There is a lack of research on how dancers persevere in their performance career, and previous literature has largely focused on reporting various challenges

dancers face in their career. Therefore, the findings of this study make a novel contribution to the current literature on dancers by filling this gap.

One of the biggest strengths of this study is my personal experience and familiarity with the ballet world as a former aspiring professional ballet dancer who completed advanced training. I disclosed that I was a former pre-professional ballet dancer in my recruitment materials and upon contacting participants, and I believe this helped me build rapport with them. Several participants in this study shared with me at the end of their interview that they felt understood and comfortable while sharing their experiences with me and considered follow-up questions I asked relevant and appropriate. In addition, I believe both my and my supervisor Dr. Tasker's familiarity with the ballet world as a former aspiring ballet dancer. contributed to our analysis and interpretation of the data as we were able to understand the personal wisdom my participants shared in relation to the specific context of the ballet world. Furthermore, we were able to recognize subtle nuances that a researcher without expert knowledge about the ballet world may have missed. The value of our personal knowledge is consistent with the spirit of the interpretive phenomenological research design of this study where the prior personal knowledge of researchers in relation to a phenomenon of interest is valued as a useful guide to the inquiry (Geanellos, 2000).

Doing narrative interviews rather than taking a more structured approach to interviewing participants allowed participants to reflect on their stories of perseverance in a performance career in a fluid and open-ended narrative way. Participants shared their wisdom, perspectives, and experiences as they related to the topic of this research. I believe that this approach allowed me to capture and represent the voice of retired

professional ballet dancers about persevering in a professional performance career, highlighting their experiences from their own perspectives. Additionally, I believe my personal experience and familiarity with the ballet world is a strength of this study as participants reported feeling comfortable sharing their stories and perspectives, understood by me, and perceiving follow up questions I asked to clarify their perspectives as relevant.

In addition, the sample of participants comprises six female dancers and three male dancers whose ranking in a ballet company during their performance career ranged from a Corps de Ballet member to a Principal Dancer. Therefore, the perspectives and experiences of male dancers as well as dancers in a lower ranking, which are largely missing in the existing literature, were included in my study. Additionally, the findings identified from what participants who completed their training and worked as a professional dancer in several different countries around the world allow me to feel confident that my findings capture and describe the common essence of dancers' experience of persevering in their performance career. Finally, I believe the focus of my study has practical implications and applications for the dance world as well as for counsellors or other mental health professionals who work with ballet dancers. Ultimately, the implications of my findings are, therefore, for the career development and well-being of ballet dancers.

Implications and Applications for the Dance World

In addition to filling the gap in the existing literature on dancers, I believe the findings of my study have practical implications for dancers as well as for dance educators and management of dance companies. My initial interest in undertaking this

study stemmed from my personal experience of leaving the ballet world as a pre-professional ballet dancer. As I reflected on my time in the ballet world and training program, I can identify several pieces of wisdom in the findings of this study that I wish I had known back then. My hope is that the findings of my study help current and aspiring dancers as well as dance educators and management personnel support dancers to persevere in their extraordinary endeavour of working as a professional ballet dancer.

For current and aspiring dancers, I believe all the findings of this study are relevant and applicable. While a single-minded focus on ballet is encouraged from dancers to master necessary technique during their pre-professional training, the findings of this study encouraged professional dancers to shift their focus to expanding a sense of their own personhood with various interests and relationships, highlighting their individualities to understand what makes them a unique person, not just a dancer. This leads me to specifically highlight the importance of the act of balancing, which a lot of ballet dancers will practice physically in their training. For example, dancers need to balance their dedication to their performance career with their ongoing development of a sense of personhood and personal excellence. In addition, while pursuing mentorships from more experienced dancers or dance educators, relationships with people outside dance need to be maintained. It is important for dancers to reach out to the management of a dance company to communicate their career vision, whilst resisting any abusive practices from the management. Accomplishing a balance across different aspects of their performance career and a life outside of the dance world can be tricky for a lot of dancers, but it is not impossible to practice it. In turn, this balance will make dancers more persevering in their extraordinary pursuit of a performance career.

