

**AN EXPLORATION OF THE IDENTITY ISSUES FACED
BY RETIRING MALE BALLET DANCERS**

by

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study was to explore the identity issues faced by professional male ballet dancers after retirement from the profession, with the overall aim of increasing insight and understanding into this specialised world. An interpretive case study using semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis was designed to probe perceptions and experiences of six retired dancers. Aspects of my own life experience as a dancer in training and performing for twenty-four years were used to broaden and complement the insights of the research. The study explored three key life stages. The first was related to the influence of training on identity formation; secondly, the reinforcement of identity throughout professional life; and finally, the management of social and psychological transition in the post-retirement phase. Building on the work of Goffman, Bourdieu and Foucault, the study focused on the institutionalising characteristics present in the ballet world and the pervasive qualities that can make the profession so difficult to leave. These qualities permeate a company's informal culture and include the camaraderie and sense of belonging amongst colleagues, the highpoints of exhilaration in performance, the sense of privilege in pursuing such an unusual career and the lifestyle commonly perceived as glamorous and elitist. To varying degrees, all participants experienced personal, social and psychological stress upon retirement and all retained the desire to return in some capacity to the dance world that had shaped them.

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1. Introduction

It can be argued that the most evaded question to a professional ballet dancer is “What are you going to do when you stop dancing?” It is a question which typically evokes a sense of dread and anxiety. Like many athletes and sports people, ballet dancers must begin an intensive training regime from an early age in order to succeed and compete at elite level. This high level of training requires dedication and sacrifice by the individual often leaving no time to explore alternatives in life. Faced with the certainty of early retirement and often unprepared for life afterwards, feelings of unease are inevitable. Turning one’s back on a career that has personified the individual for so many years and which has exercised a significant influence on the development of the personality, can be daunting to say the least. Having danced exclusively with a leading professional ballet company for fourteen years, I vicariously observed signs of anxiety and apprehension in dancers before me when approaching the end of their careers. Many of my older male colleagues, particularly those who rose to the top of their profession, seemed uncharacteristically withdrawn, particularly after retirement. One such colleague admitted having feelings of trepidation and depression brought on by the uncertainty of future employment and financial uncertainty. However, I suspect this was only part of the problem. Having been revered in the profession for so many years, becoming what could possibly be described as anonymous through role stripping was a harsh reality to face. The loss of professional and social status earned through years of tireless dedication led me to suspect that my colleague was experiencing an identity crisis. My association with dancers at this pivotal stage in their lives served as a stark reminder of the reality which would confront me.

1.1. Researcher Position

At the age of eleven I left home to attend one of the countries most renowned and intensive ballet training organisations. After graduating in 1994 I worked as a professional dancer with a major British ballet company for fourteen years, ten of which were as a Principal dancer. At the age of twenty eight I underwent surgery for a long term knee injury which required a lengthy recovery period. It was during this time of reflection that the finality of my chosen career became apparent. This career mortality confrontation, coupled with the discovery of first time fatherhood, was a major influence on my decision to assertively prepare for a smooth and seamless transition. I made the decision to actively prepare for life after dance and one year later, gained my private pilot's license with the premise of embarking on a viable second career.

In 2007 at the age of thirty one, I decided to retire from dance and move to the United States with my wife and unborn child to further my pilot training to a commercial level. Having this goal in mind certainly alleviated symptoms of the stress and anxiety related to moving on from dance. My concerns at the time were mainly domestic and familial in nature. To this day, I strongly believe that embarking on a pre-planned second career and my preoccupation with establishing a new life was vital in avoiding my ex-colleague's negative experiences.

Once the foundations were in place however, and my new routine was firmly established, I began to experience symptoms of what I suspected might be identity confusion. It was

sometimes difficult to resolve my ‘dancer identity’ with a life outside of the institution that had shaped and personified me from my formative years. I felt that I still embodied the role of a dancer except I was dressed in a pilot's uniform. This identity crossover and confusion over my ‘sense of self’ remained for the entire duration of my twelve months at the flying academy. I often wonder how long it would have taken for this sensation to dissipate, leaving way for the formation of a new identity. Would my identity ever have altered from that of a ballet dancer? How long would it have persisted and remained resistant to change?

On qualifying as a pilot at the end of my training period at the academy, the US economy began to rapidly decline, having a crippling effect on the airline industry. I was advised to seek alternative employment until the airlines recovered. With my new family to support financially and doubts arising about my sense of self, I decided to return to the ballet company which I had left, refreshed, re-energized and with a renewed enthusiasm where I continue to perform Principal roles as well as teach ballet in a vocational, professional ballet school on a part time basis.

1.2. **Framing the Study**

The core research question and main purpose of this study was to explore the identity issues faced by male ballet dancers after retirement from the dance profession. With the overall aim of increasing understanding and insight into the world of the retired professional male dancer, my research probed the perceptions and experiences of six individuals in relation to three life

stages. The first stage was related to the influence of training on identity formation. Secondly, the influence of the professional ballet career on identity and finally, the management of social and psychological transitions in the post-retirement phase. The exploration covered various aspects of the dance training and profession which contributed to the formation of identity.

The main context of my study was professional socialisation with particular emphasis placed on the institutionalising culture prevalent in such training organisations and the ballet world as a whole. In addition, I investigated whether the experiences and perceptions of the six retired dancers, concurred or contrasted with my own when describing the uniquely pervasive qualities of this social world which makes the profession so difficult to abandon. These qualities permeate a company's informal culture, which can be characterised by the camaraderie and close interpersonal relationships formed between colleagues, the sense of privilege in pursuing such an unusual career and lifestyle, commonly perceived as glamorous and elitist, epitomised by the thrill of performance.

My long career in the profession has ensured many suitable contacts for participation in this study. Being aware of the drawbacks of insider research, I was also aware of how closed the ballet world is to outsider researchers and how difficult it would have been for them to relate to the life experience of men who have dedicated so many years to this specialised career. Hence, as well as drawing intrinsic interest, I believe this study has value and originality, a combination which could produce interesting insights and depth of new knowledge in an under-researched area.

It was also a conscious decision to insert cameos of my own autobiographical experience throughout the study to add clarity and understanding of the issues raised while presenting ideas and situations at a more personal level (Tsang, 2000). It is only recently in the social sciences that interpretive scholars have confronted criticism and introduced their own voices by using personal narrative. In the past, scholars have been expected to remain as silent authors (Sparkes, 2000), but as De Vaus (2001) points out, the use of personal experience has always been in the vanguard of teaching methods, whether conveyed consciously or not. Sparkes (2000) believes that the use of personal experience can leave the reader with a heightened sensitivity to the social circumstances depicted in the research and also states perceptively: "If narratives of the self do nothing else but stimulate us to think about such issues in the sociology of sport (and in this case dance), then they will have made a significant contribution to the field" (Sparkes, 2000:38). The dance world shares similar social characteristics to that of the world of sport yet is relatively deficient of academic material and reflective accounts by comparison. For these reasons I believe the use of personal reflection will strengthen the originality and insights of the ensuing dance study.

2. Literature Review

This chapter will explore literature that will be useful in contextualising the research questions and my approach into a dancer's world. It will draw on socio-cultural studies of the ballet world and make comparisons with people processing institutions such as prisons, monasteries and the army. Goffman's theoretical work, particularly the ideal type construct of total institution will be used heuristically for analysis and comparison together with ballet specific studies such as that of Wulff (1998) and Laird (2003). Helena Wulff gained her PhD in social anthropology at Stockholm University and having trained as a dancer, decided to analyse the culture and social organisation of ballet companies tracing transnational connections between them. Maureen Laird, also an ex-dancer, is now an associate professor whose research interests include dancer transition and health issues. Both researchers have conducted ethnographic studies of ballet companies which have astutely revealed the inner workings and politics of daily practices.

I reflect on the ballet world as a social institution and explore its impact on the lived experience of individual dancers. The literature is informed and hopefully enriched by my own experience adding clarity and conceptual understanding. The review also looks beyond dance related studies to research conducted in the world of sport. This will help to contextualise the research and locate it in the wider world. I also explore theories of identity in order to underpin analysis of identity formation processes and the effects of change, particularly in career transition when dancers are required to abandon a life which has personified them since childhood.

With regards to the subject of institutionalisation, my literature search led me to one prominent figure. Although dated, the work of Canadian sociologist Ervin Goffman remains seminal in the field of understanding processes of institutionalisation and its impact on the lives of the people, who in Goffman's terms, are being 'processed' as inmates, patients, recruits, practitioners or in this case, ballet students and professional dancers. Goffman's theoretical concepts, used for the purpose of analysis and comparison, are central to the review of literature. They inform reflection of the lived experience of ballet dancers, focusing on the formation of their personal identities and what Goffman calls in later work the 'development of the self' (Goffman, 1959). This is followed by an exploration of various positive aspects of the ballet world which make it an attractive world in which to participate, in spite of its more negative institutional properties. Collectively, I believe both positive and negative aspects of a dancer's training and professional development can influence identity, with the potential to create psychological difficulties and a sense of loss upon leaving the institution.

Goffman's analysis of the institutional context of primary and secondary socialisation is complemented by the conceptual understanding derived from the corpus of literature on agency and identity formation. Identity formation can be defined as the development of distinct personality traits through which an individual can be recognised as a separate entity in terms of uniqueness and affiliation. Agency can be defined as the capacity for human beings to make choices with autonomy and freedom and to impose those choices on the world. These definitions are derived from the work of Erikson (1968), Côté & Levine (2002), Foucault

(1977), all of whom write extensively on the influence of cultural identity formation which is extremely pertinent to my study. Bourdieu (1977), Shilling (2008) and Turner (2008) focus on embodied culture, identity capital and habitus (collectively defining the physical and mental attributes and nuances derived from the individual's surrounding environment and culture) which may have been internalised throughout training and subsequent professional career.

It is particularly important to these ends to identify both the tangible and intangible resources (Côté & Schwartz, 2002) which accompany a dancer into and through retirement from his or her professional career as a dancer. Tangible assets identified include educational credentials and financial capital while intangible assets or psycho-social vitalities are more internal in nature. These include commitment, moral reasoning, self-esteem and critical thinking. It could be argued that life in the ballet world contributes to the formation of these intangible assets, particularly during the formative period of adolescence while training, as identified by Eriksson (1968). My interest lies in the positive and negative impact that the dance world has on the acquisition of these assets and their carry over value into life after dance. It will be argued that identity theory and Goffman's concept of institutionalisation are inextricably linked while identity formation and the process of socialisation into an institutional culture are also linked, reinforcing one another in generating the psychological pressures dancers experience around retirement.

2.1. What is a Total Institution?

The term “Total Institution” was first coined by Goffman in ‘Asylums’ (1961), which is a seminal study of people-processing institutions. He defines such institutions as having totalitarian social characteristics where the residing individuals are under the control and authority of a higher power (Goffman, 1961). Just some of the many institutions which fall under this description are prisons, convents, army barracks, orphanages, prisoner of war camps, nursing homes, naval ships and boarding schools to name a few. As Goffman states, total institutions are made up of a batch of individuals who are all treated as one unit and required to follow a stringent schedule of activities imposed by a single governing authority. These activities are generally conducted in a single, contained location and are devised around the particular set of aims of those in control of the institution.

Upon entrance to the institution, individuals are systematically stripped of their sense of self and their personal identity is removed through degradation rituals, leading to depersonalisation. This can be done in a number of different ways which I will outline in the following sections. It is here that I will begin my comparisons of Goffman’s definition of a total institution to that of a vocational ballet school and demonstrate their shared characteristics. It must be stressed however that my experiences occurred up to twenty years previous to this study and may no longer be relevant today.

The first method employed by the institution to weaken an individual's identity- "curtailment of self" (Goffman 1961:24), is in the form of admission procedures. The type of procedure used for this process is largely dependent on the type of institution in which it takes place. For example, in the armed forces, the cadet may lose his or her civilian clothes in exchange for the standard issue uniform and possibly a shaven head (ibid). On entrance to the prison service, inmates are "coded in to an object for the establishment" (Goffman 1961:26) by way of procedures such as weighing, taking fingerprints, stripping, bathing, and being assigned a number. On entrance to the ballet institution which the author attended, prospective students were also assigned a number. Once called, they were instructed to stand in the centre of a large room facing the back wall in nothing but their underwear and asked to bend slowly forwards before a panel of physiotherapists in order to check the alignment of the spine. Afterwards a thorough physical examination of the anatomy was conducted under the scrutiny of the ballet staff. Applicants were to remain silent throughout. They were then given an x-ray of the wrist for the purpose of height prediction. I certainly remember feeling like a physical object with the potential to be moulded, rather than an individual with a history and a personality.

One common characteristic shared by total institutions, is that they are social establishments designed to be isolated from the outside world and governed from within. Their geographical locations may emphasise this isolation and serve as a facilitator to identity removal. Some obvious examples are Naval ships, monasteries and certain maximum security prisons like the infamous 'Alcatraz'. Other institutions take a symbolic approach to isolation in the form of prison gates, high walls and barbed wire fences, sending a clear message to the residents (ibid). Upon entrance, the isolation and sense of being "cut off" from the rest of society leads

an individual to feel dispossessed of everyday roles that personify their identity. With the absence of such familiarity, all sense of self assurance weakens along with confidence. In such a state of depersonalisation, the residents' identities can become a blank canvass leaving the institution free to shape their identities as it sees fit.

