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"Moving for Pleasure": The Positive Experiences of Women in Contemporary Dance

by

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For my family, with love.

Abstract

My purpose in this research was to examine women contemporary dancers' positive experiences. While previous research in women's dance experiences exit, it tends to focus on the negative outcomes of dance participation. Using a phenomenologically inspired approach I sought to answer the following the research questions: (a) What dance training experiences are interpreted as positive experiences by continuing contemporary dancers?; (b) How do dancers overcome challenges in dance training?; and (c) How do dancers think others may be encouraged to continue dance? I interviewed 8 dancers from a university-based contemporary dance group to discover that they defined their dance experiences as mainly positive and believed dance to be beneficial to their lifestyles. These experiences were connected to three main themes: positive physical experiences in dance, positive experiences related to dance identity, and the recreational dance environment.

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Introduction

Today, Canadian adults are estimated to be insufficiently active to acquire the health benefits of a physically active lifestyle; such as reduced risk of cardiovascular disease, reduced anxiety and depression, and healthy body weight (Colley et al., 2011a). Compared to men, Canadian women accumulate even less moderate-vigorous physical activity (Colley et al., 2011a). Among females, the most dramatic decreases in sport participation and physical activity occur during girls' adolescence but physical activity levels for women continue to drop as they age (Butt, Weinberg, Breckon, & Claytor, 2011; Colley et al., 2011a; Colley et al., 2011b). The experiences of women who have been continually active through adolescence into adulthood can provide insight into women's physical activity preferences and how women engage in physically active lifestyles. By investigating dance, a field of physical activity that is dominated by female participation throughout the age groups, research can uncover the unique aspects of that environment and explore the individual experiences of many female participants. The purpose of this research is to uncover positive experiences of dance by those women continuing in contemporary dance training.

I have entered the field of dance research in the pursuit of exploring the positive experiences of dance training because my personal experiences in dance have fueled my continued involvement in the dance world and passion for physical activity and art. My involvement in the dance community includes experiences training and performing with a competitive studio, traditional ballet school, and university student dance company. I also have experience teaching

dance to both young children and adult novice dancers. I have taken away positive and valuable experiences from each form of dance involvement including social, emotional, fitness and wellness gains. The dance community is a large part of my social circle and dance training has been the source of many important friendships and role models in my life. While dance provides physical activity through participation, I have pursued other physical activities and conditioning because I was interested in how these fitness gains could benefit my dancing. While growing up, dance training was an important positive influence on my self-esteem, confidence, and enjoyment in physical activity. In my adolescence, many of my best memories were created at dance classes and events which fueled my passion for continuing dance in the future. Now as an instructor, I hope to help create and be a part of positive experiences and memories for my own dance students. My participation in dance has positively influenced my life and my positive experiences in dance training have kept me dancing from age 5, through adolescence and university to the present.

Prior to university, I danced at a competitive dance studio where I took classes and performed and more traditional ballet school. The competitive studio has a focus on producing multiple performance pieces for each dance group as well as solo pieces for individual dancers that are performed at many different competitions in a season. In this way, competitive dance has much in common with aesthetic sports such as gymnastics or cheerleading while also incorporating the art and technique involved in dance education. I also trained at a ballet school in my adolescence that had a focus on the skill, aesthetics, and tradition of ballet.

This school was more formal than the competitive studio, adhering to a set curriculum and classes divided into different grades based on skill level. A dress code and behavioural expectations were based on traditional ballet etiquette. This school also included a professional track of classes for students who aimed to become professional dancers, who would take ballet exams from nationally recognized examiners in order to advance grades. My experiences dancing at both the school and studio included stresses related to competition and expectations and the demands I placed on myself for improvement. In addition, however, my positive experiences of dance include a love for challenge, learning new things, the thrill of performance, the music, movement, and physical feeling of dancing.

The positive experiences I had in my dance training and my love of dance drove me to pursue options for dance while I attended university. Beyond high school, there are considerably less options for trained dancers as most classes offered are for either the professional or novice adult dancer. Ballet classes for adults are especially rare and the competitive system is targeted at dancers who are school aged, grades 1 through 12. However, for the experienced dancer, modern and contemporary dance groups can provide classes that are appropriate for a skilled dancer not seeking involvement in professional dance. At my university, I joined the advanced group of the modern and contemporary student dance company and found myself in the company of talented dancers similarly seeking a way to continue their dance training and involvement in the dance world while pursuing their university education or career. The women in this contemporary dance group have diverse interests, careers, and academic pursuits

but some also have a wealth of dance experience and training and a love of dance that has kept them involved throughout the years.

The majority of participants in dance training are female (Emery, Meeuwise, & McAllister, 2006). However it is not as well known that dance training provides moderate to vigorous physical activity, and is therefore a valuable part of a physically active lifestyle for many women and girls (O'Neill, Pate, & Beets, 2012). With so many women involved in dance throughout the age groups, what makes many female dancers exceptional to the drop-out that plagues many women and girls' physical activities? Dance may be considered a form of physical activity that incorporates elements of choreography, performing arts, and personal expression. These aspects that set dance training apart from sport or exercise may be the very aspects that are enjoyed by so many women and girls. Although the reasons for choosing dance may differ between dancers, individuals with a greater perception of positive experiences in dance training than negative seem to continue their training (Pickard & Bailey, 2009). In order to glimpse the positive experiences of female dancers, I have investigated the personal experiences of continuing contemporary dancers involved in dance at university. Many contemporary dancers in university dance groups have years of previous dance experience and are highly skilled technicians still seeking to learn and improve their dance ability.

By exploring the individual dance experiences of committed contemporary dancers in a university student company with significant previous training, I believe it is possible to gain insight into the experiences that inspire continued

involvement in dance. With significant previous training, participants had a wealth of dance related experiences on which to reflect as well as evidence of commitment to pursuing dance training. The purpose of this research is to uncover the positive experiences of dance by those women continuing in contemporary dance training.

Dancers' experiences make a valuable contribution to research in the fields of art, education, and physical activity due to the wide-ranging nature of dance participation. Long time dancers exemplify discipline and engagement with an activity (Kolb & Kalogeropoulou, 2012); these individuals are physically, emotionally, and mentally involved in dance participation. The experiences of continuing contemporary female dancers can shed light on how we can inspire and create physical activity for women and girls. Detailing the dancers' positive experiences can help us understand why they continue to dance year after year. A sentiment that echoes through the dance community is that dance is a passion and a calling; a dancer is driven to dance. Many dancers and choreographers have spoken to the existence of a need to dance rather than a desire to dance. This bond with dance training can exert meaningful positive and negative influences on dancers. However, I believe it is the positive experiences of dance training that both satisfies the need to dance and keep dancers returning for more. Merce Cunnignham, an influential and renowned modern dancer and choreographer said,

> You have to love dancing to stick to it. It gives you nothing back, no manuscripts to store away, no paintings to show on walls and maybe hang

> in museums, no poems to be printed and sold, nothing but that single fleeting moment when you feel alive. (2009, p.150).

I believe that those fleeting moments of emotion and positive experiences in dance training can cement a relationship with dance that can keep dancers active throughout their lives.

To examine women contemporary dancers' positive experiences, I first provide a review of the previous literature on dance experiences. In this review, I have compiled the research on experiences from the field of dance studies and will illustrate how the literature focuses negative experiences of dance and the professional and balletic experiences. I will identify the need for further research in the area of positive experiences and the experiences of recreational, contemporary dancers. My examination of the previous literature forms my research questions and provides the direction for my methodology. In methodology, I will present my phenomenologically inspired approach to the qualitative interview based research that I undertook. In this section I will outline my interview methods, participants and recruitment, and ethical considerations of this study. Then my interview data will be presented through the results section where I will discuss the important themes that emerged through my analysis. This section will contain verbatim quotations from the dancers and discussion of how these responses illuminate the topics of positive experiences in dance related to the body, identity, and the dance environment. Finally, the conclusion draws from the prominent themes uncovered by my interviews to answer the research questions I have presented. In this section I will also address any limitations of

this study and the directions that I hope will be pursued by dance studies research on dancers' experiences in the future.

Literature Review

The majority of the literature presented in this review is from the field of dance studies that encompasses multiple approaches and methodologies to researching dance. A large part of this research focuses on the culture of dance and experiences of the dancers involved in this culture. Much of the dance studies research is qualitative. This research is central to my work as I also undertook a qualitative research project. However, dance can also be the focus of psychological, physical activity, and educational research and results from these studies will also be discussed when relevant to the purpose of this study.

Dance as an art form encompasses multiple disciplines ranging from social dance and dance sport to ballet and contemporary dance. In my literature review I focus on previous research regarding ballet and modern dance because these two genres are among the most commonly practiced by trained dancers. A vast majority of this research explores ballet, which differs from contemporary dance in several ways. This is similar to the differences that exist between different sports. Concerning dance training, ballet movements differ from modern or contemporary dance and thus, ballet culture generally has more aesthetic and body shape requirements. This can result in very different classroom environments between the two dance forms. Contemporary dance is often considered more progressive in its choreography and its approach to dance education. While ballet classrooms are steeped in traditional methods and

practices, contemporary dance settings seek newer approaches to dance such as collaborative classrooms and improvisation techniques.

In this literature review, I will first discuss the research pertaining to negative experiences in dance and the imbalance between negative and positive representations of dance experience. I will then discuss the research pertaining to the positive experiences and enjoyment of dance training. With this literature review, I will identify a need for research with the purpose of investigating the positive experiences of dance by women who continue to train through contemporary dance.

Negative Experiences in Dance Training

Exploring positive experiences in dance training can provide valuable insight into the world of dance and why so many dancers return year after year to the dance classroom. However, the majority of research I have encountered on dancers' experiences focuses on the negative and even harmful experiences associated with dance participation. Through an overview of the current dance literature, I understand negative experiences to be subjective experiences that can be interpreted to be physically, psychologically, or emotionally detrimental. These experiences include disordered eating behaviours and attitudes, maladaptive perfectionism, anxiety, injury, and the perpetuation of female stereotypes (Aalten, 2005; de Bruin, Bakker, & Oudejans, 2009; Gray & Kunkel, 2001; Green, 2001; Nordin-Bates, Walker, & Redding, 2011; Penniment & Egan, 2010; Thomas & Tarr, 2009; Walker & Nordin-Bates, 2010). However, the negative experiences had by dancers are not their sole experience of dance. Additionally, a majority of

the research on negative experiences has been on ballet culture where issues of physical health, educational philosophies, and feminist implications of the art form have been noted concerns (Kolb & Kalogeropoulou, 2012). As Pickard and Bailey (2009) observed, "the world of an elite dancer is a tough environment fraught with potential rejection, prejudice and injury. Those involved in ballet education and training seek to prepare the young people for negative experiences" (p. 168). The wide range of dance experiences may hold both positive and negative for a dancer. Fisher (2007) articulates a reoccurring theme of the dual nature of ballerinas; their positive and negative experiences and ballet's wide ranging influence on lives. In the previous literature, however, the negative experiences are at the forefront of the research and the main types of negative experiences will be discussed in the following subsections.

Negative physical experiences of dance. Dance participation is a physical undertaking and as such, many dancers' experiences of training involve how their bodies move and how they physically relate to dance. Much of the existing research focuses on the negative experiences related to the body in dance, particularly ballet participation. For example, body image disturbances and experiences of eating disorders are often detailed in dance research.

Dancers' personalities have been found interact with their dance environments to create perceptions that can increase risk for eating disorders in quantitative studies that have a focus on dancer psychology (de Bruin, Bakker, & Oudejans, 2009, Nordin-Bates, Walker, & Redding, 2011; Penniment & Egan, 2010). Nordin-Bates, Walker, and Redding (2011) investigated perfectionism in

contemporary and ballet dancers related to eating disorders, finding that dancers who exhibited negative variables of perfectionism were more likely to incur low self-esteem and eating disorders. Penniment and Egan (2010) found that learning experiences in the classroom may contribute to the development of eating disorders in female dancers. Thinness related learning and perceived thinness and restriction expectations interact with the personality of the dancer to influence their susceptibility to eating disorders. Perfectionist dancers being more likely to value thinness and restriction and perceive more occurrences of thinness related learning and thus be at greater risk for eating disorders (Penniment & Egan, 2010). This evidence along with the findings on body image begins to demonstrate the complexity of body related experiences in dance.

Dance studies researchers have found that issues of body dissatisfaction and body image can have adverse effects on dancers' enjoyment of dance. In their qualitative study, Benn and Walters (2001) found that female ballet students and professional ballet dancers lacked in the understanding of risks of poor nutrition and undertook disturbed eating practices in an attempt to manage weight. Participants' learning experiences in dance class were found to include the image of an ideal ballet body (a thin silhouette with long limbs and no curves) and rewards for slenderness (Benn & Walters, 2001). The professional ballet dancers perceived these aspects as the pressure that made them engage in eating disordered behaviour and unhealthy practices in pursuit of thinness.

Alexias and Dimitropoulou (2011) in an interview study from the phenomenological perspective found 16 out of 20 female participants from

professional ballet were unsatisfied with their body appearance in the mirror. Dancers' subjective perceptions of their abilities, emotional experiences, social factors, and the idealized body in the dance class influenced their body image (Alexias & Dimitropoulou, 2011). These dancers experienced changes in the way they were treated in class when the morphology of their bodies changed. The perception of their treatment by others in the dance class as contingent on body appearance was interpreted as a negative experience of ballet dancers. Professional ballet dancers' experience in dance training may include memories of body surveillance (Dryburgh & Fortin, 2010) in which they were being looked at by the others in the group and those in positions of authority. These women primarily reported weight and body issues related to surveillance when interviewed. Weight surveillance in their dance training was accompanied by negative emotional responses and painful memories (Dryburgh & Fortin, 2010).

Body image problems, eating disorders and related behaviours are, indeed, common among dancers due to the pressures of obtaining the idealized dancing body shape. This thin silhouette is most sought after in the genre of ballet where body shape can influence a dancer's likelihood of success in the professional world. Correspondingly, most of the studies on body image disturbances and eating disorders regard ballet and professional dance. However, I am seeking out the experiences of contemporary dancers and this group's perceptions of ideal dance body aesthetics can differ from those of traditional ballet. Thus, experiences pertaining to body image and thinness related behaviour may differ between ballet dancers and contemporary dancers. The physical experience of

being injured, however, is experienced by dancers in any genre, just as injury is a potential occurrence for an athlete in any sport.

The body of the dancer can also be subject to experiences of pain and injury throughout their training. Dance training has been described as a system exerting pain and struggle in order to influence dancers (Jackson, 2005). Aalten (2005) discovered that in ballet culture a body in pain is an obstacle to be overcome and dancers will work through pain and injury, risking long term physical damage, rather than stop dancing. Some female ballet dancers expressed that they felt that they were not in a position to take time for pain and injury; that if they did take time for injury they would lose standing or employment in the company. In interviews by Alexias and Dimitropoulou (2011) 18 of 20 professional female ballet dancers reported taking dance class while injured and experiencing pain as a constant experience. Professional dancers considered injuries and occurrences of pain as necessary evils (Alexias & Dimitropoulou, 2011). This acceptance also extends to ballet dancers in training, where pain and suffering, both physical and emotional, is thought to be part of the process of creating a ballet identity (Pickard, 2011). Again most of studies have focused on ballet injuries, but in their study, a group of 204 modern and contemporary dancers, Thomas and Tarr (2009) reported 90% of participants were previously in pain and injured and 34% of this group reported current injuries.

From a phenomenological perspective, Turner and Wainwright (2003), Wainwright and Turner (2004) and Aalten (2004) found that the ballet dancers often ignored their injury and physical suffering, believed pain to an accepted part

of ballet, and believed further that pain is the result of overcoming physical challenges of dance on their bodies. Aalten found that dancers had contradictory experiences including unhealthy physical occurrences but also successes and physical excellence. These dancers' embodied experiences were composed of physicality, emotionality, and willpower and are difficult to bring into words as they are not a textual but embodied (Aalten, 2004). Thus, she suggested that phenomenological researchers must proceed with the acknowledgement of dancing as form of knowledge and experience that foremost exists and is represented physically.

Internalization of dance culture. Research on dance experiences also notes the negative effect of perceived aesthetic and technical standards of dance culture can have on the dancer. In dance culture and media, dancers, especially high achieving ones, are considered perfectionists and are often represented as such. Negative or maladaptive perfectionism traits are noted as prevalent in the ballet and elite dance population (de Bruin et al., 2009; Nordin-Bates, Cumming, Aways, & Sharp, 2011; van Staden, Myburgh, & Poggenpoel, 2009). In psychological research, among female elite dancers, higher perfectionism and lower self-esteem was reported than in their similar athlete peers (de Bruin et al., 2009). Nordin-Bates, Cumming, Aways, and Sharp (2011) found the majority of classical ballet and contemporary dance students exhibited debilitative traits including negative perfectionistic tendencies as well as low self-esteem, anxiety, and high self-evaluation. Professional female ballet dancers also exhibit these psychological traits. In dance medicine research, Van Staden et al.'s interviews

with professional ballet dancers revealed contingent self-worth related to dance ability, unrealistic personal standards, compulsive striving, defensiveness, and feeling lack of support. In their qualitative study, Bond and Stinson (2007) found that young people's experiences in dance training, including both ballet and contemporary forms, themes of fear, embarrassment, feelings of inferiority, and disengagement emerged in some students' responses. In addition, the dancer's (negative) body experiences have been shown to relate strongly to their identity construction. Dancers may undertake their bodies as an aesthetic project, working to form their bodies in the image of the ideal dance bodies, closely associate their bodies with their identities. A rejection of the body is a rejection of themselves which can be traumatic. In her qualitative study of ballet dancers, Pickard (2012) encountered themes of loss of identity, dependence on dance for identity, the body closely relating to self, sacrifice, and rejection.

The majority of this research is on ballet, but the aspects of negative perfectionism, dependence on dance for identity, and experiencing the rejection of the self can be fostered in contemporary dance culture as well. Bond and Stinson (2007) as well as Nordin-Bates et al. (2011) discovered these trends among dancers of mixed disciplines and contemporary dancers. Perfectionism, identity, and rejection related experiences appear as occurrences in both ballet and contemporary dance, perhaps as elements of the wider dance culture stemming from the shared characteristics of different styles of dance training. For example, dancing from a very young age, excluding other activities in order to dance, and idealizing the characteristics of famous dancers are aspects of dance culture that

may be undertaken by both ballet dancers and contemporary dancers alike. Several researchers have aimed to analyze the features of wider dance culture that are internalized by dancers of various genres (Alter, 1997; Bond & Stinson, 2007; Bracey, 2004; Dyer, 2010; Nordin-Bates et al., 2011). It is established that the internalization of these aspects of dance culture have resulted in negative experiences for many dancers. Thus, many dance studies researchers have examined the power relations and systems at work that keep these expectations in motion across dance culture.