Although pre-professional ballet training was not a focus of my study, several participants noted that training programs are largely responsible for planting the seeds for perseverance in professional dancers. In so doing, participants implicitly and explicitly expressed their wish that pre-professional training programs prepare dance students to *build and look after their healthy sense of self and mental attitude, navigate their career journey with intelligence and courage, grow as an artist to have more than technique and raw physicality to capture an audience, and balance their training by having a life outside the dance world.* A few specific examples of implications based on the findings of this study may be that it is advisable for dance students to maintain their relationships with friends outside their ballet training, and to proactively gather information about preferred styles and repertoires of ballet companies that they are interested in working for in the future. Furthermore, dance educators and directors of dance training programs can use the findings of this study to modify their curriculum or encourage dancers to practice different strategies identified in this study to persevere in their training and hopefully later, in their performance career as a ballet dancer. For example, dance educators may include additional training outside dance, such as acting classes, in their curriculum to help dance students start developing and polishing their artistic expression and artistry. For directors of a professional dance company, I would like to highlight the importance of receiving mentorship for dancers to persevere in their professional performance careers. For example, professional dance companies may organize a networking event for their dancers to connect with more experienced dancers from another dance company or with retired dancers to expand their networks outside their own dance company. This offers an opportunity for dancers to develop informal mentoring relationships, which was

perceived to be more effective than formal mentoring relationships where protégés are assigned a mentor (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). Another change I would like to suggest for dance educators and dance company directors to consider is including counselling support for dancers in their programs or companies, which I discuss in-depth in the following section.

Implications and Applications for Counselling Practice

The personal wisdom retired professional ballet dancers shared about persevering in a performance career in this study will add to the understanding of counsellors who support this “breed apart” with extraordinary needs and desire (Gordon, 1983, p. 7). Mental health support is widely used among professional athletes to improve their performance (Dosil, 2006). Despite potential benefits of mental health support on dancers’ perseverance in their training as well as professional performance career, it is rare to find mental health professionals being included in the support system for dancers (McGuire, 2017). Similarly, participants in this study reported a lack of mental health or counselling support both in their training and professional performance career, while encouraging current dancers to access mental health support. Some training programs (e.g., The National Ballet School of Canada) has included mental health clinicians in their team to support dancers, paying particular attention to addressing eating disorders (MacFarlane, 1994). However, McGuire (2017) advised dance teachers and artistic directors of dance companies not to reserve bringing in mental health professionals just for dancers experiencing eating disorders, as there are many other issues that may be detrimental to the perseverance of dancers. The findings of my study also suggested different areas for dancers to develop their resilience against occupational stressors of a

performance career. The counselling services offered by Dance Transition Resource Centre (DTRC) in Canada, for example, appear to recognize that dancers may face various challenges in their performance career, and identify five different categories of counselling they offer for members: academic, career, financial, legal, and personal counselling. Out of these five categories provided by DTRC, career and personal counselling are relevant areas of service for counsellors. While personal counselling can be used by dancers to explore and resolve any personal concerns affecting their careers (Dance Transition Resource Centre, n. d.) that are not limited to eating disorders, career counselling can specifically focus on understanding career behaviours in relation to work environment and implementing interventions to help dancers cope with changes, challenges, and transitions.

In other words, career counsellors help individuals develop career adaptability to navigate their work environment and cope with predictable and unpredictable career challenges through increasing their employability, fostering self-regulation of thoughts, feelings, and behaviours, and build confidence and resilience, which subsequently contribute to their satisfaction and success in their career (Hartung & Cadaret, 2017). To develop career adaptability, career counsellors can first assess to what extent each of the four resource domains of career adaptability (career concern, control, curiosity, and confidence) are developed in the client and plan specific interventions to target a resource domain that is lacking. These four components of career adaptability are supported by the findings of my study as a way to help dancers persevere in their performance career by increasing their confidence and employability. *Career concern* reflects a hopeful, optimistic, and planful attitude about one's career, and career counsellors can use

interventions orienting their clients to the future to foster planning and optimism (Hartung & Cadaret, 2017). *Career control* refers to making career decisions responsibly with a sense of agency and decisiveness, and career counsellors can use decision-making interventions to empower their client in this resource domain (Hartung & Cadaret, 2017). *Career curiosity* involves exploring career options realistically, and career counsellors can facilitate its development by using information-based interventions and reality testing about the landscape of career to foster this inquisitive attitude in clients. Last, *career confidence* is related to self-efficacy beliefs about one's ability to solve problems, and career counsellors can practice role-play with their client to provide an opportunity for problem-solving or use cognitive-behavioural interventions to improve self-efficacy beliefs (Hartung & Cadaret, 2017).

In addition to developing career adaptability, counsellors also need to focus on enhancing self-awareness of dancers in navigating their career development processes to persevere in their performance career. Career adaptability and self-awareness are two equally critical career meta-competencies that equip people to thrive in and sustain their career in a self-directed manner, and individuals need to acquire both career adaptability and self-awareness to navigate their career development processes successfully (Hall, 2004). Therefore, it is advisable for career counsellors working with dancers to introduce various self-assessments (see Harrington & Hall, 2007 for examples) to dancers to help them enhance their level of self-awareness.