This depersonalising and stripping of identity as a result of isolation from society and outside influence, has maximum effect the longer the resident is exposed to it. Goffman, (1961) refers to cadets in the armed forces being forbidden to engage in social contact with non-cadets for two months in order to produce a unified group of swabs. Similarly, at the ballet institution, weekend visits by family or the ability for a student to return home were discouraged for the first six weeks in order for pupils to fully adjust to their new way of life. As an eleven year old and living away from home for the first time, this can be a harsh reality. Attending a boarding school for the first time, one boy wrote "It's like a prison, the gates are locked at five and you can't get out" (Lambert and Millham, 1968:210). This is a situation with which I can identify. Referring back to geographical locations, the ballet school was situated in the centre of a large park with no residential areas within a five mile radius. There were only four entrances to the park which were locked by the gatekeepers at nightfall preventing anyone entering or exiting. Lambert and Millham (ibid), observe that unlike a prison, this type of security is for the protection of the residents within the gates, against external values and outside influences. External ties to pupils were often treated with suspicion and many boarding schools still discourage their pupils making contact with local children so as to avoid contamination by a distracting or undesirable 'teenage culture'.

Another feature of mortification is what Goffman (1961) refers to as 'deference requirements' in which expressive displays of reverence are demanded at all times. This can be in the form of a salute, standing to attention or in the case of the ballet school, standing against a wall with a bow of the head if a member of staff or prefect were to walk by.

A more intense method used to strip the individual of confidence and self esteem is to use a constant barrage of verbal profanations (Goffman, 1961). This can be perfectly illustrated in the form of a drill sergeant yelling obscenities at a new recruit while pointing out any negative attributes. In the ballet training environment, stories of such treatment are commonplace. During an interview, one thirteen year old female student spoke of a particularly fierce dance teacher who became agitated in class when she continually fidgeted with the back of her leotard. He eventually shouted, "If you touch your leotard one more time, I'll pull it so far up your ass, I'll split you in two like a chicken and make you bleed!" (Smith, 2001:3). Receiving such verbal insults during my vocational training was an everyday occurrence and became a way of life. In an interview, a ballet coach at the Royal Ballet was quizzed about the pedagogy of ballet tradition and in particular the discipline to which he replied, "They break them down in order to build the kind of dancer they want" (Wulff 1998:65).

Foucault, suggests in his classic 'Discipline and Punish'(1977), that the use of intense physical and mental discipline is a way to make people docile and obedient, which in turn makes them more malleable and controllable. He refers to the training techniques of soldiers in the late eighteenth century and the view that they were a manufactured product, a formless piece of clay ready to be moulded and shaped until every aspect of posture and movement

became an automated habit. Through strict discipline and endless correction, a technique referred to as 'Dressage', they eventually "'got rid of the peasant' and gave him 'the air of a soldier'" Foucault, 1977:135). The author's experiences certainly reflected this. I recall a gruelling coaching session in which a particularly fierce ballet mistress forced me and seven other classmates to stand for forty-five minutes with our arms raised at our sides in a 'second' position. She then walked slowly up and down the line shouting verbal insults at us in addition to scraping her fingernails down our shoulder blades until the skin peeled. Such harsh treatment of eleven year old boys can be considered a method of depersonalisation and a disciplinary lesson in authority. Today, it could also be considered abuse and exploitation. Thankfully writers like Celia Brackenridge, who since the mid 1980s, has strived for a change in the power relations between young athletes and authority figures (Brackenridge, 2001), have raised awareness of such practices and they would not be tolerated today. However this power differential still exists in many ballet schools and companies, and is a subject which will be discussed below.

2.2. **Adapting to the Institution**

Having been subjected to this initial period of mortification, the individual slowly gets accustomed to the surrounding environment and eventually begins to regain his or her sense of self. According to Goffman (1961), this is a result of the individual becoming integrated into the inmate culture, a term he refers to as 'Fraternalization'. He states that at some point the individual discovers a sense of community and camaraderie among his or her fellow

residents which in extreme cases can create a subterranean and subversive inmate subculture which may develop resistance techniques to protect the self and others.

One reason for this unity could be as a result of the clear distinction between the residents and the staff which govern them. There is generally a level of segregation, inmates viewing the staff as condescending and self righteous while inmates are viewed as inferior, untrustworthy and secretive (ibid). This division between staff and inmates along with the rigours of the institution itself, results in a collective spirit of unity among the inmates.

Dance teachers, ballet masters and artistic directors have been described as 'gatekeepers' to the ballet world (Aalten, 2005; Smith, 2001). As stated earlier, the power differential between dancers and management is still a prominent feature in many ballet companies. It is generally understood that creative discourse between dancers and management is kept to a minimum and no reward is given for dancers speaking their minds or interjecting their opinions (Laird, 2003). Dancers are generally eager to please and tend to do what is asked of them without question as there will always be somebody else waiting to take over the role. This relatively subservient attitude as a result of this acceptance of authority figures can result in almost childlike behaviour and leave the dancer resorting to adolescent communication skills (ibid). They must also accept that their entire career will be determined by decisions made by the managerial staff. This is true for gaining acceptance into a school or company, decisions on casting, promotions and in some cases employment termination (Aalten, 2005). Being in such a relatively powerless position leaves the dancers vulnerable, obedient and can condemn them to a life of immaturity and dependence (ibid). Even today, you can often hear the dancers in

major ballet companies referred to as “boys and girls” (Wulff, 1998:54). This is particularly true in the corps de ballet ranks where, similar to that of the prison environment, a subterranean subculture will be formed as a means of protection against the higher power. This collectively formed organisational culture leads many ballet dancers to occasionally conjure up acts of rebellion.

One example of an act of rebellion would be that of a final performance at the end of a long running production in which the dancers have grown tired of being constantly kept in check and so decide to let off some steam (Wulff, 1998). The dancers take it on themselves to surreptitiously alter many aspects of the show with a series of internal jokes that the audience are unaware of, unless they have seen the production numerous times before. Some of the gags may be directed at members of the management, usually in the form of a festive cabaret, end of season ‘skit’ or sometimes in a scheduled performance. I particularly recall a male soloist performing the quirky 'Friday night' solo from 'Elite Syncopations'. While preparing to begin the final section of the solo he began to mimic talking on a telephone. The audience were unaware that he was referring to a member of staff who had made inappropriate phone calls to a female corps de ballet member the evening before. As observed by Wulff (2008), such instances of ‘youthful defiance’ have to be hidden or subtly disguised so as not to risk jeopardising one’s career. Goffman refers to these self empowering acts of rebellion as “secondary adjustments” or “practices that do not directly challenge staff but allow inmates to obtain forbidden satisfactions” (Goffman, 1961:56).

More positively, the sense of camaraderie amongst dancers is not only formed through hierarchical division. A stronger source for the unity comes from the social nature of the profession itself. Despite being a very competitive industry, the strength of friendships formed between fellow artists can be as strong as that of biological family members (Wulff, 1998; Laird, 2003). This may be as a result of the amount of time that dancers spend in each others' company, particularly when away from home on scheduled tours where it is customary to dine and socialise together after the performances (Wulff, 1998). Familiarity is a term that is hard to avoid when describing relationships within a ballet organisation. Throughout a dancer's career a great deal of physical contact is ever present, from the early days of training to that of company life, particularly when partnering in the studio and on stage (Hesters, 2006). As described in Bourdieu's concept of habitus (1977), the body language of a dancer is influenced by the non-verbal nature of the profession. For many dancers, years spent in close physical communication with each other becomes inscribed in their bodies and carries over into their everyday social lives (Wulff, 1998). This leads some dancers to become naturally tactile with one another and as Wulff (ibid) observes, displays of affection between dancers could seem strange or even offensive in other settings. Given this level of familiarity and closeness with one another, it is hardly surprising that a majority of relationships are formed within the company: "A look at the list of names and addresses of a major ballet company shows many double addresses of company members living together" (Aalten 2005:8). The unusual working hours, long periods away from home, the closeness with colleagues as well as the demands of the profession itself, may be difficult to accept or understand by 'an outsider' having not experienced it firsthand. Of course the familial context of the working life of dancers can have incestuous consequences and be destructive in nature when relationships terminate. I have witnessed couples having to dance romantically together after

breaking up or even worse, having to dance with the person that their partner left them for. This is an unfortunate reality in the ballet world and one which seems incomprehensible to someone not in the profession.

2.3. **Making Sacrifices**

Aalten, (2005:8) describes the world of ballet as “A greedy institution” which makes total demands of its participants in terms of loyalty and commitment to the company at the expense of all other aspects of their life. To become a practitioner you must not only possess an incredible degree of self discipline and concentration, but sacrifice your entire self to its rituals, practices and aesthetic ideals (Khudaverdian, 2006). There is a strong expectation that ballet dancers live for their art so entirely that it leaves no room or indeed desire, to explore other avenues in life (Aalten, 2005). This was the view of Markova who admitted to living the life of a nun. She sacrificed the possibility of marriage and raising a family for the dedication to her career. She claimed that a true dancer lives for the art form and nothing else (Aalten, 2005). This kind of ultimate self-sacrifice displayed by Markova may be an extreme example of dedication but can still be witnessed today: “You isolate yourself from the world. Sometimes I have this feeling that one day I'll wake up and be eighty and I'll realise that I missed the whole real reality of life” (Hesters, 2006:12). This sentiment I believe, poses a very interesting question regarding the reasons why any person would want to be subjected to this 'greedy total institution' along with the negative attributes described so far?

2.4. Being a Part of Something 'Special'

American journalist Joseph Mazo also made an interesting comparison between life in a ballet company with that of a convent. He stated: “There is the same mortification of the flesh, the same conditioning of beliefs, the obedience to superiors, the absolute knowledge that one has been called to serve an ideal beyond the power of those who remain outside the walls. And often, as in all limited groups, there comes a sense of superiority to those outside, a knowledge that we can do things that they can't. The knowledge is correct, the superiority justified” (Mazo, 1974:105, Cited in Aalten, 2005:9). This view is shared by one of the female dancers interviewed by Khudaverdian (2006). She states that ballet is an arena that is extremely exclusive. If accepted into a professional company, the individual is automatically 'special': “Your body is trained to do things that most people couldn't even imagine doing” (Khudaverdian, 2006:170). She goes on to describe the ballet world as a 'Secret society' where teachings are passed down through a long line of artists. “It's like the monks who have their own ways of thinking and doing things. They have their own belief system and it's very intriguing because it seems from the outside looking in that they know something we don't” (Khudaverdian, 2006:170).

Having been involved with the dance world for most of my life and grown accustomed to its practices, it is easy to forget how unusual it may seem from an outsider's perspective.

Aalten (2005) believes this could be as a result of its deeply entrenched tradition. This could certainly be an influential factor when relating it to institutionalisation. Ballet dancers are

cultivating and passing on a long esteemed heritage dating back several centuries (Wulff, 2008). Regarded as a bourgeois cultural art form and having derived from French courts in the seventeenth century, even the language of ballet with its symbolic meaning serves as an admission ticket to its understanding. Khudaverdian (2006) observes that although the art form exists across all Western borders and many Eastern borders, transcending all cultural boundaries, it still possesses its own mysterious practices. These internal practices with their restricted access may only serve to add to the 'mystique' of the profession and its desirability or draw. She goes on to describe it as: "A self-contained world of absolute perfection where all of its parts fit and run like a well-oiled machine" (Khudaverdian, 2006:47). In the case of the Royal Ballet institutions, it could also be argued that a sense of feeling 'privileged' comes from the Royal Charter itself which was awarded in 1956. Visits by members of the Royal family are commonplace in the theatre, as are frequent encounters with 'high society' and celebrities (Wulff, 1998).

However, this feeling of having unique access to an exclusive and privileged world is perhaps one of the lesser reasons that dancers so willingly endure the 'institutional experience' in addition to the physical pain and personal sacrifice. The main reason I would suggest for the endurance of such hardship, is to experience the thrill of performance. Most dancers would agree that having the opportunity to perform for thousands of people and receive instantaneous gratification in the form of thunderous applause is more than a justifiable reward. This can have an enormous effect on self-confidence and ego as well as being highly addictive (Laird, 2003). During performance, dancers gain a deep sense of pleasure and often experience a transcendental state known as 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), where body and mind are perfectly synchronised and peak levels of physical and artistic output are reached.