Dance studies research on dance experiences often critiques the dance system, focusing on the power dynamics of dance and, most often, ballet. Dealing with issues of power, Benn and Walters (2001) combined Foucault and a self-described both interpretive and critical paradigm to examine the authoritarian nature of ballet as a source of negative experiences. According to Benn and Walters, dance instructors, directors, and choreographers have ultimate authority over a dancer and use their power to transmit ideas of the ideal physique, culture specific phenomena, and gender relations. These ideas are enforced through selection procedures for professional dancers. Also from a Foucaultian perspective, Drybough and Fortin (2010) described the dancer in an oppressive situation under the surveillance of authority positions (e.g. teachers, choreographers, directors) in ballet culture. They were interpreted as harmful to psychological health due the systematic objectification of dancers and damage to their autonomy. Gray and Kunkel (2001) used grounded theory to investigate power dynamics of ballet culture and concluded that, in this culture, the authority

(executives and dance professionals of ballet companies) exerts great control over the dancer and makes them subject to company rules and demands in order to succeed. Green (2001) used social construction to note that dance education creates docile and obedient students. In her study, themes of authority and power relationships emerged as a major themes in female dance students' interviews. The dance teacher was seen as a position of authority, having the ultimate power in the dance classroom and the dancer having little power or influence in their own dance education. Similarly, Pickard (2012) employed Bourdieu's ideas of habitus and physical capital to describe the need of ballet dancers to please the teacher, to pursue perfection, and create a ballet body as their embodiment of ballet. Pickard outlined that the sacrifices made by the dancers were normalized through their schooling and the art of ballet but not fully autonomous actions of the dancers. In her action research, Dyer (2010) reported dance students relying on the approval and judgments of authority figures in order to measure their own accomplishments and progress. Students identified how their training conflicted with their own values and beliefs, but they did not challenge this in the classroom.

But what of the dancer's personal experience of enjoyment and desire to dance? Indeed, dancers return year after year, whether professionally or recreationally, to the dance classroom despite the 'authoritarian' culture. In her qualitative phenomenological study, Alter (1997) gathered that the dancers who are motivated to dance, expressed positive attitudes about their devotion to dance. They expressed a passion and deep love of dance. These dancers also believed that the influence of years of dance on their personalities had been positive and

even beneficial to their lives. The dancer may experience a paradox; a sense of powerlessness in their pursuit of success but also a joy in dancing and the freedom to pursue it further (Alter, 1997). Those contemporary dancers that continue to participate in dance training exercise their freedom of choice. Dancers' positive experiences and enjoyment of dance training influence their decisions on how and where to pursue dance. Personal understandings of dance experiences are valuable insights into why a dancer may continue in spite of a seemingly rigorous and controlled environment.

Alexias and Dimitropoulou (2011), while uncovering the negative experiences of dancers related to the body, conceded that future research is needed to address what else, other than the pursuit of a perfect body, in dancers' experience serves to motivate their participation. I find that the interpretive paradigm is suited to explore the full scope of dancer experiences in dance training because of its onus on individual, lived experiences of individuals and how those individuals interpret their meaning. For example, Bracey (2004), in her phenomenological study, noted exploration of university dance students' voices is needed if we are to understand both enjoyment and frustration as part of dance. Future research to explore the many experiences, and most notably the positive aspects, of ballet and dance is a recommended direction in the field of dance research. I acknowledge that negative experiences exist, but also believe that other dancers, like me, have experienced positive, enjoyable dance classes.

Positive Experiences in Dance Training

The majority of current scholarship on dancers' training experiences has focused on the negative or even harmful outcomes of participation in dance. While these negative experiences do exist in the dance community, dancers' experiences of the enjoyable or pleasurable aspects of dance classes are underrepresented in the current dance research. Dance researchers Kolb and Kalogeropoulou (2012) believed this underrepresentation to be problematic:

> …three perspectives level attacks at ballet from differing viewpoints: biological, pedagogical, and gender based…they have one commonality: the implicit or explicit suggestion that women cannot (or should not) take pleasure from ballet…However, we believe that these perspectives are one-sided, ignoring as they do an evaluation of ballet as pleasurable sensory activity, and moreover reinforcing the apparent prejudice against pleasure in much Western thought (p. 111).

Dance is a physical pursuit for women participating in any genre of dance, as dance is movement. The pleasure, enjoyment, or positive experiences gained from dancing may be less explored in Western academia because: "While many philosophers acknowledge pleasure as a driving force or motivating factor in people's lives, physical pleasures are commonly rated as inferior to intellectual ones" (Kolb & Kalogeropoulou, 2012, p.112).

Stinson, Blumenfield-Jones, and van Dyke (1990) spoke to the elusiveness and importance of capturing the dance experience:

> What is dance and what is the experience of dancing? What does it mean to those who do it? Dance scholars and critics have written many words in response to these questions. Choreographers give their answers to "what is dance?" in the work they create and, often, commentary about it…not all voices are heard in dance literature, however…what is the dance experience like, and what does it mean, for them? What do their experiences- and the meanings they make of them-say to us (p.13).

Due to the subjective nature of experiences and their uniqueness to individuals, the dancers' own interpretations of a positive experience in dance are the most important. However, the previous usage of 'positive experience' in dance research can provide a foundation for understanding this term. Pickard and Bailey (2009) described the positive experience of performance as interpreted by one of their participants:

> Ellen's emotional response is that she felt 'really, really happy' and she has therefore interpreted this experience as positive which has consolidated her view. Consequently, she wants to engage further in the activity of dance so she can continue experience similar thrills and positive, emotional responses (p. 172).

Additionally, Pickard and Bailey found the positive experiences of other participants to be identified through emotional responses: "the majority of the experiences that were shared as noteworthy and significant by the dancers were positive and linked to elevated feelings of happiness, excitement and sometimes euphoria" (p. 179). Thus, the emotions elicited by an experience such as joy and

happiness are important contributors to the positive experience. Kolb and Kalogeropoulou (2012) found in their interviews: "the majority of answers were overwhelmingly positive. The respondents enjoyed ballet and found pleasure in various aspects of its practice" (p. 116). In their study, positive experiences were interpreted through the concept of pleasure which they defined as "a state of feeling of happiness and satisfaction…which results from an experience which is seen as enjoyable or in some way attractive" (p. 111) and inclusive of positive affect. Kolb and Kalogerpoulou were also careful to include both physical pleasure and emotional state as positives of dance training and this was supported by the responses of their participants. Thus, from the specific uses of 'positive experience' in dance research, positive experiences can be framed as experiences relating to positive emotions, emotional benefits, enjoyment, and both physical and mental pleasure. However, while 'positive' experiences do include emotional or physical enjoyment and pleasure in this literature, it can be assumed that positive experiences will vary between individuals and a selection will be presented later in this literature review. Illuminating women's positive experiences of dance is an important contribution to understanding all dimensions in the human experience of dance.

Positive experiences in dance can influence dancers to continue training and foster a passion and respect for the activity. Pickard and Bailey (2009) stated that "…the young dancer is likely to experience success, challenge and disappointment but that it is important that the dancer perceives the positive outweighing the negative" (p.178). This way the dancers will be likely to continue

their dance training and commitment to the development of their skills and artistry. A positive experience pertaining to dance elicits emotional, psychological, and physical benefits to the dancer and promotes the enjoyment of the activity. Fisher (2007) acknowledged most research in dance focuses on the negative aspects including hierarchies, exploitation, and ideals contrary to feminism such as female stereotyping and antiquated gender roles; but she maintained, "…pink tulle did not scare me; I had experienced ballet as a positive force in my life, a tool that had facilitated my learning about personal agency, collaborative effort, and spiritual expansion" (p.4). Similarly, Kolb and Kalogeropoulou (2012) questioned the influence of such negative experiences on ballet participation:

> …the ideas expressed in ballet, elements of its practice and the attempt to create an ideal body are degrading to women who are objectified, forced to fit into stereotypical patriarchal roles, and moreover often accept their oppression in a way wholly inconsistent with emancipatory objectives. But if we accept these allegations at face value, we reach a paradox: namely why do a vast number of women (the authors included) still voluntarily engage with the art form not only as viewers but also, notably, participants? (p.108).

Fisher's interviews with women who had ballet experience highlighted the multidimensional nature of dance. Women reported many different views of the ballerina including female stereotypes, powerful athletes, liberated women, and subjects of an authoritarian system. These were contradicting views. A female

stereotype may include traditional feminine qualities of delicateness and submission, but a powerful athlete is strong, driven, and associated with more traditionally masculine qualities. A liberated woman, as a dancer, was described as a glamorous, unmarried woman with a successful career but also dancers were described as subjects; having to conform to the standards of ballet or companies in order to succeed. Fisher believed that the acceptance of such a dual identity of the ballerina and ballet, the positive and the negative, can lead to discovery of ballet's "wide-ranging embrace of life" (2007, p. 15). Acknowledging the multidimensional nature of ballet, one of the most well-known forms of dance, is important to the acceptance of multiple dimensions of dance experiences in dance as a whole.

Dance researchers have explored the multiple dimensions of dance experience, but primarily through interviewing young dancers in training. However, the experiences of these young dancers can still provide insight into which aspects make dance an enjoyable and meaningful activity for so many individuals. Dance researchers Pickard and Bailey (2009) interviewed young ballet dancers about their commitment to dance. Researchers found that crystallizing experiences (experiences in which young dancers realize they desire continued, serious dance training) are influenced by the dancers' interpretation of dance training experiences (Pickard & Bailey, 2009). Positive experiences of skill mastery, emotional connection to dance, and a sense of belonging can contribute to these crystallizing experiences as well as the positive interpretation of setbacks which were experiences of young dancers uncovered by qualitative interviewing

(Pickard & Bailey, 2009). The young dancers understood setbacks as positive opportunities to learn, create resolve, and learn to believe in themselves. This commitment in youth can help propel individuals into dance for physical activity later in life. Stinson, Blumenfield-Jones, and van Dyke, (1990) found in qualitative interviews with young women who dance, despite some negative experiences, the young women exhibited a very satisfying relationship with dance. The young women expressed enjoyment of the activity and emotional connection to dance. And as Stinson et al. (1990) concluded "Some degree of disappointment and confusion is normal during adolescence; these students have gotten many good things from their dance study, and now, whatever their choices, will go on to live the rest of their lives" (p. 20). It is likely that committed dancers have a wealth of positive experiences in dance as they pursue training beyond their schooling in adolescence and by their own volition.

Bond and Stinson (2007) interviewed young dance students from multiple disciplines. The majority of young dance students reported high engagement with dance, a sense of accomplishment, meaning, satisfaction, and emotional connection related to dance class. Among adult recreational ballet dancers, accomplishment, expressivity and enjoyment of discipline were also aspects of engagement with dance (Kolb & Kalogeropoulou, 2012). Gardner, Komesaroff, and Fensham's (2008) interview study with studio dancers ages 14 to 26, from a variety of genres, highlighted the benefits of dance on the individual's affect and well-being. The responses of those dancers interviewed showed that dance improved self-confidence, fostered respect for physical activity, and provided

appreciation for expertise gained in the long-term. These dancers also reported dance class as fostering respect for different age groups and dance as a site for creating and exploring one's social, community, and recreational values. This group's opinions are especially relevant to exploring contemporary dance in a university based dance group, as both community based dance and university dance are separate from the professional dance world. The world of professional dance, especially ballet, can intensify the pressures dance training due to the competitive atmosphere and work related stress. In dance organizations that do not harbor competitive professional dance environments, dancers may identify more positive and enjoyable experiences related to their participation.

Outside the world of professional ballet, dance experience has been found to have a positive influence on body image. Negative experiences with weight and disordered eating is not shared by all dancers. Contributing factors such as the interactions between instructor, dancer, and class are unique to the subjective perceptions of each participant and not all will encounter eating disorders. Adolescent girls involved in dance as exercise had reduced body dissatisfaction and enhanced physical self-perception over the course of the dance program (Burgess, Grogan, & Burtwitz, 2005). According to Lewis and Scannell (1995) body image among women ages 18-69 years can also benefit from participation in dance. These women were involved in a creative dance program and those with more creative dance experience rated their body appearance more favorably. Thus, those with more dance experience regarded their bodies in a more positive way than the less experienced participants. Though these populations may not

practice dance with the same standards and technical proficiency of contemporary dancers, it is important to note positive experiences in dance can lie outside the realm of professional dance. For example, Green's (2001) qualitative work with dancers in a university program revealed the enjoyment of somatic practices, a way in which dancers may use proprioception and internal awareness of their movement to learn dance, in the dance classroom. Students had associated negative experiences with the traditional methods of learning dance (e.g., teachers physically correcting dancers' postures and using only visual information to understand a movement). The dominance of visual feedback led to self-objectification and influenced body image negatively as they physically forced their body into the desired aesthetic positions and towards the ideal physique of the thin, feminine ballerina. However, somatics was an enjoyable physical experience that allowed dancers to learn, relax, and be empowered in class.

As indicated by Fisher (2007), dancers' experiences are multidimensional. For example, negative experiences are not generalizable to all dancers, nor are they the sole experience of dancers who do encounter them. Alter (1997) reported female dancers felt powerless and inferior, fearing failure and disappointment. These dancers also felt subjected to rejection in a political, commercial, and competitive dance environment. However, the same group of participants also found dance to be an outlet for self-expression, provide a sense of accomplishment, an emotional release, an opportunity to be creative, and a way to feel alive, full, and joyful (Alter, 1997). Reframing seemingly negative experiences into positive events is practiced by some dancers. In the classroom,

this may include finding benefits to stressful situations. While dancers noted the pressure of surveillance on their bodies, the same participants also noted occurrences of positive surveillance in which being watched by others, e.g. when an audience or instructor provides motivation to work and perform, or provides guidance and structure for their practice (Dryburgh & Fortin, 2010). Ballet students in Pickard's (2012) study showed similar views: while surveillance can cause anxiety and self-consciousness, it can also be facilitative in eliciting motivation to work hard and impress viewers, such as an instructor. Many of the ballet students in Bond and Stinson's (2007) study described positive experiences found in rejection, describing them as opportunities to develop mental toughness, resiliency, drive, and self-reliance. These experiences were counted them among the pleasurable aspects of learning and moving in ballet. Adult recreational ballet dancers were also found to enjoy the challenge of dance classes and actually thrived on the discipline and structure of the classes (Kolb & Kalogeropoulou, 2012).

Reframing physical pain experiences into positive occurrences is also noted among dancers. According to Pickard & Bailey (2009), young dancers in training experience pain and learn to suppress the feelings of pain but can also reframe the occurrences of injury as positive in order to continue dancing. Being in pain and injured is then an accepted part of being committed to dance. This learned behaviour is often interpreted as a negative experience because of the dangers of training injured (Thomas & Tarr, 2009). However, Thomas, and Tarr (2009) found that contemporary and modern dancers differentiated between good

pain and bad pain when interviewed about injury. While bad pain was described as distracting from performance and hindering ability, good pain experiences were attributed to feelings of soreness, stretch, and exhaustion that were interpreted by the dancers as evidence of working hard and accomplishment (Thomas & Tarr, 2009). Positive experiences of pain are a controversial notion in the literature, but pain is, nevertheless, interpreted as a positive experience by some dancers.

Contemporary Dance Environments

The dancers' experiences can also be influenced by a specific dance culture. According to previous research, ballet and contemporary dance cultures provide quite different dance experiences for women. As I have demonstrated, the overwhelming majority of research on dancers' experience comes from the ballet culture (Aalten, 2005; Alexias & Dimitropoulou, 2011; Benn & Walters, 2001; Dryburgh & Fortin, 2010; Fisher, 2007; Gray & Kunkel, 2001; Jackson, 2005; Pickard, 2012; Pickard & Bailey, 2009; Thomas & Tarr, 2009, van Staden et al., 2009). There is rarely an exclusive focus on the contemporary or modern dancer's experiences (Alter, 1997; Bond & Stinson, 2007; Bracey, 2004; Green, 2001; Nordin-Bates, Cumming, Aways, & Sharp, 2011; Nordin-Bates, Walker, & Redding, 2011). In addition, experiences of the elite dancer, such as the professional ballet dancer or those on the professional track, are prevalent in the literature (Aalten, 2005; Alexias & Dimitropoulou, 2011; Benn & Walters, 2001; Dryburgh & Fortin, 2010; Gray & Kunkel, 2001; Jackson, 2005; Thomas & Tarr, 2009; van Staden et al., 2009). Thus, studies conducted on dancers' experiences in

training have yet to address those who participate in a serious manner but in a non-professional environment, specifically, those who participate in contemporary dance training within an on-campus organization. It is important to consider recreational dance for adults separately from professional dance and its occupational pressures (Kolb & Kalogeropoulou, 2012). Bracey (2004) stated: "most difficult to hear are the voices of the young, the inexperienced, the less technically fluent, the locally and regionally based artists – in other words the vast majority of participants in dance activity" (p.7). Although Bracey included the young in her description of unheard voices in dance research, the experiences of young dancers can be found throughout research on dance education (Alter, 1997; Bond & Stinson, 2007; Burgess, Grogan, & Burwtiz, 2006; Gardner, Komesaroff, & Fensham, 2008; Pickard, 2012; Pickard & Bailey, 2009; Stinson et al., 1990). Women who dance, but not professionally, in the university or college age group are a demographic that is absent from most dance research literature.

When considering the experiences of dancers in training in the dance class, it is important to be aware of the unique interactions between different dancers and their instructors. Each class, ballet or contemporary, and dance organization has a different approach to dance education and instructors' rapport and relationships with students vary. Additionally, dance is a living art form with a dynamic structure that can divert from tradition. Reflective practices in dance education show instructors desire for innovation and changes in teaching practices (Debenham & Lee, 2005; Hagood, 2006). Dance education in modern and contemporary dance shows a continuing development towards collaboration and

cooperation with students in dance instruction where the mastery of technical skill is encouraged in such a manner dancers may achieve their own artistic and creative goals (Andrzejewski, 2009; Huddy & Stevens, 2011; Mainwaring & Krasnow, 2010). As described by Mainwaring and Krasnow (2010),

> The teacher can act as a guide in providing an environment that challenges and stimulates dancers to achieve their highest level of mastery, and at the same time inspires the dancers to honor the body and elevate the spirit. Teachers and dancers can embrace the concept of the healthy dancer… (p.20).

The authoritarian dance training is typical in ballet culture (Benn & Walters, 2001; Bracey 2004; Dryburgh & Fortin, 2010; Gray & Kunkel, 2001) which is steeped in traditional practices. Contemporary dance, however, with elements of creative movement and improvisation, relies on innovation and new techniques, an element in the genre also conveyed through its education. In Alter's (1997) study, modern dancers were more intrinsically motivated than ballet dancers to pursue further dance study, had more positive experiences with improvisation, and had more experience of being teachers themselves. These dancers also saw teaching as helping others and respected good teaching as it was stimulating and inspiring (Alter, 1997). Exposure to contemporary or modern dance training seems to stimulate a different relationship to teaching and training than traditional ballet approaches. For many dancers, their university dance years provide the opportunity to work with a diverse range of instructors and contemporary practices which can serve to deepen and broaden their dance experience.