Further to understanding career development processes, to effectively support dancers, counsellors not only require knowledge in psychology, but also in performance science, such as dance kinesiology (Mainwaring, 2009). The understanding of both

human psychology and specific performance science helps counsellors work with dancers to develop specific performance management strategies (Mainwaring, 2009) and interventions, which is likely to necessitate additional research and education from counsellors to become familiar with and fluent in the common language dancers use to describe their training or practice. In addition, the broader understanding of the culture in a professional performance career of dancers may lend support for counsellors to provide advanced empathy as well as tailor their approach to reinforce a healthy mental attitude for dancers to be persevering and resilient in their careers.

The findings of my study highlighted how some of the dysfunctional patterns of thoughts or beliefs dancers present with can be explored in the broader context of an individual. For example, perfectionism prevalent in the ballet world was often internalized by dancers, further contributing to their stress and inability to persevere in their performance career. To address negative impacts of perfectionism experienced by dancers, it is important for counsellors working with dancers to understand how perfectionism is reinforced in the external environment of dancers. For example, Mainwaring (2009) highlighted how dancers are constantly overloaded with criticism from their teachers, choreographers, artistic directors, other dancers, and their parents. Additionally, even the language used by dance teachers for instructions on technique and form is commonly regarded as corrections, which further reinforces this critical perspective (Mainwaring, 2009). Moreover, many dance teachers who were also trained in this extremely critical, rigid, and insensitive manner may be likely to maintain this culture of perfectionism and negativity in the ballet world (Mainwaring, 2009).

Counsellors can work collaboratively with dancers to help them persevere in their performance career with a healthy mental attitude. Helping clients externalize their internalized perfectionism and working on the relationship between their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours are supported by the findings of my study. Similarly, Hall and colleagues (2012) recommended the use of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) for mental health professionals working with performing artists to manage distorted beliefs and dysfunctional achievement behaviours associated with perfectionism. It can be detrimental for dancers' perseverance to endure perfectionism, which has been also related to a wide range of psychopathology, including eating disorders (Goodwin, Arcelus, Geach, & Meyer, 2014; Penniment & Egan, 2012) and anxiety (Nordin-Bates et al., 2011), for dancers.

Moreover, counsellors can provide some psychoeducation and resources for dancers to manage and mitigate stress associated with their performance career, facilitating perseverance of dancers. Generally, counsellors can work with dancers to identify specific stressors, internal resources, and coping skills, and facilitate the development of individualized self-care and stress management plans. Using coping skills was found to be associated with decreased dance injuries, while stress mediates this relationship in previous studies (Noh et al, 2005; No et al., 2007). In addition, counsellors need to pay special attention to the dancer's social networks. Previous studies reported that while receiving social support from people outside ballet decreased stress levels of dancers (Adam et al., 2004), that from dancing peers did not (Noh et al., 2005). Therefore, counsellors can assess the current social support system of dancers and encourage dancers to expand their networks to include people outside ballet.

In addition to expanding social networks of dancers, counsellors can work with dancers to explore personal interests and identities outside ballet to help them develop their sense of personhood. In my study, expanding personhood was one of the potential mediating pathways that lead to perseverance of dancers in their performance career. In this exploration of dancers as a whole person in counselling, having counsellors highlight their strengths and transferrable skills helps dancers reaffirm their healthy sense of self. The findings of my study also pointed to the importance of acknowledging one's capabilities as well as developing confidence as a dancer. As McGuire (2017, n. p.) noted in her article, "Talent will take you far, but emotional strength will take you farther" in a performance career. As a soon-to-be professionally registered counsellor, I believe that counsellors can play a significant role in helping dancers develop this "emotional strength" as well as career adaptability, empowering dancers to persevere in their performance career.

Directions for Future Research

There are several directions for future research I became aware of while conducting this study. First, there has been very little attention given to what dancers can do to persevere or thrive in their performance career. Therefore, I recommend future researchers to use a positive psychology lens rather than highlighting occupational stressors and their negative impact on dancers, focusing on how dancers navigate these occupational stressors in their performance career.

I also noticed a lack of existing literature on mentoring or personal and social network structures of dancers despite the popularity of and wealth of literature on mentorship. Future research can address this gap by focusing specifically on dancers and

the roles mentorship or other supporting relationships play in their career development. Specifically, previous research (e.g., Shen et al., 2015) reported how various supporting relationships, including mentoring relationships, can provide different types of support in career development processes. Therefore, which specific type of support (e.g., psychosocial or career-related support) is present and most relevant for dancers' personal networks in relation to their career development can be explored.