The dancer is no longer aware of the mechanics behind the choreography or even aware that the audience is watching, but are simply ‘at one’ with the performance (Wulff, 1998). This can produce a stimulating and almost euphoric state of existence as a result of the physical energies that are produced and released (Laird, 2003). I have reached such a state many times over the course of my career. Sometimes the intensity of the performances was so great that I experienced a physical ‘high’, leaving me in a state of delirium. I was unable to eat or sleep afterwards as a result of the adrenaline still flowing through my body. This intense feeling of elation along with a deep sense of achievement and satisfaction is perhaps the greatest reward a dancer can receive and has to be experienced in order to understand its magnitude. It is this addiction to performance, the mind/body connection, the creativity involved and general passion for the art form that keeps dancers from wanting to leave the profession (Laird, 2003). It is also this passion that dancers worry will never be replaced. In what other non-performance based jobs might they find this level of intense physical and emotional satisfaction along with instantaneous reward and gratification? (ibid)

2.5. **Leaving the Institution**

“Identity is a product of social activity, and 'who we think we are' is based on the mirror of feedback others provide for us in interaction” (Côté and Levine, 2002:56). This social constructivist approach to identity formation seems to fit nicely in a context of an institution and particularly the social dynamics of the ballet world. It can also be argued that because most ballet institutions take their members before adolescence, a majority of identity formation takes place within the walls (Warriner and Lavalley, 2008; Chickering, 1969; Côté

and Levine, 2002). The process of institutionalisation takes place over a period of time and the individual gradually becomes increasingly dependent on its contingencies. Eventually they rely on the structure and routine of the institution to such a degree that they no longer have the capacity to make decisions on their own. This conditioning can become problematic upon release and cause a great deal of trepidation and anxiety (Haney, 2002).

According to Goffman (1961), prisoners can become so anxious at the thought of being released into the outside world that they deliberately 'mess up' prior to their slated discharge in order to delay parole. Some ex-prisoners often re-offend in order to return to the institution where their life has structure and meaning. I am referring to a psychological process known as 'identity crisis'. An identity crisis is characterised by a subjective sense of identity confusion, a behavioural and characterological disarray, and a lack of commitment to recognised roles in a community (Erikson 1968). People generally look towards institutional conventions to structure their behaviour in order to give it justification and clarity. Without this structure, the possibility of a psychological 'limbo' or 'void' may surface leading to identity confusion (Côté and Levine, 2002). This identity confusion can be illustrated by a recent interview on CNN involving soldiers who had returned from a tour of duty in Afghanistan. They spoke of their inability to re-adjust to civilian life and re-integrate with the surrounding community including friends and family. Their experiences at war had left them so institutionalised with an overwhelming sense of unity among each other that they collectively decided to re-enlist (CNN, 2009). This is by no means an uncommon situation and has even been depicted in Hollywood movies like those of Frank Darabont's 'The Shawshank Redemption' and more recently, Kathryn Bigelow's 'The Hurt Locker'. Given the obvious dangers and hardships inherent in returning to a life of incarceration or risking death on the front line, it seems

impossible to believe that individuals would choose to return to it voluntarily. Surely institutional life as a ballet dancer along with its attractions like camaraderie, exclusivity, and the thrill of performing, make it an even harder prospect for the dancer to leave behind?

As observed by Laird (2003), dancers tend to identify themselves by what they do. Not only have they spent years honing and perfecting their skills as performers but also their outward appearance. The dancer “look” has become their marketable identity, recognised by their walk, mannerisms, body language, even their network of friends. The thought of losing all of this can be devastating (ibid). Referring back to Bourdieu’s theories of human agency, he states that habitus is a product of an individual’s history and trajectory through life, encompassing all past experiences and once firmly established, is concrete (Bourdieu, 1990). This idea of an unchangeable and rigid habitus has been contradicted by Giddens (1984) who believes that through determination and will power, the individual can overcome the constraints and pressures of social structure, paving the way for the reformation of habitus. Although this concept would be highly desirable for individuals facing a life changing transition, in reality this could be considered over-optimistic for a majority of people (Perez, 2008) including dancers.

As stated earlier, all of a dancer’s social requirements can be within the ballet sub-culture. Stepping outside this hot-house society can lead to alienation. Dancers can be in denial about their inevitable short life span as a performer and having associations with somebody in the transitional process is a constant reminder of their impending retirement. This may leave the

transitioning dancer feeling isolated and alone in the process, making the adjustment even more challenging (Laird, 2003).

It seems that one of the biggest hurdles people face when retiring from dance or indeed any institution is deciding what to do afterwards. The fact that members have invested so much time and dedication to their institution, often leaves them unprepared and unqualified to head in a new direction. There are many organisations that have been developed over the years that aid the transition of dancers to a second career. In the United Kingdom, the 'Dancers Career Development' is one such organisation. This offers an invaluable financial resource which I myself benefited from when I left the company to retrain as a commercial pilot.

However, having the financial means to move onto another career is a separate issue to knowing what to do. Warriner and Lavalley (2008) make reference to dancers having trouble finding employment upon retirement as a result of the specialised training and socialisation which they underwent from a young age. This type of 'dependence training', or 'trained incapacity', is another prominent feature of institutional socialisation. One female dancer interviewed by Khudaverdian (2006), questioned where she may fit in the real world. She understood that she possessed many transferable skills but was apprehensive in knowing where they would be useful. Another dancer described a feeling of losing touch with the real world as a result of being a dancer 'twenty-four-seven'. "They train you to be stupid in a way...dance is the only avenue" (Smith, 2001:4). In her numerous interviews with dancers of today however, Aalten (2005), found that many of them displayed a healthy awareness of the

prospect of retirement from dance. Some of them actively strived for a balance between the passion of their profession and other parts of their lives.

This love for the profession 'without blinkers', is a state that I thankfully managed to adopt in the latter part of my career. This may have been because of my position within the ranking system of the company. Having secured my 'niche' and no longer having to fight for parts, I was able to enjoy my dancing in a way that I did as a young boy. Also, with the luxury of fewer performances in a given period, I was able to make assertive steps to prepare for a life after dance and hence a smoother transition. However, I still manifested symptoms of the identity and institutionalisation issues described in this review. In terms of human agency and Bourdieu's theory on habitus, the 'dancer' inside me was ever present while 'performing' a different role in a different costume. A poignant statement comes from Bryan Turner, "Becoming a classical ballet dancer requires the body to be the very essence of self-identity". Hence, Rudolf Nureyev boldly declared that 'I am a dancer and always will be'" (Turner, 2008:226).

2.6. **Research Conducted in the Sporting Arena**

In order to contextualise the research being conducted here and how the experiences of ballet dancers locate themselves in the wider world, it would be useful to draw comparisons with research literature conducted in the world of sport. Having explored the experiences of elite

athletes in the period leading up to and including retirement from their chosen profession, evidence suggests that similarities with dancers at a similar career stage can be drawn.

In their paper entitled 'Career Transitions in Sport', Wylleman, Alfermann and Lavallee (2004) discuss the impact of retirement on the lives of elite athletes from all disciplines. They found that in most cases, individuals suffered confusion over their identities, sometimes leading to depression and negative coping strategies like alcohol and substance abuse, eating disorders and even attempted suicide. Indeed, the analogy of a 'social death' was frequently used to describe the loss of professional and social status from being isolated and ostracised from the professional 'subculture' (ibid). While studying the experiences of retiring female gymnasts, Warriner and Lavallee (2008) discovered that these issues of identity were intensified as a result of the intensive training throughout adolescence, mirroring the theoretical concepts of identity by Erickson and Côté.

In a study conducted by Lally (2007), many athletes consciously tried to diminish their athletic identities prior to retirement through 'role disengagement' as a coping strategy and as a way of avoiding an identity crisis. This was also found to be the case in a comparative study between German, Lithuanian and Russian athletes (Alfermann, Stambulova and Zemaityte, 2004). It was concluded that the Russian athletes, through role disengagement and distraction strategies, were able to experience a significantly smoother adaptation process, while the Lithuanian athletes, who were found to be in denial about their impending retirement, took significantly longer to adjust (ibid).

It would seem like a reasonable assumption that in both the world of ballet and the world of sport, active preparation has a desirable influence on the transitional phase in addition to being an effective distraction mechanism from negative feelings relating to identity confusion. According to Torregrosa, Boixadós, Valiente and Cruz (2004), retirement from the world of sport can be seen as less problematic if viewed as a relocation or a process rather than a singular event. Such understandings from research conducted in the field of sport fit well with personal experience and vicarious evidence of dancer's lives, providing useful direction to ensuing research.

The main purpose of this chapter was to explore literature that would be useful in contextualising and underpinning my research into the lives of male ballet dancers. I have found a range of literature sources covering the subjects which I believe are pertinent to my study, including the theoretical work of Goffman, theories of identity formation processes, ballet specific studies along with my own autobiographical accounts and literature from the world of sport. I have used each of these in the context of professional socialisation to describe some of the pervasive qualities of the ballet world which make it so difficult to leave. The literature provides compelling evidence which supports my conviction that these qualities significantly contribute to the formation and development of a dancer's identity and I hope to crystallise my own ideas which have been formed through experience and observation over the last twenty four years as a dancer. Thus I hope to develop further insights and awareness into post performance career transition, a stage many dancers consider to be an extremely

traumatic life change. Firsthand experience of these socio-psychological pressures prompted the starting point for emergent research questions:

1. How did the vocational ballet training process contribute to identity formation and institutionalisation?
2. In what ways did life in a professional ballet company continue identity formation / reinforcement and institutionalisation?
3. How did retired dancers manage the social and psychological transitions of retirement?
4. What tangible and intangible identity capital resources does a ballet dancer take with them upon retirement from the profession?
5. In what ways do the experiences of other male dancers concur or contrast with the researchers?

3. Methodology

3.1. Theoretical Framework

As stated in the introduction, my research aims to improve understanding and insight into the social and psychological experiences of dance professionals and therefore focuses on multiple subjective realities. Theoretically, my research is located in the social construct of identity and professional socialisation in a training and performance institutional context. Empirically it is concerned with the individual dancer's social construct of reality and is therefore located in the interpretive paradigm: "Interpretivism is concerned with the theory and method of the interpretation of human action" (Bryman, 2008:15). To understand human action, the researcher must interpret the meanings and intentions behind the actions. To illustrate this concept and symbolise it in an everyday context, Denzin and Lincoln use the physical gesture of raising one's arm to indicate a variety of possible intentions. Depending on its context, this gesture could be viewed as hailing a taxi, bidding at an auction, asking permission to speak and so forth (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). Therefore according to Grix (2004), analysis is discursively laden with the subjective values and opinions of the researcher and can never be totally objective. The intention is to increase understanding of dancers' lives and the meanings they attribute to experiences encountered in their training and professional commitment to ballet.

3.2. Research Design

The research design is a case study based around the life experiences of post-retirement male professional ballet dancers informed by my own personal experience and understanding. The case study according to Bryman (2008), is the most appropriate way to analyse the complexities and nature of a particular phenomenon which has produced some of the best known studies in sociology. Interpretive case studies allow the researcher to become a “passionate participant” (Guba and Lincoln, 1994:115) by gaining deep insights in to the social world of those being studied.

3.3. Methodology

As a result of the research question and theoretical framework, my study lies clearly in the naturalistic or interpretive paradigm. This is based on the belief that the social world is full of multiple realities and interpretations of reality, and cannot be understood in terms of broad generalisations (Grix, 2004; Bell, 2005; Robson, 2002 et al). The paradigm stands in contrast to positivist research that is based largely on the belief that human behaviour is measurable, predictable and controllable. The latter leads to predominantly numerical, quantifiable measures in data collection and the search for generalisable findings. The interpretive paradigm utilises qualitative methods which collect insights through observation and the voices of participants, predominantly in text form, in the search for truths and realities in everyday situations (ibid). Since the 1970s, qualitative research has been used extensively in

many social studies in order to gain a deeper understanding of human behaviour. As opposed to quantitative research, it focuses on 'why' and 'how' things happen, instead of merely 'what' (Sparkes, 2000; Richardson, 2000; Grix, 2004 et al).

Regardless of the epistemological stance of scholars and their opinions or preferences towards research methodology, they would all agree that the research questions are the driving force in selecting which type of methodology is employed (Janesick, 2000 et al).

In the case of this study's questions (see p.26), a method was selected which would allow the researcher to closely connect with the subjects in order to analyse and interpret their individual constructions of reality.

3.4. **Reliability and Validity**

Unfortunately, such research can be vulnerable to the possibility of contradiction and internal inconsistencies resulting from the subjective nature of social phenomenon. Hence the need for consideration of the terms 'reliability' or repeatability of the study to show stability over time, and 'validity' or ensuring the research measures what it set out to measure (Golafshani 2003).

The subjects of validity and reliability in research have been intensely debated and early qualitative studies were often criticised in these areas. Wolcott (1995) believes that one of the reasons for disagreement is because the terms originated with positivist research and are not

easily transferred to interpretive research. The latter does not seek generalisability and stability of measurements but meaning through insights and understandings of realities in the lives of others. Wolcott believes that terms such as ‘credibility’ and ‘dependability’ more accurately reflect the aims of a qualitative study (ibid). Golafshani (2003) uses the term ‘trustworthiness’ and locates this at the heart of validity and reliability in confidence of results in qualitative studies.

Denzin and Lincoln, (2000) suggest that this is achievable with the use of ‘qualitative referents’. These can be described as devices which increase credibility by incorporating cross checks from an outside source, like those of a tutor or auditor, from the use of respondent validation and also triangulation (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). In order to increase the level of validity for this study I utilised respondent validation to check both accuracy of interview transcripts and researcher’s interpretations with interviewees, also the triangulation of author experience with multiple interviewees’ contributions and existing literature.