University contemporary dance groups. University based dance groups provide a venue for contemporary dancers to further their skill and practice in a positive and enriching environment beyond their training in adolescence. They are sites of dance training enjoyment and positive experiences for many women continuing to dance through contemporary classes. In Canada, dance programs and degrees at post-secondary institutions are rare but many dancers seek participation in dance on campus while continuing their education and may do so through student groups. These on-campus dance organizations may be described as student dance companies. As Oliver (2011) explained:

> Student dance companies are pedagogical entities that contribute to the overall education of the student, whether he or she is a dance major, minor, or simply a dance enthusiast…Student companies instruct in many ways: through company classes; choreographic experience with faculty, guest and student artists; choreographic opportunities for students; and leadership opportunities for students… (p. 4)

In Canada and the United States, the proliferation of contemporary and modern student dance companies can be attributed in part to the work of Margaret H'Doubler and Martha Hill, an innovator in women's physical education and a modern dance educator, respectively (Vertinsky, 2010). H'Doubler saw the potential of modern dance to provide women with physical activity that was non-competitive, personal, and democratic (Vertinsky, 2010); creating positive experiences for women in physical activity through dance.

Student dance companies provide valuable educational, artistic, and community building opportunities to students seeking continued involvement in the world of dance. While providing these opportunities, student dance companies offer an alternative form of physical activity. The positive experiences of physical activity in dance classes for university women include higher levels physical fitness compared to their non-dancing peers and positive body-image attitudes that are positively correlated to a dancer's fitness (Adame, Radell, Johnson, & Cole, 1991). University recreational dancers do not experience the rigorous body aesthetic requirements ballet or professional dance schools may have in place (Adame et al., 1991). This removed pressure may be more conducive to creating more positive experiences for dancers in their training. According to Valverde (1987), college dancers of a variety of academic disciplines value the variables of dance pertaining to fitness, wish to dance more frequently, and prefer dance instruction to other physical activity. These participants did not participate in dance as an academic pursuit but as an extracurricular activity, and had pursued dance in a committed manner previous to university, participating in genres such as ballet, tap, and jazz. As evidence of the large numbers of women who continue to dance during their college years, 459 female dancers participated in this study. More research in dance studies is needed on this unique population of university contemporary dancers. As Oliver (2011) observed:

> If student dance groups make an important part of an undergraduate education, then it seems important that we study them to know how they

> function, in what ways they make a positive contribution to students' educations, and how they might be improved (p. 4)

These student dance companies are an opportunity for positive experiences and enjoyment of dance training for continuing contemporary female dancers in their university years.

The current scholarship does not include research on dancers' experiences at recreational university based student dance groups. Many female contemporary dancers turn to these groups for the opportunity to continue their dance training beyond their adolescent experiences. Student groups also provide dancers with more control over their dance participation and the delivery of the programming is reflective of what continuing dancers find enjoyable and valuable in their training. Dance research will benefit from the insight into the positive and enjoyable aspects of dance experience that university based student dance groups can provide.

Conclusion

According to previous research, dance provides positive social, emotional, and physical experiences for female dancers. These experiences include feeling of belonging to community, emotional connection to dance, happiness, confidence, drive, challenge, skill mastery and accomplishment, and positive body awareness. It is evident in the literature that despite experiences of body image disturbances, injury, rejection, and setbacks by some dancers, dance does have the potential to play an important positive role in the lives of women who dance. I hope to expand upon the current literature regarding dancers' positive experiences and enjoyment

of dance training. I interviewed women who are continuing contemporary dancers in a university student dance company to better understand positive experiences and their influence on dancers. As Stinson et al. (1990) discovered, the young women in their study exhibit "…delight in having someone listen to them with clear interest as they spoke of dance and of themselves…several noted they had never had the opportunity to speak in this way with someone who understood, and that all dancers should have a chance to do this" (p. 21). With the purpose of investigating positive experiences of continuing contemporary dancers, I asked the following question: (a) what dance training experiences are interpreted as positive experiences by continuing dancers, (b) how do dancers overcome challenges in dance training, (c) how do dancers think others may be encouraged to continue dance? Answering these questions adds to our understanding of how positive experiences of dance play an important role in the continued participation by women who dance. Further, discovering the individual experiences and meanings by a researcher versed in the culture of dance, is beneficial to the dancer, dance community, dance research, and the area of women's physical activity. Examining dancers' individual, lived experiences is possible through qualitative interviews where participants voiced the positive experiences that contribute to their ongoing dance participation.

Methodology

Qualitative Framework

The purpose of this study is to explore the positive experiences of dance as experienced by women continuing in contemporary dance training. Based on my

own experiences in dance as well as my research in dance studies, I would personally conceptualize positive experiences in dance as those that are enjoyable, physically exhilarating, benefit my well-being, and/or elicit emotions such as happiness, love, joy, or contentment. However, such a definition only illustrates my own subjective experiences of dance. In order to find what defines a positive experience in dance for other women, I leave the interpretation and description of what is a 'positive experience' to the participants of this study. I am specifically interested in the experiences of dancers currently involved in a university based recreational contemporary dance group. While acknowledging that a dancer, like anyone, will have experienced negative situations or feelings over the course of their involvement in dance, I am interested in how positive experiences serve to fuel their continued commitment to practicing dance and the benefits they perceive from their involvement. I do not seek standardized results, but a collection of unique and diverse responses that may share common ground in terms of dance related experiences.

In accordance with these goals, I chose to approach my research from the humanist, interpretive perspective (Markula & Silk, 2011). Within the interpretive paradigm, research is understood as a subjective and interactive process and thus, all knowledge production is acknowledged to be subjective. I, therefore, locate my work within a subjective epistemology (Markula & Silk, 2011) when I explore individual unique experiences. Thus, the purpose of this research was approached as to "expose and discuss the experiences of individuals rather than ascertain 'truth'" (Bracey, 2004, p.8). Embracing relativist ontology, the interpretive

researcher believes that multiple meanings of reality are constructed by different individuals and, thus, the representation of reality through research is a co-construction between researcher and participants (Markula & Silk, 2011). In this research process, I aimed to employ hermeneutic methodology to produce mutually constructed knowledge by means of interaction with the participants (Markula & Silk, 2011). As Gardner, Komesaroff, and Fensham (2008) explained: "If young people participate in dance class…voluntarily, it is important to understand what 'lived' factors, meanings, and experiences are involved" (p. 702).

Furthermore, to better understand participants' experiences and interpret their meanings, I drew from phenomenology as this theoretical approach focuses on studying human experience (Markula & Silk, 2011). Phenomenology has been used by several dance studies scholars to capture the experiences of dancers and their meanings (Alexias & Dimitropoulou, 2011; Bond & Stinson, 2007; Bracey, 2004; Fraleigh, 2000; Jackson, 2005; Parviainen, 2002; Rouhiainen, 2008). Phenomenology as the study of experience provides dance researchers with "a method for intuitive and theoretical reflections on dance from multiple perspectives" (Fraleigh, 2000, p.54). Fraleigh (2000), a phenomenological dance studies researcher, believed phenomenology allows for representation of the voice of the dancer, choreographer, and teacher that are located in a dance researcher. Further, Farleigh argued that the formalization in dance criticism and research distances the researcher's position from the dance experience. She questioned such dance research and asked: "But what about the voice of the dancer in valuing

the experience of dance, and the consciousness of the choreographer in making the dance? Where are they accounted for in the formulas for dance research and writing?" (Fraleigh, 2000, p. 54). Parviainen (2002) added that the work of phenomenologists is particularly insightful because its focus on physical perception can illuminate dance as a physical undertaking. From a phenomenological perspective, the dancer's knowledge and experience is in part shaped by their perceptions of their body, which in turn influences their movements (Parviainen, 2002). Fraleigh recommended that the validation of personal and shared experiences, and dancing as a way of knowing should be among future directions of phenomenology in dance studies. In my own approach, I am interested in the dancers' individual experiences, their interpretations, and reflections on this physical training. A dancer myself, involved in the university based dance group, I am able to draw on those experiences that I share with participants to further and deepen the interpretations of our training. Dance scholars Bond and Stinson (2007) stated that phenomenological descriptions form a collection of sources can be examined systematically to provide a robust picture of experiences of dancing within a certain group although it is not possible to conclusively compare dancers from different populations. In the following research, I will provide a picture of the lived experiences of contemporary female dancers within a specific university based setting. This phenomenologically inspired, interpretive approach influenced by Merleau-Ponty encompasses what I deem to be the most valuable elements of this research: the experiences of

contemporary female dancers, my personal dance experience, and what these experiences may mean for the human experience of dance.

As noted by Allen-Collinson (2009), there are several categories of phenomenology such as constitutive phenomenology, hermeneutic phenomenology, and existentialist phenomenology. They often overlapping and intertwined and the work of some phenomenological scholars transcends categorization. However, among the phenomenological dance studies, existentialist phenomenology dominates the study of dance experiences. Fraleigh (2000), Parviainen (2002), and Bracey (2004) (as she follows the interpretations of Fraleigh (2000)) count Merleau-Ponty, an existential phenomenology theorist, among their major influences. According to Allen-Collinson (2009) Merleau-Ponty is also a commonly referenced theorist in phenomenological approaches to physical culture. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological approach is especially suited for researching physical cultures such as sport and dance because of the focus on embodiment; Allen-Collinson (2009) explained: "Merleau-Ponty's form of existential phenomenology, with its focus upon embodiment, is particularly well-suited to the in-depth portrayal of the corporeally grounded experience of sport and physical activity" (p. 284). Dance is a physical pursuit that places much significance on body awareness, aesthetics, and the mind-body connection. The onus on the body and its connection to the consciousness lends existential phenomenology to be particularly effective for uncovering the meanings in the human experience of dance. Citing the influences of Merleau-Ponty and phenomenologist Giorgi, Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) explain: "…focusing the

interview on the experienced meanings of the subject's life world, phenomenology has been relevant for clarifying the mode of understanding in a qualitative research interview" (p. 26). Thus, existential phenomenology has also been shown to be effective in studying human experiences through interview methodology.

An interpretive, phenomenologically inspired approach accounts for the influence of a researcher's subjective involvement. Thus, my own subjectivity as a researcher and as a dancer with long standing relationships with the dance community is accepted as a necessary part of the research. Bond and Stinson (2007) described this approach to dance research:

> …we do not have, and can never have, "the whole picture" of what dance means to any one child or group of young people. Because it is constantly in the process of creation, meaning is always partial…we acknowledge ourselves as both creators and discoverers of meaning (p.157).

In acknowledging my own subjectivity as a researcher, a creator and discoverer of meaning, I am also self-reflexive and acknowledge the influence of my personal experiences on the research. Personally, I have a wealth of positive experiences related to my participation in dance training. These experiences are valuable to my identity as a dancer, instructor, and student and to my lifestyle. My relationships in the dance community have led me to believe that other dancers may feel similarly about the role of dance in their lives. However, dancers' experiences are individual to them. Not all individuals will have positive experiences in dance training and they may interpret their dance experience as a

negative occurrence in their lives. Similarly, the unique nature of experience means that not all positive experiences will be the same and meanings of a positive experience may differ between researcher and participants.

Interview as a Qualitative Method

Interpretive research into the meanings of female contemporary dancers' positive experiences in dance training is best explored through qualitative interview methodology. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) explained: "The qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences, to uncover their lived world" (p.1). Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) believe the qualitative interview to be one of the realizations of Merleau-Ponty's scholarship in phenomenology as he sought to investigate the basic experiences of the lived world and assess their meaning. This approach follows the main purpose of the study: to uncover and understand the meanings of lived experiences of dancers. Interview methodology also exemplifies the hermeneutics of the interpretive research paradigm as "it is an inter-view, where knowledge is constructed in the inter-action between the interviewer and interviewee. An interview is literally an *inter view*, an inter-change of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p.2). Following this logic, many previous dance researchers have effectively utilized interview methodology in their exploration of dancers' experiences (Aalten, 2005; Alexias & Dimitropoulou, 2011; Bond & Stinson, 2007; Gardner, Komesaroff, & Fensham, 2008; Pickard & Bailey, 2009). Thus, for the purpose of investigating the positive experiences of

dance training by women who continue to dance, an interview method was selected as a means to answer the research questions: (a) What dance training experiences are interpreted as positive experiences by continuing contemporary dancers?; (b) How do dancers overcome challenges in dance training?; and (c) How do dancers think others may be encouraged to continue dance?

Semi-structured interviews with open ended questions for in-depth responses were used (Markula & Silk, 2011) to uncover contemporary dancers' experiences and opinions related to the research questions. Phenomenology informs an interest to understanding social phenomena from the participant's own point of view and description of their lived world (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). A semi-structured "life world" interview, or semi-structured interview, was best suited for this approach as this type of interview seeks descriptions of the participants' lived world with respect to the meaning of the social phenomenon in question (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Interviews took place in a formal setting with a set time determined by the participants' convenience and a set interview location on the University campus, the office of the on-campus dance studio. The interview was scheduled to take no more than one hour. Dancers were asked to reflect previous dance class experiences as well as more recent or current dance participation following an interview guide. By incorporating both current and retrospective features, the interview process illuminated the nature of their committed participation in dance. Interviews were recorded via audio device and participants were informed of the audio recording and that they may ask that the recorder be stopped at any point. The interviews were then transcribed for

analysis, at which point participants were assigned a number and then pseudonym, the only label associated with their data for anonymity.

Interview Guide. The document of questions and themes for the interview (see appendix) is referred to as the interview guide and not the interview schedule. An interview guide is appropriate terminology for this study as the interviews are organized around a set of themes with appropriate, related questions under each theme (Patton, 2002). Additionally, Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) use the term interview guide to design a semi-structured interview. The open-ended questions that make up the interview were organized by theme in accordance to the focus of the research questions. The first section served as a background and demographic exploration. This section included questions such as when did you start dancing, what styles or genres have you trained in, and how many classes do you take a week. This section collected demographic data of the dancer and function to build rapport and allow the participant to ease into the interview (Markula & Silk, 2011).

The following themes of the interview pertained to training in dance, such as the comparison of dance to other activities, and the university dance community. In this section questions pertaining to positive experiences were discussed, such as important experiences, meaningful events, and experiences that dancers believe to have had a positive influence on them and their dance training. The term ‘positive’ was open to the dancers’ interpretation. The experiences I would deem as positive arise from how the dancers categorized their own experiences as positive and may have used the term ‘positive’ as a descriptor in

their own words. Finally, dancers' thoughts on involving other dancers in continued training were discussed. The themes of the interview guide were determined by a review of previous literature on dancers' experiences in dance training. The meaningful and information rich experiences that emerged were related to the body and the way it is trained physically, social aspects and community in dance participation, and influence of dance on the participants' lifestyle. Together, these themes all contributed to the overall aim of uncovering and discussing committed contemporary dancers' experiences in dance training. By limiting the interview guide questions to explore class, practice and rehearsal rather than performance or broader dance experience, I focused on the dance training experience.

The interview guide outlined the planned questions of the interview organized by theme, but remained flexible as per the semi-structured interview format (Markula & Silk, 2011). The interviewer used comments to probe for further details to a response, added questions to pursue an important developing theme in the interview, and shared pieces of their own experiences with the participant to build rapport in hopes of a more information rich interview. The use of the interview guide reflects the interpretive paradigm as the interviewer interacts with the participants and the interview questions, created by the researcher, are interpreted by the participants' for their response. Thus the knowledge that emerged from the interview is subjective and resulted in mutually constructed meaning of the dancers' experiences.

Pilot Interview. A pilot interview was carried out prior to conducting interviews with participants. A fellow master's student with suitable dance experience to speak knowledgeably about themes in the interview was recruited for the pilot. The pilot interview was an opportunity to practice the interview, interview skills, and test the effectiveness of the interview guide (Markula & Silk, 2011). Thus, the interview situation, interviewer's skills, and interview guide were open to feedback from the pilot participant. Based on the pilot interview, I reflected on what parts they felt were successful and what parts needed improvement through practice or revision. After this process, the original interview guide was rehearsed further and re-worded in places to account for feedback in terms of question clarity.

Sampling. Interviews were carried out with a sample of 8 dancers who responded to recruitment for a sample size of a possible10 continuing contemporary dancers from a university based dance group. While no clear rule for sample size in qualitative research exists, a sample of 10 or less is recommended by Markula and Silk (2011) for a master's thesis for pragmatic reasons of interviewing, transcribing, and analysis time requirements. Qualitative research does not use random sampling but instead uses purposeful sampling which selects information rich cases that can provide insight on the research purpose (Patton, 2002). Patton detailed subcategories of purposeful sampling in order to specify techniques. The subcategories used in this study are convenience and criterion sampling. Convenience sampling was carried out as the university dance group is easily accessible to the researcher who has a history of

involvement with the group that is also located within the same university as the researcher. Criterion sampling of dancers entailed that they meet predetermined criteria of having previous and substantial dance class experience in pre-professional, vocational, or private studio settings prior to their involvement with the university dance group, are female dancers, and are 18 years of age or older. This criterion existed to ensure that participants had a wealth of experience to draw upon in the interview, met the research purposes, and were able to provide their own consent to participate in the interview process.

After obtaining approval for the proposed research from the University of Alberta ethics board, participant recruitment was carried out. This was done through in class announcements. I also presented information letters and contact information was presented to dancers interested in volunteering to be interviewed. Additionally, contact information of the researcher and a description of the study were sent out via the dance group's email listserv and interested volunteers were encouraged to contact the researcher for an information letter. Informed consent forms were signed and collected prior to the interview commencing.

Participants. Eight female participants volunteered and were interviewed for this study. Theses dancers were student, alumni, staff, or community members of the university based dance organization. The dance organization was assigned the pseudonym USDG (as university student based dance group) for the results and discussion. The dancers' involvement in USDG organization ranged from approx. 1 year to 6 years at the time of interviews. The average age of participants was 25.25 years, ranging from 18 to 36 years. The dancers all had substantial

dance training and commonly began their dance involvement at very young ages. The average years of dance participation for the participants was 18.6 years. The dancers were all current participants in contemporary dance genres but had previous experience from genres such as jazz, ballet, tap, hip hop, and musical theatre (see appendix).

Analysis. Transcribed interviews provided the raw data for analysis and interpretation. As Markula and Silk explain: "the interpretive paradigm assumes that there is one reality, but there are multiple openings to that reality, and thus the focus is on individual meaning making" (2011, p.103). Therefore, analysis of the empirical material, the interviews, is necessary to uncover and interpret these individual meanings. There are many different analysis techniques available for interview research, but styles of analysis vary with paradigmatic approach. (e.g., Giorgi's (1985) phenomenological analysis, Holstein and Gubrium's (2005) analytic bracketing, and Ritchie and Spencer's (1994) framework). Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is a commonly used method for phenomenological analysis; however, there are criticisms for using this method with an interpretive and philosophical phenomenology inspired approach. IPA has been criticized for not upholding phenomenological principles in the application of this technique (Allen-Collinson, 2009). Allen-Collinson has noted that most uses of IPA seem to be done quite arbitrarily, "…these are by no means specific to phenomenology but a general goal of much qualitative research in general, the rationale is fundamentally blunted and is left to the reader to speculate as to why a phenomenological perspective in particular was chosen" (p. 288). Thus, I chose

Kvale and Brinkmann's (2007) approach to meaning condensation from the original by Giorgi (1975). It is based on a philosophical understanding of phenomenology by focusing on the meanings of the interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The application of meaning condensation to the empirical material from the interviews is also appropriate as Kvale and Brinkmann's (2009) literature was foundational to my interview construction. This brings further consistency between the interview process and the analysis.