Another interesting area for future research is exploring perseverance of pre-professional dancers or dance students to see if different facilitating factors emerge. Some participants in this study contributed their perseverance to different strategies they learned in their pre-professional ballet training. A longitudinal study following dancers from their training years to their years in a professional dance company may be able to highlight how perseverance evolves in the career developmental processes of dancers. Most particularly, it would be novel and interesting to explore the development of ballet dancers using a career adaptability lens. That is, to study the development and use of career adapt-abilities related to career concern, control, curiosity, and confidence in performance careers. In addition, it may be worth exploring perseverance in dancers of different dance genres (e.g., Contemporary Dance) to see if different patterns are identified.

Exploring personal wisdom of current professional ballet dancers about persevering in their performance career appears to be a natural progression from this study. Warnick and colleagues (2016) noted that both current and retired dancers in their sample reported similar types of challenges in their career. However, it is worth noting that while current dancers reported how to cope with or solve their career challenges by,

for example, letting go of fighting their personal struggles, none of the retired dancers reported resolving career challenges they faced in their performance career (Warnick et al., 2016). Given this finding revealing the difference between retired and current dancers in regard to their coping with career challenges, it would be interesting to see if this pattern of difference emerges when exploring perseverance as well

When I finished analyzing my data set, I started to wonder how dancers can balance what the findings of this study suggested them to do with the demanding nature of their performance career. Again, future research can explore perseverance of current professional ballet dancers to observe what they do to persevere in their career concurrently while performing. Finally, a large-scale mediation analysis of the findings identified in this study and their relation to perseverance of dancers may be able to identify mediating pathways more conclusively than I did in this study.

Concluding Remarks

To conclude, I would like to return to Gordon's quote about ballet dancers being "not ordinary people with ordinary needs and ordinary desires," but "a breed apart" (p. 7). Comparing this idea of dancers being "a breed apart" with my findings, I was rather surprised by how applicable these findings are not only to dancers, but also for the general population. The personal wisdom of retired professional ballet dancers about persevering in a performance career shone a light on how dancers can be a proactive agent in their career development processes. Interestingly, when I compared the findings of my study with the criteria for personal wisdom, I realized that practicing the personal wisdom shared by the retired professional ballet dancers about persevering in a performance career may naturally lead current and aspiring dancers to discover their own

personal wisdom about their performance career. For example, one of the potential mediating pathways identified in this study, managing and mitigating stress of dancers, involves strategies to express and regulate feelings in difficult situations and to develop social relationships, which Mickler and Staudinger (2008) referred to as the fourth criterion of personal wisdom (i.e., Heuristics for Growth and Self-Regulation). The findings of my study are applicable to the individual dancer, the dance company, the broad community of artists, and even the community outside dance. By maintaining a healthy sense of self and mental attitude, navigating a career journey with career meta-competencies, growing an identity as an artist, and balancing their career with various personal interests and relationships, dancers can manage and mitigate their stress, increase their employability, expand their personhood, and reaffirm their commitment and purpose to persevere in their performance career.