3.5. **Semi-Structured Interview**

I decided to conduct six in-depth semi-structured interviews, each lasting approximately ninety minutes. Given its qualitative nature, semi-structured interviewing is a useful tool in providing a greater breadth and depth of information than other forms of data collection (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). It is also useful for ensuring consistency across interviews, facilitating analysis of points of consensus and contradiction across transcripts, as well as

allowing the researcher the flexibility to modify the questions and follow up responses (Robson, 2002; Grix, 2004). A significant disadvantage in conducting in-depth interviews is that they can be extremely time-consuming and a small sample size becomes inevitable (Wengraf, 2001). In terms of validity and reliability, this can lead to the possibility of response bias as a result of the highly subjective material. Other limitations to the interview method stem from the innate nature of human beings and the possibility that the information they disclose is false (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1997). Even though people are the most accurate informants on their own lives, it is important to remember that their accounts are retrospective and reconstructed on the basis of memory (ibid). However, Bell argues that in spite of these possible limitations, the richness of material gathered is effective in 'putting flesh on the bones' of a project, (Bell, 2005:157).

The subject matter covered in the interviews required the interviewees to recall experiences from childhood to the present. Such retrospective and anecdotal material is a useful way to transform unquantifiable stories and experiences into knowledge (Bryman, 2008). These narratives are purposeful, strategic and functional and have an engaging effect unlike any other form of communication (Riessman, 2008). More importantly, it offers the participants the power and freedom to tell their side of the story, particularly with regards to institutional experiences of ballet training and professional lives. It gives them a unique opportunity to go on record, albeit in confidence, to express their views and opinions, discuss their experiences in an open and candid manner and reflect on their life paths. For many, this could be viewed as an opportunity to gain closure on problematic periods of their lives (Maynes, Pierce & Laslett, 2008; Riessman, 2008). This was certainly the case for my participants, each of whom conveyed that their involvement in the study was a cathartic experience. Also, in my

extensive experience of the visual art form of ballet, dancers are generally seen and not heard, often coming to the end of a long and rewarding career with nothing but memories, a few photographs and no opportunity to reflect on their achievements. My research offered the participants this opportunity.

3.6. **Sampling Strategy**

To maximise proximity to my researcher experiences and to avoid complexities of gender differences, I chose to focus on male dancers. A similar study on female dancers and retirement would have been of equal interest and would have included identity issues surrounding body change as a result of delayed child-bearing. For a significant level of institutionalisation to be present in my participants, I chose individuals who had experienced a minimum of five years in a vocational training institution followed by a minimum of five years in a single professional ballet company. I believe that remaining in one particular institution for a significant period of time with the familiarity of routine, surroundings and people can contribute to institutionalisation more significantly. To maximise consistency, all applicants were over twenty-five years of age and had retired from a professional performing ballet career. As previously mentioned, given the depth of personal detail required for the interviews and the amount of time allotted for the research project, six participants were used in order to gain thorough understanding and insight without compromising the quality of the results. In order to gain insight into the time taken for an individual's identity to alter from that where consciousness of 'being a dancer' was dominant, the time since retirement varied between participants, starting from as little as one year to seventeen years. For a complete list

of the chosen participants, including age, number of years spent in a training and professional institution, number of years since retirement and choice of second career, (see appendix A).

3.7. **Ethical Considerations**

Under the British Educational Research Association and the Economic Social Research Council, the social science code of practice of ethics guided the research process. A University of Birmingham Ethical Review of Research self assessment form was filed prior to undertaking my research. As a post graduate student researching with human subjects, I was required to gain ethical approval to minimise any risk to my participants. As my research involved adult volunteers, I was placed in the low risk category.

Initially, I contacted my potential respondents to offer a brief outline of my research in order to determine if they were interested in taking part. I then sent each prospective participant a more detailed description of the project along with sample interview questions to consider (see Appendix B). We then arranged a convenient time and location that was suitable and comfortable for the participant. With consent, I recorded the interviews by way of an electronic digital voice recorder.

Before the interviews began, my participants were asked to sign a participation and consent form (see Appendix C) as part of the ethics procedure to ensure understanding of their rights

under specific terms and conditions. These included an assurance that they were in no way deceived about the purpose of the study and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time up until submission. The data received was treated as strictly confidential and pseudonyms were used to protect the participant's identity.

Unfortunately, a major feature of a ballet company is the aforementioned tightly knit community, often generating intensive relationships (Wulff, 1998). Even with the use of pseudonyms it is difficult to disguise the identity of the subject when they are prominent in the field. This situation could affect the authenticity and validity of the interview data as a result of what the participants choose to reveal. Fortunately, by using retired dancers this problem was addressed, removing any possible negative impact of their participation in the study. They could be completely forthright in discussion without fear of repercussion if data were to fall into the wrong hands. With the 'qualitative referent' of participant validation, the interviewees were able to check that they were represented accurately, view the transcripts and change or redact any part of the text (Aronson, 1994).

Records of transcripts are kept on an external data storage device in a locked cabinet for a period of ten years, as specified by the University, at which time they will be permanently deleted. It was also a conscious decision to provide pseudonyms for the names of the training institutions and professional companies involved in the study for confidentiality purposes. These pseudonyms will appear in both the presentation of results section and the interview transcripts as 'Ballet School A,B,C' and 'Ballet Company A,B,C'.

3.8. Design and Implementation of Interviews

As previously stated, the objective of my enquiries was to gain understanding and insight into my participant's social construction of identity in relation to the three distinct life stages.

Subsequently, I devised my questions to reflect this goal (see appendix D). I began with a few simple, straightforward questions to aid both researcher and respondent in adjusting to the interview situation (Oppenheim, 1992). The first main question was based around the training phase and devised to gain insight into institutional experiences during adolescence which may have contributed to the formation of identity. The next few questions which delved into the professional phase were designed to encourage the respondent to talk freely of his experiences of performance, socialisation, camaraderie and sense of identity. The final five questions were focused around the post-retirement phase and designed to extract the respondent's experiences and perceptions of identity throughout career transition up to the present day. These nine questions, placed chronologically, were generic and open-ended so as not to pre-empt a response. In addition, prompts were used to amplify each question if necessary. The prompts served to keep the interview on the right track, keep a good flow and ensure that all lines of questioning were covered (Bell, 2005; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000).

There were obvious advantages in presenting my lines of questioning in chronological order. Firstly, it allowed the respondents to relive their entire journey through life and reflect on all stages of their career, in both memory and emotion. It also served as an aid to the researcher to gain a clear insight into their childhood experiences to provide insight and understanding of the ways in which this may have influenced and guided their decisions in later life. Of course,

from a researcher's perspective the greatest advantage of chronological questioning was in the analysis stage. When dealing with multiple interview transcripts, having the data already placed in some sort of logical order provided a far simpler task in locating and de-constructing the applicable information.

3.9. **Insider Research**

In addition to the sampling criteria above, the chosen respondents for the interviews were either ex-colleagues of the researcher or linked by social or professional means. This rapport between the researcher and the participants was a conscious decision in the selection process. The ballet world is often perceived as 'elitist', even by the practitioners themselves which can often leave 'outsider researchers' unable to gain access to ballet companies and to gain the necessary trust to conduct a study (Wulff, 1998). My insider knowledge of the company's social dynamics, specialised terminology and subtle nuances, together with an empathy and personal understanding of the interviewees' experiences, served as an entree into this specialised world and created a common ground and mutual trust which facilitated an honest, flowing interview (Merton, 1972). This is also the view of Hockey (1993), who believes that this empathy and understanding creates an authentic account rather than a simplistic caricature. Of course this type of insider research, or "practitioner research" (Robson, 2002:382), also has its disadvantages.

The existence of a prior relationship between the researcher and the subject can have a negative impact on the research, leading to questions over the validity of the data (Kvale, 1995). Firstly, participants may be reluctant to share intimate details with somebody so familiar for fear of being judged. It can sometimes be easier to disclose sensitive matters to an outsider to whom one is less well known (Shah, 2004). In addition, the involvement of the researchers themselves can lead to biases, distortion of the truth and a lack of objectivity (Kvale, 1995). However, anti-positivist researchers would argue that it is impossible to assure the honesty and openness of subjects in all research (Hammersley, 2000). As for the researcher, he or she will always be influenced by their own subjectivities and therefore no piece of research can be totally objective (ibid). Therefore, according to Tierney (1994), insider research can actually increase validity due to the added richness, fidelity and authenticity of the data acquired.

Hammersley (2000) suggests that the aim of the researcher is to minimise these biases as much as possible, to maintain a transparent approach throughout the process and to allow the readers to construct their own perspectives and judgements. Hammersley (1993) also suggests there are no clear advantages or disadvantages to being an insider or an outsider, both positions have their strengths and weaknesses depending on the circumstances and purpose of the research. In the case of my research, having a positive professional or personal association with the participants was a definite facilitator to the recruitment process and they all gladly agreed to participate. With a conscious effort to maintain an objective approach throughout the study, and with the use of selective sampling, I was able to avoid most of the negative elements relating to insider research and all participants were extremely open to express themselves on all issues raised.

3.10. The Interview Process

Having agreed to be interviewed, the next step was to arrange convenient times and locations that were suitable for both researcher and participant. The ease with which this could be accomplished varied between participants. One of the interviewees who was married to a current dancer within the company happened to live in close proximity. Another labour-saving instance came as a result of a chosen interviewee travelling to Cardiff during a company touring week to watch his partner perform the role of Juliet. I was able to capitalise on this and conduct the interview in my hotel room. With other interviews I was not so fortunate. Working around people's busy lives and work schedules often left the researcher having to make long evening journeys at a moment's notice.

In terms of location, I made a conscious effort to travel to, and conduct the interview at the home of the participant. I believed this would offer the most comfortable and familiar environment for the participant with the obvious advantages of privacy and minimal chance of disturbance or interruption (Oppenheim, 1992). Unfortunately this was not feasible in all cases. One of the interviews had to be conducted in a theatre dressing room and another in a busy coffee shop in central London. However, in the latter case, this bustling location was the suggestion of the interviewee, indicating that this was his most comfortable environment of choice. It turned out to be relaxed, conversational and an extremely successful interview.

If the interview was to take place at the home of the participant, I would arrive with a bottle of wine, as one might when turning up for a social event. In addition to being a general courtesy and token of gratitude, I thought a small glass of wine would serve to soften the inhibitions of the interviewee without making them too inebriated or incoherent (Oppenheim, 1992). I would then ask the interviewee where he would feel most comfortable conducting the interview itself. This would usually be sitting around a table with the voice recorder placed equidistant between myself and the participant.

One of the most important aspects of the interview was to maintain rapport and the prompts were helpful in keeping the interviews on track and avoiding unnecessary pauses. However, I was cautious not to be too hasty in breaking a silence while the interviewee was in mid-thought so as not to miss relevant information or lead the interviewee (Oppenheim, 1992; Wengraf, 2001). The voice recorder was extremely valuable for a novice researcher. It allowed me to concentrate on the questions and responses of the interview without frantically taking notes and risk causing a distraction (Robson, 2002; Wengraf, 2001; Oppenheim, 1992; et al). I decided instead to play the interview back as soon as possible, as suggested by Wengraf (2001). I took a mental note of any unusual emotional or physical reactions and recorded my observations alongside the questions on the interview protocol.

The next step was to transcribe the interviews. This is often described as a tiresome and laborious task which can take between four and eight hours of the researcher's time to transcribe one hour of interview material (Bell, 2005). It has been suggested by Robson (2002) that an alternative to full transcription is to be selective and extract relevant passages

only. Riessman (1993) recommends transcribing the entire interview verbatim before re-transcribing select portions for more detailed analysis. I decided to transcribe the interviews in their entirety with the omission of extraneous or irrelevant sounds. Whichever method is chosen, most researchers would all agree that transcribing the interview oneself as opposed to using an alternative service, allows the researcher to become fully connected to the data.

The interview was an extremely valuable research method for achieving the insight for which I was searching. Having face to face contact with the participants enabled me to engage with their experiences and share their thoughts and emotions on a profound level. Despite this success, I was still concerned about the relatively small sample size and decided to investigate the possibility of distributing open-ended questionnaires in order to target a greater number of participants. However, its effectiveness as a research tool was ruled out after encountering an extremely problematic recruitment issue and I concluded that its value for the success of the study was unfeasible and unnecessary. For a comprehensive explanation (see appendix E).

3.11. **Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis has been described as a combination of both inductive and deductive analytical procedures used to identify deterministic laws of a particular phenomena (Silverman, 2001) and can be used effectively to identify prominent themes to present and reflect textual data (Robson, 2002). A form of content analysis, thematic analysis is one of the most commonly used methods of qualitative analysis and is not as heavily dependent on

specialised theory as other techniques such as discourse or conversational analysis, making it especially useful and accessible to the novice researcher (Howitt and Cramer, 2007).

However, it is important that the researcher is extremely familiar and fully connected to the data for the results to be insightful (ibid).

It was the aim of the researcher to categorise and present recurring themes, consensus patterns, perspectives and contradiction between the testimonies of each participant, complemented by autobiographical experience and understanding. The first step in the analytical process was the task of data reduction. This involved careful scrutiny of the interview transcripts and a decision was made on which passages were irrelevant to the research project. To do this, it was first necessary to develop themes in order to provide logical structure and order to the data (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1997) along with codes to add a procedural dimension (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009). Fortunately, these main themes had already been established throughout the literature review and from the researcher's own experience (Huberman, 1994) and took the form of the three key life stages described earlier. These themes were instrumental in constructing and shaping the interview protocol, analytical procedure and presentation. Under the umbrella of these *a priori* themes emerged a list of sub-themes from deductive and inductive analysis. These sub-themes reflect and expand the recurring issues related to the retirement of professional male dancers and were used discursively to assist fluency.