Kvale and Brinkmann's (2007) approach to meaning condensation is based on the original meaning condensation analysis developed by Giorgi (1975). Meaning condensation was developed under philosophical phenomenology and was used by Giorgi while investigating what experiences constituted learning for ordinary people in their daily lives (Giorgi, 1975). In this analysis, "long statements are compressed into brief statements in which the main sense of what is said is rephrased in a few words" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2007, p.205). The analysis consists of five main steps: reading the interview through, determining 'natural meaning units', identifying dominant themes, linking meaning units to purpose of study, and the establishment of a descriptive statement based on the essential themes (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2007). The first step serves to get a sense of the whole piece and allow the researcher to familiar with the interview (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The second step consists of the researcher determining natural meaning units from the participants' interview text (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) to ascertain meaning of participant responses. Thirdly, the theme dominant in a meaning unit is stated by the research in the simplest way possible (Kvale &

Brinkmann, 2009) in order to further condense the meaning of the whole text. Fourth, these identified meanings from the interviews are related back to the purpose of the research (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) to address the research questions. In the final step, the nonredundant and essential themes from the whole interview are brought together in a descriptive statement (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) to represent the most concise and condensed meaning of the interview. This analysis technique allowed the resultant themes to be further interpreted and subject to theoretical analysis to address the research questions.

For this study, multiple readings of the transcripts with margin notes and highlighting important words and phrases was completed as the first step. Such highlighted and noted words and phrases were the determined 'natural meaning units'. The reoccurring and/or important meaning units were organized into a chart form for each transcript. These charts organized meaning units by thematic section and the number of times they may have reoccurred within a transcript. The meaning units were then further condensed by grouping into simpler, encompassing themes. Then, the theme was written with a simple description for each transcript, thus condensing the whole transcript into concise, descriptive statements. Finally, the condensed thematic statements of each participant were compared for commonalities and emphases from which the most important themes emerged.

This method of analysis was suited for interpreting the meaning of continuing contemporary dancers' positive dance experiences because it captures the phenomena of interest using the participants' everyday language and allows

for co-construction of research as the researcher works to ascertain and represent the participants' meanings. The methodological approach of meaning condensation allows for rigor and discipline in interview analysis without resulting in quantitative expressions and consequently, the everyday language of participants is preserved (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Issues of Representation

The empirical material of the interviews and the co-constructed meanings that resulted from the interview analysis are presented while representing the researcher and participants in a way congruent with the interpretive paradigm. I am using the realist representation of research, still common in qualitative research, to represent the co-constructed meanings of participants and myself, the researcher.

This form of representation acknowledges the subjectivity of the researchers and their attempts to present multiple voices in their research, including their own, their participants, research traditions, and personal cultures (Markula & Silk, 2011). The participants' voices appear in extensive and verbatim quotations from the interview process, allowing the actual words of the participant to come across in the representation (Markula & Silk, 2011). In my representation of the research, I acknowledge my own subjectivity and the voices of the participants and dance culture. Through the interview process, I took notes on my impressions, thoughts, and initial interpretations of interviews with the participants. I was able to reflect on my ideas and impressions by returning to these notes. This self-reflection and critical thinking provided a better

understanding of my own position and experiences and allowed me to interpret the dancers' experiences in greater depth. In my research, I present extensive verbatim quotations from the dancers in order to present their thoughts in their own words.

Qualitative research has special considerations for the representation of material. The researcher must give due respect to the lived experiences that participants have shared with them and thus should be reflexive in their writing process. One should reflect and evaluate "whose voice speaks, who is excluded, and how voices are interpreted" (Markula & Silk, 2011, p.180) in the research while they are writing. Thus, I maintained awareness of the readability of my research as well as an understanding of how the presentation could be read and interpreted by others.

Validation

In qualitative research the validation of a project is an issue within itself as qualitative research differs from quantitative research and by paradigm in terms of what aspects may be assessed for quality. As Markula and Silk explained: "…qualitative research is subjective, there is no need for an evaluation of validity and reliability as these are measures of objectivity" (2011, p.199). However, several criteria to assess quality of qualitative research do exist with their own terminology and guidelines. These criteria differ with paradigmatic approaches and methods of representation in qualitative research to reflect assumptions specific to the paradigm. While there are several validation criteria for interpretive research (e.g., Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Lincoln, 1995; Polkinghorne, 2007;

Sparkes, 2002) I chose Kvale and Brinkmann's (2009) understanding of validating interview research. This approach focuses on defensible knowledge claims in qualitative research instead of establishing a 'truth' as in quantitative research. Kvale and Brinkmann understand validity in qualitative research as "quality of craftsmanship" and are referring to the said quality when using the term validity. It should be noted that Kvale and Brinkmann use both 'validity' and 'validation' in their descriptions. The validation criteria for quality craftsmanship are suitable for this study as they pertain specifically to interview research and are consistent with the methodology of this study.

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) approached the validation as an encompassing process of the research craftsmanship and not as a separate stage carried out on a final product. They stressed that the "validation rests on the quality of the researcher's craftsmanship throughout an investigation, on continually checking, questioning, and theoretically interpreting the findings" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 249). In an overview of the research process, Kvale and Brinkmann described qualitative interview craftsmanship as containing seven key stages: thematizing, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analyzing, validating (as reflective judgment), and reporting.

In the thematizing stage, the soundness of the theoretical framework in the research questions and in the investigation provides the basis for validation. The theoretical presuppositions of the research should be logical and defensible. In the design of research, quality craftsmanship is evident in the adequacy and suitableness of the methods chosen to explore the subject matter (Kvale &

Brinkmann, 2009). This includes conducting research that is ethical in design as well. The interviewing stage includes the trustworthiness of the participant's reports and the quality of the conducted interview as validity concerns (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Thus, the interviewer should question the meaning of responses and carry out continual checking of the obtained information throughout the interview process (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The transcription stage is validated by careful translation of oral to written language per the transcription style chosen by the researcher (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). At the analyzing stage the logic and soundness of the questions are verified against the gathered information and the interpretations that have been made (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The validation stage is not a separate stage, but a reflective judgment on the procedures of validation in place for a study and the decision on what community is appropriate for a dialogue for the specific study. For example, discussions between the researcher and the interpreters of the research can help establish the logic and soundness of the study. Finally, reporting is validated based on creating an accurate account of the main findings of the study and acknowledging the role of the reader in determining the results (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

The following describes my specific efforts to maintain quality craftsmanship throughout my research process. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) asked: "Are the steps in the research process each reasonable, defensible, and supportive of what the researcher concludes?" (p. 249). I validated my research through the constant checking, questioning, and interpreting throughout the

investigation. In thematizing, I established a phenomenological approach to the positive experiences of dance perceived by female contemporary dancers. The use of this theoretical framework to approach dancer experiences is supported by previous phenomenological studies in dance research. It is also coherent with my goal to uncover individual, unique experiences. The design of my research, the use of interview as a method, is appropriate for exploring the subject matter of dance experiences and has been effective in gathering knowledge on dance experiences by others in the field of dance research. Additionally, the interviews were performed in accordance with ethical practices, maximizing potential benefits for the participant and minimizing potential for harm.

To validate the interview stage, I conducted a pilot interview to improve quality of my technique and questions. Also, response meanings were clarified with participants during the interview if a response was unclear and continual checking of the information occurred. Following Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), phenomenologically derived meaning condensation (Giorgi, 1975) was used to analyze interview material providing a consistency with the interview method. This methodological coherency provides an internal logic for using this method of analysis. Validating as reflection was carried out by positioning this study in the field of qualitative dance research and the qualitative research community's expectations for validity as well as making a constant effort throughout the investigation to be reflective and find the most logical and defensible processes for the study. Finally, reporting the results has been done through the realist manner and considerate of the readers' interpretations. Being considerate of how

research may be interpreted by others helps to construct a final report that will be read and interpreted as the researcher intended. By taking these validation steps, a transparent research process is achieved by having validation embedded at each stage through the interview inquiry.

Ethical Concerns

The nature of interview research entails involving human beings as participants in a research project. The human interactions that occur throughout the research project should be respectful of both the rights of the researcher and the participants. The interview process involves recording personal accounts and presenting them to the public arena of research which gives rise to ethical issues (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Accounting for potential ethical concerns and being considerate of respect for dignity, free and informed consent, privacy and confidentiality, and justice and inclusiveness lays the framework for ethical research processes. By practicing ethical research this study was conducted with sensitivity to the rights of both participants and researcher throughout the process.

Respect for dignity. As the underlying principle for ethical behaviour in research, respect for the participants' human dignity was carried out and preserved throughout this study. This interview research was conducted in a Canadian university setting, and in this context, the westernized cultural value of individual autonomy is the most widely accepted definition of being respected. Throughout this study, the participants' right to practice self-governance was upheld by conducting and engaging fully in the practice of ethical research. The participants had individual control over their participation in the research process.

This was ensured through voluntary participation in the study, provision complete information about the study, voluntary informed consent, and respecting the participants' right to withdraw.

Free and informed consent. Initial contact was made with participants in one of two ways: in class announcements made by the researcher and/or an email announcement via the dance group's listserv mail outs. In class announcements were a brief verbal announcement describing the purpose of the study, a general description of the interview process, and the criteria needed to be an eligible participant. Some interested dancers contacted the researcher in person in class but dancers were also provided with the researchers email address if they wished to express interest privately. The email announcement contained relevant information about the study similar to the in-class announcements. These included the study purpose, description of the interview process, and criteria for participation. This email also contained the email contact information for those interested in participation.

Dancers who expressed interest in participation via email or in person contact were then provided with a detailed information sheet explaining comprehensibly the purpose of the study to uncover positive experiences of committed contemporary dancers, the one hour interview requirement from participants, and how the researcher suggested to maintain ethical practices such as obtaining consent and maintaining privacy and anonymity. In addition to the information sheet, interested dancers were provided with a written consent form to be completed before the interview process. This form was also available at the

interview meeting where the interviewer had a chance to go through it and answer any questions participants may have. However, the early provision of this form to the participants provided them with all information necessary to make a decision about being interviewed. The right of the participant to withdraw was outlined in both information sheet and the consent form. These guidelines were restated at the interview meeting. The researcher also requested the participant's best availability for an interview and scheduled interviews to the participant's convenience.

Vulnerable persons. The population of interest for this study did not include children, the elderly, or persons who do not have the means or ability to comprehend the purpose of the research. All participants were the age of the majority and able to provide their own free and informed consent upon being provided research information by the researcher.

Privacy and confidentiality. In a qualitative interview study, complete confidentiality is not possible as "complete confidentiality would mean that the researcher never shares any of the empirical material obtained in the research project with anyone" (Markula & Silk, 2011). Thus, the principle of anonymity was used to ensure the privacy of participants and to create written research where no participant is personally identifiable. To ensure the privacy of participants, individuals were assigned a pseudonym at time of transcription and the proper names of dance groups, persons, or places used in the interview were removed or changed as needed to preserve coherency of the statement. For example, the university dance group is referred to as USDG. Also, participants and their setting, exclusive of their cultural setting, were not described in a way that could

lead to identification of individuals. These efforts to ensure anonymity were detailed in the consent.

The research information, including audio recorded interviews, transcripts, and demographic materials were kept confidential and kept only on the researchers' password protected computer. Raw data will be kept for 7 years before it will be erased. To limit the access to information, only the researcher and the supervisor are able to listen to any recorded interview and read original transcripts. The transcribed interviews were used for analysis in the project, audio recordings only used to create the transcripts. The details of how and where information will be stored and who has access were detailed in the consent form for the participants.

Justice and inclusiveness. The study of committed contemporary dancers' positive experiences through interview methodology had no known risks that could result in physical or psychological harmful effects for participants. Although some questions of the interview pertained to health and the body, no question is designed to elicit any response about personal conditions of a sensitive nature such as body image disturbances or eating disorders. Any participant responses of this nature would have been incidental to the question and treated with compassion and respect by the interviewer. In the interview process, participants could be provided a transcription of their interview should have they requested one and they could recant any statement they regretted sharing or wished to be excluded from analysis and presentation. This way, participants were

able to retain privacy around any sensitive issue that may have surfaced and was irrelevant to the study purposes.

Benefits for the participants involved in the study are not immediate or tangible, but the purpose of exploring positive experiences in dance and use of a university based dance group will serve to the dance community. As the university based dance group is located within the Physical Education and Recreation Faculty that the researcher is associated with, the research can also serve to further the knowledge of dance in the Faculty. Dance research is a relatively new venture in the Faculty and research contributions about dance can raise awareness of dance among physical education scholars and increase appreciation of local and university based dancers. Improving the understanding of dance in physical education and recreation serves the dance group of the participants by bolstering support for the organization among the faculty. The benefits and meaningfulness of this interview study far outweighed any risk in participation as no known risks were inherent to the interview process of this research. The importance of dance research and how dance research can benefit a university based dance group was described in the information letter accompanying the consent for participants

Results and Discussion

After multiple readings of the interview transcripts and analysis through meaning condensation (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), three main themes emerged. The themes of positive physical experiences, positive experiences related to dance identity, and the recreational dance environment were the most prominent themes.

The meaning of a positive experience was open to the interpretation by the dancers during the interview. My interpretation is then based on the dancers' own understanding of how dance has been positive their lives. The majority of experiences were complimentary to the basic understanding of positive established by the existing literature: emotionally significant, enjoyable, pleasurable, and psychologically or physically beneficial. The main themes are layered: they are composed of subthemes that make up the complex positive dance experiences (see Table 1). In this section the meanings of these themes will be illustrated with the dancers' own voices and relevant discussion from existing dance research.

Table 1

Positive Experiences of Dance: Themes and Subthemes

Theme	Subtheme 1	Subtheme 2	Subtheme 3
A) Positive Physical Experiences	Physicality	Emotional Connection to Movement	Skill Mastery
B) Positive Experiences Related to Dance Identity	Dance Identity	Changes to Dance Identity	Commitment to Dance
C) Recreational Dance Environment	Recreational Dance	Interpersonal Aspects in Recreational Dance	The Influence of the Instructor

Positive Physical Experiences

Based on my analysis, one of the most prominent themes that emerged from the dancers' responses related to the physical experience of dance. The centrality of movement in the dancers' experiences is illustrated by subthemes that revolve around physical dance training. These subthemes included the enjoyment of being physical and obtaining physical skill, the opportunity for

physical communication, and experiences of dance as physical activity. Additionally, subthemes of emotional connection to movement and opportunity to improve physical skills were important to the positive experiences of dance. Emotional connection to movement as a subtheme included dance as creating emotion, movement's effects on emotional states, and the experience of "release" through movement. Skill mastery was comprised of feelings of achievement, enjoyment of physical challenges, and the drive to improve. By exploring the centrality of movement in the dancers' experiences, I acknowledge the important perspectives of dance phenomenology: dancing as a way of knowing and the influence of movement and the body on dancers' experience (Fraleigh, 2000; Parviainen, 2002). I will first discuss the subtheme of being physical in dance training, described here as physicality. Then, I will explore the subtheme of emotion and dance as the emotional connection to movement. Finally, skill mastery and how dancers feel about the physical demands of challenging dance classes will be discussed.

Physicality. I titled this subtheme 'physicality' because dance training provided an important and enjoyable opportunity to move and be physical for the dancers. Movement and the body are central to the human experience of dance as physical activity. Phenomenologically, the dancers' perceptions of their bodies and movement and how these in turn influence their experience is valuable to the understanding of the human experience of dance. The dancers I interviewed expressed three main ideas related to physicality: a desire to move and explore

their physical abilities, the influence of movement in the perception of their bodies, and how dance contributed to exercise in their lifestyles.

The desire to move and explore physical abilities is the impetus for a dancer to experience physicality. For some dancers, the physicality or athletic side of dance is the most important aspect of dance training. Blair described in her feelings before a dance class: "just ready to go, ready to dance, ready to stretch…and do some sit ups…especially if I've been in classes all day, I'm kind of antsy, I want to do something instead of sitting around". But they must also have an opportunity to be physically engaged. The opportunity to move in such a way may not be found in their daily routines. Amanda described dance class as, "I always look forward to it…it's something different and it's something I love to do…something completely different from what you do in your everyday life". Some dancers described feelings of freedom when they were able to 'take up space' through their movement, move in big ways and explore their physicality. The dancers defined the concepts of freedom and power in their own way. Freedom seemed to refer to the idea that when in class their movement and physicality was unrestricted in class. Power referred more to intensity, control over their movement, and ability to take up space. Jamie described this "awesome" and "fun" part of class as "you can go as high or as far as you want" in an expansive area. Sara said her favorite part of class as to "feel my body move through space and take up as much room as I can, there's something really powerful about that". Danielle mentioned "conquering" the space with her movement and other dancers expressed feeling free when they move. These

quotations demonstrate that dancers are not only docile bodies in an authoritarian dance culture (Drybough & Forton, 2010; Gray & Kunkel, 2001; Green 2001). Docile dancers are silenced, not connected to their own bodies and are controlled, used, and improved by some external authority. These dancers expressed feeling unrestricted and in control of their own movement: a degree of autonomy not allowed for subjected dancers. This difference may also exist in part due to the differences in genre and training between ballet and contemporary dance and the dance environment will be discussed later in the results. The exploration of physical abilities, finding their strengths and limitations, and trying new things is an influential feature of dance for these women. The dancers seemed to initiate this process themselves, not as a response to demands by others, such as teachers or choreographers that may lead a class or rehearsal. Karen described this experience as "self-discovery": "there's the possibility that I can discover something new that I can do with my body…I really like the possibility of what could be in dance…I like the physicality of it. I like moving my body".

The dancers also considered movement a chance to experience communication in a different way and to explore their physical selves rather than their intellectual selves. Many dancers were involved in academic or related pursuits which valued their intellectual capacity over their physical capacity (Kolb & Kalogeropoulou, 2012) and utilized verbal communication almost exclusively. However, Sara stated that movement is her most comfortable form of expression and preferable to verbal discourse. Chloe described movement opportunities as balancing the different demands of her work life. Karen stated: "I like using my

body and not my brain because all day I use my brain and I get to use my body in dance". This understanding of dance as an alternate form of personal expression and communication for adult women is largely undocumented as the majority of literature focuses in the professional dancers' experiences (Aalten, 2005; Alexias & Dimitropoulou, 2011; Benn & Walters, 2001; Dryburgh & Fortin, 2010; Gray & Kunkel, 2001; Jackson, 2005; Thomas & Tarr, 2009; van Staden et al., 2009). The professional dancer's primary mode of expression may be dance as that is their main occupation. The recreational dancers in my study worked in education and business that are dominated by verbal communication. Thus, the shift in communication and expression from verbal to physical is a more notable and unique experience for the recreational dancer.