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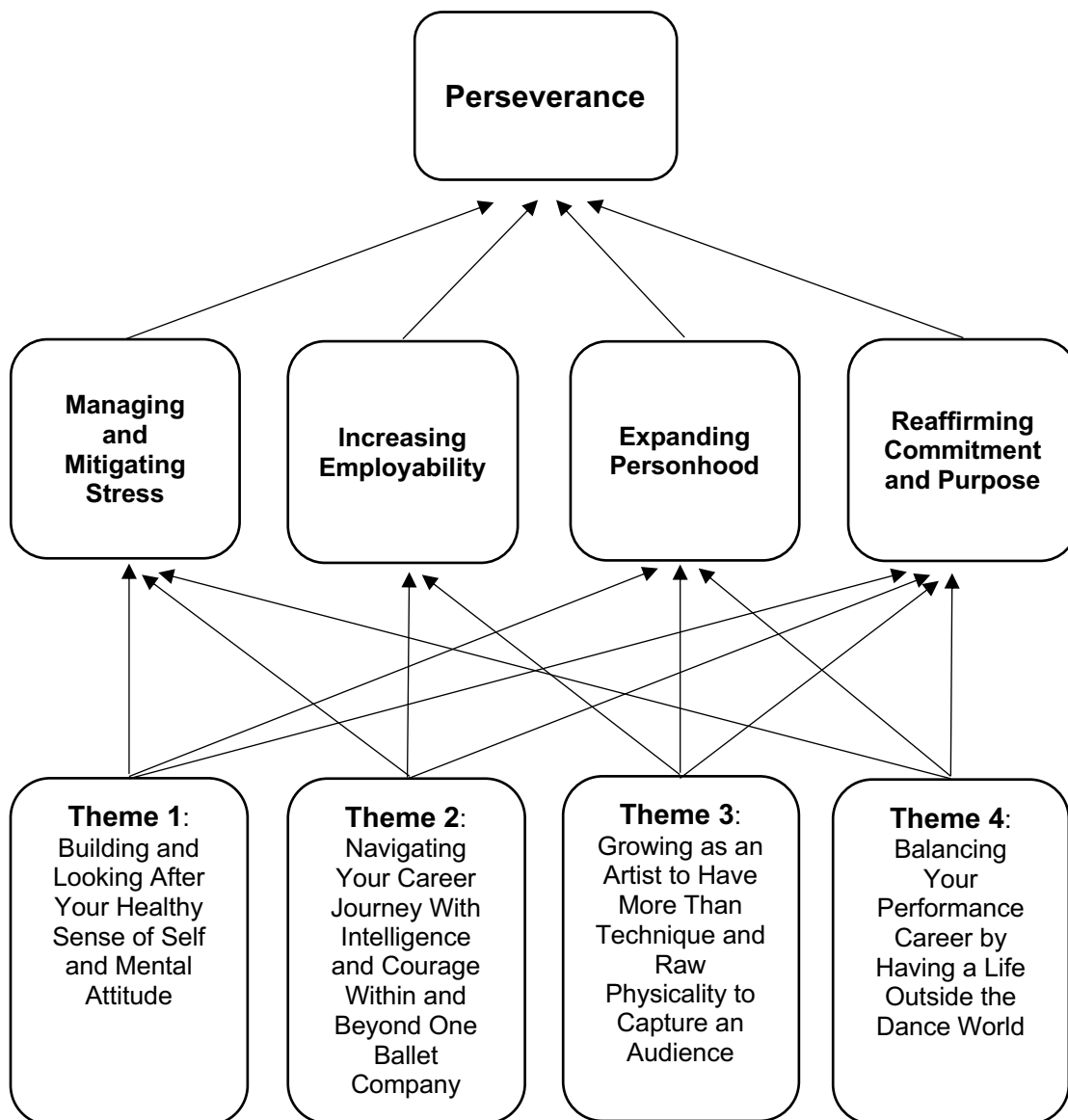
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Table 1