Deductive theory describes the process of applying reason to a given set of circumstances or in this case, taking ideas from the major issues identified throughout the literature and arriving

at a conclusion (Grix, 2004). Inductive theory is generated by the interaction and analysis of empirical data, or in this case the responses of the interviewees (ibid). According to Grix (ibid), many researchers believe that studies can never be purely inductive as a result of priori assumptions, research goals and formulations by the researcher before embarking on the study. It is more likely that a piece of research involves an interplay of both induction and deduction, described by some philosophers of science as retroduction (Ragin, 1994). Of course, such assumptions by the researcher can once again lead to the question of validity and reliability. By strictly adhering to the research questions, the criteria set out for the development of themes and by utilising the ‘qualitative referent’ of triangulation with the literature and personal experience, I was able to minimise the researcher biases and target the most pertinent passages relevant to the study, thereby increasing the legitimacy of the data (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Aronson, 1994).

For a list of the developed themes alongside an assigned analytical code, (see appendix F). Statements and passages from the interview transcripts suitably depicting a particular theme were highlighted and assigned the analytical code. (To view examples of the coded transcripts see appendix G and H). In the presentation of results section it was necessary to identify the origins of the interview passages. To accomplish this I created an identification code which was displayed at the end of the excerpt and consisted of specific line numbers from which the quote was extracted, alongside the pseudonym of the interviewee, for example, ‘(William, L860-864)’.

As recommended by Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2007), it was a conscious decision to display the exact words or phrases of the participants to avoid distortion of the original intention of their words and allow the rich 'flavour' to be expressed. As described earlier in the chapter, the use of career history questioning placed my themes in a natural, chronological order. It was a conscious decision to present the findings with this structure for clarity of progression in career identity developments.

4. Analysis of Results and Discussion

This chapter combines an analysis of results and discussion of the six interviews, concentrating on the similarities and differences between respondents' experiences and perceptions while making comparisons with those of the researcher. Key emergent influential events and factors are highlighted which contributed to identity formation and illuminate the key issues raised throughout the study with the aim of addressing the research questions. The data is presented in order of the three key life stages highlighted in the introduction, beginning with the training phase and its influence on identity formation, continuing with professional life in a ballet company and concluding with the transition to the post-retirement phase.

4.1. Stage One- Training: "Learning to Cope, Coping to Learn"

This section will cover the professional training stage of the interviewees' dancing careers. Using Goffman's concepts and institutional characteristics for comparison, (for example, admission procedures, deference requirements, curtailment of self, trained incapacity), it will focus heuristically on their institutionalised experiences and perceptions of the contribution of institutional socialisation to the formation of their identities.

Four of the participants, Ralph, Peter, Timothy and William, attended the same training institution, based in the UK, which shall be referred to as 'Ballet School A'. These four

interviewees trained at different times over a period of twenty-four years without overlapping. The memories and recollections of these four interviewees were extremely comparable despite having trained with different cohorts under the direction of a changing cadre of directors, head and housemasters and ballet mistresses. Despite these changes in organisation leaders, the institutional ethos and aims endured, justifying the use of the analytical concept 'Total Institution'. Another participant, James, differed from the other interviewees and attended a training institution in France, which shall be named "Ballet School B", while Simeon attended an institution also based in the UK which shall be named "Ballet School C".

Having asked each of the 'Ballet School A' graduates for their overview of their training experiences, all four at some point used the analogy, 'like a prison'. William (L130, L133-134) in particular, who attended in the early nineteen seventies found the experience particularly traumatic: "*I would have rather stayed away...I just found the whole 'Ballet School A' thing the most horrendous five years of my life*". He went on to explain how his peers were particularly cruel to him as a result of him being the youngest in the class and he was subjected to a large degree of bullying (William L129-130). Coupled with the rigours of the institution itself, William admitted that if it was not for the aspirations of his mother, he would have left almost immediately (William L185-186). Being the oldest interviewee, William's memories portray life of a distant past. He gave an example of the harsh living conditions and lack of privacy which he experienced at boarding school. Before the invention of mobile telephones, only two payphones were available at 'Ballet School A' for over one hundred students to use. With a limited number of hours in each day to contact loved ones, this resulted in lengthy queues. He recalls:

You'd have to queue up in the Central Hall. When the assessments were over with, you'd have to ask your Mum and Dad if they'd got the letter (about acceptance or rejection from the school) and ask, 'Have I got another year?' And they'd have to tell you in front of the whole school queuing. I mean, no help, no guidance, nothing. That was it. Just barbaric! (William L338-341).

On reflection on their first memories of school, the audition and other admission procedures, the interviewees' comments reinforced the researchers own recollections: *"I remember it was just, you know, body only and that's it, how flexible you are? I remember a big session on that. They look at the structure, your Achilles tendons, your knees, the hips and everything"* (Peter L205-207).

Each interviewee emphasised the importance of this close body examination and the emphasis placed on their physical attributes to the exclusion of interest into their intellectual capacity or psychological suitability for such a career. This disinterest in 'the person' could certainly be considered one of the first stages in the process of 'curtailment of self' as described by Goffman (1961). A recollection was also provided by the researcher to draw comparison and illustrate its relevance to the ballet world (p. 11). As a hidden agenda, and in keeping with Foucault's (1977) concept of 'docile bodies', this visual examination was likely to have been a method for selection and suitability for the student to be moulded in the same way the eighteenth century soldiers were moulded through 'dressage'. *"It was like military precision.*

When dealing with children you have to have respect that they should still have a childhood” (Ralph L108-110). This last quote held resonance with the researcher who encountered ‘military influence’ in many practices conducted at school. For example, pupils were expected to stand silently at the end of the bed while their drawers and wardrobes were inspected for tidiness and even military terms like ‘mufti’ were used for casual ware and the naval term ‘hatch’ was used to describe the opening in which the food would be served at meal times.

Goffman’s (1961) idea of stripping back physically and mentally was also the experience of the other two interviewees. James (L471-473) recalled his first memories of life at ‘Ballet School B’, based in France: *“I think we were broken down, in a way. Broken down like you break down your pointe shoes. Broken down mentally, and I never realised until much later on how dramatic it was”*. A similar perception is echoed by Simeon at ‘Ballet School C’:

I think it's something that's kind of common to ballet. When you're a student, teachers are pretty horrible to you. They like to kind of really put you down to make you work hard and to really push you and kind of mould you into something, you know? They don't want you to ask too many questions. They just want you to do it again and again until you get it right and kind of make you feel like you're just not trying hard enough (Simeon L128-132).

Again, Foucault's description of 'dressage' can be used as a metaphor here. A 'back to basics' approach has always been at the forefront of ballet practices and each movement must be perfected before the student can progress to the next one.

These responses naturally steered the interviews to the subject of discipline and the process of 'mortification of the self'. As researcher, I was eager to gauge the extent to which the experiences of my participants were similar to my own. William (L224-227) recalls:

One teacher, he just used to scream at us. He just used to shake us and, you know. And then, there was another teacher, she used to throw bibles and hymn books at people and shout 'whores', at the girls. I mean it's just like really scary. I don't really know now, where I found solace and how. I don't know. It was horrendous.

A similar memory came from Ralph (L94-95): "*Yes I got hit, slapped by a teacher in the first month because I wasn't pulling up my leg. She thought nothing of it until I started crying*".

These anecdotes are typical examples of the physical and verbal abuse described by all participants. An example of neglect comes from an incident involving James (L611-613, L617-621):

One day I went to school and before my class my intestines were literally so knotted that I was doubled over in the changing room and couldn't even stretch my body. I

couldn't stand up...I didn't know if it was appendicitis or peritonea. They put me on the sofa in one of the corridors and left me there and said, 'Call us when you feel better'. They didn't call a doctor. That same year, a girl fainted on stage and they put her back up on stage. Literally propped her back up on stage!

He also made reference to the 'deference requirements' which seem even more stringent than those experienced in the UK: *"You were not allowed to address the teachers. You were not even allowed to make eye contact. I don't think it was a real rule, but an unspoken rule. When you pass them in the corridor, you just curtsy or bow and avoid their gaze"* (James L648-651).

Of all the interviewees, it appears that James (L486, L489) was particularly affected by the harsh discipline: *"My experience in France was completely hyper-abusive...I was in such a state of inner depression that I didn't even know I was depressed"*. He also recalls suffering from anaemia and anorexia as a direct result of the extreme pressures of the institution.

When asked of their honest opinions, almost all of the other participants described the level of discipline as a necessary requirement for achieving success. *"I think with ballet or any physical activity, you need that discipline. You need to be pushed. If you're too soft with kids these days they'll run crazy, you know? You wouldn't get the same results"* (Simeon L140-142). As a seasoned professional dancer with teaching experience, I agree with the previous comment to a degree and have always attributed my success to a high level of discipline

received over the years. I do believe however, that even today, harsh bullying tactics are occasionally employed by under-confident teachers as a way to force respect through fear as opposed to gaining respect through an ability to inspire. A clear line must be drawn.

In keeping with Goffman's definitions, I raised the subject of friendships with fellow students in order to gain insight into the level of camaraderie experienced as a result of these collective experiences. I discovered that each participant had differing experiences. William, who described his entire five years at 'Ballet School A' as 'traumatic' felt as though he was never accepted by his peers, possibly as a result of being the youngest in his class, and resorted to other measures to gain acceptance:

I was bullied badly at first. Then, I tried to turn the tables. 'Cause, I wanted to be on the side of the people who were being horrible. So, I went through a phase of being horrible to people. Which, I'll never forgive myself for. But, it was the only way I thought I could survive. Otherwise I would have had a breakdown, completely
(William L248-252).

Another pupil of 'Ballet School A', Timothy, also remembers fighting for acceptance as a result of joining in the second year when friendships between pupils were already firmly established: *"That's always going to be difficult for people to accept, that you've kind of replaced the position in the school that one of their friends have had to forfeit through been assessed out"* (Timothy L112-114). He went on to describe initiation traditions which he was

forced to endure as a newcomer into the group which he described as ‘part of a culture’ and ‘learning the ropes’ (Timothy L158-159):

If I had a child at ‘Ballet School A’ I would be mortified to think that they were having their heads flushed down the toilet, being turned upside down with their pants down, or being whipped in the face with a belt, but having gone through it myself both receiving and delivering, it was just part of life (Timothy L203-207).

It can be argued that such initiation rituals are commonplace at many boarding schools as depicted by Lambert and Millham (1968) and were experienced by the researcher on many occasions. Once Timothy gained acceptance within the group however, he began to find comfort and even a sense of reliance on the social dynamics, as illustrated here:

I think, you know, working together, studying together, dancing together, eating together, sleeping in the dormitories, these friendships are all you have, and it was quite cut off at ‘Ballet School A’ (Timothy L114-116); I never had any brothers or sisters and so found something I never had (Timothy L130-131); I cried more when I graduated than I did leaving home at the age of twelve (Timothy L138-139).

As described by Goffman (1961), he also went on to explain that he declined the option of returning home every weekend in order to establish closer bonds to his fellow pupils and

avoid being ‘left out’. This is a situation that I could identify with as I still consider some of the relationships that I formed at school to be ‘brotherly’ in nature, as though part of my immediate family (Wulff, 1998). I remember these close bonds with fellow pupils often leading to rebellion against the authority of the institution. Timothy (L148-155) explains:

We were unintentionally becoming part of this culture which shaped our personalities. We even started to talk the same and form a slightly neutral accent. I’m from London but I started to say things like ‘bath’ and ‘path’, (pronounced like ‘math’). As for how we behaved? I think the whole idea of your parents not being around. Your parents are now the housemaster and housemistress yet because they’re not your blood parents that mischievous behaviour was turned on them. The only kind of recrimination would be expulsion so we were constantly trying to push the boundaries.

These ‘rituals of resistance’ certainly reflect Goffman’s analytical concepts of inmate sub-culture for the preservation self identity and self protection. This last statement ‘pushing the boundaries’ has particular resonance with the researcher as a great deal of the rebellion was aimed at breaking through the physical confines of the institution. At the age of thirteen, I decided to investigate a rumour of underground tunnels which linked the ballet school to the local village. With a friend, I managed to access the foundations of the building but we were unable to discover the fabled tunnels. We returned to our dormitory crestfallen only to be reprimanded by the housemaster for being untidy and covered in plaster dust. Such accounts of ‘prison-style escapes’ are commonplace, as in Peter’s (L426-430) account:

We used to run into the girls' dormitories just for the hell of it or go out to the garden after lights out or pretend to sleepwalk, things like that, but other years would try to actually get out of the park and into the town. A few of them were reported missing and they had helicopters looking for them. I guess the place drove them that crazy! It was on the news I think.