Their physical engagement influenced how the dancers viewed their bodies. Many of the interviewees believed that how their bodies moved was more important than how it looked. Amanda's experience viewing her body through dance training was "really positive because…it was really empowering for me to see that I can have any body shape and still dance with it". This sentiment is shared by the other women who believed that dance training has deepened their appreciation for diverse body types. They now focused on movement rather than appearance which has benefitted their own body image. Sara explained how she viewed her body: "I love my body!...you have to respect your body and the way it moves, what it can do…I don't think it's so much how my body physically looks but what it does for me and it works pretty well". This contrasts with the findings of body image in the world of ballet and professional dance (de Bruin, Bakker, &

Oudejans, 2009, Nordin-Bates, Walker, & Redding, 2011; Penniment & Egan, 2010) where dancers were found to have an increased risk of eating disorders and body dissatisfaction. Learning new ways to move provided an increased awareness of how the dancers' bodies felt and moved. Danielle explained: "realizing the benefits of dance in terms of how your body works, understanding your body, and I think that feels good to me, that's just an amazing feeling when you understand every move in a better way". Other dancers cited how this awareness provided "physical literacy" (Karen), improved kinesthetic awareness, posture, and movement that translated into other parts of their lives. Green (2001) noted that the connection to the body and focus on movement share similarities to the somatic practices that provide dancers with a change of focus from external visual feedback to internal sensations of movement. According to Green, this resulted in enjoyment, relaxation, and feeling of empowerment in the classroom. In recreational dance, body image of participants was found to improve with their involvement in dance, reducing body dissatisfaction and improving the perception of their body appearance (Burgess, Grogan, & Burtwitz, 2005; Lewis & Scannell, 1995). Overall, my findings support the literature on the positive experiences of dance participation related to the physical experience of dancing and also contribute to the enjoyment of dance as a form of exercise.

The sensations, benefits, and enjoyment of being fit and physically active dovetail with the dancers' positive experiences of physicality. These women all acknowledge importance of dance training in their active lifestyles as either a main source of physical activity, inspiration to be more physically active, or the

way they learned about the value of physical activity for their health. Dancers in Gardner, Komesaroff, and Fensham's (2008) study also described how dance experience that had fostered respect for physical activity, appreciation for developing skill in the long term, and helped form recreational values such as seeking recreation that provides a meaningful site to learn through activity. In my study, dancers differed in their enjoyment of basic fitness aspects of dance such as flexibility, strength, and cardiovascular exercises: "Cardio's good, I think that's probably one of the best" (Emily), "I would love it if we could do more strength in it…I know I'm supposed to like [cardio] but usually I hate it" (Danielle), "[Flexibility exercises] are a positive experience for me…[Strength exercises] are not necessarily fun…not necessarily enjoyable" (Jamie). However, all dancers acknowledged that all these features of training were important in order to improve fitness and dance abilities. Many also sought to have more exercises for their weakest areas included in their classes. Sara credited her dance training for fostering an understanding and appreciation for the importance of continuing physical activity in her life. The main source of enjoyment for dance as physical activity related to the sensations of being active. For example: "I like the way stretching feels" (Karen), "the feeling of being stronger" (Chloe), "strength…feels a bit more naturally to me" (Sara), "you feel…that you had a good workout out" (Emily), and the feeling of "getting sweaty" (Jamie). Kolb and Kalogeropoulou (2012) explained that experiencing enjoyable physical sensations such as strength, sweat, and physical exertion can be interpreted as non-typical feminine attributes. This challenges the idea that dance perpetuates female stereotypes (Benn &

Walters, 2001; Fisher; 2007; Gray & Kunkel, 2001). A main source of dance enjoyment is derived from the experience of physical exercise that are considered typical masculine attributes. In terms of the dancers' physical activities, many of these women also described how dancing was more fun and more interesting than going to the gym, more enjoyable than other activities such as running, and less competitive than a sport. Karen described dance and its possible implications for physical activity in our current inactive society:

> I would never want dance to be what you prescribe to people to lose weight or whatever, but it can be a round about way to improve people's well-being…I think that's really important. It's not in that box of competition, it's more broad.

For Emily, the benefits of dance as physical activity are influential throughout her life: "I feel good being able to be active…you feel better physically, a bit more in shape, but it also makes you happy, makes you social so generally a positive influence on your self-esteem".

Being physically active through dance is also influences the health habits of these dancers and some cite learning about nutrition and eating better through being involved in dance and valuing healthy choices for their lifestyles. Chloe described this as:

> I feel like dance has made me eat better because I want to do better and I want to be more fit and so I think it motivates you to make other healthy choices in my lifestyle outside of dance…I feel that because I dance I just

> feel healthier…you know I want to feel like this feeling right now, like when I dance, and I want to feel it in all aspects.

While the dancers derived a great amount of enjoyment, benefit, and pleasure from "the pure physical" (Jamie) aspect of dance training, they distinguished "actual dancing" and the feeling of dancing from the movement of technique and fitness based components of dance training. Based on their descriptions, "actual dancing" seemed to comprise of more expressive, performance, and choreographic elements than the other exercises. This actual dancing elicits a wide variety of emotions and sensations while also involving the joy, exhilaration, and pleasure of physicality. The subtheme of emotional connection to dance will now be explored through the meanings of emotion and movement for these dancers.

Emotional connection to movement. In this subtheme of positive physical experiences, the participation in the "actual dancing" aspects of dance training provided the emotional connection of dancers to dance. Dance was not simply physical activity for these women, although the enjoyment and benefits of incorporating dance as exercise had a positive influence on their lifestyles. The connectedness between movement, the body, and the dance experience has been emphasized in phenomenological dance research (Alexias & Dimitropoulou, 2011; Bond & Stinson, 2007; Bracey, 2004; Fraleigh, 2000; Jackson, 2005; Parviainen, 2002; Rouhiainen, 2008). This relationship is especially evident in the emotional experiences of the dancers and how movement played an important role in eliciting emotions. The act of dancing engages the emotions and allows for

artistry and self-expression. This is an important distinction for the dancers because "actual dancing" is not simply a sport or exercise. Jamie described this difference in dance from physical activity as

> it is important that there are creative and expressive forms of movement that are included in that portfolio of physical education and recreation…dance can be overlooked because sports and things are what most people know but I think expressive movement is important too.

Danielle also spoke on the emotional expression of dance as "…emotionally the body has so many ways to experience and express emotion and that's why I dance because it feels good…it makes us feel something, it's not just about the technical aspect of it". An emotional relationship with dance among younger dancers has been found to foster commitment and positive interpretations of dance experiences (Pickard & Bailey, 2009; Stinson, Blumenfield-Jones, & van Dyke, 1990). Among these women, this emotional connection seems to have been developed over their long term participation in dance and further fueled their commitment to the activity. The emotional connection is often referenced when dancers discuss the expression in and the performance of choreography, a part of dance class that is the favorite among the majority of these dancers. Choreography is a regular section of class where dancers learn a brief combination of steps set to a specific piece of music. This may be expanded upon each week to make a longer dance and representative of something one might see at a dance show. While the dancers refer to choreography in class in terms of performance, there is no audience. Dancers draw similarities between the energy

and effort in choreography and performance situations. Through choreography, dancers could access their emotions and relate them to the piece they are performing. Blair described this emotive aspect of dance training: "choreography I think is the biggest emotional impact because working with different moves and different music has different tones and when you put yourself into the choreography and try to display the emotions, you can feel it yourself". Danielle explained her preference for choreography: "'Cause I'm dancing. And it feels like you're moving for pleasure and not for training". The dancers' emotional state beyond the classroom can also be affected by dancing.

Dancing is also an emotional experience when it becomes a way to cope and provide perspective on their daily emotions. Chloe felt particularly emotionally engaged in an instance where she was able to express what she was feeling in the moment through the choreography of the day:

> I was just down and upset…when we got to dance…it was a more sad number, and so I felt I could relate to the movement we were doing…it felt like what I wanted to because sometimes when you're upset, you're like 'I really want to dance', and when you dance something sad you feel like you're just letting it out.

Similarly, Karen described the influence of dancing on her emotions:

> You can be having a bad day and you and you can work it out through moving, and it's not necessarily by moving that you've addressed the situation…but through moving it's different now…your emotions have meaning somehow and your perspective shifted

Dancers can also experience the movement first and then an emotion. The emotional attachment to the movement may be difficult to articulate. Danielle said: "when I'm dancing, it's not that I have a specific emotion in mind but there's like this visceral feeling in my whole body that's embodied specifically when I'm performing". Karen described:

> everything's kind of in sync and that will make me feel emotional…I can't always name what those emotions are and I think I've been feeling that my whole life…if we're doing jumps or a more upbeat combination…I feel exhilarated but again…it's an emotion but not a named emotion.

And Blair stated this idea concisely: "I come to dance, I feel good physically and then I feel emotionally".

A main finding of the dancer's emotional connection to the movement of dance was the feeling described most often as 'release'. Release incorporated meanings of stress relief, emotional outlets, and relaxation. In this study, the women saw dance as opportunity to "let go" (Amanda), "let loose" (Emily), and "decompress" (Jamie). This source of release improved their state of mind and emotional response in other aspects of their lives. Dancers believed that their mood improves, they feel happier, more optimistic, and better cope with stressors. This is especially notable to dancers when they are not regularly going to dance. Many noted that this change resulted in feeling more stress, pressure, and a feeling of "something missing". Emily described her dance group as "a nice sort of break from all that stress and studying, from that reality, and just somewhere to

let loose". Amanda noticed "thing are getting a little rougher" when it has been a while since her last dance class. Dance was an "emotional release", a "physical release", or an "artistic release" to different dancers. However, all these releases comprised of letting go, not worrying, relaxing, and reducing stress. This contrasts with the studies on professional and student ballet dancers. The ballet dancers' experiences have been found to include anxiety, low self-esteem, and high self-evaluation (Nordin-Bates, Cumming, Aways, & Sharp, 2011) as well as compulsive striving, defensiveness (van Staden et al., 2009), fear, embarrassment, and disengagement (Bond & Stinson, 2007). This further demonstrates the difference in experiences and training between the world of professional dance and ballet and recreational contemporary dance. While class is a major source of stress for the professional and ballet dancer, the recreational dancer seeks dance to relax and cope with the stress in their life external to dance participation.

These dancers felt a strong emotional connection to dance that they have established and explored through movement. Interpreting and expressing emotion of choreography, relating to movement with personal emotional states, and experiencing a form of release are all facets of emotional connection to movement for the dancers. Movement, in addition to emotional connections, also elicits feelings achievement and success in undertaking physical challenges and skill mastery. In the dancers' responses the enjoyment of physically demanding challenges and skill mastery emerged as a subtheme because of its contribution to important positive experiences derived from being physical.

Skill Mastery. The dancers participated in an advanced level of dance and as such, training consisted of complex physical skills and high levels of fitness. And although these dancers were participating in a recreational dance environment, they still pursued improvement in their physical skills and abilities through dance. They desired challenge in their dance training and derived enjoyment from working hard in class. These aspects of skill mastery formed a reoccurring subtheme within the theme of positive physical experiences. According to Pickard and Bailey (2009), ballet students' positive experiences of skill mastery contributed to their commitment to dance. The mastery of physical skills continued to be important for the dancers' adult participation in the University based Student Dance Group (USDG). According to Kolb and Kalogeropoulou (2012), adult women involved in recreational ballet took pleasure in the degree of difficulty. This challenge motivated them to be dedicated which they and perceived as a reward of participation. Jamie described that she looked forward to: "…knowing that it's going to be a workout is good….something like that I want it to be a workout, I want it to be worth my time". Blair described how she approached going to class:

> …I put more pressure on myself to work harder in class while you have the chance to make mistakes and to do better…I think those are pressures but that that those are good because they push you to do better as a dancer and improve yourself.

Sara recalled a particular instance of a challenging ballet barre exercise from her training: "I loved that feeling of just pushing yourself to get that psycho barre and

just going through the whole exercise…which was really challenging…but in a way people could succeed…and you feel like you conquered this amazing goal". Sara's continued to seek challenge:

> Sometimes I find too that I can't find classes that are at the high level that I need them to be at, they're too easy and I want to feel like I'm still challenged to make it worth it for me.

Chloe described her drive to keep dancing: "…pushing myself, I am motivated because I want to be better, I want to be stronger, more flexible". The dancers showed a preference for physically challenging classes that provided opportunities to build their skills. This preference included the desire to improve physical accomplishments, but also enjoyment in the process of working hard in dance class.

Amanda felt that working hard made class more fun: "…and I find when I'm working at something I tend to enjoy it more; the better I'm getting at it, and have a better attitude to work harder and get better at it". Emily appreciated not only a physical challenge: "I like that feeling of sweating and working hard so I guess that's why I like the idea of good cardio [in a dance class]" but also a mental challenge to keep her engaged: "…after a while you know your across the floor technique and you know your warm up so it's sort of mechanical in your brain, whereas you have to sort of think about combo and figure it out, learn it". Amanda explained her approach to class to include hard work and achievement:

> …when I come to dance class, I always expect 110% out of myself. I don't always do it but I always try to…because they only way to get better

> is to work really hard and that's always a goal of mine, to leave class feeling like I've accomplished something.

While the traditional connotations for hard work may be negative, for dancers hard work in the form of dance training was pleasurable. Kolb and Kalogeropoulou (2012) found that among adult recreational ballet dancers, the enjoyment of discipline and challenge was among the main motivations for these women to dance. Working with discipline and being challenged provided the framework for achievement and progression in dance, and thus led to further enjoyment and feelings of success (Kolb & Kalogeropoulou, 2012). The enjoyment of hard work and the desire to improve also contributed to positive experiences of achievement and success for the dancers of USDG.

Dancers defined improving their dance abilities and skill mastery as a positive experience of achievement and success. Blair described: "I feel good about myself because class is an hour and a half of doing work and different types of work, it's challenging and satisfying". Karen talked about mastering a skill or technique:

> I actually think that's one of my favorite things about dance is mastering skill…I really enjoy that part…'cause your kind of engaged, like your body and mind is engaged in the process and makes you feel amazing after. And even if you don't get it perfectly, you at least make some progress, so I think that's really rewarding…that's why I keep dancing.

Many of the dancers described the experience of mastering a skill as a "fulfilling" (Chloe, Danielle) accomplishment. Mastering skills and improvement in dance

class were important aspects of the dancers' feelings of success and achievement. For Amanda:

> …you finally get something and work through something and finally get it. I feel those are the most meaningful moments for me because you're always working at things and you're always trying to reach that end goal…those little breakthroughs that you have…those are the most meaningful because those are what motivates you to keep going.

For Danielle having a setting for achievement like dance is important: "it sparks something in people especially when you love it so for me it's something that constantly kept me…happy or with a goal, which is what I'll say, a goal". Emily described working towards and finally achieving a skill:

> …you feel really accomplished especially if it was something that seemed really unattainable and really hard and then you work at it…sometimes I would do triples [pirouettes] this year, I never really thought that would be attainable…empowers you sort of, makes you feel very confident.

The experience of skill mastery and success derived from commitment and hard work was rewarding for dancers; a payoff for time and effort that fuels further work. Sara explained: "...just the overall feeling of success and there's nothing better than getting the really complex exercise after working at it, yeah it just feels great and like you can do anything that you put your mind to". Blair pinpointed the influence of achievement in her dance training: "It's a motivation and gives you determination, keeps you going for accomplishing just the small things, it makes you set personal goals to get that achievement" and: "…it makes you feel

good about yourself too and it's like your hard work paid off". An important observation on the dancers' meanings of achievement and success is that while performances and shows are popularly considered the standard of achievement in performing arts, these dancers value the day-to-day accomplishments found in the training environment. Goals and milestones such as physical skill mastery exist for the dancers whether or not they have a focus on performing. The drive to improve, work hard, and feel achievement through skill mastery can also become aspects that define one as a dancer. They become facets of the dancers' identity as described in my next theme.

Positive Experiences Related to Dance Identity

Dance has played a major role in my interviewees' lives. Most of the dancers had been involved in dance since their childhood and some began to take dance classes as young as two or three years old. The early introduction to dance and long term involvement in the activity is part of what connected these dancers to dance. They often identified themselves as a dancer: this was a part of who they are and how they lived their lives. Dancers embraced this identity as a positive aspect of their lived experience. The dancer identity emerged as a major theme based on my analysis of the interviewees' responses. From this theme, three major subthemes were notable: the self-identification as a dancer (dance identity), changes to their dance identity, and commitment to dance was a particularly notable facet of their identity as dancers.

Dance identity. Identity as a dancer played an important role in the interviewees' dance participation: "I have an identity as a dancer, it's a big part of

my life still…I've always loved doing it and I hope to continue doing it, so definitely it's been a really positive experience for me" was how Jamie reflected on her overall experience of dance training. This declaration was echoed among many of the interviewees as something that had great personal value in their lives. The interconnectedness of dance and identity for serious dancers is researched most notably among professional and student ballet dancers (Fisher, 2007; Gray & Kunkel, 2001; Pickard, 2012; van Staden, Myburgh, & Poggenpoel, 2009). However, identity also emerges as a major feature of dance participation for others involved in the forms of modern, jazz, or multidisciplinary university dance (Alter, 1997; Bracey, 2004; Stinson, Blumenfield-Jones, & van Dyke, 1990; Dyer, 2010). Stinson et al. (1990) discovered that identity as a dancer was valuable to the dance students and greatly contributed to their effort and continued involvement in dance. Similarly, based on my analysis of dancers' responses, dancer identity as a dancer drove their continued involvement in dance and incorporation of dance in their lifestyle. Amanda spoke about how this motivates her to continue dancing:

> …why would I stop doing something that brings so much joy to my life and that has taught me so much over the years so it has become a part of me. Like I don't just say I dance, I say I'm a dancer, that's part of my identity. So that's my motivation, to say it is a part of me, I can't give up on it.

As part of an identity for these women, dancing can become a deep-seated desire in their lives. Karen described her internal desire to dance as, "there's a little

voice that's just like, you miss dance, you should dance, that's kind of the biggest thing" which compliments her statement that, "I've learned my lesson this past year not dancing and realizing that I don't feel complete". Chloe had noticed this among dancers:

> …I think specifically dance is, if you love it so much, you don't really want to be away from it, so I don't think you can really make anyone, you should just be doing it! I think if you truly love it you'll be motivated to do it.

The link between the desire to dance and feeling of identity is similar to the findings of Stinson et al. (1990) and the phenomenological research of Bracey (2004) in which dancers were found to perceive leaving dance as unimaginable. Dance provided them with meaningful purpose in their lives. Dancers in Stinson et al. (1990) believed they would feel incomplete and even bitter if they stopped dancing. Danielle explained her sense of purpose and connection to dance:

> I love dancing and this kind of feeling…you don't get this anywhere else…I had been working out and finding other ways to train my body but when I was in that class, really made me aware of that dance was so good and I need to keep doing it 'cause that's why I'm alive.

This feeling of purpose and self-awareness in dance training is further evident in the other dancers' responses pertaining to the development and expression of their identity through dance training.