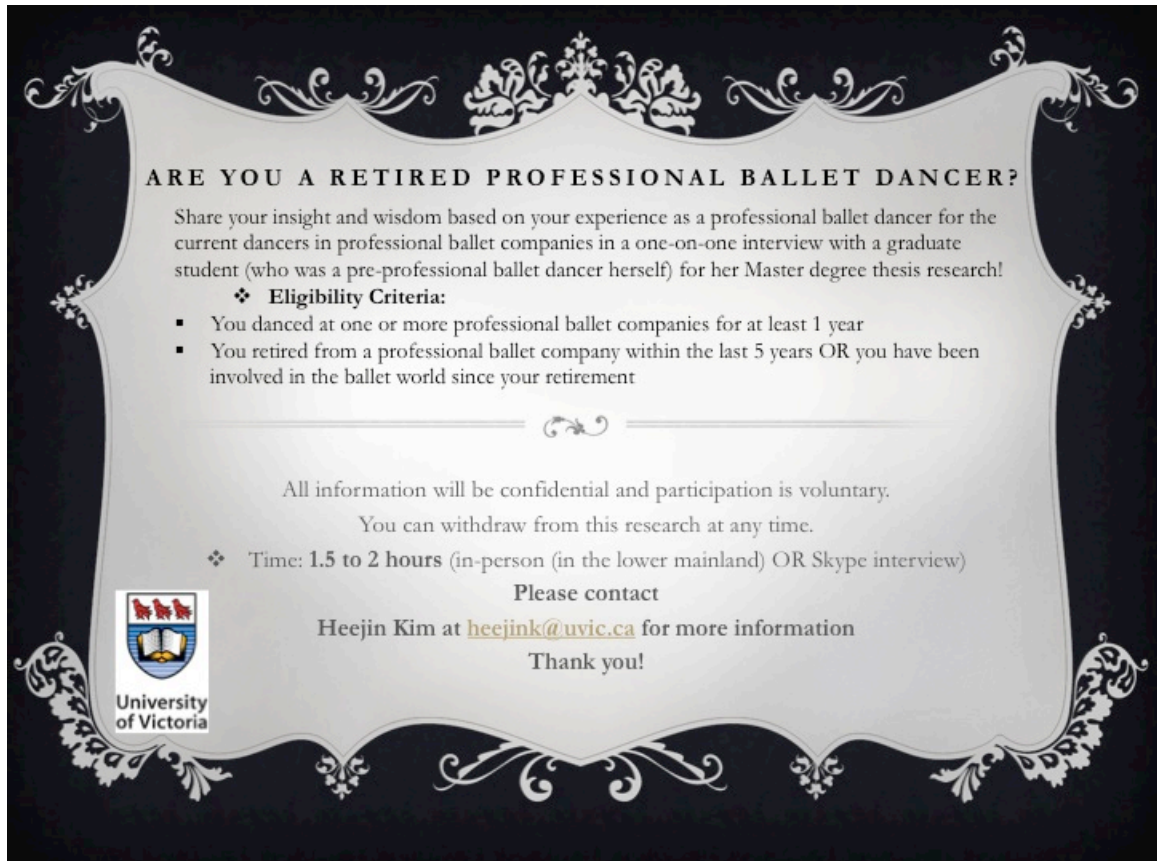
Thematic Findings and Example Quotes

Theme 1: Building and Looking After Your Healthy Sense of Self and Mental Attitude	
You develop and maintain a healthy sense of self and mental attitude by practicing compassion and acceptance, standing up to inside and outside forces that devalue you, and focusing on the joy of dancing as your centre in your performance career.	
Codes	Example Quotes
Practicing self-compassion	<i>If you beat yourself up constantly, you're not going to go to the next audition. You stop dancing, and that will be the end of your career.</i> (Russ)
Practicing acceptance	<i>[I]f you accept who you are and are willing to work with that, I think it creates much healthier, much healthier psychological environment for you.</i> (Bev)
Pursuing your best rather than perfection	<i>Perfection will never be attained, but the game and the fun is in working towards that.</i> (Lise)
Acknowledging and believing in your capabilities	<i>You stop and give yourself credit for what you've achieved and say: 'This is what I've earned. . . . This is what I think I'm capable of.'</i> (Robert)
Seeking counselling	<i>Emotional support—it would have been nice to have some sort of counselling within the structure of the company.</i> (Suzanne)
Demanding fair treatment	<i>[D]ancers need to take a stance and say, 'This is not how we want to be treated.'</i> (Emma)
Focusing on the joy of dancing	<i>I've always loved dancing and exercising and music and all that part of it, so for me, even though it's a job and its work, it's a lot of fun.</i> (Michel)
Theme 2: Navigating Your Performance Career Journey With Intelligence and Courage Within and Beyond One Ballet Company	
You are proactive in increasing your chance of persevering in your performance career by educating yourself about job opportunities and options, finding yourself a healthy work environment, seeking mentorship and guidance, communicating your vision, stepping outside your comfort zone to improve, and diversifying your training.	
Codes	Example Quotes
Educating oneself about career opportunities	<i>[M]ost dancers don't do the work to understand what art institutions are out there, so they pursue the right career path.</i> (Robert)
Being open to finding a better work environment	<i>We are all afraid of moving forward. . . . But it's better to be in an environment where you're appreciated.</i> (Lise)
Diversifying training	<i>[C]ross training is a chance to balance extreme dynamics of dance with some other form of physical activity which brings general health, a balance to the body, and counteracts, perhaps, a little bit of extreme nature of dance to help your body stay healthy and balanced.</i> (Robert)
Stepping outside your comfort zone to improve	<i>You always want to try and have the courage to go one step further, one little extra thing, so you find the dancers that are complacent and safe, they never develop or grow.</i> (Bev)
Communicating your career vision with courage	<i>I think you need to have that conversation with the director and say, 'I know I'm young and I know there are so many people here, but I feel like this is what I wanna do with my career, and I wanna do it here.'</i> (Michel)
Seeking mentorship/guidance	<i>Mentoring you as to how to train out of the box, where to go for extra help, what is it that your issue is, what is it that maybe is blocking you from being more than just staying in a Corps de Ballet.</i> (Emma)
Theme 3: Growing as an Artist to Have More Than Technique and Raw Physicality to Capture an Audience	
You grow as an artist to enrich what you can offer to capture an audience by focusing on artistry and exposing yourself to other dance genres.	
Codes	Example Quotes
Focusing on artistry and artistic expression	<i>We have to be very careful about we don't push the dance genre to a point where it becomes so athletic, not artistic. It leaves you cold.</i> (Emma)
Exposing yourself to various dance genres and art forms	<i>You also simply, as an artist, are influenced by experiences of watching other aspects of dance and all of its forms. Get out and see as much dance as possible.</i> (Robert)
Theme 4: Balancing Your Performance Career by Having a Life Outside the Dance World	
You have a life outside your performance career. The interests and relationships outside dance can help you mitigate stress in a performance career with a more balanced attitude.	
Codes	Example Quotes
Have interests outside dance	<i>Have some outside interests, then your world doesn't become so insular. . . . [J]ust find something else besides ballet to help keep you from becoming too wrapped up in one field. . . . [Y]ou have outside influence to balance what's happening in your life within the company, which can be very stressful.</i> (Astrid)
Have relationships outside dance	<i>I found a place with 3 housemates, and that was the best thing. . . . I had normal [chuckles] people doing other things. It just kind of keeps your perspective a little.</i> (Tania)

Figure 1

Themes, Potential Mediating Pathways, and Perseverance

Appendix A: Recruitment Poster



ARE YOU A RETIRED PROFESSIONAL BALLET DANCER?