As these events occurred during adolescence, a key issue was the ways in which these experiences contributed to the formation of their identity as theorised by Erikson (1968). Some of the interviewees believed that their experiences had impacted on them in a positive way. William, in spite of his traumatic experience believed it had brought him out of himself and made him an outgoing, strong and assertive person (William L270-271), as did Ralph (Ralph L241). Peter, although very complimentary of the structure and professionalism, believed that the over emphasis on stringent rules and discipline left him with a lack of self-assurance (Peter L440-443). James seemed to be the most negatively affected from his institutional experiences in France and describes it as having left such “an imprint of abuse” (James L844) that he suffers panic attacks when returning (James L791-793). He also felt unequipped for adulthood as a result of the ‘dictator-style’ management, (James L907-910). A perceptive response came from Timothy:

I think ‘Ballet School A’ definitely changed who I was because of this immersion into a culture. A kind of very intense microcosm with such close proximity with other

people. It changed the way I spoke, it changed what I spoke about, it changed obviously the way that I move. I'm pretty sure it had some influence on what I wore. It started to change the music I listened to and it had a lasting effect. My accent didn't de-neutralise after I left. My body language didn't change after I left. The ideas of quality and hard work, the 'no pain, no progress' approach, I still find myself believing in (Timothy L300-306).

Although each of the participants underwent slightly different experiences with differing psychological outcomes, it seems apparent that the collective institutional experience had an influential impact on identity formation with enduring effect.

4.2. **Stage Two- Company Life: “Performing and Relating”**

This section contains the interviewees' recollections of their professional life and their perceptions of the experience of what we now understand to have been professional socialisation (Goffman, 1961). This all encompassing term is used to describe the social dynamics between dancers and management as well as inter-colleague relations. It will also cover the interviewees' memories with regards to feelings of exclusivity and experiences of performance. Together these issues can provide evidence to support continued/reinforced identity formation within a company setting.

To be accepted into a professional Ballet company is arguably one of the highlights of a dancer's life. It is the ultimate reward, achievement and justification of the years of intense training and sacrifice. Without exception the subjects recalled their overwhelming excitement at the new challenges and possibilities before them. Performing alongside established and renowned artists in front of a large audience for the first time and being paid for the privilege, was the realisation of a lifelong ambition. Ralph (L363-365) explains: "*The rush of adrenaline! I felt very special, especially when you've worked your arse off, sweated, bled, broken bones, and it is all worth it because they are applauding you!*"

As described earlier by the researcher, Simeon reminisced about the transcendental pleasure of performing and the euphoria felt on his first experience of 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). "*Performing, if I had the right role, was amazing, you know? When you've got it all right and it all just comes together, it's an amazing feeling!*" (Simeon L364-365). William concurs with Simeon and describes the sensation of portraying a character for the first time:

I was put straight into these character roles which was amazing! Suddenly I found this whole amazing world. Oh god, it was amazing. A new side to myself. I could make people laugh...I loved it. It was just one of the best and most brilliant things I did. And, I just felt completely and utterly at home doing that (William L455-457, L459-460).

In response to questions about other positive features, both Ralph and William made reference to the exclusivity of the profession and feeling special. Ralph (L380-384) recalled a visit from the Princess of Wales and the privilege of having performed on television, which he believes he would never have experienced had he not become a dancer. William (L524-525) gave a similar response: *“We stayed at incredible hotels and visited amazing places, you know? Embassies and that. Meeting the high and mighty”*. When asked about the most rewarding aspects of company life, like William, all participants expressed their appreciation of the opportunity to tour foreign countries as part of the profession: *“Visiting different places and cultures. You know, it’s like being paid for a holiday. I mean when you’re young, who can afford to fly to Japan or China? I know I wouldn’t have the money”* (Ralph L371-373).

Most of the interviewees agreed that these professional ‘perks of the job’ were a noticeable absence from their lives after retirement. However, when quizzed about what they miss the most about life as a dancer, the majority simply answered ‘the people’. According to William (L514-515): *“It’s the dancers. Absolutely amazing. Ballet dancers are the most incredibly fabulous people!”*. Simeon echoed Aalten (2005) and Wulff’s (1998) sentiments in stressing the depth of personal relations found between dancers: *“There’s a kind of understanding between dancers, having shared such a similar upbringing and experiences that other people don’t seem to have. There are lots of in-jokes, phrases and a common language”* (Simeon L583-585). One source of this common bond is the shared experience of dancers which was recognised by Wulff (ibid). William (L490-493) certainly concurs: *“My friends back home are gone. Company people became my family, and I loved it! Always on the road, arriving on a Sunday night, eating in the only curry house that was open, staying at shit digs, freezing cold, wet and filthy sheets and having a fabulous time!”* Timothy attributed the ease of

conversation with young dancers he has never met, down to the familiarity and intensity of these shared experiences (Timothy L667-671). James went on to use the metaphor of downloading software to describe the immediacy with which communication and understanding is established between strangers: *“It’s going to help you process lots of stuff together and it’s wonderful. It’s like family ties and it’s just brilliant!”* (James L957-959). He perceptively and sensitively describes the bond formed between the male and female dancer during a pas de deux as a subliminal, non-verbal connection which culminates in a heightened level of emotion, understanding and trust (James L938-948). As described by Wulff (1998), this common understanding, emotional connection, trust and shared physicality can lead to a partnership off the stage. Peter (L827-829) explains: *“I think it’s like a natural continuation of the intimacy on stage...it brings two people together and often relationships are formed”*.

In many cases including that of the researcher’s, this situation can blossom into a loving marriage and the beginning of a family. However, as witnessed on numerous occasions and observed by Wulff (1998), this intimacy on stage can also lead to negative consequences as a result of the familial and often ‘incestuous’ nature of ballet companies. It is a perfect example of symbolism in the arts crossing over into reality with repercussions on professional responsibility. As reflected by Timothy (L429-431): *“Some people who have been together for a long time, even married have been known to suddenly switch over and get with the other person. A complete wife swap!”* William, who spent long periods abroad as a dancer remembers this as a prominent and negative feature of touring: *“They’d come back from a six week tour and everyone’s got another fucking partner! I just found it awful. That’s the real downside”* (William L606-607). This can be viewed as an extreme bi-product of the Hothouse environment, often with devastating consequences.

I inquired into other negative memories relating to social dynamics within a ballet company. Timothy (L417-424) describes the social division between groups of dancers and the ‘cliques’ that would form as a direct result of the repertoire:

This is fascinating. I would notice what they call ‘The Bible’ for God’s sake. When the casting would go up, you would immediately start to see new ‘let’s go and do coffee and dinner’ relationships forming around that production or that season of work. Depending on where people appeared on that sheet, in terms of first or second cast, relationships would shift and morph. I would watch this behaviour from a distance with a certain sense of jealousy, which sounds weird. You get kind of upset that you are not invited to a party that you didn’t want to go to in the first place.

This describes the complex, tiered and transient levels of social structure within what is already an insider environment. This was usually as a direct result of the repertoire and another example of symbolic representation overlapping into real life. This social division can also be influenced by the ranking system. When I first became a professional, it would be considered disrespectful for a member of the corps de ballet to converse with a Principal dancer unless invited to. This again could be as a result of their differing experiences and responsibilities and also because of the existing hierarchical structure of ballet (Wulff, *ibid*). On the subject of hierarchy, all of the interviewees felt that social relations between staff and dancers were often problematic and occasionally strained to breaking point. Without

exception, the participants can recall having difficulty in establishing and sustaining mature, adult relationships with management, an observation confirmed by Khudaverdian (2006) and Smith (2001). Peter believes that the conditioned obedience to staff developed at school could be the cause of a continued division between dancers and management in a company setting (Peter L777-779). William (L663-666) went on to explain:

You are completely at their disposal. It's like 'No talking!' again. You've got these ex-dancers in managerial roles. They are so insecure because they grew up in 'The Ballet institution' and were treated the same way. Of course they're going to treat people how they were treated.

This was the general consensus of the interviewees who had all encountered this hierarchical structure throughout their career. Another perception came from Simeon (L151-154):

You get these people who are not born teachers or, you know, nurturing or whatever. They just ended up in this position and they love abusing it a little bit. They love the power so they just stride around and, you know? They make you feel like shit because they can.

This is certainly reflective of Goffman's (1961) description of the social division between inmates and the governing authority. Timothy refers to the 'trained incapacity' (ibid), that dancers undergo, and the effects of its continuation throughout company life:

Often you are still treated like a child. In some cases you still feel like one... I think there's a psychological theory about this...if the management treat you like a child, you will start acting like one. I'm talking about adults in their twenties and thirties. They are still renting, they have been entitled to their pension at thirty-five and have blown it! They're still going out and partying hard. This lifestyle can go on into their forties (Timothy L390-391, L400, L404, L409-412).

The interviewees also make reference to the level of dependence on the institution as recognised by Goffman (ibid), Aalten (2005) and Laird (2003), resulting in a stunted level of maturity, resourcefulness and culture shock when leaving the safety of the ballet company. Timothy (L461-464) recalls: *"Everything was done for us. Everything shipped over for us. Flights booked. Hotels booked. We didn't have to think for ourselves. We were told when to take our holidays. Even washing machines were provided at twenty pence a throw!"*

Another issue raised was the response from staff while exploring other avenues in preparation for life after dance. Timothy (L505-506, L499, L502-503) describes a response from the Ballet master when asking to be absent from a non-compulsory ballet class to attend an alternative dance class outside of the company:

He said, 'No, you are a ballet dancer. That's all you must focus on and nothing else'. I had a row with him and learned not to ask permission, just do it anyway... Other interests were not encouraged...It was like having another interest other than ballet was a distraction from your main career.

Many dancers would view this as typical response. In many cases, ballet staff acquire their managerial positions directly following their dance careers and have managed to avoid the transitional processes. This can lead to a lack of empathy and understanding, with 'outside interests and influences' being viewed with suspicion, mirroring Foucault's (1977) idea that 'knowledge is power', and therefore dangerous to the ideals of the institution. William believes that this lack of understanding, lack of interest and dismissive attitude, which he also experienced, is derived from their seamless transition to management which long term, can be detrimental to the dance world:

Because they've never stepped outside the 'Ballet bubble', they're still carrying all this shit on their shoulders. You need to get out and do something else because it puts the whole ballet world into perspective. Then if you come back into it, you can just give, because you really understand. What you're giving is selfless, nothing to prove (William L924-928).

This last sentiment particularly resonates with the researcher, whose renewed passion and rekindled enthusiasm for the profession deriving from a total absence from the ballet world, has prompted a desire to pass on knowledge and experience through teaching, to the next generation of aspiring young dancers.

4.3. **Stage Three- Life after Dance: “Shifting the Dancer Identity”**

In this final section I shall be focusing on the transitional period and post-retirement phase as experienced by the interviewees. It will cover the various issues that the former dancers faced on retirement, as identified in the literature review. As discussed above, the period leading up to retirement can produce feelings of anxiety and stress. Even with a clear post-retirement plan, my interviewees without exception, admitted feelings of anxiety and apprehension associated with the impending life change. In Timothy’s case, these feelings of anxiety were extremely stressful:

I completely cracked. I got really under-confident and was totally exhausted. I was getting into difficult behaviours because I wasn't feeling good enough. My body was changing. I was putting on a bit of weight. I was starting to drink more and had less energy to come to class. I was getting fed up with the daily routine. I'd also done the degree which had opened my mind a little bit and it was getting harder to be told what to do like a child. I felt like I was a thinking person that wasn't really allowed to express those thoughts. I became very destructive to myself and I started hurting

myself physically...I was panicking. I was fearful of change (Timothy L518-525, L533).

The above passage certainly encapsulates the various psychological pressures experienced on leaving an institution as described by Goffman (1961) and reflects some of the negative coping strategies seen by athletes (Wylleman, Alfermann and Lavalée, 2004). At the age of thirty-five Timothy was considered a 'seasoned' professional' who had been with the same company for seventeen years. This prolonged period could have been responsible for his increased level of institutionalisation and dependence on the institution as described by Haney (2002). James (L1029-1032) also recalls feelings of trepidation:

I was very scared, yeah. Massive. I was very scared, first of all if I would miss it physically. So, I thought I was making a big mistake when I stopped dancing because I thought you're going to wake up in six months time and realize you've made the biggest mistake in your life.

As well as psychological anxiety, James mentioned his concerns surrounding the abrupt end of physical activity upon retirement. This sudden change in lifestyle can be a 'shock to the system' after so many years of constant physical activity. This was echoed by Peter: "*How do you cope when your body feels like it's ready to just sprint and do a show, and you have to sit at a desk and study, it's such a sudden change doing class everyday for so many years and suddenly becoming a couch potato*" (Peter L1163-1165). This statement resonates with the

researcher's own experience. On many occasions during pilot ground school training sessions, I would find my lower limbs twitching uncontrollably as I suffered 'withdrawal' symptoms caused by an unaccustomed sedentary lifestyle and physical inactivity.

Using the concepts of Bourdieu (1977), the shifting of emphasis from the importance of physical capital as a professional dancer, to its redundancy, can lead to extreme physical and psychological discomfort. As stated in the introduction, throughout my flight training I continued to 'embody' the role of a dancer but with no physical outlet available for its existence. Instead, I would draw on habitual behaviour learned as a dancer and physically rehearse aerobatic manoeuvres, activating muscle memory, which I frequently utilised when learning choreography. I would even count to eight during each aerobatic sequence in order to place it in the familiar 'eight count phrasing' context of ballet tradition. This continuation of physical capital is mentioned by Simeon: "I'm always pointing my feet and stuff" (Simeon L864). This is also a physical trait described by Timothy and again, representative of the 'embodied culture' discussed by Bourdieu (ibid):

People that I work with sometimes joke with me because of my ballet identity. I'm managing a lot, which means a lot of meetings and presentations in front of people. If I am not standing with anything behind me, apparently every single time I stand in either a 'fourth position' or 'B+'. I start to 'tendu' and transfer my weight and do a 'temps lié' while I'm talking or I will cock my head round the door in an 'arabesque' and say "Come in please", and they all laugh. That is not deliberate. I'm not trying to be funny. It's just there (Timothy L655-661).