When in dance training or the classroom environment, the dancers often expressed that they were able to be themselves and to develop them into the

persons that they are today. In dance, Sara explained, “I feel like myself, I feel very comfortable. I feel the way I should be in dance class, just, I guess, it’s natural”. Amanda described herself in dance training:

> after I’m done a dance class, it just seems like I can go out and do anything…you’re just full of self-awareness and assurance…because you become so aware of yourself during a dance...that’ll carry on through the rest of the week…that’s what I really like about doing it more often…that constant self-awareness and sort of self-inventory that you can do

Karen has felt “grounded”, “centered”, and “at peace” with herself in dance: “I feel like I know who I am a bit more when I’m dancing a lot, it just makes me feel like everything’s pieced together, where other times I kind of feel like pieces are all over the place”. These dancers’ responses show how participating in dance class can allow dancers to feel and express their true selves. This differs from van Staden, Myburgh, and Poggenpoel (2009) and Dyer (2010) who reported that dancers do not feel they can be themselves, express their individuality, or reveal their emotions in class. However, van Staden et al. (2009) interviewed professional dancers and Dyer’s (2010) study pertained to university dance programs. Both are contexts for more intensive training than recreational dance programs. Such settings may place dancers in competition with one another and thus, might not be conducive to sharing emotions and personal expression.

Identifying oneself as a dancer within a group and the wider dance culture provided dancers with a feeling of belonging to an exclusive group. Blair explained how important it was to belong to a group with others who dance:

"…we kind of have our own take on things that other people wouldn't understand, only dancers understand which makes it interesting". To Sara, this was part of the benefits of dance: "I think that comes from…having a place where I feel I can just be myself and belong to something". Jamie noted the feeling of exclusivity and specialness of a dancer identity:

> ...one thing I like about being to say, I'm a dancer, is that not everyone can say that but because I've done it for so many years and still have access to this form of exercise, and this form of art, and this form of expression

She continued: "also there's a little part of me that likes it because not everyone can do it". As Stinson et al. (1990) also noted:

> There also is a sense of feeling special in being set apart. While dancers may not be particularly understood or appreciated by the larger culture, these students appreciate themselves-the discipline that characterizes their lives and the knowledge they have that others do not (p. 18).

Thus to dancers, the ability to identify themselves as a dancer positioned them to be part of a group they view as exceptional and special. This sets them apart from larger culture. They valued their personal experience and connection to dance but also the shared experiences that unite dancers on a common ground. This can be a very powerful and valuable facet of how the dancers view themselves and a connection they strive to maintain. In addition to constructing a dance identity, many of the dancers' responses pertained to how dance training helped to shape their character both within and beyond the dance classroom.

Many of the interviewed dancers credited their involvement in dance training with the development of some of their positive character qualities. This corresponds with the literature on dance students' experiences as dance training is considered an important site and stimulation for developing students' discipline, determination, and self-belief (Bond & Stinson, 2007; Pickard & Bailey, 2009; Stinson et al., 1990). Sara's life skills were influenced by her dance experience:

> I like that there's so many skills you learn in dance class that are transferrable to other aspects of your life. So when I was young, it taught me huge things around responsibility, things like time management, how to feel your body, accountability, all that stuff.

Amanda believed her work ethic came from her involvement in dance training:

> I find that my dance training has helped me obviously to dance, but I've been able to carry that over to everyday life the focus you learn, the determination, the drive; you can't get that from anything else or very few other things…You have to work at it if you want to do well and I think that really helped me in my academics.

Confidence was a commonly referenced gain from involvement in dance training. Dance training helped many of the dancers to feel more confident while in class but this also translated to their daily lives. For Chloe: "I think that dance has made me a lot more confident and I think that it has shaped my character, definitely". Previous research also includes self-confidence as a noted benefit of dance participation (Gardner, Komesaroff, & Fensham, 2008; Pickard & Bailey, 2009). The features of dance identity among the interviewed women arose from their

wealth of dance experience and long-term involvement. However, for many dancers, their participation and the role of dance in their lives have changed over time. The challenges to identity and the search for meaningful dance participation were important experiences for many interviewees and will be explored in the next subtheme.

Changes to dance identity. For the interviewed dancers, being involved in dance throughout their lives has changed the extent and type of their dance participation over time. Dancers' identities are challenged when their expectations for dance are not realized or a shift in their participation threatens how they see themselves as a dancer. Transitions away from dance are commonly researched in professional and pre-professional ballet dancers who often struggle with career transitions (Gray & Kunkel, 2001; Pickard 2012; van Staden et al., 2009). However, rejection in dance can be particularly difficult for any dancer if they feel a threat to their identity. This was particularly tangible when the dancers talked about auditions where the dancers' abilities are openly judged. Karen recounted her experience as a young girl at auditions: "…that was total rejection and I was a pretty mild mannered kid and I was so mad…heartbroken…'cause it feels like a reflection of you, right. It's hard not to separate that, it's hard not to take it personally". Conversely, an experience of success at an audition process could also validate self-appraisal. Jamie described being accepted in the audition process as "validation…you're good enough". Identity linked to dance ability can influence dancers' responses to rejection and how they respond to changes in their dance participation. Chloe had quit dance but felt she should keep going, because

watching dance made her think "I should be doing that". When returning to dance she struggled to regain how she felt she should be as a dancer. Sara described the end of her pre-professional dance training as,

> I felt like something was missing. And like going from a clean break, I didn't know how I was going to move forward with it…I almost went through a mild depression…because I didn't know how I was going to be able to continue to dance.

However, Sara continued to explain her experience, "But then I started to realize that I don't have to do that at that level and I can do something that can be more recreational and I think I still get the same satisfaction and…well-being from it".

While the transition to a different form of dance participation can be difficult and personal for the serious dancer, their current participation remained a meaningful and positive part of their lives. At the time of interviews, Danielle was experiencing her own transition from pre-professional programming to the more recreational USDG:

> I am definitely at a crossroads right now, where I know that I want to keep dancing but how seriously I want to keep dancing is a really good question…it's hard because sometimes the littlest things can just remind you dance is important, what you love but I've always still had that question.

Danielle was also familiar with the challenge of transition for other dancers:

> …you have these experiences and you are a dancer in your own mind, right, and it doesn't matter that anyone thinks you're not good enough, it's

> just an unfortunate, like where do you go now? When you want to continue your love of dance but you don't want to do it like a profession.

For the interviewed dancers, they have found meaningful participation in the USDG. Involvement in USDG and other forms of dance participation expanded Sara's definition of what it means to be a dancer:

> reframing it in my mind that to be a dancer and be involved in dance, you don't have to be a professional dancer, it's not the be all end all of being involved in dance and dance participation can be many different things…rewiring that for myself was huge…there are ways to be a dancer that were just as meaningful for me not that professional part.

Emily's shift from competitive to recreational participation improved her dance experiences:

> I did stop dancing and I really missed it…and I came back and I just remember that I was really happy that I came back…studio was competitive and I just wanted a break from it, I didn't want it to take up my whole life.

Making transitions between levels of dance participation can challenge dancers to personally redefine what it means to be a dancer. Not all dancers may be successful in finding meaningful new ways to dance. Amanda believed this challenge deters many dancers from continuing as they cannot expand their definition of "dancer". She explained:

> you don't have to stop dancing because you're not making it a profession, I think that deters a lot of people that think I'm not going to continue with

> it, I'm not looking for a career, it was just a for fun thing…And they don't think that that can still be, they can still do it recreationally throughout their adult life…people don't really see it that way…it's a lot of dance for kids and then you either stop dancing or you do it professionally.

Evidently, dancers who continue beyond their pre-professional, professional, or studio experiences are able to adapt their personal definition of meaningful dance involvement and successfully cope with instances that threaten their dance identities. Overcoming these threats to dance identity provides a glimpse into the perseverance exhibited by these dancers. In connection with such challenges in dance, such as rejection and injury, perseverance was an important characteristic and subtheme that contributed to their long-term involvement in dance.

Commitment to dance. Based on my interviews, I commitment and determination in their approach to dance was common among the dancers. Thus, the subtheme of commitment to dance was a part of the dance identity was formed. The dancers had pursued dance training throughout their lives and had experienced challenges to their continued participation. As Amanda explained: "…every time you face a challenge you have to overcome it…you always have to try and overcome it the best you can because that's what's going to push you forward and I think that's why I've had so many good experiences". In Karen's experience, a challenge could add to the enjoyment: "…so the challenges are slightly due to stress levels that come at exam time or performance time, but they're also sort of exciting in that, it adds to the excitement, the thrill of it". Main challenges dancers faced were rejection (in auditions and from dance groups) and

pain and injury. These often difficult experiences had the potential to deter the participants from continued dancing. However, the dancers were determined and reframed challenging experiences to continue dancing in spite of these obstacles. The continued determination to overcome challenge was an interesting facet of these dancers' identities in dance training.

When dancers experienced instances of rejection, most commonly through auditions, it could be an emotional and difficult time for a dancer. The dancers interviewed described feelings of sadness, heartbreak, and frustration associated with their experiences of rejection in dance. Sara described the audition process: "auditions process were always to me, horrible, I don't know, I wasn't cut out for it, the waiting forever, getting five minutes to prove yourself in front of people who'd never laid eyes on you before…and I found that so discouraging". Karen also described rejection as a result of auditions: "…when I was younger I auditioned for [a prestigious ballet school] twice…And so that was rejection and it stung…I was so mad, and I was just like heartbroken…not getting it". However, it was also common among the dancers to explain how they had come to see their experiences of rejection as opportunities to learn, inspiration to work harder, and even as indicators of future success. This is indicative that to continue dance and overcome challenges, reframing otherwise negative experiences to find the possible positive outcomes is important. Blair described how she coped with her rejection from a more advanced dance group:

> …working harder at the place you're at and when you're not in the top group working just as hard…and to recognize that's not the end of it just

> because you're not in a certain group doesn't mean you're not good and doesn't mean you can't keep going…just keep working hard.

Danielle discussed her outlook on rejection: "I just think in those instances it's one person or event or piece that's choosing you and it doesn't really define you at all and as many instances that you have in rejection, you'll have in success". According to the phenomenological research by Bond and Stinson (2007), ballet students counted a challenge, including rejection, among the pleasurable aspects of dance as it cultivated their drive and self-reliance. Emily discussed her preparedness to reframe rejection as an opportunity to improve:

> I would find it hard, you know, I would take it more personally. But at the same time, hopefully use the opportunity to work, work harder, and improve. Hopefully, it's not just rejection, hopefully it's some constructive criticism that you can work on.

Sara also said that her process of dealing with rejection was a "reframing" and "rewiring" and: "…deciding my love for dance was more important than letting people tell me that I could or couldn't dance". According to Pickard and Bailey (2009), young ballet dancers interpreted setbacks as positive experiences, viewing the setbacks as opportunities to learn, believe in themselves, and create resolve. These experiences were part of the young ballet dancers' descriptions of their commitment to continued dance training. Similarly, persevering in the face of rejection seemed to affirm the dancers' commitment to continued dance training. Reframing negative occurrences and seeking positive outcomes is not limited to

dancers' experiences of rejection, but framed also how they persevered through pain and injury in their dance involvement.

Pain and injury, especially in an activity as physical as dancing, are challenges both physically and emotionally. In the dancers' responses, pain and injury were described as frustrating, saddening, overwhelming, and inhibiting. Persevering through injury, some dancers described "pushing through" (Amanda, Jamie), "working through" (Sara) and "refusing to stop" (Karen) when faced with pain so they could continue to dance. However, they also commonly felt that it was an opportunity to learn about their body. This resulted in a positive outlook for dancing post-injury. Chloe described her experiences with pain and injury:

> I've learned in time that there's days when [pain is] bad and days when it's really good, and back and forth. But I know if it's bad just back off today or the week, and in time it's going to get better. And it has, it's gotten so much better.

Similar to Chloe, many of the dancers believed injury had taught them more about their bodies and how to take care of themselves. Sara explained her experience of dancing injured:

> [enjoying a dance class is] difficult when you're in excruciating pain but then I also think that you learn how to take care of yourself and to move your body better so hopefully those things don't happen in the first place.

Like Chloe and Sara, Danielle also sought these positive potential outcomes when injured:

> …it makes [dance] less enjoyable but also the feeling of when you can dance again…you're so invigorated to dance and you want to a lot more so I think it also makes you more aware of your body….aware of your pains and to listen to it.

Blair shared Danielle's optimistic outlook on dancing post-injury:

> …you're trying to do something and it hurts…and if you are actually healed, then the next class doing the same things again will be better. So I think at the time it might not be as enjoyable but it will be more enjoyable when it heals.

These findings correspond with Pickard and Bailey (2009) who found young ballet dancers suppressed pain to continue dancing and often reframed occurrences of injury as positive. They described being tough, strong, and that pain and injury is a part of dancing (Pickard & Bailey, 2009). Similar to the dancers of USDG, they believed that one should continue to dance in spite of injury because there were more good experiences to be had (Pickard & Bailey, 2009). Emily found pain (but not injury) to be positive; a sign that she had been dancing well: "…that soreness that happens the next day, I'll sort of take care of it…but it's almost usually a better feeling than when it's not hurting so much…I feel good that I worked out so hard that I hurt right now". Emily's experience was not unusual. For example, Thomas and Tarr (2009) found that ballet dancers interpreted their soreness and exhaustion as evidence of working hard and accomplishment. While pain and injury can hinder the enjoyment of a dance class, the reframing of pain and injury experiences allowed dancers to persevere through

these challenges and did not deter them from future dance participation. Karen explained in her experiences of dance training:

> I think the good experiences outweigh the bad experiences by far, absolutely by far. And it's interesting in talking [about the challenges], for me, most of the bad experiences and issues are kind of dependent on my response to things, so yeah, the positive experiences outweigh the bad ones by far.

The majority of these bad or negative experiences were reflected on by dancers as stemming from their previous experiences in dance from youth participation in studios or pre-professional programs. Their current participation in dance seemed to yield a wealth of positive experiences. Thus, their recreational dance participation and the features of their current recreational dance environment were an important theme in their positive experiences of dance and will be examined through the final theme.

The Recreational Dance Environment

Phenomenology in dance research is "a method for intuitive and theoretical reflections on dance from multiple perspectives" (Fraleigh, 2000, p.54). I will now expand on the meanings in dancers' experiences by discussing their perspectives on the importance of the dance environment. The dance environment comprised of factors such as instructors, style of dance training, class settings, and fellow dancers can influence the participation and positive experiences of the dancers involved. Through my own dance experience, I have also found the environment of dance class, especially the in-class social aspects

and instructor, to be influential to my enjoyment of a class. The dancers shared similar thoughts on the dance environment and the factors that influenced their own in-class experiences. Through analysis of the interview responses, the recreational dance environment emerged as a major theme in the enjoyment of class and continued participation of dance. The most important subthemes of the dance environment for the interviewed dancers were the recreational setting, the interpersonal aspect of recreational dance, and the influence of the instructor. The influence of these three subthemes on dance training experiences will be explored through the following section.

Recreational dance. The recreational dance setting has been the site of many positive experiences for the dancers and highly beneficial to their continued participation in dance training. The three main components of the recreational dance environment as described by the dancers were the inclusivity and accessibility of recreational dance, the skill and age appropriate dance opportunities, and the importance of recreational dance for the community. Jamie described USDG as:

> I feel like it's, especially in the advanced classes, people who have been dancing their whole lives who just want to keep doing it for exercise, for fun and really enjoy doing it…It's a lot more laid back and kind of a recreational type of setting.

In the literature of recreational dancers in the university setting, dancers are more likely to have positive experiences as they are removed from the rigors and demands of ballet or professional dance (Adame, Radell, Johnson, & Cole, 1991).

Dancing for the fun of it through recreational participation is an important aspect of their current dance training for many of the interviewees. Blair said of her current dancing, "…I think it's better for me, for fun" and Emily: "…it's the class style I find…keeps it sort of relaxed and more recreational and for fun, and you don't have to be too competitive or too serious". Jamie commented on the group of dancers in her recreational class: "just sharing that experience with people who are in sort of the same situation as us, you know, they've grown up dancing and now just do it for fun and that common interest". Recreational dance offered through a university setting can be a valuable opportunity for many women to continue their involvement in dance while pursuing careers, academics, and other interests. In the responses of 459 female recreational dancers in a college setting, Valverde (1987) found that they preferred this style extracurricular dance programming to other forms of physical activity and wished to be more involved in recreational dance. Recreational dance training in a college setting was how the dancers in Valverde (1987) were able to continue their dance participation from their previous long term experience in genres such as ballet, jazz, and tap. Dancers from many backgrounds and genres can participate in recreational dance, especially in a setting as accessible as a university based dance group open to both students and the public.

Inclusivity of recreational dance and of USDG in particular, was valuable to the dancers and prominent in their descriptions of USDG. Amanda described the group as "welcoming" and Sara saw it as "accessible". Karen described the setting of the group:

> I think for one of the dancers to come in who's never danced before, that's extremely brave…so really ensuring that not too much hierarchy, and that kind of warmth and inclusiveness is really maintained and fostered, because it is a culture.

Within this environment of inclusivity, the dancers also noted safety and non-judgment as a benefit of the recreational dance environment. Jamie described her current dance participation at USDG: "this has been really great because it's a really safe environment too and really inclusive…in that anyone you know can come and experience dance so that's really good, it's open to all". Emily also described her experience of such an environment at UDSG: "…if I'm not getting something I don't feel like getting judged for it…everyone's there to work on themselves and you know you're not being judged if you don't do something properly, so kind of keeps things light and friendly". Amanda described the non-judgmental atmosphere as beneficial and as something that arose from the university setting:

> I find in the university setting, because there's none of the preconceived notions of what the class should be, it's all very individual. And so I feel, much of people are still social, it's more beneficial to your own individual dancer because you're just focused on why you're there.

The inclusiveness of the group and recreational dance participation does not hold the same pressures and demands the dancers had previously experienced in other studio or pre-professional training. While the dancers have many positive experiences from previous years of dance training, their past studio or dance

programs also generated stresses (such as those discussed in subtheme of Perseverance) and they often contrasted this experience with how they felt about their current dance participation. From the dancers' responses, stress and negative experiences are unlikely occurrences for them in recreational dance participation.

The interviewed dancers have a wealth of experience in other forms of dance participation in addition to their current recreational group. Many drew comparisons between their previous competitive or pre-professional involvement and recreational dance environments. The recreational dance environment seems to be a source of positive experiences for dancers and differs from their previous training in ways that make dance class more enjoyable. The competitive environment of studios and pre-professional programs can place more demands on students and contribute to the perceived high stakes of their dance training. However, the recreational dance class does not have competitive performances or competition between dancers vying for professional work. This distinction was also described in Kolb and Kalogeropoulou (2012): "Vitally, this distinguishes people for whom dance is a recreational pursuit from professional dancers; for the latter dance ceases to be a relief from work and instead constitutes the very essence of their labours" (p.114). Emily has found recreational dancing to be less stressful than her previous competitive studio experience:

> I think personally that I've just gotten to the point where I like to do it recreationally, do it for fun. I'm not, you know, a professional dancer and so I've come to be so much more comfortable with letting go and taking that pressure off and...I still have a little bit of I want to push myself to

> more…but at the same time I'm not getting worked up like I used to…I'm okay with just being at my level and fine dancing with a lot of really good dancers.