Share your insight and wisdom based on your experience as a professional ballet dancer for the current dancers in professional ballet companies in a one-on-one interview with a graduate student (who was a pre-professional ballet dancer herself) for her Master degree thesis research!


❖ **Eligibility Criteria:**

- You danced at one or more professional ballet companies for at least 1 year
- You retired from a professional ballet company within the last 5 years OR you have been involved in the ballet world since your retirement

All information will be confidential and participation is voluntary.
You can withdraw from this research at any time.

❖ Time: 1.5 to 2 hours (in-person (in the lower mainland) OR Skype interview)

Please contact
Heejin Kim at heejink@uvic.ca for more information
Thank you!



University of Victoria

Appendix B: Letter of Invitation

Hello,

My name is Heejin Kim. I am a third year Master degree student in Counselling Psychology at University of Victoria in Canada, and I was a pre-professional ballet dancer in South Korea before coming to university. For my thesis in my Master's degree, I am interviewing retired professional ballet dancers internationally. The goal of my study is to gather personal wisdom from retired professional ballet dancers to pass down to current professional ballet dancers. Specifically, I am interested in learning about retired ballet dancers' insight gained from their lived experience in their performing career and life.

If you:

- Speak fluent English,
- Danced in one or more professional ballet companies for at least 1 year,
- Retired from dancing ballet professionally within the last 5 years OR have been involved in the ballet world (e.g., dance educator, choreographer) since your retirement,

Please consider my request for your participation as an invitation to help me to gather the wisdom of ballet dancers, including advice, strategies, or suggestions. I will greatly appreciate your participation in my study because I believe there are a lot to learn from each of you, and unfortunately, the voice of dancers is often missing in the current scholarly literature. Also, I believe what you share about your experience in the performance career could help current ballet dancers. My hope is that you find this focused reflection on your experience as a ballet dancer meaningful.

Time: 1.5 to 2 hours one-on-one interview with a researcher (face-to-face in the lower mainland OR via Skype)

Your participation in this research is voluntary, and you can withdraw from this research at any time. All identifying information about you will be confidential. My thesis supervisor is Dr. Susan Tasker, and you can contact her at stasker@uvic.ca, if you have any questions for her.

If this sounds interesting to you, I have attached more complete information for you to read in the word document titled Consent Form. If you have any questions or are interested in being interviewed for this research, please contact me (Heejin Kim) at heejink@uvic.ca. Thank you very much!

Sincerely,

Heejin Kim, B.A.

M.A. student, Counselling Psychology, Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies
University of Victoria

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form



University
of Victoria

Extraordinary People, Extraordinary Wisdom: Personal Wisdom of Retired Professional Ballet Dancers for Current Professional Ballet Dancers

Principal Investigator: Heejin Kim (heejink@uvic.ca)
Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Susan Tasker (stasker@uvic.ca)

Purpose and objectives

The purpose of this research is to explore personal wisdom of retired professional ballet dancers based on the lived experience in the performing career.

Importance of this research

This research will help current professional ballet dancers and the broader ballet community to understand how professional ballet dancers navigate their professional performing career from the dancers' perspectives.

Participant eligibility

You danced in a professional ballet company for at least 1 year, and retired from your professional performing career. You understand and are able to express your thoughts in English. You retired from dancing professionally within the last 5 years OR you are still involved in the ballet world (e.g., dance educator, choreographer).

What is involved

Your participation will involve a 1.5 to 2 hours long one-on-one interview with a principal investigator either in person or via Skype.

Inconvenience, risks, & benefits

The only inconvenience will be the time you spend doing interviews. There are no known or anticipated risks. Potential benefits include guiding your reflection on your experience and contributing to scholarly research on this topic.

Voluntary participation

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. If you decide to participate, you can withdraw at any time without any consequences or explanation. If you do withdraw from the study, your data will be removed from analysis.

Anonymity and confidentiality

All data will be confidential, but not necessarily anonymous. Names will naturally appear in notes of the researcher. However, all names will be substituted with pseudonyms and any identifying information will be removed prior to any reporting of findings. There is a possibility that my thesis supervisor, Dr. Susan Tasker, could identify a participant because a participant may have a personal relationship with Dr. Susan Tasker prior to their involvement in this research. However, any information or data gathered in this research would not be used for any personal purposes not listed above. I cannot guarantee that information being electronically transmitted via Skype will be completely confidential. However, dissemination of results of this research will be given using pseudonyms and no identifying information will be used.