As other researchers have noted (Laird 2003), the dancers body is part of their ‘marketable identity’ and the previous observations perfectly illustrate the enduring strength of internalised identity capital and the way dancers use their physical capital. It also illustrates Bourdieu’s (1977) concept of ‘habitus’ and it’s resistance to change, even after a prolonged period of time.

An even more profound indication of the ‘ballet dancer’ identity being resistant to change is from a psychological source rather than physical. Resonating with the researcher’s memories, three of the interviewees experienced a sensation of ‘stepping into another person’s shoes’ during their second career while struggling to adopt an alternative persona. Timothy recalls returning as a Dance Officer for the Arts Council to the same theatre that he previously performed in:

I’m walking in, in a full suit with my prop of a suitcase, looking like a businessman. I completely used my characterisation and I didn’t realise that I was still performing. What I was doing in order to cope was to take on the character. I didn’t know how to be ‘myself’ at the Arts Council (Timothy L597-600).

This statement is reflective of the enduring ‘habitus’ described by Bourdieu. James felt that his identity capital as a dancer persisted unchanged for approximately seven years or so after retirement. He described himself during this period as ‘A complete fake’ (James L1052). Only

when he received an Olivier award for design did he feel accomplished enough to warrant his new identity (James L1059-1060).

'You're bullshitting. You're an ex-dancer who's trying to be a designer'. And not because I'm insecure. I think it's just because ballet gives you an experience of what it means to have skills that are so engrained into the existence of your body. I mean your instrument is not a violin that you can leave, It's your own body...It's in your DNA. It's in your atoms (James L1061-1064, L1078).

Referring back to the introduction, I frequently experienced these feelings of identity confusion, particularly in the early stages of flight training. Immersion in this radically different institutional culture of aviation, carrying a flight bag and wearing epaulets, I would frequently observe the other recruits and feel like an imposter in their world, as though I was leading a double life. Peter (L1228-1231) recalls a similar experience while at medical school, training to be a doctor: *"I was walking around with my white coat and laughing because I felt I had become a con. I am not really a doctor. What am I doing here? I'm a dancer and I've come from the stage to a ward full of people coughing and sneezing!"*.

He goes on to describe the weakening of his 'ballet identity' as he felt that he had entered a difficult period what he described as a social 'no man's land' or state of limbo (Peter 282):

I had all the muscle memory of moving, what it feels like to do certain steps, and then the five years at university were quite hard because I gradually lost that identity and I

felt like I was no one. I didn't have an identity. I wasn't a doctor, because I didn't know enough about medicine and I wasn't a dancer, because it has been too long since I had danced (Peter L1172-1176).

He later told me that these feelings will persist perhaps until he becomes fully qualified as a doctor (Peter L1437-1438). William, who like Timothy, retired from dance after a long career, still feels the embodiment and haunting presence of his 'dancer' identity despite a successful transition to running a floristry business with another ex-dancer in an affluent area of London:

I still go and watch from the wings sometimes, I can't resist. Even fifteen, sixteen years down the line, people come up to me, they hug me and say, 'Oh my god, we really miss you!' The other night I had ten people around me in a circle. So I still get a bit, you know. I can't believe I still have an identity within that world. It's amazing. It still draws me in. Some days it's a bit depressing. You think, 'Oh God. Those were the days!' (William L834-838).

This indicates the extent to which William misses the social aspect of the profession. Having been immersed and surrounded by such a rich, social environment, it could be argued that the sudden lack of interaction was like entering a personal void. He describes the day after the grand opening of the shop in which himself and his business partner were alone for the first time: “*'Oh my God, nobody else, just us'. That was really terrifying!*” (William L829-830). During this transitional period, it wasn't just an internal battle for William to come to terms

with losing his 'ballet identity', he also had to convince the general public who still perceived him as the charismatic performer: "*We've got a flower shop and no-one will know our history. We'll just be private. But of course, no!... People won't deal with my staff. No, we've got to have William and Mike. They're the ex-ballet dancers!*" (William L787-789). It seems that the public perception of ballet with its glamour and exclusivity (Wulff, 1998), was initially found disconcerting by William who would have preferred a clean break from his 'ballet' identity and to find success in business in his own right.

In contrast to William and Timothy, Simeon retired relatively early after only five years in a professional company. As a result it can be argued that he was less institutionalised and was freer psychologically to explore other career avenues after dance (Simeon L403-407). At the age of twenty-three he decided to: "Take the leap into the real world" (Simeon L404). On reflection he admits that he was young and naive, lacking direction and a clear plan but positive that he was making the correct choice (Simeon L480-482). However, although Simeon's transition appears less traumatic than those of Timothy or James, he still suffered the symptoms of physical and psychological withdrawal from the dance world and remaining indications of his 'ballet' identity. In addition to his frequent displays of physical 'habitus', pointing feet for example, he admitted instances of fantasy or déjà vu of his dance career: "*I sometimes have 'ballet dreams' which are really positive where I'm dancing and enjoying it. It takes a few minutes once I wake up to remember that I gave up*" (Simeon L773-774). Such instances of reverie are commonplace with ex-dancers and very often, even practicing professional dancers will admit to having 'ballet dreams' when absent from the profession through injury or away on a summer break.

In addition to these self-examining responses to questions regarding identity, there was also the presence of subtle but revealing nuances during the interviews themselves, which indicated the continuation of the interviewee's 'ballet' identity. When recounting their life experiences, Timothy (L405-407), Peter (L818) and Ralph (L561) inadvertently refer to their dance careers in the present tense, speaking as though they are still involved in the profession. Peter, who was interviewed in the very theatre in which he used to perform, admitted afterwards that he experienced an uncanny sensation of 'going back in time' in response to the smell of hairspray, wig glue and shellac.

Timothy, who experienced a particularly traumatic transition and who displayed signs of 'identity crisis' as described by Erickson (1968) and Côté and Levine (2002), finally gained a sense of psychological serenity and closure once he accepted that his 'dancer identity' would always remain a part of his sense of self:

It took me a long time after I left to stop saying 'I used to be a ballet dancer'. I had real trouble letting go...It is really hard because you are feeling like a non-person simply because you are no longer in the company...Almost immediately, the close bonds were suddenly gone. I felt like an outcast (Timothy L471-473, L476-477, L478-479). A psychologist once told me that I am a person who dances. I disagreed. I am a dancer and will always be one. When I accepted that and didn't need to try to be someone else or pretend it never happened, it was a major breakthrough... I remember

the big shift for me was when the head of DCD told me that the pain I was feeling was a reflection of how much I loved it. I just cried how I needed to (Timothy L782-785, L787-789).

As described by Laird (2003), it would seem apparent that Timothy experienced a large degree of alienation from ex-colleagues once he had stepped outside of the ‘ballet bubble’. Having been so involved in the ballet culture he found its sudden absence distressing and expressed difficulty in letting go of the company routine:

I still knew when the first technical rehearsals would start. I knew when the first night was and felt strange not being there. I remember when the company went on tour for the first time without me. I was already working with the Arts Council at the time. It was really hard. I actually called up the Director’s phone several times and got his answerphone at work. I was basically going to beg for my job back but then I would hang up (Timothy L690-695).

Taking into account all of these candid recollections and the ambivalent attitudes towards the profession, an almost irresistible question begged. Given the opportunity, would my interviewees return to dance in some capacity? *“I would, I would definitely, yeah, I would”* (Peter L1368). In a rare instance, one year after retirement, Peter was given the opportunity. While visiting friends and ex-colleagues, he decided to watch a performance. During the opening section, the dancer playing the role that Peter had previously performed, sprained his

ankle and was unable to continue. With no last minute understudy and the knowledge that Peter was sitting in the auditorium, the management invited him to rescue the performance, a task he willingly accepted. I inquired how this felt: *“Great. Fantastic. Yeah, yeah. I think even now, if I could do both (medicine and ballet), I would. That would make me really happy”* (Peter L1361). This comment is representative of retired dancers who miss the ‘high’ of performance and perhaps yearn for the opportunity to live the experience one more time.

In a similar instance as Peter, I was given such an opportunity to revisit the stage approximately nine months into my pilot training when a prominent member of the ballet staff retired from the profession. A Gala was held in his honour and I was invited to return to the UK to perform one of my favourite and reputed roles. The thrilling sensation of performing along with the warmth and response of the audience was unforgettable. Aside from the US economic downturn, this rare opportunity to rekindle my passion for performance, dancing alongside old friends and colleagues was probably the catalyst and instigator of my return to dance.

At the time when Ralph gave his interview, he was in the process of diligently laying the foundations of his new career and mirroring the researcher’s experience, his mind was too preoccupied to fully reflect on the life he was leaving behind and the possibility of a desire to return: *“I’ve kept myself so busy throughout the year, I haven’t had chance to stop and think. I think it will have a massive impact when I finally slow down and settle into where I live and what I’m doing. The penny might drop”* (Ralph L504-506). This comment turned out to be an extremely accurate prediction, as Ralph is now teaching ballet on a regular basis in his spare

time and is finding the experience both rewarding and fulfilling. During his career, Ralph would frequently exhibit a relatively unmoved attitude towards the profession, making this sudden reversal of career path even more significant.

I was eager to gain the interviewee's perspectives of why the ballet world can maintain a firm hold over its participants, long after their departure from the profession. Timothy explains:

There is something about it that other things will never match up to. There's a kind of magic. There is something about being a dancer I can't explain. It's the performing, spending most of your life on stage. There is something mysterious about that. Something almost spiritual. I think my identity is always going to be one of a dancer from the 'Ballet institution'. I've accepted that (Timothy L633-637).

In addition to the exclusivity of the profession as described by Aalten (2005) and Khudaverdian (2006), James (L1512-1515) believes that the purity and integrity of the art form itself is responsible for enticing people to remain practitioners: *"Today in a world where even if you can't sing, you can become a pop star. Even if you look horrendous, you can become a top model. You can't bullshit ballet. You can transcend it as an artist but you'll remain with the feet you have"*.

One inevitable truth that every dancer must come to terms with is the reality of career mortality. The interviewees, including Ralph, agreed that the key to a smooth and successful transition is preparation in anticipation of retirement: *"You can't think, 'I'm going to leave the*

ballet and next month I'm going to be a plastic surgeon'. That is not going to happen" (Ralph L614-615).

Timothy had very practical ideas about diminishing the anxiety of dancers approaching retirement. In reference to a dancer's 'trained incapacity' (Goffman, 1961), he recommends that a dancer should take advantage of their theatrical surroundings and learn about the workings of a ballet organisation from a broader perspective. This would help to enhance their appreciation of the art form in addition to educating and possibly equipping them with more transferable skills. He explains:

I think that dancers can contribute a lot more than just the artistic policy and it gives them a chance within that bubble to try out some new things. Why not shadow marketing department for a day? Find out what is going on in finance. Find out how the orchestra is managed. You then have a broader awareness of the world that you are in, and it is right next door to you. There's that fear of coming out of a bubble. It's a comfort zone but it's also a restriction zone. If you just take little steps now and then outside of that zone, it expands and expands and without you even realising it and you end up with more transferable skills (Timothy L763-770).

Transferable skills acquired by ballet dancers generally consist of intangible assets as defined by Côté & Schwartz (2002). Timothy outlines some of these skills which he observed in the dance world and they include commitment, reliability and self-reflection (Timothy L773-

781). He believes that immersion into other departments within the organisation would enhance these skills, while equipping the dancer with tangible knowledge and practical experience which is attractive to many organisations. Simeon also expressed a need for these internal 'shadowing' opportunities within ballet companies: *"It would be a great idea and something should be on offer. It would have to be on a voluntary basis though. If someone is not interested there's no point"* (Simeon L816-817).

As a result of the time, dedication and sacrifice required to be a dancer, preparation for another career can often be delayed or even denied altogether until it is too late. James believes this could be because some dancers are fearful of this inevitable, critical junction in their lives and prefer to disregard its existence:

It's a bit like thinking about death when you're alive. There's something really vivacious about dancing. It's a live art form. It's life practice and it's every day. So it's hard to pre-empt what you are going to do in ten years time because you will know once you're there. Plus it's hard to come to terms with. I think a lot of dancers prefer to bury their heads in the sand (James L1088-1093).

James was not the only person who used a metaphor of death as analogy to retirement from the ballet world. The year that Timothy retired from dance, he unfortunately lost his father. As found in the sport literature (Wylleman, Alfermann and Lavallee (2004), he spoke of the similar sense of loss and bereavement felt in both situations:

I recognised as I started to come to terms with both of those experiences, how similar they were in terms of how they made me feel. Grief plays tricks on you. They made me feel sick. You start crying when you least expect it. You laugh when perhaps you shouldn't be laughing because your emotions are everywhere... You never get over it, but the acute pain turns into more of a dull ache and you just live with it (Timothy L581-584, L586-587).