From dancing recreationally, Blair believed that her motivation to dance became more self-guided:

> …taking class at university it's more personal motivation, I do it for myself and because I love it…when I was at such a competitive studio it was more, the motivation was to win competitions and to do well that way…so it's changed a little bit.

Sara experienced the competition between dancers in pre-professional training as a stress: "…my undergrad, it was a really different environment, very competitive, very intense and my first year, probably my first two years were very intimidating. It was a very different atmosphere to my dance community". Danielle was also glad to be out of the studio system for her continued participation, as she found competitive dance to be limiting: "you can continue dancing at a studio…if you have that option…but my experience of it was not the most positive experience to have, I think it can be kind of like…not really open to other kinds of things". Chloe also came from the competitive studio environment and has found her recreational dancing to be more positive:

> It's good in the fact that this group that we're with is so much more chill, I'm not in a structured competitive group anymore. Because that's more cliquey and it more intense. But this one is like just come and do your best

> and you'll feel good and I like that…they're not here to prepare for competition, they're just here to dance.

When seeking dance classes as adults, the dancers were glad to have found a recreational option among the dance organizations available in their city. Jamie noted that the recreational option was preferred for her current participation:

> …without this group I don't know…I guess I would be taking an adult dance class but the studio's on the other side of the city. And I'm not really keen on going back to the studio 'cause it's this whole other sort of subculture…So without [USDG] I'm not sure I would have danced.

Karen also shared this sentiment: "I probably wouldn't be dancing anywhere else in [the city] right now. Because [USDG] was so accessible and not intimidating it was a great way to kind of open the door to dance". Thus, the opportunity to dance recreationally and move on from a studio or pre-professional dance program is important to the continued involvement of dancers and is a more positive experience for them at this stage of their dance involvement.

Recreational dance in a group such as USDG was described as an exceptional opportunity by dancers. Many had experienced difficulties finding dance training that suited their skill level and class preferences. Jamie described finding adult dance classes in her city:

> …lots of the adult classes out there are beginner so as an experienced dancer it's hard to dance with beginners 'cause you know it's not challenging enough or class moves too slowly that kind of thing and again just the studios being a different environment so it's hard sort of in that

> adult experienced class you don't necessarily want to be in that studio environment.

Sara and Danielle also both cited the prevalence of beginner level classes and the difficulty of finding appropriate classes for the experienced and skilled adult dancer. When searching for classes, age was also a factor. Many dancers found that recreational participation with USDG was a more positive experience as it provided training within their skill level but also within their own peer group. Sara described finding USDG: "…there's nothing more discouraging now than going into, like the first drop in class I in [the city] I went to was just a drop in class and it was all young, young people, I just felt so old" And then in taking classes at USDG:

> …it has provided the opportunity where I don't feel like I was the oldest person there, so it has given me the opportunity to keep dancing fortunately, what I was most excited about coming here. So it has definitely filled that need.

Chloe described USDG as "a more mature group" and believed that for adult dancers age can be a barrier for participation:

> I think that a lot of people worry about their age and their physical ability, right now…there's a lot of people that are like, oh I don't think I'm at that level but I'm like, you know try your best and you'll get there.

Karen discussed this barrier in her own experience:

Karen: I almost took a ballet class at [studio] because I really liked the teacher…and I think it would be really good technical work but I really didn't want to be with eighteen year olds, so I decided not to.

Carolyn: Eighteen year olds that dance like ten hours a week!

Karen: Exactly! Exactly.

In coming to USDG to dance, the dancers described how this provided them with a sense of community and connection to the dancers of their city. A sense of community fostered through recreational dance participation was described by dancers as social connections in the local dance scene as well as belonging to a diverse group of individuals with shared dance interests. Sara experienced this sense of community through her current participation especially: "it brings together all different, people from all different walks of life, so students, staff, community members all working together" and she also said of community:

> bringing people together in the space is huge…having to work together on the same end goal is really important for developing a sense of community…building relationships…and the community being those people that support you and I think that transfers to other aspects of your life not just dance. And there's a sense of community in class and feeling like you belong to something when you're dancing in a group.

Amanda has found greater connection to the dance community through her current recreational dance participation:

> …now that I've come here there's so much more awareness of all the dance community…You know, it's not just, on well, this is kind of for this

> set of people, no. This is our community and we're sharing it with you, if you want to come out to this, come out to it...And I think that's what community is about. Sharing and being a part of people's lives.

However, dancers were also aware many dancers do not continue their training or are unable to find a recreational dance community. To encourage and enable others to continue dancing, the interviewed dancers believed in creating and supporting more opportunities for the experienced adult dancer that are accessible. Karen explained how the current state of dance opportunities can be a barrier for dancers:

> I think just the sheer existence of programs that are suitable for the people, so when you think about dance in the studio that is what usually exists for adolescents…obstacles and barriers would be just whether or not a program exists….So then I guess it just comes down to resources, the resources to support them…But what it contributes to the well-being of the women and men and girls who dance is amazing…And the community building is like amazing, it's so valuable. People should be throwing money at us!

And Sara also believed that availability of dance opportunities is a current obstacle:

> …having groups like this, groups at university is huge…even recreation, clubs, more community type dance I think is good….People love to dance! I think if you give them the opportunity, so I think it's just making it more accessible and not intimidating.

The dancers interviewed have had a wealth of positive experiences from their current participation in a recreational dance environment. The hope to involve more dancers and belief in the benefit of creating more dance opportunities for others shows how much this particular form of dance participation is valued by the women interviewed. Another positive contributor to the dance environment is the social aspect of sharing the classes and building connections with their fellow dancers. This interpersonal subtheme of the dance environment will be explored through the following discussion.

Interpersonal aspects of recreational dance. The social or interpersonal aspect of dance training was very important to dancers throughout their different experiences of dance participation. Based on my analysis, the interpersonal aspects of dance class had three main components: social experiences within the dance class, building beneficial social networks, and creating friendships. These key components as described by the dancers' responses are explored in this section.

Sharing the in-class experience and moving through space with a group of other dancers was part of what made dance enjoyable for the dancers interviewed. In Sara's experience:

> I think being with other people in the space is huge, I don't think I'd be in dance if it was just me doing it solo, not really my thing. I like that you work together as a group to create something and to create something that you wouldn't be able to create on your own.

For Karen, talking and in-class communication was an important social factor of a class:

> I think just talking to each other. Just at the beginning of class during warm up and stuff, just talking and I guess encouragement and feedback…if a dancer does something really nicely, I compliment them on it…lots of constant compliments or feedback…I think that helps build that kind of closeness.

Through dance participation, the dancers have experienced how to work within a group and develop closeness or intimacy with the other regular participants in the class. As Gardner, Komesaroff, and Fensham (2008) found that dance participation was an important site for creating and exploring social and community values such as being comfortable physically and emotionally within a group, creating intimacy, and developing community solidarity. Danielle described:

> I think my most positive experience in dance is the supportive environment it brings out in people, and I think people really struggle together and learn together and support each other and want to see each other succeed. Specifically, relationships with women have, I think, in my experience have been super positive.

Even if Danielle was occasionally intimidated by the skill of fellow dancers she found a source of positive experiences:

> …it's hard not to feel like, oh I'm going to look like a fool if they're really amazing, but it's always inspiring when there's someone in the class that's so much better than you because it makes you want to dance harder.

In class, Amanda felt that the attitude of her fellow dancers to influenced her enjoyment: "…if everyone else is enjoying it then even if you don't like it as much you're going to enjoy it more…that's motivation for you to do better and try harder". Emily also asserted that other dancers in class can be an important support:

> I think it's nice to sort of have people there, if you're having an off day or other people are having an off day and you can just sort of laugh it off and joke about it and also encouragement too.

Alter (1997) found that the social context, such as friends and community, of the dancers' training can contribute or detract from pleasurable aspects of training. The social context of USDG as a community and place for friendship seems to greatly contribute to the enjoyment dance training by these women. The dancers also explained that wider social networks may emerge from in-class interaction and the social experience of dancing. Karen described experiencing connections to dancers in class as forming this type of community:

> …I think community is created through the spaces you share and the way you move through those spaces and I think that people come to [USDG] for a lot of different reasons but they kind of become enveloped in that community.

This is consistent with the vision that Margaret H'Doubler had for her creation of university based student dance groups: to provide dancers with an experience that was non-competitive, personal, and democratic (Vertinsky, 2010). The interpersonal connections fostered by USDG shows that such environments have positive impacts on the dancers involved. From in-class connections and interactions, dancers can develop social networks that can be beneficial to their pursuits outside of and beyond dance.

The opportunity to build a support system and beneficial social network was a positive experience from sharing dance with a community of diverse individuals. Much like learning transferrable skills from dance, networking in dance participation can also benefit the lives and potential success of dancers outside of the classroom. Chloe explained her networking interactions within her dance group:

> …there's so many girls that I dance with here and they are so successful. All the girls we dance with are so smart and so talented so it's like how could you not be drawn to converse with them and get to know them more…now that we have shared dance connection.

She added later: "it builds your social life because most people you know through dance now, you never know down the road who, they're going to come back into your life and benefit you so building a circle like that is really important". Blair has also found dance to be an important social network opportunity: "…especially at a group like this at university where there's people coming from so many different areas…it's interesting to talk to other people and by doing that you begin

talking about other topics and they help you out with stuff". As previously mentioned in the subtheme of the recreational dance environment, dance classes can be a site of gathering for a diverse group of men and women who come together through the shared experience of dance. Women and men from a variety of experiences, professions, and educations can relate to each other because of their shared passion for dance. This gives people an opportunity to communicate and build important social, professional, or educational connections with people they might not otherwise meet. According to Alter (1997), community among a diverse dance group increased tolerance, consideration of other points of view, and feelings of enrichment in the participant dancers. As described by Karen: "…it's great to meet people that I really don't meet in other areas of my life…there is a lot of potential there".

Finally, the interpersonal aspect of dance has provided many of the dancers with meaningful friendships and personal connections throughout their lives. As Emily said, "The most positive experience…probably just the people. I find it a nice social thing. We're friends at dance, I think, we're close". Danielle described training with other dancers: "I think it builds incredible bonds especially if you have a long period of time with the same people and you're watching each other grow and you're feeling their success as much as you're feeling your own". These friendships can play an important role in all the different types of dance participation these women have experienced. Gardener, Komesaroff, and Fensham (2008) found among young people who dance the friendly atmosphere of dance led them to feel cared for, meet new people, be with

others, and maintain friendships throughout their dance participation. Being involved with a peer group through dancing, possibly over the course of years, can yield strong friendships that are based on common interests, shared understanding, and history. Karen's childhood and adolescence dance friends were an important facet of her social life:

> ….the other thing I've experienced is this continuity, when I was growing up in the studio…because I was with these people for a long time, there was history, a shared understanding, I couldn't really go to school and talk to my friends there about dance because their eyes would glaze over but at the dance studio you didn't have to explain anything.

Similarly, Sara experienced such friendships from her earliest involvement in dance:

> I had six other girls that I had danced with that entire time from when I was four to when I was nineteen…we were in dance together every day after school from 4:30 until 9:00 every night…they really became my family and my support system.

According to Bracey (2004), university aged dancers found that the support and friendships of their dance groups in their youth were influential in their continued involvement and the kind of environment they sought for university dance opportunities. While establishing history and long term friendships with fellow dancers can be more difficult in adulthood, the shared understandings between dancers seem to remain. This connection can continue to produce important relationships in the lives of adult recreational dancers. In her adult dance

participation, Jamie found the connection with other dancers to still be present: "I think we're good friends and we go out sometimes you know outside of dance, whether it's for brunch after class or going for a drink or the cast party…you sort of have this shared connection of being a dancer". Stemming from this connection and ready-made social circle, Chloe has gained friendships and support within her current dance group that have been influential to her life:

> …when I talk to the other girls and see how good they're doing and they have so much going for them, it makes me feel better even about personal life…even if I'm in an unhappy relationship, it's easier to walk away because you know I have a lot of friends now and I have a lot going for me.

In terms of their continued and future involvement in dance classes, having a social group at class can be influential concerning dancers' attendance. According to dancers in Bracey (2004), dance class was a place where dancers felt at home and have familiarity within a group. Having a social experience in class was part of what encouraged continued dance participation for Chloe: "...building a social connection with them, 'cause I think when you have friends at dance it makes it easier to come and it's just like workout buddies, you want to workout with your friends". Blair shared this outlook: "I most look forward to being there with my friends and people I know, not always just the dance, but I look forward to seeing people I know and like my good friends at dance class". There was another important social figure in the dance class that influenced dancers' enjoyment and

participation in dance, the instructor. The influence of the instructors' personal approaches and teaching styles are discussed in the following subtheme.

The influence of the instructor. USDG was foremost a group that practices genre of contemporary dance. This genre has a history of incorporating innovative instruction approaches which diverts from the traditional authoritarian model of the ballet classroom (Benn & Walters, 2001; Bracey 2004; Dryburgh & Fortin, 2010; Gray & Kunkel, 2001). Contemporary dance instruction has developed to include collaborative and cooperative practices with students and the encouragement of skill mastery for the purposes of the students' own artistic and creative goals (Andrzejewski, 2009; Huddy & Stevens, 2011; Mainwaring & Krasnow, 2010). According to Huddy & Stevens (2011), collaborative teaching departs from the traditional teacher as expert approach and requires that dance participants take ownership for their own performance and choreography. According to Mainwaring & Krasnow (2010), this is a more student centered approach that encourages learning from self-exploration and work with peers. This acknowledges that an instructor does not hold all the answers but instead, facilitates learning for dancers. This departure from strict, authoritarian teaching has been a positive experience for the dancers involved and served to encourage their further participation in dance classes.

Sara described her preferred dance instruction from the classes she has taken: "I think like collaborative teaching, like somebody who looks for feedback. I think teachers can sense what students like and don't like and kind of tailor their classes that way. I don't like teachers who are really yellers". Vertinsky (2010)

explained teaching approach at Orchesis, a university modern dance organization, as personal experience that focuses on students' enjoyment through instruction in ideas not simply steps. This approach was embraced at USDG. Danielle also had a preference for collaborative, cooperative instruction that she had found in contemporary dance:

> I love teachers that they're so dedicated and you can see that they learn to be a part of your class…they're so open and they want to give you as much as they want to take from you and learn from you and so it's really like a good relationship.

Blair had more positive experiences with teachers who were relaxed and personable:

> I like instructors who will talk you about dance as well as other things and joke around, not teachers who are overly strict and just like to yell stuff out at you…so I think teachers where more a relaxed style is better.

This enjoyment of classes with personable and relaxed teachers as part of a non-authoritarian classroom environment was common among the dancers' responses. As university dancers in Bracey (2004) noted, the instructors expectations were important but also acknowledged that a teacher is a person as well, not solely an expert and beyond reproach. Relaxed and personable teachers seem to be important to adult dancers who wish to be treated as equals by their instructors. Amanda explained this importance of this approach in class:

> I prefer the style that is demanding but not overpowering, you know. I like my instructors to be on a level with their students, not try to be too

> authoritative, especially as adults, you know we're all adults, we don't need this power surge right now.

Jamie believed that a personable and fun instructor was important to the recreational environment of class as well:

> …it has a huge influence on the make up of the class…setting the tone, joking and around with us…is always fun, makes for a good experience…keeping the tone light. You know, we're not here to go on make a living out of this kind of thing, well I'm not anyway…keeps it recreational, keeps it in perspective.

Dancers' involvement in such a style of contemporary dance instruction is important to their continued commitment to dance training. Alter (1997) similarly found that contemporary dance students were more intrinsically motivated to pursue further dance study than ballet dancers and had more positive experiences with practicing improvisation, a student centered dance approach where students' explore their own movement choices. Danielle described a recent experience with an instructor who used many improvisation techniques:

> …just doing that and having that kind of improv happening, like to me that was something…that I really loved and after class it was one of those days where I just want to stay there forever and do this because [the instructor] was so inspiring.

Dancers' personal desire to continue training and improve their skill was also involved in how they interacted with their instructors.

Dancers desired and appreciated the feedback, corrections, and challenges presented by instructors. For Danielle, "…I want them to correct me, I wish that was something that I got more of". As in Alter (1997) found that contemporary dancers saw teaching as helping others and respected good teaching as stimulating. Bracey (2004) discovered that university dancers sought constructive feedback and the attention of instructors. This allowed them to explore new ideas, improve, and find common ground between a teacher's standards and their own. Similarly, the dancers I interviewed saw feedback as constructive and helpful and often sought the opinions of instructors. Emily described this approach in her class:

> …I don't know if strict is the right word, so you can push yourself and you're not getting off easy…I still wouldn't want like a drill sergeant…I'm doing it for fun. So you know I want to improve and do better but I also want it to be a fun, light class.

Karen also described feedback in her classes:

> ...I think that feedback's really important…even though we're not all going onto to dance at a professional level…I think evaluating people's time and energy is really important …they're appreciating my effort even if I'm not doing something right, at least they're taking the time to point that out.

Feedback and corrections can be valuable interactions between the instructor and dancers. This contradiction of seeking a challenging instructor who was serious, relaxed, and personable at the same time was voiced by many dancers. Based on

dancers' descriptions of their preferred instructors, they preferred to be challenged by their instructor who is able improve their skill level through quality instruction and delivery. However, they did not want an authoritarian in this position, but an instructor who saw them as an equal and organized their classes in such a way that every dancer enjoyed the experience. In Bracey (2004) and Alter (1997) dancers also described quality instructors as professional and knowledgeable. Compliments from the instructor that acknowledged and appreciated dancers' movement, still has meaning for dancers even as adults. As Karen explained:

> And I still…if I think I nailed something, I'll still kind of look to the teacher to-oh did she see? So that hasn't gone away…but it's definitely negotiated from when I was younger and wanting to be a star to just wanting to perform well given where I'm at now.

The approval and appreciation from instructors was important to the dancers in their current adult dance participation and in their dance participation in youth. Part of this can be attributed to the important relationships dancers have had with instructors. Dancers saw their favorite instructors as mentors, inspirations, and people they admire and wish to emulate.

Relationships with instructors are meaningful interpersonal aspects of the dance environment. These relationships have been positive influences on the dance experience and lives of the interviewed dancers. Dance instructors from childhood and adolescence were influential to dancers' formative years of dance, and for some, continued to be part of their social network. Among dancers, it is common to aspire to be like an influential instructor and see this as a positive part

of dance training (Alter, 1997; Bracey, 2004; Fisher, 2007; Gardener, Komesaroff, & Fensham, 2008). Sara continued to keep in touch with the teachers she considered mentors from her early dance experience. Jamie, Amanda, Blair talked about their earliest instructors as familial and even maternal figures in their dance participation. Karen described such a teacher in her experience: "I think the instructor is so important…growing up she was one of the most important people in my life, even to this day…she was tough but she was kind and she was really funny and she was very stable". In their adult participation dancers still reference the importance of their dance instructor. Danielle talked about her influential instructors: "they influence me by their attitude and their energy and their physical awareness and how inspiring I find them as movers sometimes even more so than as teachers…you always feel like you're looking up to them". In her current classes, Chloe found her instructor inspirational and motivational: "…she really challenges herself and you can tell she's not just sitting there not working or whatever, she's also pushing herself and it pushes us and motivates us to be just like her". The influence of the dance instructor on the dance environment and their interpersonal relationships with the dancers plays a large role in the positive experiences for dancers. Their role may have greater meaning for dancers who have had long-term involvement in dance. Dancers, such as those interviewed, have had meaningful relationships with dance teachers over the course of their lifetime and view them as possible sources of mentorship and inspiration.