Dissemination

Dissemination of this research will be done via a student thesis and oral defense to fulfil my (Heejin Kim) Master's degree requirement, published research papers or book chapters, scholarly meetings, research conferences, and other media (e.g., magazine, newspaper).

Storage and disposal of data

Data will be stored for 5 years. At this time, electronic data will be erased and paper copies will be shredded.

Contacts

If you have any questions regarding this research, you may contact me, Heejin Kim, the principal investigator at heejink@uvic.ca. You can also contact my thesis supervisor, Dr. Susan Tasker (stasker@uvic.ca or Tel: 1-250-721-7827). You may verify the ethical approval of this research or raise any concerns you might have by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at University of Victoria (ethics@uvic.ca or Tel: 1-250 472-4555).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this research, that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher, and that you consent to participate in this research project.

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Appendix D: Demographic Questionnaire

Extraordinary People, Extraordinary Wisdom: Personal Wisdom of Retired Professional Ballet Dancers for Current Professional Ballet Dancers

Principal Investigator: Heejin Kim (heejink@uvic.ca)
Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Susan Tasker (stasker@uvic.ca)

Thank you for taking the time to complete this form. I would like to collect basic information about you to understand your experience better. This information will be kept confidential, and this information will not be linked to your lived experience you share in the interview in a way that allows others to identify you. If there are any questions that you are uncertain about, please ask Heejin Kim via email or at your interview. If there are any questions that you would rather not answer, please leave them blank. Thanks again!

Name:

Birth Date (Date/Month/Year):

Gender:

Place of Birth (City & Country):

Ethnicity/Cultural Identity:

Current Nationality (or Citizenship):

Primary Residence (City & Country):

Have you immigrated? Yes No

If Yes:

When (Year)?

From _____ (City & Country) to _____ (City & Country)

When did you start ballet? (Year or Your age):

How were you introduced to ballet?:

Where/who did you train with?:

How many years did you train before you started your professional performance career as a ballet dancer?:

Please list one or more professional ballet companies you performed with as a dancer:

When did you begin your professional performance career (Month & Year)?:

Did you take any gap(s) from your performance career? Yes No

If Yes:

a) Years you took the gap(s) (e.g., 2001-2003):

b) Reason(s) for taking the gap(s):

Your highest position in one or more professional Ballet companies (e.g., Pricipal, Soloist, Coryphées, Corps de Ballet):

Your favourite role to dance during your career:

When did you retire from dancing at a professional ballet company (Month & Year)?:

Was your retirement planned? Yes No

What was the reason for your retirement?

Are you currently employed? Yes No

If Yes:

What is your job?

Is there any other background information about you or your experience as a professional ballet dancer that may be helpful or important for me to know?

Thank you for taking the time to share some information about your background!
Please return this completed form to Heejin Kim at heejink@uvic.ca.

Appendix E: Interview Script

Guiding Interview Question:

If we had a current professional ballet dancer in this room with us, or if you could go back in time and share what you know now with your younger self about persevering as a professional ballet dancer, what would you share?

Prompt Questions (will be used at the discretion of the principle investigator):

- Is there something you learned, heard, or did while you were in the ballet company that made a real difference for you?
- We don't know what we don't know. Looking back to the time when you were in the ballet company, what do you wish you had known that you didn't know?
- What are the things that you are really glad that you did or knew during your career as a ballet dancer?
- If you can go back in time and meet the younger self in the ballet company, and share one thing out of all the things you know now, what would be the most important to share and why do you choose that to share?
- How did this idea/strategy/way or thinking/advice help you as a dancer? Can you share an example?
- How did you learn that this idea/strategy/way or thinking/advice is important for you as a dancer?
- How did learning this idea/strategy/way or thinking/advice change things for you as a dancer?
- During your career as a professional ballet dancer, has anyone shared their idea/strategy/way or thinking/advice to help you grow as a dancer? What did they share and how was that like for you?
- During your career as a professional ballet dancer or even after you retired, have you had a chance to share your idea/strategy/way or thinking/advice with other dancers? What did you share and how was that like for you?
- Can you tell me what was most rewarding about being a dancer?
- Can you tell me what was most challenging about being a dancer? How did you navigate that challenge?
- What role, if any, does your dance career play in who you are now?
- Just to clarify, when you said _____, do you mean _____?
- Can you give me an example of _____?
- I heard you _____. Am I following you?
- Can you tell me more about _____?
- Do you think you've told me most of your story and experience that you think will help me to put a finger on the advice you think is important, or helpful, for professional ballet dancers to hear?