Having examined these extremely personal, candid and revealing passages, it can be concluded that the transition from life as a performer is an event of considerable impact and laden with emotions. This life-changing process raises many psychological issues which are managed in diverse ways. Strategies range from immediate and total immersion into another career, expanding skills and knowledge in preparation for a second career, to more negative strategies such as complete denial and in extreme circumstances, drug abuse and even self-harm. All of the interviewees, regardless of age, nationality, career duration or time spent away from the profession, have experienced to some degree, the various issues outlined in the literature review. Although a lot of the accounts depict this transition as an extremely traumatic and anti-climactic period, one particular passage from Simeon pays testament to the notion 'Tis better to have loved and lost, than never to have loved at all' (Tennyson, 1849). His words offer encouragement and determination as well as a reflection of gratitude and appreciation for a life experienced by so few:

The transition can be tough and scary but no one can avoid change in their lives, so you have to grab it by the horns and steer it in the direction you want to go. I don't regret a minute of time I spent training and working as a dancer. I think it shaped me and gave me experiences most people only dream about (Simeon L837-841)

5. Conclusion

5.1. Key Emergent Ideas

Although each subject faced slightly different experiences and psychological stresses, it seems apparent that the collective institutional experience across the three life stages had an influential impact on identity formation with enduring effect. The interviewees' recollections of their vocational training reflected Goffman's definition of a 'Total Institution' in terms of institutional culture, social dynamics and discipline. Most participants however, regarded this discipline and regimented training as necessary to produce elite ballet dancers. The segregation and social distance between dancers and management enforced by this discipline, had been experienced by all participants, who identified strong social cohesion amongst dancers which continued throughout professional life. In addition to the experience and thrill of performance, it was this reliance on professional socialisation which the participants found absent from their lives after retirement. There are indicators that the longer an individual stays within a ballet company, the more profound the psychological challenges, even by those who actively prepare for life after dance.

Those participants who, like the researcher, experienced relatively straightforward career transitions with clear objectives, still experienced elements of withdrawal and nostalgia for a life which had encapsulated their identity. These sentiments persisted notwithstanding the time spent absent from the profession and all participants expressed a longing to return to the dance world in some capacity.

Although aware of the positive, personal qualities which they had acquired throughout their careers, and in most cases, recognition of marketable skills, the participants agreed that the closed nature of the ballet world had inhibited them in reaching out into other areas of social and professional life, resulting in a lack of confidence and dependence on the institution. They expressed not only a need for greater empathy and understanding on the part of management when actively preparing for life after dance, but for the provision of voluntary workshops or shadowing opportunities to those eager to gain knowledge of the theatrical world as a whole and to acquire further transferable skills.

5.2. **Strengths and Weaknesses**

As discussed (see p.37-38), insider research can sometimes be viewed as detrimental to the acquisition of insightful data for a study. In this case however, it was instrumental in obtaining access to the profession, gaining the trust of the participants and facilitating open and candid discussion. It allowed the researcher to gather rich, in-depth data that was vividly detailed, producing both revealing and practical insights. The one downside to such in-depth research is the inevitable small sample. Due to time constraints it is a matter of regret that a larger sample could not be obtained.

5.3. Recommendations

Placing the participants' personal experiences in the context of the research literature, it can be argued that ballet education and training within the ballet world is primarily transmissionist rather than transformative. The premise and emphasis of most ballet schools and companies is to convey a transmission of traditional ideas, culture and ethos, in order to perpetuate and ensure the survival of existing knowledge, practices, technique and repertory for generations to come. This self-perpetuating process which creates in its own mirror image is extremely effective to preserve heritage but can also be detrimental to the development and progression of creativity, forward thinking and change. As described by the participants, when accepted into a ballet training institution, the student is shaped and moulded to the physical and technical ideals of the institution, with expressive individuality ignored or even discouraged. This process, often described as 'cloning' can produce a perfectly proportioned line of corps de ballet in which to replicate the traditional classics such as 'Swan Lake', but does not allow for individual creativity and artistry which of course, is an essential quality of a star performer. It is the writer's opinion that the development of artistic capacity needs to be nurtured as well as technical capabilities.

It is my recommendation that institutions recognise a healthy balance between the transmission of culture and the transformation of people through education. There needs to be a greater emphasis on producing independent, multi-skilled workers in order to diminish the more negative institutional and incapacity training characteristics prevalent in the profession. I would encourage dancers to actively develop outside interests and influences in order to

develop unique personalities and identities. That way they can inject these expressive qualities into their work, offering unique interpretations rather than a reproduction of previous performers. As a result, the profession would benefit greatly as a performing art without compromising the production of classical dancers at the highest level. Most importantly, it would produce well-rounded creative and multi-faceted individuals, eager to explore and utilise their skills in various capacities, long after their careers on the stage have ended. I also recommend that ballet companies introduce and implement policies which actively utilise the skills of dancers in other areas of the profession.

5.4. **Ideas for Further Research**

Given the time constraints for the study, in addition to the aforementioned sampling difficulty and limitations, I was only able to target a limited number of participants who were also connected to the researcher by professional association. It would be interesting to broaden the scope and target individuals from further afield to make comparison between institutions on a global level. It would also make a worthwhile study to discover if performers from other dance forms, musical theatre or freelance performers for example, experience the same identity issues as those targeted in this study. As previously mentioned, a similar study with female dancers would make an interesting comparison and offer many additional insights and perspectives. Throughout the research, many of the recollections of institutional training practices have been defamatory in nature, depicting life more than fifteen years previous to the study. A study to determine if current ballet education and training practices have

improved, evolved and progressed from those described, would also make a worthwhile piece of research.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A.

Introduction to Participants

NAME	AGE AT TIME OF STUDY	YRS SPENT IN TRAINING INSTITUTION	YRS SPENT IN PROFESSIONAL COMPANY	AGE AT RETIREMENT	2 nd CAREER AT THE TIME OF STUDY	YRS SINCE RETIREMENT	CURRENT SITUATION
RALPH	26	7	7	25	Quantity Surveyor	1	Quantity Surveyor + Part-time Dance Teacher
PETER	31	7	5	23	Medical Student	8	Medical Doctor
SIMEON	35	7	5	23	Marketing for Beauty Products	12	Marketing for Beauty Products
TIMOTHY	38	6	15	32	Dance Officer for Arts Council	6	Youth Dance Strategist for Dance Exchange
JAMES	40	6	10	27	Costume and Set Designer	13	Costume and Set Designer
WILLIAM	53	7	17	36	Florist	17	Florist
THE AUTHOR/ RESEARCHER	35	7	14	31	Commercial Pilot Trainee	1	Principal dancer + Part-time Dance Teacher

APPENDIX B.

Sample Questions to Consider

- 1a. How did you feel leaving home at such a young age and training full time in a vocational school?
- 1b. Do you think spending many years in an institution had an influence over your identity as a person?

- 2a. Could you describe some of the positive aspects of working in a professional ballet company?
- 2b. What about the negatives?

- 3a. How did you regard yourself being part of such an unusual profession in comparison to other jobs?
- 3b. How do you think other people regarded you?

4. Can you describe the relationships you formed with colleagues and staff in the company?

5. What influenced your decision to retire from the profession? How did you feel as you approached retirement? Did you have any concerns?

- 6a. Do you miss anything about life as a dancer?
- 6b. Is there anything you really do not miss?

7. Did you acquire any skills that have been useful in your new career since leaving the ballet?

8. Do you still feel like a dancer? If not, how long did it take for you to move on and develop a new identity?

9. Can you think of any ways in which dancers could be helped to move on after being a dancer?

APPENDIX C.

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

My name is Robert Parker. I am conducting research for my Mphil degree in Education at the University of Birmingham.

The title of my research is 'An investigation into the identity issues faced by male ballet dancers upon retirement from the dance profession'. The main focus of my study will be based around the subject of identity and the various aspects of the dance profession which contribute to its formation. I would like to gain insight into this complex subject by listening to the accounts of several retired male dancers and comparing them to my own first-hand experiences. Participants will be encouraged to talk freely about their experiences of the training, professional career as well as the transitional phase to life after dance. Interviews will be approximately sixty minutes duration.

Anyone who takes part in the study will have their identity kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms, and all data will be kept confidential during the study. Participants are free to withdraw from the study at any time up until the work is submitted for publication. This can be done by using the contact details below.

Phone: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

University of Birmingham: Project supervisor: Prof. Tansin Benn. Email:

[REDACTED]

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I _____ give consent to participate in this study, investigating the issues faced by male ballet dancers on retirement. I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time and that my personal details will be kept anonymous and pseudonyms will be used. I have read the participant information sheet and have an understanding of what the study is about.

Signed _____ Date _____

Witnessed by: _____ Date _____

APPENDIX D.

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

How did you feel leaving home at such a young age and training full time in a vocational school? Do you think spending many years in an institution had an influence over your identity as a person?

What was it like leaving home at a young age?

Homesickness?

Did you feel disconnected or cut-off from home life?

When was the first time you went home?

How often were you able to return home?

Did you feel like you were being moulded by the establishment?

Describe the treatment from staff and discipline received?

How long to adjust to your new environment?

Did you or your relationships with family or old friends change?

Describe the friendships formed with fellow cohorts.

Did you ever rebel?

How was your personality influenced by the training? Did it shape your identity?

What did it prepare you for? Skills it gave you?

What were your experiences like at the Upper School? Differences?

Do you think your personality changed or developed? Reasons?

Company life. First instincts?

Can you describe the relationships between company members and staff?

Did you feel that your career path was determined by the management?

In what ways did you find relief from their control?

And what about relationships with your colleagues in the company?

Would you describe your relationships different to those you have now?

Could you describe some of the positive and negative aspects of working in a professional ballet company?

Did you have to make any sacrifices?

Did you have chance to pursue other interests?

How did you perceive yourself as a ballet dancer and how do you think other people perceived you?

Were you made to feel special by those around you?

Did you feel you belonged to an exclusive profession?

What were the circumstances which led to your retirement from the profession? How did you feel leading up to your retirement? Did you have any concerns?

Did you feel prepared?

Did you want to retire? Were you fulfilled in your career?

Was it hard to relate to people on the outside?

What do you miss most about life as a dancer? What do you not miss?

What skills did you obtain from the ballet world that were transferable to your new career?

Do you still feel like a dancer? If not, how much time had passed until you felt the presence of your new identity?

When people ask what you do?

Can you think of anything missing that could be put in place to aid the transition from life as a dancer?

Did you feel that your long career in dance had made you 'blinkered' in any way?

Does the closed nature of the Ballet world inhibit dancers in reaching out into other areas?

APPENDIX E.

Reasons for not using the Open-Ended Questionnaire

For the questionnaire, I used exactly the same sampling criteria as for the interview. The aim of issuing the questionnaires was to target a larger sample of the desired population (Oppenheim, 1992; Grix, 2004; Robson, 2002 et al). Even though the questionnaires would be qualitative in nature, and numerical data collection would not be the objective, a larger sample group would give a more comprehensive overview of the experiences of retired male ballet dancers. My intention was to identify forty or fifty individuals who fell into the required categories. I soon discovered that this was easier said than done. First of all, it is impossible to determine if an individual has spent a minimum of five years in a training institution followed by a minimum of five years in a single professional company unless the individual themselves offer you this information directly. Even though the ballet world is relatively small, the career paths of dancers often take numerous twists and turns, placing them in several locations around the world. I imagined the logistical implications of contacting every major vocational training organisation followed by every major classical ballet company in the world to obtain a list of individuals who trained and worked for a minimum of five years. Following this, I would need a way of identifying which of this group have retired from dance, left their contact details behind and had the courtesy of updating those details whenever they moved house or changed mobile phone number. As a last resort, I contacted the Dancer's Career Development which was set up in 1974 and offers a trust fund for the purpose of retraining dancers. This is available to any candidate that has danced professionally in the UK for eight years or longer and has been a member of a British arts council funded dance company for at least five of those years. They informed me that they only held information on individual's

professional careers and not on training. In addition to this I was informed that even if the contact details for all those individuals were current and up to date, it was against company policy to divulge the information. As a result, the only method of identifying the required individuals is by association through either myself or a colleague. To date, I have only identified twelve individuals who fit all criteria and who's contact details I have access to. Taking into account these recruitment problems and the inevitable sample size, it seems that interviewing every participant would be a feasible option, making the use of questionnaires impracticable and unnecessary.

APPENDIX F.

List of Themes & Sub-Themes with Analysis Codes

Theme 1: Life in a Training Institution

- AP Admission Procedures
- MP Mortification Procedures
- DR Deference Requirements
- OD Opinion towards Discipline
- EE Enduring Effects
- R Rebellion

Theme 2: Life in a Ballet Company

- P Performance (Experience of 'Flow')
- EX Feelings of Exclusivity
- CAM Cameraderie
- DR Dancer Relations
- MR Management Relations
- IR 'Incestuous' Relations
- TI 'Trained Incapacity'

Theme 3: Life after Dance

- PI Psychological Issues
- PHI Physical Issues
- ID Identity Issues
- LOI Level of Institutionalisation
- TS Transferable Skills
- CS Coping Strategies
- ET Ideas for an Easier Transition

APPENDIX G.

[Not available in the digital version of this thesis]

APPENDIX H.

[Not available in the digital version of this thesis]

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