From the responses, the dance environment was influential to the dancers' experiences of dance training and their desire to further their involvement in

dance. Positive experiences were created in part by the recreational setting, interactions with fellow dancers, and the approach of the dance instructor. Finding an enjoyable space to continue their dance training allowed dancers to pursue their passion for dance beyond their previous training and continue to have positive and meaningful experiences in class and with other dancers.

Conclusion

In this research, I examined eight dancers' positive lived experiences of dance training using phenomenologically inspired, interpretive perspective. From the phenomenological perspective, moving bodies are central to the experience of dance and the understanding of dance as a way of knowing (Fraleigh, 2000). Being physical was also central to the dancers' positive experiences in my study and provided them with deepened knowledge of themselves and the cultural context of dance. Parviainen (2002) asserted that the dancers' knowledge and experience were in part shaped by their perceptions of their body, which in turn influenced their movement. My findings demonstrated a similar connection through the meanings the dancers' associated with movement. They enjoyed the sensations of physicality, felt an emotional connection to dance movement, and had positive experiences of physical challenges and skill mastery. Phenomenology privileges the voice of the dancer (Fraleigh, 2000) and nowhere was this as evident as in the dancers' discussion of how dance was a part of their being and identity. This discussion foregrounds the dancers' voices as they spoke of their selves and innermost connection to dance. I examined how the dancers defined "being a dancer" and how this comprised a valued aspect of their

identities. Finally, the recreational dance environment was a main contributor to the dancers' positive experiences of dance. The recreational setting and the relationships with fellow dancers and instructors were valuable in the dancers' experiences of training. Bond and Stinson (2007) stated that through phenomenology, the collection of individual experiences can provide a robust picture of the experience of dancing in a specific group although the individuals cannot be conclusively compared to different dancers. The USDG dance setting was common to all the dancers and by collecting their individual experiences, I have a picture of female contemporary dancers' experience within that specific university setting. To conclude, I will now demonstrate how the findings of these three main themes have answered my research questions.

Through the interview process, the interaction between the dancers and myself revealed the dancers' meanings of positive experiences, challenges, and continued participation in dance served to answer the research questions: a) What experiences are interpreted as positive by continuing dancers?: b) How do dancers overcome challenges?: and c) How do dancers think others may be encouraged to continue dance?

Positive Experiences through Continuing Recreational Dance

The question of positive experiences in dance training was foundational to this research. From the dancers' responses, the positive aspects of the multidimensional experience of dance were further illuminated. The meaning of a positive experience was open to the interpretation by the dancers during the interview, and thus, my interpretation is based on the dancers' own understanding

of what made dance positive for them. They considered positive experiences in dance to be those that were enjoyable, beneficial, and contributed to their desire to dance. The three main themes, positive physical experiences, positive experiences related to dance identity, and the recreational dance environment were all important contributors to the positive experiences of continuing dancers.

Being physical was inherent to how the women experienced dance. Similar to experiences found in previous phenomenological and interpretive dance literature, physical enjoyment and benefits were valuable parts of their dance experience (Adame, Radell, Johnson, & Cole, 1991; Alter, 1997; Burgess, Grogan, & Burtwitz, 2005; Gardner, Komesaroff, & Fensham2008; Kolb & Kalogeropoulou, 2012; Valverde; 1987). Dancers enjoyed the bodily sensations of dancing, the chance to communicate physically, and the benefits of being physically active that they achieved through dancing. The physically challenging and demanding aspects of a class were also a source of enjoyment that fueled the dancers' desire to improve their skills and continue to dance. The emotional connection to movement was the most positive physical experience for many of the dancers. The ability to express, interpret, and embrace emotions by moving was a benefit of dance that was meaningful in the lives of the dancers who believed it to be an experience unique to dancing. Feelings of release through movement were considered important and enjoyable outlets for coping with stress and emotions of daily life.

Dance training was an important part of these dancers' lives from a young age and they believed it exerted a positive influence on their identities. The ability

to self-identify as a dancer was important and they experienced the possibility of maintaining this identity through continued dance participation was positive. Dance provided an outlet for self-discovery, self-awareness, and the opportunity to 'feel like themselves.' Dancers explained obtaining confidence, self-belief, discipline, and determination through their dance participation. Dance, they asserted, helped them to develop their potential even beyond the dance classroom. Although they experienced challenges to their definition of a dance identity when transitioning between different forms of dance participation, adapting to change enabled them to yield even more positive experiences from long-term participation in dance. Adapting to a recreational environment was especially important to the positive experiences of the dancers.

The recreational dance environment as a social and recreational space was a positive experience for the dancers involved. Recreational dancing was an overall positive experience for many dancers in the literature who participated in a non-competitive, non-professional training environment (Adame, Radell, Johnson, & Cole, 1991; Gardner, Komesaroff, & Fensham, 2008; Kolb & Kalogeropoulou, 2012; Oliver, 2011; Valverde, 1987). The dancers I interviewed enjoyed dancing, creating, and talking in class which contributed to a sense of belonging to a group. USDG provided skill appropriate dance classes within a group of dancers of advanced technique, but recreational dance also allowed dancers to dance for the fun. This dance environment did not have the pressures associated with competitive and pre-professional programs and, thus, provided a more relaxed context for dance participation. This environment enabled a positive

in-class experience to which the dancers enjoyed returning to each week. Forming relationships with fellow dancers and instructors was an important positive experience for the dancers and considered to be the most positive experience of dance training by some of my interviewees. From their earliest training, dancers formed social bonds with their fellow dancers and instructors that resulted in meaningful friendships with fellow dancers and mentorships with instructors. These valued relationships lasted throughout the dancers' lives. Dancers also built diverse social networks that connected them to a group of students, academics, and other professionals from a variety of backgrounds. The interviewees believed these would be beneficial in their lives beyond dance.

Overcoming Challenges

All interviewees showed a passion and drive for dance in their lives. Their ability to overcome challenges in their dance participation was crucial to their continued love of dance. I discussed the ways dancers overcame challenges in the themes of identity and moving bodies. The theme of identity uncovered the commitment, reframing of negative experiences, and adaptation to transitions in dance exhibited by dancers. The theme of moving bodies also contributed understanding of how dancers overcome challenge as they pursued and enjoyed physically challenging classes.

Dancers had committed to their dance training even when facing challenges. Whether they had faced rejection, pain and injury, or difficulties transitioning between types of dance programs, dancers continued dancing. Reframing negative experiences as opportunities to learn, to grow, and be

motivated was common among dancers. For example, they interpreted rejection from auditions as an opportunity to learn from any constructive criticism and as a source of drive to work harder and try again. The importance of reframing negative experiences and seeking the positive outcomes of setbacks also fueled the commitment to training among young dancers from the previous literature (Bond & Stinson, 2007; Pickard & Bailey, 2009; Stinson, Blumenfield-Jones, & van Dyke, 1990). The dancers broadened their definition of dance when they discussed challenges related to the transition between different types of dance participation. For example, transitioning from a competitive dance program into recreational participation reduced the intensity of the training and challenged how they knew dance involvement. However, dancers were able to continue dancing in a different environment when they could define personal meaning in recreational dance participation. They, nevertheless, found their current training physically challenging which they enjoyed.

Dancers identified physical challenges and physically demanding classes as an enjoyable part of dance training. Physical challenges were seen as necessary for improvement and skill mastery and an important aspect of their dedication to work hard in dance class. Dance classes that were too easy or instructors that did not push them to try harder were not considered enjoyable. The dancers thrived on challenges to improve their skills. They formulated goals, mastered new skills, and experienced feelings of achievement by overcoming such physical challenges. This challenge to improve their skills was an important part of their commitment to dance training in the future.

Encouraging Others to Continue Dance

The accessibility of dance opportunities at an appropriate skill level seemed to be the most important factor in encouraging dance participation. All eight interviewees danced within a university based dance group that was founded in order to provide positive experiences of physical activity and artistic opportunities for students and community (Oliver, 2011; Vertinsky, 2010). It was clear that the dancers highly valued the opportunity to dance with USDG and recognized that for other dancers an opportunity similar to USDG may not be available. Dancers believed that the provision of more recreational dance opportunities at an appropriate skill level would encourage adult dancers to continue. They believed that making these opportunities known to dancers transitioning from studios or other programs and making them financially accessible, could reduce barriers to their continued dance training. In addition, addressing the challenges transitioning to a new form of dance participation, broadening dancers' views of dance, and opening minds to the spectrum of dance opportunities was considered helpful. The dancers acknowledged that changing from pre-professional dance threatened their identity as dancers and entering a recreational dance environment was a difficult experience. By expanding dancers' views of how they can be involved in dance in the future may ease the transition and make continued participation in new groups more enjoyable. This may be an approach to be undertaken by studios, schools, and other programs to ensure that also recreational dancers can have meaningful dance participation. It is possible to provide more physical activity options to women by creating opportunities and

the support to continue taking classes. As previously discussed, the majority of dance participants are women and dance provides a source of beneficial physical activity for participants (Emery, Meeuwise, & McAllister, 2006; O'Neill, Pate, & Beets, 2012). Offering dance training as an option for these women would allow them to stay physically active in a way they prefer. These steps may be taken to encourage all dancers to continue with their activity, although perseverance, drive, passion, and commitment will surely vary between dancers.

Limitations

In my position as a researcher who is also a dancer, I have my own understandings and dance experiences that frame how I view the world of dance. My position has influenced this research, as I have many positive experiences and interpretations of dance and sought to uncover the positive dance experiences of others. However, I have attempted to be open and transparent in this respect and acknowledge my position as a dancer, a researcher and part of "…both creators and discovers of meaning" (Bond & Stinson, 2007, p.157). I have also acknowledged that dance experiences are unique to each individual and they can have interpretations of positive and negative experiences that differ from my own. Finally, in using verbatim quotations from the dancers throughout the results, I have aimed to represent their experiences and meanings in their own voices.

In my construction of this research, I have chosen to conceptualize experiences as either negative or positive. This was done to provide an analytic tool to help distinguish different types of dance experiences for both the researcher and the reader. However, the dichotomous nature of this classification

may be a simplification of multidimensional dance experiences. A dancer's experience may not be completely positive or completely negative but include elements of both. While the term positive experiences seeks to be inclusive of a variety of experiences that are considered beneficial or good by dancers, it would perhaps be more reasonable in future studies to consider these experiences in more specific terms such as enjoyment or pleasure. By focusing on more specific definitions, multiple studies can be done to eventually further complete the picture of what dance participation means to continuing adult dancers.

Research in the area of the experiences of dancers, especially among recreational adult dancers with significant training, is still scarce dance studies. As such, my research has been exploratory. However, I feel that by using a diverse range of literature from the field of dance studies related to dancers' training experiences, I was able to create an interview study that yielded important results for the field of dance research. The results of this research deepen our understanding of the multidimensional nature of dancers' training experiences by providing a picture of the types of positive experiences adult recreational dancers value in their dance participation. However, it was not possible to explore fully all the issues that emerged from the interview study. For example, the experience of transition from dance studios and programs to a new dance environment was important to the dancers' continued enjoyment of dance. This provides an avenue for future research that I hope is undertaken to better understand the experiences of adult contemporary dancers.

Future Directions

This research contributed to the understanding of positive experiences of dance training in non-professional dance participation for adults. However, the experience of transitioning from dance studios and pre-professional programs into a new form of adult dance participation emerged as an important topic deserving of further investigation. My research uncovered experiences and feelings that surrounded the challenge of the transition to new forms of dance participation, but it is clear that this specific experience has the potential yield even more information about how dancers are able to overcome challenges and are driven to continue dancing. By exploring the transition to adult dance participation specifically, we could improve the dance programming to retain dancers beyond this critical point.

In addition, recreational dance as a space for dancers who have a substantial background of formal training needs to be explored further. The dancers themselves noted that many perceive recreational dance as a place for adult beginners or dance based exercise programs. Among the hierarchy of training options available for dancers, the recreational setting is considered with a lower quality of technical training and not suitable for a dancer with advanced technical skills. In my study, finding a recreational program that offered recreational classes for advanced skill levels was difficult for the dancers. The USDG provided them with challenging classes to further build on their skills. By researching the recreational programs that exist for the skilled adult dancer, we can understand the importance of such dance classes in the lives of dancers and

raise awareness of the benefits of such programs to the dance community. This could broaden the definition of recreational dance and encourage advanced dancers to consider this type of participation for their training. Furthermore, increased knowledge could help the dance community to create more of this type of opportunities and reduce participation barriers to skilled dancers.

Through the course of my research, I have also felt that the research on the enjoyment and benefits of dance and the experiences of skilled non-professional adult dancers is just beginning to form. In my study of the positive experiences in dance and in my interactions with the women of USDG, I believe that further research in these areas is necessary to the understanding of the multidimensional human experience of dance. There is a continued need to illuminate the positive experiences of dance and their importance to culture in general.

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Appendix

Table 2

Participant Demographics

Participant	Age	Years of Dance Participation	USDG Membership	Career
Amanda	19	16	Student	Student
Blair	18	14	Student	Student
Chloe	23	15	Community	Business Admin
Danielle	22	10	Community	Office Temp.
Emily	26	24	Alumni	Not for Profit Sector
Jamie	28	24	Alumni	Phys. Ed. Consultant
Karen	36	20	Student	Academic
Sara	30	26	Staff	Social Worker

Interview Guide: The Positive Experiences of Women in Contemporary Dance

Background

When did you begin dancing?

What was your previous dance group or studio like?

What styles or genres did you train in?

What is the group you dance with like?

What classes or training do you currently take?

How many times a week do you dance? How long are classes?

Positive Experiences

What do you find to be the most positive experience of dance training?

What is the most positive aspect of your training?

What do you look forward to the most in dance class? Why?

The Physical:

What benefits do you feel you receive from the physical training of dance classes?

How do you feel about the flexibility exercises in class? The strength? The cardio?

What is your opinion about doing across the floor work in dance class?

How do you feel about learning choreographed combinations in class?

What aspect of your dance class do you enjoy the most?

How does participation in dance training influence the way you think of your body?

What role does dance training have in your overall physical activity participation?

How can you describe the experience of mastering a dance skill or technique?

The Social:

How do you feel dance classes contribute to your social connections?

How can other dancers influence your enjoyment of dance class?

How does the instructor influence your participation in dance training?

What type of teaching do you enjoy the most?

In your opinion, what are the benefits of a university based dance group?

Dancers, instructors, and choreographers of an area are often described as a dance community. How have you experienced a feeling of community through dance participation?

The Emotional:

Does regular participation in dance training influence your state of mind? How does it make you feel?

How do you typically feel at the beginning of a dance class? At the end?

In your experiences of dance classes, can you describe an instance that is particularly meaningful to you?

How have you experienced achievement or success in dance training?

Dance can involve our emotions and influence our state of mind. What is an experience you've had when you have felt strong emotional engagement in dance training?

In your opinion, how does participation in dance training influence your own mental well-being?

Challenges

Can you describe a specific experience that challenged your desire to keep dancing? How did you overcome this?

How do you deal with occurrences of pain or injury? How do they influence your enjoyment of dance?

How have you experienced instances of rejection in dance training? In spite of experiencing rejection, how did you continue your training?

How do you feel about the pressures and expectations of yourself and others for your dancing? How do you deal with these?

Reflecting on both your good and bad experiences in dance training, how do they compare?

Continuing Involvement

How would you describe your motivation to dance?

What drives you to keep dancing?

What other opportunities for further training would you like to experience?

How has a university based dance group influenced your continued involvement in dance?

How do you see yourself involved in dance in the future?

What would your ideal dance class be like?

What barriers or obstacles do you believe exist to people trying to continue dance participation beyond their studio or dance program?

How may we encourage dancers to continue their dance involvement after their training in adolescence?

What steps do you believe need to be taken for to enable more dancers to keep dancing?

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
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Study Title: The Positive Experiences of Women in Contemporary Dance

Supervisor: Pirkko Markula, PhD
Professor
Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation

Phone: 780 492 7192

Investigator: Carolyn (Carrie) Millar
Bsc Kin
Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation
Phone: 780 233 2185

Dear Participant:

Thank you for your interest in my study of the positive experiences of women in contemporary dance. I would like to talk with you about the ways you feel about your dance classes. I am also interested in how dance has influenced your life and how we may encourage others to dance. I will also interview others in your dance group to have dancers' voice their views about their involvement in dance. For this study, participants must be over 18 years of age, be currently involved in Orchesis Modern Dance group, and have substantial previous dance experience from a studio, school, or similarly organized dance program.

In this study, you are asked to participate in an interview that will take about an hour. You will also be asked to fill out a brief demographic questionnaire. The interview will be audio-recorded and later your taped words will be written out word for word. This is done so that information from all the interviews can be written into a research analysis. I will use fake names in the transcripts and any publications. In addition, all the interview material will be kept in password protected computer files to which only the principal investigator will have access. The audio recordings will be destroyed 5 years after the study is complete in accordance with University of Alberta policy. My supervisor, Dr. Pirkko Markula, may view transcripts or data with the my permission and will also respect the anonymity of the interview material.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. If you feel uncomfortable about a specific question, you can simply not answer and we move immediately to a different question. You can also ask to have the tape recorder switched off any time during the interview. Even if you have agreed to be in the study, you can change your mind and withdraw during the interview if you wish. Also, if you wish to withdraw information after the interview, please contact me within three weeks from the day you completed the interview. You can also contact me to

request to see the interview transcripts to make changes or to see any publications resulting from this research.

If you have any questions concerning the study, please feel free to ask at any point. You are also free to contact the researcher at the email address provide below if you have questions at a later time. The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by Research Ethics Board 1 at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615.

Thank you for your participation in this project.

Sincerely,

Carrie Millar Dr. Pirkko Markula

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation

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Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T6G 2H9

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Study Title: **The Positive Experiences of Women in Contemporary Dance**

Investigator	**Supervisor**
Carrie Millar, BSc Kin MA Student Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation University of Alberta Phone: 780 233 2185	Pirkko Markula, PhD Professor Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation University of Alberta Phone: 780 492 7192

Do you understand that you have been asked to be in a research study?	Yes	No
Have you read and received a copy of the attached Information Sheet?	Yes	No
Do you understand the benefits and risks involved in taking part in this research study?	Yes	No
Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study?	Yes	No
Do you understand that you are free to refuse to participate, or that you may withdraw from the study, within 3 weeks of being interviewed, without consequence, and your information will be withdrawn at your request?	Yes	No
Has the issue of confidentiality been explained to you? Do you understand who will have access to your information?	Yes	No

I agree to take part in this study:

_____ _____

Signature of Research Participant Date